

# Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed., Thurles



## Healthy Eating Policy

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This policy was prepared by the Student Support Team on behalf of, and in consultation with, the Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed. Staff, Students, Parents and Board of Management.

## **School Background**

Name and address of school:	Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed., Thurles
Description of School:	Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed. is a co-educational multi-denominational school under the management of Tipperary ETB.
Mission Statement of School:	At Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed. we aspire to develop a caring and inclusive learning community that optimises the potential of each person.  This policy is aligned to our core values of care, community, respect, equality and excellence in education.

## **Our Vision**

The Wellbeing Committee aims to lead the school community in the creation of an environment where Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed. students want to come to school because they feel safe, connected, supported and cared for. We hope to foster a school environment whereby each student and staff member knows that they feel valued. Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed. recognises that parents and guardians are the primary educators of their children in relation to dietary choices.

This policy is designed to ensure Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed can assist the work of parents/guardians in their role of encouraging healthy eating choices. By promoting healthy eating in our school, we can play a key role in improving students' long-term health and quality of life.

This policy was formulated in consultation with staff, parents, students and the Board of Management of our school and from information gathered in healthy eating surveys from parents, students and staff in October 2024.

This policy is centred in our core values of Respect, Care, Community Equality and Excellence in Education.

## **Related School Policies**

This Healthy Eating Policy is consistent with and supported by a range of other School Policies:

- Code of Behaviour
- Wellbeing Policy
- Student Support Team Policy
- SPHE Policy

## Rationale

The eating habits we develop as children shape our health both in the short and long term. Studies in Ireland and across Europe show that teenagers are consuming excessive amounts of sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats while not eating enough fruits and vegetables. This can contribute to health issues for students now and later in their lives.

Encouraging young people to make healthy food choices sets them on a path toward a healthier adulthood. Given that students spend a significant portion of their day in school and often eat at least one main meal there, schools are uniquely positioned to promote better nutrition. While families play a primary role in setting healthy eating habits, schools can reinforce this by providing balanced meals and promoting awareness around nutritious food.

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 (Department of Education and Skills) states that:

“The school environment is conducive to promoting healthy eating choices. Drinking water is freely available and rewards other than food are used to motivate children and young people.”

This Healthy Eating policy is more crucial than ever, especially in light of recent findings:

- The Healthy Ireland Survey (2023) shows that nearly 1 in 4 secondary school-aged children in Ireland are overweight or obese.
- The Healthy Ireland Survey (2023) found that Type 2 diabetes, once rare among young people, is now increasingly common in Irish teenagers.
- Findings from The National Teens Food Consumption Survey II (IUNA, 2021), found that the average intake of fruit and vegetable is less than 3 servings, well below the 5–7 recommended servings a day.
- Findings from The National Teens Food Consumption Survey II (IUNA, 2021), found that the intake of salt, sugar and saturated fat are more than recommended.

## Aims & Objectives

This policy aims to support everyone in our school community – students, parents, and staff – in fostering a positive approach to eating and recognizing the important role that nutritious food plays in our physical and mental well-being. Specifically, the policy will:

- Promote healthy eating in Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed., in line with the national healthy eating guidelines.
- Encourage all members of the school community to opt for healthier food alternatives.
- Empower students to take personal responsibility for their food choices and embrace a balanced, nutritious diet.
- Support the key skills of **staying well** and **being healthy and physically active** as guided by the Junior Cycle curriculum.
- Promote a positive relationship with food to improve focus, learning, and physical energy.
- Involve the entire school community in the development and promotion of this policy.

## **Action Plan**

Our consultations with parents, students and school staff gave us some clear direction on how to shape our Healthy Eating Policy. The survey findings are included in the appendix.

## **Established practice**

The following guidelines reflect the actions Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed., Thurles are currently undertaking in order to ensure a whole school policy approach:

### **(i) Culture and Environment**

- Drinking water is freely available to students and staff with a water fountain in the school assembly available to all members of the school community throughout the day.
- The eating environment for both staff and students is both clean and comfortable.
- Students are not allowed to bring nuts or products containing nuts to school, due to student and staff allergies.
- Students are not allowed to bring fizzy drinks/energy drinks to school.
- 6th year students may leave the school premises for lunch.
- Free fruit, orange juice, apple juice and tea are available to students all day in the canteen.
- Free toast and cereal available in the canteen before school starts which encourages students to eat breakfast in the morning.
- Nutrition Week is held in January which includes fun activities like healthy breakfast mornings, healthy meal competitions, guest speakers such as dieticians/ nutritionists, and challenges to encourage student engagement.

### **(ii) Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)**

- The promotion of healthy eating is addressed through the following subjects- Home Economics, Social Personal and Health Education, Science and Physical Education as well as through social and cultural activities and extracurricular activities.
- Practical resources for teaching about healthy eating are available on shared drives, which are available to teachers.

### **(iii) Policy and Planning**

- Curriculum planning in SPHE ensures a coherent and consistent approach to teaching and learning in relation to food and health.
- Professional development of school staff is supported.

### **(iv) Relationships and Partnerships**

- During Nutrition Week 2025, registered dietitian Ellen Roche gave an informative talk to 5th year students about healthy eating and the benefits of healthy eating on concentration, mood and performance in both school and sport.
- This healthy eating policy is available to parents, students and staff on the school website.

