

# ***Blackwater Community School***

## ***Healthy Eating Policy***

Food and drink are an essential part of our daily lives. They play a fundamental role in the development of us as human beings. Making the right choices to support our nutrition requirements satisfies our physiological needs, and also contributes to our mental and emotional development. What we eat and drink is directly related to our state of health.

Adolescence is a time for developing the skills to make informed decisions and choices throughout life. What we eat and drink is one such choice. Young people need to be aware of the importance of good nutrition for health in order to optimise their growth, health and developmental potential through their teenage years and beyond.

Blackwater Community School can contribute by developing a Healthy Eating Policy that reflects and represents the whole school community.

The aim of this policy is to improve the eating choices and habits of young people.

### **Policy Statement**

Blackwater Community School is committed to Quality Education. We strive to help all students achieve their potential. Therefore, we endeavour to develop a positive attitude towards healthy eating.

### **Blackwater Community School recognises the benefits of healthy eating**

- Nutrition is central to health. Diet can be an important influence on the life of young people now and in the future.
- A healthy diet is essential for maintaining and protecting young people's health, for ensuring they perform to their full potential (both academically and physically) and for their growth and development.
- Eating a wide variety of foods is one of the best ways to ensure the body gets its RDA of each nutrient.
- Eating well at a young age is influential to eating well throughout life.

- Establishing healthy eating habits at a young age is crucial as changing eating habits in adulthood can be difficult.
- Poor food choices can affect cholesterol levels, weight, blood pressure, insulin regulation, brain function, emotional health and self esteem.
- Adolescent health problems such as being overweight, obesity, anorexia, bulimia, anaemia and tooth decay are becoming more prevalent in Irish society.
- Long term, eating patterns can directly affect health , including stroke, osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and certain cancers.
- A good , working healthy eating policy affects our reputation.

### **Consequences of unhealthy eating**

- Skipping breakfast and /or lunch or not eating good food or not drinking enough fluids can lessen students' concentration levels and make learning more difficult.
- Research has shown that foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom particularly in the afternoon : consuming food and drinks that are high in fats and sugar, especially fizzy drinks may cause over activity, resulting in difficult classroom management.
- Hungry young people are more likely to have behavioural , emotional and academic problems throughout school.
- Being overweight and obesity is the result of poor eating habits.
- Overweight children are more likely to get bullied than other school groups in the school environment.
- Eating disorders are increasing in Irish society.
- One in four Irish children are currently overweight and obesity levels are rising rapidly.
- Young girls particularly, are concerned about their weight and are constantly dieting, this can affect their vitamin and mineral consumption , their brain functioning and their general health.
- A high percentage of children eat too much fat and sugar.
- Many teenagers are overfed and undernourished.

## Concerns

- ❖ Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in Europe and Ireland is one of the country's worst affected. The Growing Up in Ireland survey, 2011 which is funded by my Department found that 1 in 4 children as young as 3 years of age are overweight or obese .
- ❖ The level of tooth decay is higher among Irish children than those in the UK according to a leading researcher on oral health. With tooth decay the most common chronic disease of childhood, it was revealed that more than 20 per cent of eight-year-olds, 50 per cent of 12-year-olds and 75 per cent of 15-year-olds have experienced high levels of decay in their permanent teeth.
- ❖ A study of teenage eating habits has revealed that one in three Irish young people do not eat any fruit.  
It revealed a number of worrying trends in relation to the types of food being consumed. Overall, the participants were found to be eating too much fat, too much salt and not enough fruit, vegetables and fibre. A further four out of five were not consuming enough fibre. However over 50% were eating too much fat, while daily salt intake was also higher than recommended levels.

## Blackwater Community School Aims to :

- ✓ Help students establish a healthy lifestyle that we hope will continue into adulthood.
- ✓ Ensure that all aspects of food and nutrition are promoted through the school and the promotion of health and wellbeing.
- ✓ Ensure that students are well informed regarding healthy eating patterns and the benefits of healthy eating patterns.
- ✓ Enable students to identify healthy and unhealthy elements of their diet and , where appropriate, to plan for change.
- ✓ Encourage healthier breakfasts, small break food choices and lunches by working alongside canteen staff and management on suitable menu choices at a reasonable cost.
- ✓ Maintain and develop a whole school promotion of healthy eating through the use of posters/ signage in the canteen and corridors to encourage healthy food choices.

