



GOOD FOOD POLICY



Context:

Good food¹ choices form the basis for good health at all stages of life, particularly in childhood when children develop lifestyle habits that can last a lifetime. The current research suggests that good food choices in childhood can also be associated with improved learning concentration, better mood and behaviour, and healthy growth.

Concerns have recently mounted over poor food choices and eating habits (including those of children), and their established links with the global health crisis. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed a global strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (2004) in response to the rapid growth of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancers and even dental cavities and osteoporosis that have been linked with poor diet and other lifestyle choices. In its strategy, WHO encourages schools to adopt policies and programs to encourage healthy diets and other healthy behaviours in children.²

The number of overweight children in Australia has doubled in recent years, with a quarter of children considered overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is often caused by poor food choices, lack of physical activity and family eating habits.³ There are many health problems that are associated with obesity, including coronary heart disease, high blood pressure and cholesterol, diabetes and gall bladder disease, gout, arthritis and other joint issues, sleeping problems, including sleep apnoea and certain types of cancer.⁴ Childhood obesity can also have long-term social, emotional and psychological impacts.⁵

Latest research has also shown that poor food choices can exacerbate behaviour disorders and problems in children.⁶ There is also an established link between regular intake of healthy food and learning ability: a recent pilot project in England demonstrated significant academic benefits with pupils who had access to free healthy school lunches, well exceeding the academic performance of their peers.⁷ In Finland, one of the best performing educational systems in the world, free healthy school meals are seen as an investment in learning.⁸

In Australia, the Federal Government has recognised the importance of healthier food and beverage choices in school canteens and in 2010 issued the National Healthy School Canteens Guidelines as part of the Australian Better Health Initiative. The Department of Education and Early Childhood in Victoria (DEEC) encourages a 'whole-of-school' approach to healthy eating in accordance with the Health Promoting Schools Framework that integrates curriculum, teaching and learning; school organisation, ethos and environment; and community links and partnerships.

¹ In accordance with Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, we define 'good food' as diverse home-made food made with local, fresh, clean, wholesome and seasonal produce.

² http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/eb11344/strategy_english_web.pdf

³ http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Obesity_in_children

⁴ <http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/healthy-eating/Pages/healthy-weight.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/The-Emotional-Toll-of-Obesity.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/articles/2010/november/research-update-food-and-childrens-behaviour>

⁷ <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Chapter-11-Universal-Free-School-meals.pdf>

⁸ http://www.oph.fi/download/47657_school_meals_in_finland.pdf

Purpose

Foster Primary School recognises that school food services⁹ serve an important role not only in the provision of nutrition¹⁰ but also in modelling and educating the students and the whole of school community about good food choices for life. Positive peer pressure in the school setting can also create a culture where good food choices are actively chosen.¹¹

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program that has been successfully implemented by the school since 2007. It forms a useful basis for introducing a consistent approach to the Foster Primary School's food services. Through the application of the program philosophy to all occasions when food is offered at the school and during school-led activities.

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. promote a school culture that celebrates food and fosters positive, consistent and integrated experiences and information to encourage good food choices and behaviours in line with the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program;
2. ensure that the good food principles of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program are consistently applied across the school's food services and are reflected in its curriculum, teaching and learning; school organisation, ethos and environment; and community links and partnerships;
3. educate students and the broader school community about good food choices and behaviours and their positive impacts, and develop an informed appreciation of good food for life;
4. support the other related school's programs, policies and initiatives that aim to foster physical, mental, emotional, psychological and social health and well-being of students.

Rationale

The fundamental philosophy that underpins the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program is that by setting good examples and engaging children's curiosity, as well as their energy and taste buds. We can provide positive and memorable food experiences that will form the basis of positive lifelong eating habits.¹²

Additionally, the Program encourages sharing a meal at the table. Quoting Stephanie:

*'I believe absolutely in the importance and power of the shared table.
In many cultures, eating together around a table is the centre of family life.
It is the meeting place, where thoughts are shared, ideas challenged,
news are exchanged and where the participants leave the table
restored in many ways.'*

⁹ Food services in this document refer to the following:

- a. canteen (if applicable)
- b. special hot food lunch days
- c. regular themed food days including Breakfast Club, Free Fruit Thursday etc.
- d. food offered on other occasions, including celebrations, sports days, sleep overs, excursions, camps etc.
- e. special fundraisers
- f. Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program Farmer's Market Stall

¹⁰ A school lunch should equate to about one third of a child's daily food intake: http://www.oph.fi/download/47657_school_meals_in_finland.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/management/pages/canteenwholeschool.aspx>

¹² <http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/about-us/the-program>