- The school canteen staff, parents' policy group and student focus group were consulted in this policy review and the contents were informed by surveys.
- The school enjoys a positive relationship with organisations such as CAMHS, Barnados and Youth Work Ireland.

## **Plans for the Future**

The following guidelines reflect the actions Coláiste Mhuire Co-Ed., Thurles **will undertake** in order to ensure a whole school policy approach:

### **(i) Culture and Environment**

- Poster to be displayed around the school to remind students about the prohibition of nuts and fizzy drinks/ energy drinks.
- Food Pyramid to be displayed across the school for awareness
- Improvement of the seating capacity in the school to accommodate students, particularly on busy days like Friday's. There may not be space for this in the canteen but potential to improve seating in other areas of the school, such as the new building.
- Revamp the staff room to include better kitchen facilities that encourage healthier and more mindful eating (e.g., working microwaves, sandwich grill, coffee machine, air fryer, etc.), along with a more comfortable eating area to promote mindful meals and social interaction.
- Introduction of a staff rota to keep the staff room clean and tidy - ensuring there will always be clean cutlery and delph available during eating times.

### **(ii) Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)**

- Continue teaching about healthy eating and nutrition as part of SPHE and Home Economics in the junior classes.
- Senior cycle SPHE will be implemented from September 2025, which will ensure that senior classes will also cover topics such as healthy eating and nutrition.
- A nutrition module to be covered in Transition Year Home Economics classes.

### **(iii) Policy and Planning**

- ENERGY leaders to be involved in Nutrition Week earlier in the school term - these students should be given time to think of ideas/activities to encourage healthy eating in the school and make a plan for Nutrition Week.
- Ensure the ENERGY leaders are checking that students are taking part in the Nutrition Challenge in their diaries throughout Nutrition Week.
- Discussions about the removal of certain foods such as chocolate bars and sweets from the canteen.

### **(iv) Relationships and Partnerships**

- Review the school canteen menu each academic year with student and staff input to ensure a variety of healthy meals are available. Focus group of students has been set up for this.

- Liaise with the canteen staff to ensure they continue to offer healthy snack options, ensuring alternatives to high-sugar foods.
- Invite guest speakers such as dietitians or nutritionists, to talk to **both students and staff** about the benefits of healthy eating and balanced nutrition.

### **Communication**

- The policy is available on the school website for the entire school community.
- The policy will be included in the staff handbook and staff will be informed of the new policy at a staff meeting.
- Year Heads and Senior Management will inform students about the healthy eating policy.
- Home Economics, SPHE, Science and PE teachers will remind students about the policy in lessons relating to diet and nutrition.
- The policy will be printed and given to the canteen staff.

### **Implementation**

- The healthy eating policy will be communicated to the whole school community and executed as described above.

### **Resources**

The resources listed below may be of use to students, parents/guardians and teachers.

- The Safefood website contains a variety of healthy recipe ideas. <https://www.safefood.net/Recipes/Lunch>
- The Dental Health Foundation Ireland website contains information about sugar and oral health. <https://www.dentalhealth.ie/adult-oral-health/the-healthy-mouth/nutrition-and-your-oral-health/>
- The Coeliac Society of Ireland have information on their website: [coeliac.ie](http://coeliac.ie)
- The Eating Disorder Association of Ireland has a website called [Bodywhys.ie](http://Bodywhys.ie). It contains information about eating disorders.

### **Key Documents Referenced:**

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 (Department of Education and Skills, 2019)

<https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf>

## **Appendix 1: Results from Healthy Eating Surveys (Students, Parents & Staff) and action plan for 2025-2028.**

### **Results from Students**

#### **1. More Fun and Engagement in promotion of healthy eating:**

Action: More competitions or challenges related to healthy eating - Nutrition week in January. Display vibrant posters and hang around the school reminding students about healthy eating and also foods that are banned (e.g. energy drinks, nuts etc).

#### **2. Expand Seating Capacity**

Action: We are currently unable to provide extra seating in the canteen, but there is potential to improve this in the future, especially to accommodate busy days like Fridays and help reduce students opting for fast food alternatives due to overcrowding.

#### **3. Reduce Queues:**

Action: Review queue management in the canteen.

### **Results from Parents**

#### **1. Support Healthy Eating Education:**

Action: Invite more guest speakers such as registered dieticians and nutritionists to give talks and workshops highlighting benefits of healthy eating. Continue to promote healthy food choices in subjects such as Home Economics and SPHE.

#### **2. Healthy Snack Awareness:**

Action: Promote awareness about sugar levels in snacks and drinks. Encourage alternatives to chocolate and sweets.

#### **3. Seating area:**

Action: As previously mentioned, we are currently unable to provide extra seating in the canteen, but there is potential to improve this in the future to ensure adequate seating so all students can eat comfortably while socialising.

### **Results from Staff:**

#### **1. Staff Room Upgrade:**

Action: There have been discussions among the wellbeing committee to improve staff kitchen facilities to support healthier eating and revamp the staff room.

#### **2. Treats in the Staff Room:**

Action: Provide fruit and healthy snacks in the staff room instead of defaulting to cakes/treats on open nights/ parent teacher meetings, etc.