

Packed Lunch Policy and Parent Guidance

(EYFS, Safeguarding, Food Safety and Nutrition Compliant)

1. Policy Statement

In line with our commitment to supporting parental choice, we have reviewed our approach and propose to allow parents to provide packed lunches as an alternative to purchasing meals from the setting.

However, as part of our statutory safeguarding, food safety, and allergy management responsibilities under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), we must ensure that any packed lunch arrangements are operationally safe and manageable within the physical environment and staffing structure of the setting.

The EYFS requires that where food is provided to children, it must be **healthy, balanced and nutritious**, and from September 2025 providers are expected to follow national nutrition guidance unless there is a clear reason not to.

Our packed lunch arrangements are therefore based on **risk assessment, safeguarding, food safety, and nutrition requirements**, not financial or commercial considerations.

2. Our Approach

To support safe and manageable implementation, we operate a **capacity-managed packed lunch system**.

This includes:

- Allowing packed lunches as a standard alternative to purchasing meals
 - Packed lunches must be provided **at the start of the session**
 - Lunches must be provided in **insulated lunch bags**
 - All items must be **clearly labelled with the child's name**
 - Parents must provide **allergen information where applicable**
 - The setting **cannot reheat packed lunches** due to cross-contamination and food safety risk
 - Packed lunch numbers may be managed to ensure safe storage, allergy management and safe supervision during meal times
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- Children bringing a packed lunch will be seated at a separate table from those eating cooked meals, to help maintain good hygiene practices and manage food safety and allergies.
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3. Managing Capacity Fairly

Where demand exceeds safe operational capacity, we will:

- Operate a fair and transparent booking or waiting list system
- Work with families individually to identify reasonable alternatives
- Consider flexibility where there are financial hardship or equality considerations
- Ensure access to funded childcare places is not restricted

Our aim is to balance parental choice and accessibility with our legal duties relating to safeguarding, food safety, allergy management and supervision.

4. Lunchbox Size and Storage Requirements

To support safe storage and supervision:

- Lunch boxes must be **standard child lunch box size** (approx. 20–25cm width, standard supermarket lunchbox size)
- Large multi-compartment containers or adult-sized lunch bags may be refused due to storage capacity limits
- Lunch must be stored in an **insulated lunch bag with ice pack** where required
- Food must be ready to eat (no heating required)

Insulated storage helps reduce risk of harmful bacteria growth in perishable foods such as dairy, cooked meats and rice if kept at unsafe temperatures.

5. Healthy Eating and Nutrition Expectations (NHS & EYFS Aligned)

To meet EYFS and NHS guidance, packed lunches should include foods from the main food groups.

A balanced packed lunch should contain:

- **Starchy food** (bread, rice, pasta, potatoes)
- **Protein food** (meat, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu)
- **Dairy or dairy alternative** (cheese, yoghurt, milk)
- **Vegetables**
- **Fruit**
- **Water or milk to drink**

Balanced lunches should be based on the main food groups and avoid high sugar, salt and highly processed foods where possible.

Guidance for early years settings also recommends including fruit/vegetables, protein, dairy and limiting high salt snacks and confectionery.

6. Foods We Ask Parents to Avoid

To support healthy development and safety, we ask parents to avoid:

- Chocolate bars, sweets and confectionery
 - Full packets of crisps or high salt snacks
 - Sugary drinks
 - Highly processed foods
- We are a strict nut-free setting; all packed lunches must be completely free from nuts and nut products. Families are required to thoroughly check ingredient labels before bringing food into the setting.
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7. Allergy and Labelling Responsibilities

Parents must:

- Inform the setting of all allergies and dietary needs
 - Clearly label lunch boxes and containers with child's name and any of the 14 major allergens
 - Provide ingredient information for homemade items if requested
- Parents and carers are responsible for ensuring all food provided in packed lunches is safe for their child and clearly labelled with any allergens. The 14 main allergens that must be declared are: celery, cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, lupin, milk, molluscs, mustard, nuts, peanuts, sesame seeds, soya, and sulphur dioxide/sulphites. As we are a strict nut-free setting, packed lunches must not contain nuts or nut products. Families must carefully check ingredient labels to help protect children with allergies.

Food law requires clear identification of the 14 major allergens where food is prepared or provided, and settings must ensure allergen risks are managed appropriately.

8. Safeguarding and Supervision

Food Safety and Choking Prevention

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children, packed lunches must be prepared in line with early years food safety guidance and choking prevention recommendations. Some foods

can present a higher choking risk for young children, particularly those that are small, round, firm, or difficult to chew.

Parents and carers are asked to follow the guidance below when providing food from home:

- **Grapes, cherry tomatoes, berries, and other small round fruits or vegetables must be cut lengthways into halves or quarters** before being brought into the setting. Whole grapes and similar foods pose a significant choking hazard.
- **Sausages, hot dogs, and similar processed meats must be cut into small strips and the skins/casings removed where possible**, as these can be difficult for young children to chew safely.
- Foods containing **stones, pips, or hard skins** (such as olives, cherries, or stone fruits) must have these removed prior to being included in packed lunches.
- All children will be appropriately supervised while eating, and staff will continue to promote safe eating practices in accordance with the **EYFS safeguarding and welfare requirements**.

By working together, we can help reduce the risk of choking and ensure that mealtimes remain safe and enjoyable for all children.

Baby Weaning and Packed Lunches

For babies who are in the process of weaning, packed lunches must be age-appropriate and prepared in line with current early years food safety and weaning guidance.

Parents and carers are asked to ensure that:

- Foods provided are **suitable for the child's stage of weaning** and individual development.
- Food is **soft, easy to chew, and cut into safe sizes** to reduce the risk of choking.
- **Whole grapes, cherry tomatoes, sausages with skins, hard foods, and small round items must not be included**, unless prepared safely and appropriately for the child's age and stage.
- Foods are **clearly labelled**, particularly where allergens are present.
- **Added salt, sugar, honey, and whole nuts must not be included** in packed lunches for babies.

The setting reserves the right to remove or refuse any food items that are not considered safe or appropriate for a baby's stage of development. Parents/carers will be informed if this occurs.

9. Operational Safety Expectations

The setting cannot:

- Reheat or cook packed lunches
- Refrigerate lunches
- Accept unpackaged or unlabelled food

Non-Compliance with the Packed Lunch Policy

To ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of all children in our care, it is essential that families follow the Packed Lunch Policy at all times, particularly in relation to allergens and choking hazards.

If a packed lunch contains items that do not meet our safety requirements (for example, nut products or foods that have not been prepared safely), the setting will take the following steps:

- Staff will remove the unsafe item from the child's lunch immediately to reduce any risk to children with allergies or choking concerns.
- Parents/carers will be informed at collection time, or sooner if necessary.
- Where appropriate, families may be asked to provide a suitable replacement food item.
- Repeated failure to follow the policy may result in a meeting with the nursery manager to ensure the safety requirements are understood and adhered to.

We appreciate your cooperation in helping us maintain a safe environment for all children.

10. Partnership With Parents

We will:

- Provide guidance and support where needed
 - Work with families experiencing difficulty meeting guidance
 - Make reasonable adjustments for medical, cultural, or equality needs
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11. Our Commitment

Our intention is to balance parental choice and accessibility with our legal duties relating to safeguarding, food safety, allergy management, and safe supervision of children.

This approach supports providing a reasonable alternative to purchasing meals, while ensuring we continue to meet statutory obligations under EYFS and health and safety legislation.