The main points of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program¹³ include:

- Encourage fun, flavour and texture through experiences that engage all the senses;
- Model good food choices without resorting to pyramids or labels of ‘healthy’ or ‘unhealthy’;
- Reinforce techniques repeatedly, providing the confidence to plant seeds or cook simple dishes at home;
- Plan menus around the fresh, seasonal produce growing in the garden;
- Use ingredients at their peak – seasonal herbs, crisp veggies, fresh fruits;
- Expand culinary horizons, presenting cultural differences as fascinating rather than strange;
- Expand vocabularies for describing foods, flavours, textures, plants and processes;
- Food should be delicious and the cooking of fresh fruit and vegetables should be timed with great care;
- Come together at the end of the cooking to eat around the table.

This policy supports the other policies of the Foster Primary School that aim to enhance students’ physical, mental, social and emotional health, including the *Health and Physical Education Policy*, and the *Student Engagement and Well-Being Policy*, as well as programs such as KidsMatter (a mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative).

Principles

Building on the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, the aim of this approach is to apply the following principles across the school:

- Encourage the diversity of food and expand culinary experiences;
- Favour home-made food made with local, fresh, clean, wholesome and seasonal produce;
- Model good food choices and behaviours throughout the school food services, in classrooms and, where possible, during school-led activities outside the school premises.

Safe food handling

The Foster Primary School places high importance on the hygiene and safety of food and requires all volunteers to exercise the utmost care when preparing, storing and handling food. The school requires that in all occasions when food is handled or offered at school, at least one volunteer or a staff member with a current safe food handling certification is to be in attendance to instruct and supervise safe food handling by others present.

Implementation

This policy is to be implemented in accordance with the enclosed implementation guidelines.

¹³ <http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/about-us>

Good Food Policy Implementation Guidelines

Roles and responsibilities

The Foster Primary School convenes a Kitchen Garden Committee as a sub-committee of the Parents and Friends Club whose role is to lead the implementation of this policy, supported by the School Council and the school principal that hold the ultimate decision-making responsibility and operational oversight.

It is also recognised that teachers, other staff, students, parents/ carers, volunteers and the broader school community all play an important role in creating an environment that is supportive of the implementation of this policy.

The role of the Kitchen Garden Committee is to:

- ensure that the food services offered at the Foster Primary School comply with this policy and its principles;
- manage the logistics, budgeting and ordering of food, volunteer roster and preparation day coordination for special hot food lunch days and other occasions when food is offered by the school within and outside of the school premises;
- manage the operation of the food stall at the Foster Farmers' Market to raise funds in support of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program at the Foster Primary School;
- ensure that the food offered continues to be affordable;
- educate the school community about good food and its positive impacts;
- raise profile about good food within the school and through its links with the broader community;
- encourage good food behaviours (e.g. sharing meal around the table) through education, modelling, and providing appropriate infrastructure (tables and chairs);
- consult the Parents and Friends Club, the school principal, teachers, parents/ carers and the broader school community to build ownership and support, and address concerns in relation to food initiatives and longer term plans;

The role of the Principal is to:

- lead the development and implementation of this policy within the school;
- ensure that this policy is reflected in the school curriculum, operations and activities where appropriate.

The role of the School Council is to:

- review this policy every two years, and ratify any updates and changes.

Allergies and anaphylaxis

The Foster Primary School aims to provide inclusive food services where commonplace allergies and food sensitivities are catered for in line with the school's anaphylaxis policy. Please refer to the separate anaphylaxis policy *Foster Primary School Anaphylaxis Management Policy: Ministerial Order 706 – Anaphylaxis Management in Schools* for further details.

Beverage guide

The school encourages a healthy intake of water throughout the day. Water is available at school to all students throughout the day. Only water is permitted for drinking during class time.

High sugar drinks such as commercial soft drinks, energy drinks and flavoured mineral waters are banned from all school food services during school hours. Students or other members of the school community are not permitted to bring or consume these items on the school premises during school hours unless this is necessary due to a medical condition such as diabetes.

Food guide

In line with the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, the food offered at school should be **home-made with local, fresh, clean, wholesome and seasonal produce**. As a general guide, it is recommended that foods with high sugar content, deep-fried foods, highly processed foods with additives or trans-fats¹⁴ should be minimised or avoided as part of the regular food services.

Food alternatives for celebrations and special occasions such as the school fete, sleepovers, excursions and special fundraisers that are consistent with this policy are strongly encouraged.

Parents/ carers must consult the classroom teacher regarding allergies and food sensitivities prior to sending any foods to school. Birthday treats are distributed to children at either recess, lunch break or at the end of the day.

