Lunch times at Abbey Wood Nursery School

Rational

Meal and snack times are an important part of our school day. Mealtimes represent a social time where children can learn about healthy eating. During the school day children are provided with snacks and meals which are healthy and meet children's individual dietary needs and recognise that healthy children learn more effectively. Our school strives to have an impact on issues such as obesity and oral hygiene. We understand that early food experiences can have an effect on adult eating patterns and may influence attitude to eating. All staff at Abbey Wood Nursery School are committed to ensuring that the food provided supports the development of healthy eating practices in the future.

We work closely with our catering supplier to ensure that we follow the Department of Education; Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance (May 2025). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6839b752210698b3364e86fc/Early_years_foundation_stage_nutrition_guidance.pdf

Aims

We aim to ensure that through our family service meal times we make eating a core part of the curriculum experience for children.

Special diets

We recognise that some children may require special diets for religious or medical reasons. We work closely with our catering provider to ensure that these diets meet the needs of the children. Children who need a special diet for medical reasons will need to provide medical evidence of the reason so that the dieticians can develop a bespoke plan for them.

Vegetarian and vegan diets can be catered for and we often have a vegetarian meal for the children. The caterers follow a 'No Meat Monday' plan for all children every Monday.

We also understand that some of the children have restricted eating habits due to their sensory needs. We work closely with the family and other professionals to ensure that their dietary needs are met.

Lunchtime routines

Children eat lunch in their base classes, each table has a tablecloth and the children's name cards. The children will, either take turns to lay the table with cups and cutlery or they will each get their own. (Depending on the number of children and the time of year.)

Lunch will be brought to the class on a trolley. The menu is three week rotating. Sometimes the day a meal is on, may change for example roast on a Wednesday could be moved to another day due to delivery issues. The children are served at the table by an adult who talks to them about what the lunch is that day.

Staff will use the opportunity to develop the children's language skills and will encourage children to try new foods. Children will be asked how much they would like of something and will be encourage to try a small amount. We find that children will often eat items at school that they do not eat at home, as their friends are eating it.

We would prefer the children to eat a hot lunch at school and endeavour to keep the price as low as possible. However, we know that some parents would prefer that their child eat a packed lunch.

It is important that parents understand the limitations of what they can include in a packed lunch and that we will have nowhere to heat the food or to keep it cold prior to lunch. A cold block in an insulated bag would help to keep the food cool. Children who have a packed lunch will be supported in the same way as the children having a hot meal. Their packed lunch will be placed on a plate and they will wait for any pudding or dessert until all the children are having dessert. As part of the learning intentions for lunch we would ask that children are not given any 'suckies' or pouches with yogurt as this will not help to develop their fine motor skills in the same way as using a spoon in a yogurt pot will.

Packed lunch

To ensure that all packed lunches brought from home and consumed in school (or on school trips) provide the pupil with healthy and nutritious food that is similar to food served in school, which is now regulated by national standards.

Guidance for what to include in packed lunches

- At least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables. (If adding grapes, cherries, blueberries, strawberries, and cherry tomatoes these must be cut in half as they represent a choking hazard to young children.)
- Meat, fish, or other source of non-dairy protein such as lentils, kidney beans, hummus.
- A starchy food such as bread, pasta, rice, couscous, noodles, potatoes.
- Dairy food such as milk, yoghurt, cheese, custard.

Guidance for what not to include in packed lunches:

- No nuts or nut products
- No juices, squash or fizzy drinks
- No sweets, no chocolate-coated products
- No chewing gum, popcorn or crisps which are all choking hazards and can also contain above the recommended daily levels of salt and sugar

It is important to note that some children have sever allergic reactions to some foods. You must not put nuts or nut products in your child's packed lunch. Following the health advice given for under 5s eating, children will be offered water or milk in school. There is no need to add a drink to the packed lunch.

The setting also recognises that some children may require special diets that do not allow for the standards to be met exactly. In this case parents should talk to a member of the leadership team so that we are able to identify what the packed lunch can contain. For these reasons children are also not permitted to swap food items.

Waste and disposal

All food not eaten and packaging will be returned in the lunch bag, so that parents are able to see what has been eaten.

Teeth Cleaning

After lunch, all children will clean their teeth. They each have their own toothbrush, which is replaced each term. The children have adult support when they are doing this and it is natural part of the lunchtime routine when they go to wash their hands after eating.