



# Vanguard Learning Trust

## School food protocol September 2025

### 1. Introduction

The Trust recognises the significant impact of nutrition on student wellbeing, behaviour, engagement and attainment. Healthy eating supports physical growth, cognitive development and long-term health outcomes. This protocol ensures that all Trust schools comply with statutory school food standards and provide consistent messages on healthy lifestyles. Schools are expected to promote an environment in which nutritious food choices are available, accessible and actively encouraged.

### 2. Application of protocol

This protocol applies to all Trust schools and all staff, contractors and volunteers involved in the preparation, serving or supervision of food and drink. Trustees delegate to the local governing body the responsibility for ensuring compliance with school food standards and for supporting the promotion of healthy eating within each school.

### 3. Aim of the protocol

The aim of this food protocol is to:

- ensure all Trust schools comply with statutory school food standards and other relevant legislation and guidance;
- provide clear expectations for food provision during the school day, including breakfast, lunch and snacks;
- promote consistent messages on healthy eating and reduce the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar;
- ensure students have access to fresh drinking water throughout the school day; and
- support students, families and staff in developing positive attitudes towards food and nutrition.

### 4. Roles and responsibilities

#### 4.1 Local governing body

Each school's local governing body provides strategic oversight of school food provision and its impact on students' health, wellbeing and experience. They will:

- provide oversight of compliance with statutory standards;
- review menus, audits and student feedback to ensure adherence to the protocol;
- gauge how the lunchtime experience contributes to the culture and ethos of the school when making a school visit;
- attend school council and School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) meetings to gain feedback on the quality and enjoyment of school food and overall lunchtime experience;
- support the promotion of healthy eating throughout the school community;
- review school food take-up data each term and require corrective action where take-up falls below local targets;
- check what continuing professional development training is in place for all teachers and support staff to support their knowledge of health and wellbeing; and
- are encouraged to attend a pilot online training course on school food for governors and trustees ([click here](#)). This is a targeted online training programme, designed to provide governors and trustees with the skills and expertise to understand their responsibilities concerning school food, and to develop and champion their own whole school approach to food. The training is available to all and is free to complete.

#### **4.2 School leaders**

- Ensure that staff responsible for food preparation and service are trained and comply with statutory standards.
- Monitor food provision and student uptake of meals.
- Promote healthy eating messages and education about good quality food across the school, such as displaying relevant posters with key messages ([click here](#)). This could be achieved through the school's provision of personal, health, social and economic education (PSHE) education.

#### **4.3 Catering provider**

The catering provider is a key partner in supporting the school's whole-school aims for health, behaviour and attainment. The provider should ensure that their staff have access to continuing professional development appropriate to their roles (for example food safety, menu planning and school food culture training). Schools will seek to ensure that the catering provider:

- leads the day-to-day delivery of meals that meet the School Food Standards;
- contributes to menu planning with the headteacher and other relevant staff;
- participates in appropriate student voice activities;
- supports tasting and promotional events;
- maintains food safety, allergen records and procurement documentation; and
- works with the business manager and headteacher on strategies to increase meal uptake.

The provider must operate to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles and provide evidence of current food hygiene ratings, staff food hygiene certificates, cleaning schedules, temperature logs and pest control records. Schools will retain records for inspections and sampling. The Trust expects evidence of compliance during central checks.

#### **4.4 School business/operations manager**

The school will actively promote FSM eligibility and provide confidential sign-up support. The school's lead member of staff will:

- run termly checks on eligibility uptake;
- provide governors with reports on FSM uptake and the financial implications; and
- ensure that students eligible for FSM can access meals without stigma (discrete codes/identification). Payment systems should avoid distinguishing FSM students at point of service, to protect their dignity and anonymity.

#### **4.5 Staff, volunteers and contractors**

Staff, volunteers and contractors have an important role in supporting a positive food culture within the school. They are expected to:

- support students during meal times and encourage positive food choices; and
- report any concerns regarding food provision or safety to senior leaders.

#### **4.6 External providers and after-school clubs**

All third-party providers, including breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, holiday clubs or contractors operating on the school site, must comply with this protocol and the statutory School Food Standards. Providers must:

- supply menus and allergen information to the school in advance of service;
- adhere to the same nutritional, allergen and food safety standards as the school's own catering team;
- ensure staff supervising food provision have received appropriate training (for example allergen awareness and food hygiene); and
- cooperate with the school on monitoring and incident reporting.

Schools should include these requirements in any service level agreement or contract and periodically check compliance during governor or staff monitoring visits.

#### **4.7 Parents/carers**

Parents/carers play an important role in supporting the school's approach to healthy eating and food safety. They must inform the school of any known allergies or dietary requirements during induction and promptly report any changes that occur during their child's time at the school. Parents/carers are also expected to

follow the school's packed food guidance set out in section 11 to ensure consistency with the Trust's commitment to healthy, safe and inclusive food provision.

