



Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore

HEALTHY EATING POLICY

Mercy Secondary Inchicore is a co-educational Catholic school in the heart of Inchicore, Dublin 8. Just as our founder Catherine McAuley imagined and created a world, in which education empowered and provided opportunities for all; we continue that vision of realising all that our students and our learning community can become. At the heart of our mission is the belief that each and every member of our community is a valued and treasured child of God. We are committed to creating opportunities for our students. We hold the belief that we have a duty to dream big for each and every person within our learning community.

Ratified: 6th of March 2023

Introduction

The Board of Management of Mercy Secondary School Inchicore recognises and accepts that parents are the first and foremost the primary educators of their children in relation to food choices. Young people spend a large part of the day in school where they eat at least one of their main meals - this policy is designed to ensure that Mercy Secondary School Inchicore can support the work of parents in relation to encouraging students to eat healthily. This policy was formulated with consultation with staff, parents and students of Mercy Secondary School Inchicore.

Mission Statement

Mercy Secondary Inchicore is a co-educational Catholic school in the heart of Inchicore, Dublin 8. Just as our founder Catherine McAuley imagined and created a world, in which education empowered and provided opportunities for all; we continue that vision of realising all that our students and our learning community can become. At the heart of our mission is the belief that each and every member of our community is a valued and treasured child of God. We are committed to creating opportunities for our students. We hold the belief that we have a duty to dream big for each and every person within our learning community.

Rationale

- The Department of Education recommends that schools implement a ‘Healthy Eating Policy’ as per the *Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Post-Primary Schools* document and previously in the Circular 0051/2015. Furthermore, The NTFO report makes recommendations for the education sector. Two key recommendations provide a strong basis for action by schools: a) Nutrition and physical activity levels of school children should be seen as part of the duty of care of each school, for example in relation to catering for school meals, policy on vending machines, and provision of fresh drinking water, b) All post-primary schools should be encouraged to engage with their student councils and parents associations in promoting the concept of ‘healthy eating and active living’.
- Adolescence is a time of rapid physical growth and mental development. It requires adequate intake of energy and nutrients necessary for daily activities. There is a significant link between nutrition and physical activity in increasing academic achievement.
- The *Health Behaviour in School Aged Children* (HBSC, 2010) report highlighted the fact that 16% of teenagers never eat breakfast. Many drink limited fluids and don’t eat good foods. Skipping breakfast and making poor food choices at lunch can have a serious effect on concentration levels and make learning more difficult. Research has also shown that the foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom during the afternoon: consuming food and drinks that are high in fats and sugars, especially fizzy drinks, may cause over-activity, resulting in difficult classroom management.

- According to the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (IUNA, 2008), Irish teenagers are consuming foods high in fat, sugar and salt. These foods include carbonated drinks and confectionery which are often very low in iron, calcium and essential vitamins. Consequently, the consumption of such ‘junk food’ is being linked to the development of diet related health problems such as anaemia, obesity or osteoporosis.
- Poor food choices in teenage years can develop into unhealthy food habits which may continue into adulthood and may lead to diseases such as diabetes and coronary heart disease in later life.
- For young people to achieve their full potential, a healthy diet is essential. It is within this context i.e. the desire for students to achieve all they are capable of and a care for their overall welfare, that the school is concerned with the eating habits of its students.
- It is important that we are mindful of the pleasure we get from food - it is there to be enjoyed and is often central to socialising/ celebrating. Eating healthily is about being aware of balance among all food groups and making sure not to over/ undereat.

Aims and Objectives

This policy aims to encourage the school community to develop a positive attitude towards healthy eating and an appreciation of the contribution that healthy food makes to our physical and mental health. The policy will aim to:

- Promote the personal development, nutritional standards and well-being of the student.
- Develop positive attitudes to healthy eating and healthy living.
- Encourage healthy eating choices and habits of students using a whole school approach.
- Support and encourage long-term healthy habits.
- Impact positively on teaching and learning.
- To support the key skills of staying well and being healthy and physically active as guided by the new Junior Cycle curriculum.
- To recognise the dietary needs of all pupils and aim to ensure that all pupils’ individual and cultural needs are met
- To raise levels of concentration within class due to consumption of healthy food
- To monitor and review the schools practise and policy and, if necessary, make amendments

Action Plan

a) Whole-school context

Mercy Secondary School Inchicore provides a physical and social environment that encourages healthy eating. It ensures that lessons learnt in the classroom are transferred into school life and that healthy-eating messages are consistent throughout the school.

In order to implement a Healthy Eating Policy consideration must be given to the following:

Promote and market healthy eating:

- Opportunities for unhealthy eating choices within the school environment have been removed. ie. Removal of fast food, sweets and fizzy drinks as a saleable item on the premises.
- Replacement of the above with a healthier option e.g. water, fruit juices, isotonic drinks, milk.
- Fizzy drinks and high-caffeine drinks are not permitted within the school grounds.
- Make provision for healthy lunches which are served within the social areas of the school.
- Survey students or communicate via the student council to ascertain their preferences regarding food choices.
- Consult with parents through the parents' association.
- Displays promoting healthy eating around the school, particularly in areas where food is served, i.e. social areas/ lunch room/ Home Economics kitchen.

Healthy Eating Events:

Hosting a Healthy Eating Day/Week offers an ideal opportunity to provide a variety of healthy-eating activities for students, staff and parents. Healthy Eating Week activities may include:

- inviting guest speakers into the classroom
- offering healthy options through the school meals scheme at all stages of the school day.
- hosting a healthy-eating cookery demonstrations/competition
- holding art/slogan competitions
- Encouraging the student council to promote healthy eating through these events

The activities deemed to be the most beneficial may be repeated at appropriate times throughout the school year and integrated into school life.

Support and advise parents:

To encourage parents to play a role, it is important to offer them support. This may take many forms (e.g. being kept informed via newsletter/flyer, information home on healthy eating and the nutrition needs of a young person).

Involve the wider community:

This helps to provide support and expertise to the school and may help to generate heightened interest in healthy eating locally. Possible ways of involving the wider community are:

- developing initiatives in partnership with local food businesses –e.g. shops and fast-food outlets
- participating in national youth projects – for example, Young Social Innovators or school business projects.
- the local media can also play a part by highlighting the school's good work
- Communicating with the wider community through the school's social media outlets e.g. Twitter, Facebook or Instagram

b) Teaching and learning

The classroom should be used to inform the whole-school practice and help instigate change. Health education is not only about delivering information but also about developing the skills and confidence required to make healthy choices.

Subject areas:

The subject of healthy eating is addressed to varying degrees in many subject areas that offer a unique opportunity for teachers to influence young people in this regard. Home Economics, Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE), Science, and Physical Education (PE) are subjects on the curriculum that address aspects of diet, nutrition, physical activity and health.

Cross-curricular projects:

These provide valuable learning opportunities. Examples of cross-curricular links include: English and Art. Pastoral-care and tutor time may also offer teaching and learning opportunities. The Transition Year Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied programmes will also be used to help promote healthy eating.

Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed regularly. It will take into account any legislative changes, new policy and strategy documents either in the school or from the Department of Education and Skills, changes in school facilities and feedback from parents, students and staff. The review will be carried out by the Healthy Eating Committee in conjunction with senior members of

staff and the Board of Management. Parental views will be acquired through the Parents' Association. Furthermore, a review will take place with our student council.

Ratification

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Mercy Secondary School Inchicore on the 6th of March 2023 and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Signed: _____
Chairperson of the Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____