- ✓ Publicise in school newsletter , website and school app to raise awareness to parents and students of healthy lunch options available to students.
- ✓ Improve students mental and physical performance through healthy eating.

## **Objectives**

- All students learn about healthy food choices through S.P.H.E, Junior and Senior cycle Home Economics, Health Promotion in P.E, first year Science, “Cooking for Life” programme offered to all TY students and as Nutrition module in Transition Year
- Due to the large number of students purchasing food from the school canteen, emphasis must be put on health promotion here, through the use of healthy food options, signage and posters.

## **Whole School Context**

Pupils encouraged to bring healthy snacks to school.

Food allergy/ intolerances: all staff and students are made aware at the beginning of the year of students who have food allergies. Health plans in place for students who may need medical intervention in the event of an emergency.

Drinking Water: available throughout the day from canteen.

No vending machines.

Continue to develop the signage around the school to make students more aware of important information such as the main tips for eating well and health promotion as a whole.

Continue to update the school app / website with information regarding the food pyramid, healthy eating guidelines, ideas and tips for healthy lunches , breakfast foods and snacks.

Students PR book to contain healthy eating tips and detail on nutrition.

## *School Canteen*

Food served at the school canteen should be :

- As fresh and unprocessed as possible
- No fizzy drinks
- Juices and water sold only.
- A selection of sandwiches made daily with emphasis on wholemeal options.
- Fresh fruit available daily.
- Include vegetables as much as possible.
- Low in saturated fat . sugar and salt.
- High in fibre , vitamins and minerals.
- Look attractive .

Offering a wide variety of food and drink choices at affordable prices will contribute to the success of these recommendations.

## **Teaching and Learning**

**Home Economics** – 6 key nutrients covered – functions , sources and RDAs, balanced eating, healthy diets, special diets, healthy eating guidelines, deficiency diseases, menu planning, and diet recommendations

**SPHE** – Food Pyramid, balanced eating, Good food choices, what to eat and why, junk food , food facts – sugar and fat, nutrition and sport, fad diets.

**PE-** In Physical Education in BCS, diet and nutrition would be covered when students do a block of Health Related Activity. Topics like the Importance of Breakfast, Food Pyramid, Hydration and Sports Drinks, Eating to Compete are all covered. Health Related Activity would be done with all year groups, with a particular focus on First Years to Transition Years.

**Science-**The following items are taught in Junior Certificate Science and Leaving Certificate Biology regarding healthy eating:

- The Food Pyramid is taught which puts emphasis on eating a balanced diet and recommended daily portions.
- We look at the calorie content of various foods and identify the recommended calorie intake for males and females.
- Students learn the functions and problems associated with deficiencies of the main biomolecules in food; proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins (C and D) and minerals (iron and calcium).

**TY module in Nutrition-** students study healthy eating practices, analyse and evaluate food labels, research health problems associated with an unhealthy diet, look at food diaries, swap and save calories, eating habits , food pyramid and fast food.

**TY “Cooking for Life” Programme** – All Transition Year students cook once a week, evaluation sheets completed each week reflect nutrition and healthy eating.

## Key Nutritional Messages

Outlined below are 10 of the main nutritional issues pertinent to young people in Ireland today:

### 1. *Eating Habits*

The Health Behaviour in School -Aged (HBSC,2006) survey has shown that poor eating habits are a feature of many children's lifestyles. Research has shown that the foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom during the afternoon (foods high in fats and sugars and especially fizzy drinks may cause over-activity and lead to difficult classroom management)

#### Key Nutritional Messages

- Restrict faddy eating and dieting
- Eat three main meals daily using the food pyramid.
- Eat breakfast daily.
- Get into the habit of eating healthy snacks in school and before homework/study.