## **5. Statutory 'School Food Standards'**

All Trust schools must ensure that all meals provided meet or exceed statutory School Food Standards. These include:

1. **Nutritional balance**
  - Meals must provide a balance of protein, starchy foods, vegetables, fruit, dairy and oils or spreads.
  - Portion sizes should be age-appropriate and support the daily nutritional needs of students.
2. **Fruit and vegetables**
  - A minimum of one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables must be served with lunch each day.
  - Salad or raw vegetables should be offered at every lunch service where possible.
3. **Protein foods**
  - Meat, fish, eggs, pulses or other protein sources should be included daily.
  - Oily fish must be offered at least once every three weeks.
4. **Starchy foods**
  - Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods should form part of every meal.
  - Wholegrain or high-fibre options should be prioritised.
5. **Milk and dairy**
  - Milk or dairy foods must be available daily to provide calcium and other essential nutrients.
6. **Drinks**
  - Only plain water, milk and fruit or vegetable juice (with no added sugar) may be served.
  - Students must have free access to drinking water at all times.
7. **Foods high in fat, salt and sugar**
  - Foods high in fat, salt or sugar should be limited.
  - Crisps, fried foods, confectionery and sugar-sweetened drinks are not permitted during the school day.
8. **Cultural and dietary needs**
  - Menus must reflect cultural, religious, allergy-related and medical dietary requirements.
  - Schools must have procedures in place to safely manage allergens and special diets.

## **6. Meals and snacks**

- **Breakfast:** All Trust schools offer breakfast provision, which will provide options that meet the nutritional standards outlined above.
- **Break:** Schools offering snacks or refreshments at breaktime must provide options that meet statutory food standards.
- **Lunch:** All students must have access to a lunch meal that meets statutory food standards.
- **Snacks:** Where schools provide snacks during the day, including in after-school clubs, they must adhere to the same principles of healthy eating.
- **School events and fundraising:** Food and drink served at events should follow the same nutritional principles as meals served during the school day.

## **7. Communication of menus**

- Menus will be published on the school website and made accessible to parents, carers and students before the start of each term or menu cycle, and updated immediately if dishes, ingredients or allergens change. These changes will be communicated via the school's typical communication channels.
- Information about nutritional content and any dietary adaptations must be available on request.

## **8. Lunchtime environment**

- Schools should create a welcoming and calm dining environment that encourages positive social

interaction and healthy eating habits.

- Staff should model healthy eating behaviours and support students in making nutritious choices.

## **9. Curriculum and student voice**

Schools will link practical cooking and nutrition to the curriculum, involve their student council for menu testing and run tasting events and cooking clubs to normalise healthy eating. Student voice may be used to shape menus and lunchtime improvements.

## **10. Strategy to increase take-up of school lunches**

Each school will publish a short, time-bounded plan to increase and sustain meal take-up. The plan will include:

- baseline take-up data (termly) and targets (termly/annual);
- actions to improve meal appeal (menu trials, tasting sessions, student menu panels);
- pricing review and Free School Meals/Pupil Premium sign-up promotion activities (including targeted communications to eligible families);
- dining environment improvements (timings, seating, social arrangements);
- marketing and parental engagement (menus, photos, social media, parent taster sessions); and
- clear responsibilities and timescales, resourcing and monitoring metrics.

The local governing body will review take-up data each term and require corrective action where take-up falls below local targets.

## **11. Packed lunches**

Packed lunches should support the school's healthy eating approach and should not replace school meals for students eligible for free school meals. Parents/carers will be encouraged to follow these expectations:

- Include at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables each day.
- Add a starchy food (bread, pasta, rice, potatoes).
- Incorporate a dairy product or alternative (cheese, yoghurt, milk).
- Foods high in fat, salt and sugar should be limited.
- Confectionery, chocolate bars and sugary drinks are not permitted.
- Only water, milk or unsweetened juice may be provided in lunchboxes.
- The school will not heat or refrigerate packed lunch items; perishables must be packed in a cool pack and clearly labelled for students with special diets/allergies.

Schools will endeavour to communicate this to parents termly and signpost simple lunchbox suggestions/recipe ideas.

## **12. Allergen and special diet procedures**

- All schools will maintain an up-to-date, easily accessible allergen register and special diets log. Schools are to provide this list to their catering team, who are responsible for making sure the allergens are controlled on site.
- School staff must hold documented evidence (medical or parental) for any special diets and complete a risk assessment for each case. This information must be shared with catering staff during student induction and whenever a student's dietary needs change.
- Clear labelling protocols must be used at service points and on menus. School staff supervising mealtimes will receive annual training to help identify allergic reactions.
- Schools will provide annual training on allergen management and deliver refresher training to staff when a new student with complex dietary needs joins the school. The school's catering company will provide training for their staff.
- Details regarding the school's emergency anaphylaxis procedures are set out in the Trust's 'Supporting students with medical conditions' policy.

