


Little Dukes: Mealtimes Policy



Policy adopted September
2024 - Version 1

Little Dukes Nursery Schools, 58 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E
6AJ



Little Dukes: Mealtimes Policy Richmond

Monitoring and review:

This policy will be continuously monitored, refined and audited by the Headteacher who will also review it annually to assess how efficiently duties have been carried out over the year. This review will take place no later than one year from the date shown below, or sooner if needed due to changes in legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines.

Adopted September 2024

Reviewed by:

Genna Tucker, Senior Head, Richmond Nursery

Jo Allen, Principal: Riverside Nurseries

Geoff Marston Group Compliance Director: Dukes Education

Rik McShane, Director of Operations: Little Dukes Nurseries

Nazish Usman, Principal of Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nurseries

Ben Murray, Marketing and Admissions Director - Little Dukes Nurseries


Next review due: September 2025

Any reference to 'Little Dukes' applies to the nursery named above

Little Dukes: Mealtimes Policy

Statement of intent:

At Little Dukes, we believe that mealtimes should be happy, social occasions for children and team members. We promote shared, positive interactions at these times. We are



committed to offering children healthy, nutritious snacks that meet individual needs and requirements.

Policy aims:

This policy is in place to inform parents/carers and team members about nutrition and mealtimes at nurseries. It is intended to help identify and cater for individual food requirements and to promote healthy eating in a relaxed atmosphere.

We understand that early food experiences have an important effect on adult eating patterns and may influence attitudes to eating, so Little Dukes are committed to providing food that supports the development of healthy eating practices now and in the future.

Key points:

- We organise meal and snack times so that they are shared social occasions between team members and the children.
- We use meal and snack times to help children develop independence through making choices, serving food and drink and feeding themselves.
- We provide children with utensils/cutlery that are appropriate for their ages and stage of development considering each child's cultural eating practice.
- We ensure children always have access to fresh drinking water.
- We regularly consult with parents/carers to ensure that our records of their children's dietary needs, including any allergies, are up to date.
- We implement systems to ensure that children receive only food and drink that is consistent with their dietary needs and their parents'/carers' wishes.
- We plan menus in advance, involving local authority guidelines and a nutritionist where possible.
- Team members will keep the mealtimes routine as close to the home environment as possible which includes washing hands and eating with the children for positive role modelling, as we do not advocate the use of plastic gloves and aprons.
- We provide nutritious food at all meals and snacks, avoiding large quantities of fat, sugar and salt and artificial additives, preservatives, and colourings.

Approach to Nutrition:

We champion a balanced and healthy diet for all the children.

For those children attending a full day at the nursery we will provide two snacks along with three main meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner.

For children in our term time only nurseries, where we do not offer a cooked meal, parents/carers are encouraged to provide their children with healthy lunch boxes.

Menus are planned in line with recommended nutritional guidelines, rotated regularly and reflect cultural diversity and variation. They are also displayed for children and parents/carers to see (Autumn/Winter, Spring and Summer menus).

We provide nutritious food at all snack times, avoiding large quantities of fat, sugar, salt and artificial additives, preservatives and colourings.

Team members will always support children in making healthy choices and help them to understand the need for healthy eating. They will encourage the children to eat all portions of their meals with a strong emphasis on fruits and vegetables.

We aim to offer and celebrate food from all our children's cultural backgrounds, providing children with familiar foods and introducing and encouraging them to try new ones.

Approach to eating:

We use meal and snack times to help children to develop independence through making choices, serving food and drink, and feeding themselves.

The children may be given the responsibility of laying out the table in turns and adults can support the routine by placing the plates, cups and cutlery on the tables to assist with smooth transition of the mealtimes.

We provide children with utensils/cutlery which are appropriate for their ages and stage of development and considering the eating practices in their cultures.

Fresh drinking water and milk is always available and accessible. It is frequently offered to children and intake is monitored. In hot weather, team members will encourage children to drink more water to keep themselves hydrated.

We encourage children to prepare their own snacks and take active part in cutting the fruits and vegetables with the supervision of team members who will role model the cutting and

will encourage independence. In this way we promote our ethos of children taking the lead in their own learning.

Staff set a good example and eat with the children modelling good table manners.

Meal and snack times are organised so that they are social occasions that children and team members take part in together in small groups.

During meals and snack times children are encouraged to use their manners and to say 'please' and 'thank you' and conversation is encouraged.

Any child who shows signs of distress at being faced with a meal they do not like will have that food removed without any fuss. If a child does not finish their first course, they will still be given a helping of dessert.