Students and other members of the school community are strongly discouraged to bring or consume fast foods or lollies on the school premises.

Food and beverage additives

All highly processed foods are to be avoided and ingredients of any foods not prepared at the school should be thoroughly checked prior to ordering to ensure that only foods that are compliant with food and beverage guidelines outlined in this policy are ordered and purchased for the school food services.

Food and beverage additives are known to cause a range of behavioural, health and learning problems in children:

- irritability, restlessness, difficulty falling asleep
- mood swings, anxiety, depression, panic attacks
- inattention, difficulty concentrating or debilitating fatigue
- speech delay, learning difficulties
- eczema, urticaria and other itchy skin rashes; angioedema or swelling of the lips etc. often associated with rashes
- reflux, colic, stomach aches, bloating, and other irritable bowel symptoms including constipation and/or diarrhoea, sneaky poos, sticky poos, bedwetting
- headaches or migraines

¹⁴ The legislation does not currently mandate food manufacturers to list trans-fats in the ingredients list. Sometimes these fats are labelled as 'hydrogenated oils' or 'partially hydrogenated vegetable oils'.

- frequent colds, flu, bronchitis, tonsillitis, sinusitis; stuffy or runny nose, constant throat clearing, cough or asthma
- joint pain, arthritis, heart palpitations, racing heartbeat

Many additives have been linked with various forms of cancer.

Additives that commonly cause problems and should be avoided include¹⁵:

Artificial colours (in sweets, drinks, takeaways, cereals and many processed foods)

102 tartrazine
 104 quinoline yellow
 110 sunset yellow
 122 azorubine
 123 amaranth
 124 ponceau red
 127 erythrosine
 129 allura red
 132 indigotine
 133 brilliant blue
 142 green S
 143 fast green FCF
 151 brilliant black
 155 chocolate brown

Natural colour 160b annatto (in yoghurts, ice creams, popcorn)

Preservatives

200-203 sorbates (in margarine, dips, cakes, fruit products)
 210-213 benzoates (in juices, soft drinks, cordials, syrups, medications)
 220-228 sulphites (in dried fruit, fruit drinks, sausages, and many others)
 280-283 propionates including cultured whey/dextrose (in bread, crumpets, bakery products)
 249-252 nitrates, nitrites (in processed meats like ham)

Synthetic antioxidants (in margarines, vegetable oils, fried foods, snacks, biscuits etc)

310-312 gallates
 319-320 TBHQ, BHA, BHT (306-309 are safe alternatives)

Flavour enhancers (in tasty foods)

621 MSG, hydrolysed vegetable protein, yeast extract
 627, 631, 635 disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate, ribonucleotides

Flavours (in many foods and children's medicines; vanilla is safest)

No numbers since they are trade secrets

Food as behavioural/ learning incentive

Staff and volunteers are requested to model good food choices in the class room and not to use food of any type as a reward for positive behaviour or as a learning incentive. This applies particularly to lollies and other treats.

Food education

The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program and related food education continue to be integrated into the school's curriculum (years 3-6).

¹⁵ <http://fedup.com.au/factsheets/support-factsheets/introduction-to-food-intolerance#effects>

Leftover food

Any leftover food that would otherwise be discarded and thrown out can be consumed on the school premises. Any food that can be used at a later date will be appropriately stored in accordance with the current Victorian food safety regulations. Volunteers cannot expect to receive free food unless specified in advance.

Mealtimes scheduling and behaviour

The Foster Primary School recognises that it is important to teach the children to honour and respect food, and to provide them an opportunity to concentrate on their meal by scheduling adequate time and a peaceful space to sit and eat. There are many benefits: children will learn table manners, build appreciation of food, and develop social skills and proper lunchtime routines. This is also proven to reduce hunger and increase the ability to learn. Behavioural, emotional and academic problems have been found to be more prevalent in hungry children, and both aggression and anxiety in children are strongly associated with hunger. Studies have also shown that being hungry reduces a young child's tolerance to frustration, and can make them more prone to tantrums and behavioural issues.¹⁶

Therefore, teachers are encouraged to ensure that students eat their lunch by sitting at the table provided in classrooms. Students are also educated about the importance of sitting down to eat during the recess. Information about current lunch and recess times are included in the Foster Primary School Information Booklet.

School community involvement

The participation of parents/ carers, grandparents, friends and the extended family of the students is welcomed and strongly supported in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program and the related food services. New parents to the school are provided with information about this policy in the Foster Primary School Information Booklet and on the school's website.

¹⁶ <http://www.healthyfoodguide.com.au/articles/2010/november/research-update-food-and-childrens-behaviour>