## **13. Sustainability**

The Trust recognises its responsibility to ensure that sustainability commitments are embedded in the procurement process with third-party providers, covering both food produce and waste. Once agreed, schools will monitor delivery against these commitments. Examples of practice include reducing food waste (through portioning and food waste audits and composting), prioritising seasonal and local suppliers within

procurement rules, using reusable service items where practicable and regularly reviewing packaging choices (such as reducing plastics and using recyclable options) to reinforce environmental goals.

#### 14. Monitoring and evaluation

The Trust's governance professional will confirm that local governing bodies include school food within the remit of one of their committees, as part of the school's wider health and wellbeing strategy. Each school's local governing body must review compliance with the school food standards and this protocol at least annually, based on feedback from the central lead for estates and facilities. Governors may request evidence including menus, nutritional audits, student feedback and records of food provision. Any areas requiring improvement must be addressed through the school's action planning process. Governors should review performance of the caterers against the catering specification annually. Any catering contract must include:

- School Food Standards compliance;
- professional service standards;
- menus and portion control;
- quality and dining experience metrics;
- allergen management;
- data reporting on take-up; and
- a written plan from the caterer for increasing take-up.

Governors may also review:

- termly meal take-up data and trend analysis;
- FSM sign-up data and intervention reporting (ie. actions taken to maximise sign up);
- menu compliance audit (annual) against the School Food Standards (see checklist in appendix);
- student feedback and levels of satisfaction; and/or
- evidence of promotion to parents/carers (such as FSM sign-up letters, social media).

The Trust's central team may conduct periodic checks to ensure standards are consistently applied across all schools.

#### 15. References

This food protocol should be read alongside:

- School Food Standards and associated guidance
- Trust health and safety policy
- Trust supporting students with medical conditions policy

#### 16. Links

There are many national and local authority initiatives which schools are encouraged to make use of, including:

- Change4Life ([click here](#))
- National School Meals Week ([click here](#))
- British Nutrition Foundation Healthy Eating Week ([click here](#))

Other initiatives and programmes, to help schools transform food culture and promote healthy lifestyles, are showcased at What Works Well ([click here](#)). Further guidance for governors on food in schools is available on the government website ([click here](#)).

#### Version history

First issue/revision date	Approved by	Summary of changes if not first issue
October 2025	BoT	N/A

## Appendix

### Governor visit checklist: School food protocol

<b>Governor completing visit</b>	
<b>Date of visit</b>	
<b>Next review date</b>	

<b>Area</b>	<b>Evidence / Observation</b>	<b>Notes / Actions / Follow-ups</b>
<b>Compliance with School Food Standards:</b> Menus meet statutory standards (including portion sizes, fruit/veg, oily fish, salt/fat limits)	<i>Menus published on school website; copy reviewed on visit</i>	
<b>Catering team integration:</b> Catering staff included in whole-school meetings, receive CPD and are engaged with student voice activities	<i>Meet with catering manager or staff on visit; CPD logs available</i>	
<b>HACCP / Food safety:</b> Food hygiene rating and HACCP records up to date	<i>Hygiene certificate and HACCP paperwork sighted; rating displayed publicly</i>	
<b>Allergen and special diet management:</b> Accurate records held and staff trained	<i>Check allergen register and training records; spot-check labels in dining area</i>	
<b>Free School Meals uptake:</b> % eligible vs % taking up FSM	<i>Obtain current data; check promotion of FSM sign-up (letters, website, forms)</i>	
<b>Take-up of school meals overall:</b> Termly trend data and targets	<i>Ask for data by phase (infant, junior, secondary); discuss strategies for improvement</i>	

<b>Packed lunch policy in practice:</b> Expectations communicated and visible	<i>Review parental communications; observe packed lunches during visit</i>	
<b>Vending and drinks policy:</b> Products and operating times comply	<i>Inspect any vending machines / tuck shops; check contracts if relevant</i>	
<b>Dining environment:</b> Cleanliness, queue length, supervision, positive social space	<i>Walk round dining area during lunch; note pupil behaviour, atmosphere</i>	
<b>Student voice:</b> Evidence of School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) / school council involvement	<i>Look at minutes, surveys, menu tasting events</i>	
<b>Curriculum links:</b> Cooking/nutrition delivered in PSHE, DT or science	<i>Ask to see curriculum plans or evidence</i>	
<b>Parent engagement:</b> Menus publicised, tasting events, healthy eating workshops	<i>Ask how parents are consulted/informed; check website</i>	
<b>Sustainability/waste:</b> Food waste audits, local procurement, reusable items	<i>Ask to see waste monitoring or sustainability initiatives</i>	
<b>Governance reporting:</b> Catering contract performance reports to governors	<i>View latest contract report or headteacher report to board</i>	