### 2. *Overweight and obesity*

The report of the National Task Force on Obesity highlighted the increase in childhood obesity across Europe. Figures suggest that the number of overweight children may be rising at a rate of 10,000 per year.

#### Key Nutritional Messages

- Lead an active lifestyle with a minimum 60 minutes a day moderate exercise.
- Increase intake of fruit and vegetables.
- Reduce intake of sweet and savoury snacks.
- Reduce intake of sugar sweetened snacks.
- Reduce portion size.

### **3. Iron deficiency anaemia.**

Irish studies have shown that teenage girls are particularly vulnerable to poor iron intake. Socio-economic disadvantage may increase the risk of iron deficiency.

#### *Key Nutritional Messages*

- Eat red meat (50-100g of red meat , 3-4 days a week)
- Include vitamin C rich foods and juices to increase iron absorption.
- Choose iron fortified breakfast cereals.
- Following lower- calorie eating plans may reduce intake.

### **4. Adequate calcium intake.**

Adolescence is a period of critical bone growth and increased calcium requirements. Both boys and girls need to include calcium rich dairy foods in their diets to achieve the recommended 1200mgs per day, 5 servings .

#### *Key Nutritional Messages*

- Choose milk as a drink with meals or snacks.
- Take 5 servings per day of milk, cheese or yogurt.
- Do not cut out dairy products if weight-watching – low fat varieties are good sources of calcium

### **5. Folic acid.**

Folate is an important B vitamin for all age groups. In the past decade it has been recognised that folic acid, taken before conception and during early pregnancy, is associated with a significant reduction in the incidence of neural tube defects in infancy. Teenage girls should be made especially aware of the importance of folate in the diet.

#### *Key Nutritional Messages:*

- Increase intake of folate rich foods (leafy vegetables, fruit, berries, whole grain products and liver)
- Choose folic acid fortifies foods where appropriate (breakfast cereals, some milks, breads)

## **6. Vegetarians.**

Vegetarian diets are becoming more popular among adolescents. It is important that the diet be balanced and does not damage nutrition intakes.

### *Key Nutritional Messages*

- Include other sources of protein and iron in the diet such as pulses, eggs and cheese
- The more restrictive the diet, the greater the need to avoid deficiencies.
- Vegetarian diets are not healthier than omnivorous diets.
- Ensure adequate intake of calcium, vitamin A and vitamin D.

## **7. Special food needs.**

Ireland is now a multi cultural country. In Blackwater Community School we acknowledge that adolescents from various ethnic communities may have different food customs. These may cover foods eaten, how the foods are prepared, what combinations of foods are used and when particular foods are eaten. There also be periods of fasting.

## **8. Sports nutrition.**

Adolescents who take part in strenuous exercise and team sports should be aware of the dietary consequences of regular sporting activity. Healthy eating messages can be well received by boys and girls in the context of sports nutrition and sports performance.

### *Key Nutritional Messages*

- Eat regularly and do not skip meals
- Include carbohydrate snack foods before and after training and sporting events.
- Choose complex high-fibre carbohydrate foods from the bottom of the food pyramid as a basis for all meals and snacks.
- Drink fluids before, during and after sports as dehydration lessens sports performance.

## **9. Physical activity.**

Irish studies have shown that regular exercise is more common among boys than girls. Activity rates for girls show a sharp drop at around 15 years of age.

*Key Message:*

- All teenagers should engage in at least one hour of moderate physical exercise every day.

## **10. "Fear of fatness" among teenagers.**

Adolescence is frequently associated with dramatic physical changes in both boys and girls such as weight gain, change in shape and bone structure and skin conditions. The number of girls on a weight reducing diet is higher than that of boys.

## **Recommendations**

Establish a working group that represents the whole school community. It should include at least 2 staff members, 2 parents and 2 students and a representative from the school canteen.

The role of this group would be

- to liaise with senior management and board of management
- be a voice for their peers.
- Review current healthy eating guidelines and practices.
- Assist in implementing the healthy eating policy
- Monitor, review and evaluate the policy