We will always respect cultural differences in eating habits. If a child did not eat at a set mealtime and is seen to be hungry, then we will offer a healthy, suitable snack before the next full meal is offered.

Children are given time to eat at their own pace and will not be rushed.

Quantities offered take account of the ages of the children being catered for in line with recommended portion sizes for young children. Consideration is paid towards how to cut fruits and vegetables to prevent choking (see appendix A).


Infants and young children will be seated safely in a highchair or an appropriately sized low chair while eating.

Infants and young children will never be left alone while they are eating, and team members will be familiar with Paediatric First Aid advice for children who may choke.

Approach to hygiene at Mealtimes:

Staff will wash their hands before serving the meal and will support all children in washing their hands before each meal. We do not use plastic gloves and aprons because we want to keep the serving routine like a home environment. This also reflects our approach to environmental awareness.

After each meal and snack, the children will be supported to wash their hands and faces if needed.



Where nurseries support children with oral hygiene routines, dental hygiene will be encouraged.

Approach to Weaning

To support in the weaning process, we will work closely with parents paying close attention to embracing parents' wishes when using the "child led weaning" approach and continue this while their child is with us. We will support and advise parents in the introduction of solid foods and follow government guidelines whilst working alongside parents who must keep us up to date and informed of any changes.


Most babies, by the age of 6 months (though some as early as four months) are ready to start weaning and add solid food to add bulk to their diet, as they need more iron and nutrients than milk alone can provide. We may suggest weaning to parents if we feel baby is not satisfied with just milk and encourage introducing a varied diet, following government health guidelines, taking advice from what the baby's health visitor has suggested and the parents own approach.

We aim to work with parents offering similar foods, portions, and routine to their approach at home to establish weaning. The child's key person will meet with parents to discuss progress and any changes that might need to be incorporated. Notes will be made of these discussions on Family.

We will gradually offer a variety of food in line with the ages outlined below and introduce a routine of three meals a day if full day with a drink at each mealtime, then eventually having additional snacks, offering a wide variety of foods. As the child eats more solid food, their milk intake will start to decrease, and we will review this with the parents.

Between 6 – 9 Months we will introduce most of the foods that constitute the Nursery School's menu including a variety of vegetables pasta, bread, proteins etc. Our aim is by the time the child is 6 months the baby will be eating food from the general nursery menu and can experience even more tastes.

We will then make the food a little more textured / lumpier which helps learning to chew. Initially using a handheld blender to puree food, then slightly blending, mashing by hand. Finger foods will be offered, to promote chewing, such as toast, bread, breadsticks, pitta bread, pieces of banana etc. It is vitally important to develop this action as chewing helps develop jaw muscles. These are then used to help pronunciation and the formation of sounds and words. Once children can manage finger foods, we will reduce the type of pureed food offered at mealtimes.

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Between 9 – 12 Months babies are given one or two spoons to help assist in independent feeding skills as they try to feed themselves. The baby is now usually ready to sit at the table, so it becomes more of a social occasion for everyone.

By 12 months we are trying to discourage bottles and start to solely use a beaker cup. We find by that time that many children are ready to begin or have already weaned themselves off the bottle. We also encourage children to have full fat cow's milk (or an alternative if the child cannot have cow's milk) as their main drink, after their first birthday.

Managing dietary requirements and allergies:

All our nurseries are nut free environments.

All food given to children in the nursery comes through our kitchen or agreed supplier, and parents cannot bring in food to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays.

If a parent wishes to provide a cake for their child's birthday the head teacher will take the cake and hand out to parents at the end of the day it will be the individual parent's choice whether to give the cake to their children as we cannot guarantee allergens for food produced outside of our regular supply.

Following our mandatory training programme All staff are trained in the signs, symptoms and how to respond to a possible allergic reaction in the case of an unknown or first reaction in a child. These may include a rash or hives, nausea, stomach pain, diarrhoea, itchy skin, watery eyes, shortness of breath, chest pain, swelling of the mouth or tongue, swelling to the airways or the lungs, wheezing and anaphylaxis.

Where staff wish to bring in their own food this must be kept out of the kitchen and rooms, must be nut-free, compliant with any specific allergy rules for the nursery and it is the staff member's responsibility to store hygienically and appropriately. Staff may not share any food that they bring in with any children in the setting.

In nurseries where children bring their own packed lunch the head teacher will provide parents with the nursery guidelines for allergen management including foods not allowed where there are children with severe allergies.

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Packed lunches that do not follow these guidelines may not be given to children during the day. Parents will be informed and asked to provide a suitable replacement in a timely manner.

We ask parents/carers to share all information about allergic reactions and allergies on their child's registration form and to inform team members of any allergies discovered after registration. We share all information with all team members and keep an allergy register on Family.

Individual dietary requirements are respected. We gather information from parents/carers about their children's dietary needs, including any special dietary requirements, preferences, and food allergies that a child has and any special health requirements before a child starts or joins the nursery.


Where a child has a known medically diagnosed allergy, the Headteacher will carry out a full Allergy Risk Assessment Procedure with the parent/carer prior to the child starting the nursery and/or following notification of a known allergy. This assessment will be logged on Family and shared with all staff.

Parents will be required to provide two EpiPens for their child if they are prone to any anaphylactic shock and is prescribed by a doctor. Parents must check that their child's EpiPen does not expire. The nursery is not required under current legislation to hold any spare EpiPen.

All food prepared for a child with a specific allergy is prepared in an area where there is no chance of contamination and served with equipment that has not been in contact with this specific food type, e.g., nuts.

This food will be clearly labelled before leaving the kitchen and being transported to the room and checked by the lead practitioner upon receipt.

Where food is provided by an external catering company, members of staff will be nominated each day to receive the delivery check allergen information visible on the labels or stickers and ensure that food arrives to the room for any children with allergies clearly labelled. This will be checked by the lead practitioner in the room on receipt



The Headteacher, nursery cook, and parents/carers work together to ensure a child with specific food allergies receives no food at nursery that may harm them. This may include designing an appropriate menu or substituting specific meals on the current nursery menu.

We incorporate additional procedures in line with the Food Information Regulations 2014 (FIR) including displaying our weekly menus in the nursery and sharing them on the Family app, identifying any of the 14 allergens that are used as ingredients in any of our dishes visible on the FS13 form.

Any dietary requirements will be identified when children are at the table by using a colour code system, usually with plates, allergy placements or table stands. These will be placed on the table before any food is served:

The system at Richmond is:

Colour: Yellow
Allergen: Parental Dietary Preference

Colour: Red
Allergen: Allergic Reaction

We consider seating arrangements to avoid cross contamination of food from child to child and where appropriate, an adult will sit with children during meals to ensure safety and to minimise risks.

If a child has an allergic reaction to food, a bee or wasp sting, a plant etc. a paediatric first aid trained team member will act quickly and administer the appropriate treatment, where necessary. Parents/carers must be informed, and the information recorded on Family.

If an allergic reaction requires specialist treatment, e.g. an EpiPen, then at least two team members working directly with the child and the Headteacher will receive specific medical training to be able to administer the treatment to each individual child.

In the event of a serious allergic reaction and a child needing transporting to hospital, the Headteacher/team member will follow the emergency procedures laid out in our Accident and Incident Policy.

Food Preparation:

All team members who prepare and handle food are competent to do so and receive training in Food Hygiene - minimum Level 2 for all team members, updated every three years.

All our kitchen team receive level 3 in food Hygiene.

Our food preparation areas follow EHO guidelines around cleaning and maintenance and are inspected annually.

In the very unlikely event of any food poisoning affecting two or more children on the premises, whether or not from food offered at the nursery, we will inform Ofsted as soon as reasonably practical and in all cases within 14 days. We will also inform the relevant health agencies and follow any advice given.

We observe the following food safety preparation advice for children aged 5 and under, to reduce the risk of choking:

- Remove any stones and pips from fruit before serving.
- Cut small round foods, like grapes, strawberries, and cherry tomatoes, lengthways and into quarters.
- Cut large fruits like melon, and hard fruit or vegetables like raw apple and carrot, into slices instead of small chunks.
- Do not offer raisins as a snack to children under 12 months – although these can be chopped up as part of a meal.
- Soften hard fruit and vegetables (such as carrot and apple) and remove the skins when first given to babies from around 6 months.
- Sausages should be avoided due to their high salt content, but if offered to children these should be cut into thin strips rather than chunks and with skins removed.
- Remove bones from meat or fish.
- Do not give whole seeds to children under five years old.
- Cut cheese into strips rather than chunks.

- Do not give popcorn as a snack unless supervised in small groups as part of a Forest School activity.
- Do not give children marshmallows or jelly cubes from a packet unsupervised as part of messy play activities as they can get stuck in the throat.
- Do not give children hard sweets.

Legislative Framework:

EYFS 2024

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024

Early Years Policies September 2024 - Version 1 73



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Little Dukes: Mealtimes Policy – Appendix:

The Eatwell plate:



Appropriate food preparation:



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HOW TO CUT FOODS FOR SAFE BABY-LED WEANING



Portion sizes:

