



Healthy Eating, Nutrition & Hydration Policy

September 2026 · EYFS 2026

1. Statement of intent

At Play Days we believe in real food for our children. All our meals are freshly prepared on site by our qualified cook. Good food & good hydration are not an add-on to our care; they are part of it. The habits a child forms between birth & five will, in all likelihood, stay with them for life. We are determined that the children in our care leave us with healthy teeth, healthy appetites, a liking for water & the independence that comes with both.

This policy sets out what we provide, what we ask of parents & carers, & the standards we hold ourselves to. It applies to both settings, to all staff, students & volunteers, & to all food & drink brought into the settings from home — including for children accessing funded hours under our Opt-Out arrangements.

2. Statutory position

We are required to meet the safeguarding & welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, which states that where children are provided with meals, snacks & drinks, these must be healthy, balanced & nutritious.

Since September 2025 all early years providers in England are additionally required to have regard to the Department for Education's *Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance*. "Have regard to" means we must follow it unless we have a compelling reason not to. We have no such reason, & we do not accept individual preference as one. Ofsted inspects us against these standards, & compliance forms part of our Early Education Entitlement funding agreement with Leicester City Council & Leicestershire County Council.

Respectfully, & with full acknowledgement that parents & carers are the primary decision makers for their own children, this is not a policy we are at liberty to set aside at individual request.

3. Our food provision

- Menus run on a three-weekly rotation, with separate summer & winter menus. Meals & snacks are displayed outside the kitchen, published on our website, & shared with parents through Nursery in a Box (Parent admin), in each case with full allergen information.
- Menus are built on fresh products so far as is practicable, across the four main food groups, & are reviewed against the DfE nutrition guidance & Food Standards Agency advice.
- Three meals are provided each day: breakfast (toast, cereal); a main meal with a vegetarian option & a second course; & a small tea (sandwiches, soup, beans on toast).

- A vegetarian option is offered at every main meal.
- Second courses are fruit, unsweetened yoghurt or fromage frais, or a milk-based dessert. Traditional sweet puddings are not served.
- Children are encouraged to try their main meal before a second course is offered. Second helpings of savoury food, fruit or milk-based desserts are available.
- Portions are child-sized — as a guide, roughly the size of the child’s own clenched fist. Children are never made to finish a plate or to eat more than they want.
- We follow the “provide, limit & avoid” framework set out in the DfE guidance. Oily fish, beans, pulses, eggs, wholegrains, fruit & vegetables feature regularly; processed meats & fried foods are limited; sweets, chocolate, crisps, sugary drinks & high-salt foods are avoided altogether.
- Children are offered at least one portion of fruit or vegetables at every meal.
- Menus change over time to widen the range of foods children meet, & food is used as a route into learning about other cultures.
- Our cook holds current food hygiene certification appropriate to the role.

4. Drinks & hydration — water & plain milk only

This section reflects the area of greatest difficulty at present & is therefore set out in full. Our position is fixed: **water or plain milk only**.

What we provide

- Fresh drinking water is available & accessible to every child throughout the day, indoors & outdoors, & is offered regularly by staff.
- Plain whole milk is served to all children from twelve months of age. The DfE guidance permits whole or semi-skimmed milk from one year; we have taken the decision to provide whole milk throughout, as it carries almost double the vitamin A & around 40% more energy per cup, which best supports children under two & any child who is small for age, a reluctant eater or on a restricted diet.
- Skimmed & 1% milk are never served, as they do not contain sufficient energy for children under five. Unsweetened, calcium-fortified non-dairy alternatives are provided where required.
- Children under five are entitled to free milk under the Nursery Milk Scheme, which we operate.
- Drinks are served in open or free-flow cups. We do not use valved or spouted beakers beyond the age at which a child is able to manage a cup, generally around twelve months.

What we are unable to accept

The following may not be brought into either setting, for any child, at any time:

- squash or cordial of any kind, including “no added sugar”, “sugar free” & heavily diluted preparations

- fruit juice, smoothies & juice drinks
- flavoured water & flavoured milk
- fizzy or carbonated drinks, including diet & zero-sugar varieties
- drinks containing caffeine or artificial sweeteners
- follow-on formula & growing-up milks, unless prescribed in writing by a health professional

Bottles brought from home

- Water bottles brought from home must contain plain water only & must be clearly named.
- Where a bottle arrives containing squash or any other drink listed above, staff will empty & rinse it, refill it with fresh water & inform the parent or carer at collection. This will always be done courteously & without comment in front of the child.
- Where the position recurs, the parent or carer will be invited to meet the Room Leader or Manager so that the reasons can be explained & a way forward agreed.
- Where non-compliance continues following that meeting, the matter will be referred to the Director. Persistent failure to comply with nursery policy is addressed under our Terms & Conditions.

Why we hold this line

- **Dental decay.** Each mouthful of a sweetened or acidic drink begins an acid attack on the teeth lasting approximately one hour. A child sipping squash across a full nursery day gives the enamel no opportunity to recover. In Leicester, 35.6% of five-year-olds already have obvious decay against 22.4% nationally, rising to 42.4% once early enamel decay is counted. In Eyres Monsell the figure is 36.4%, or 42.4% including enamel decay.
- **Bladder health & toilet training.** Great Ormond Street Hospital & ERIC, the children's bowel & bladder charity, identify dark squashes, artificial sweeteners & fizzy drinks as bladder irritants, producing urgency, frequency & wetting. The volume consumed is equally significant: a bladder continually refilling gives a child little opportunity to recognise the sensation of needing the toilet, which is the skill toilet training depends upon.
- **Appetite & nutrition.** Children filled with sweetened drinks eat less of the balanced food provided to them.
- **Lifelong preference.** Taste preferences form early & endure.

We recognise that for some children the bottle serves as a comforter as much as a source of drink. We do not remove that comfort abruptly. The child's key person will support them to settle by other means, & water remains within reach at all times.

5. Babies & children under one

- Breastfeeding mothers are welcome to feed in the setting & we provide a comfortable, private space on request.

- Expressed breast milk must be clearly labelled with the child's name & the date expressed, & is stored & handled in accordance with our procedures.
- First infant formula is the only suitable alternative to breast milk unless otherwise prescribed. Follow-on & growing-up milks are not provided.
- Sips of water are offered at mealtimes from six months, from an open or free-flow cup without a valve.
- Weaning is planned in partnership with parents, introducing a wide range of tastes & textures. Salt & sugar are not added to food for babies.
- Children under twelve months do not require snacks; where a child is hungry between meals, additional milk is offered.

6. Food & drink brought from home

This section applies equally to children accessing funded hours under our Opt-Out arrangements & to any child bringing food from home.

- All food brought from home must comply with our *Packed Lunch & Safe Eating Policy* & must align with the standards we apply to our own provision. Items we would not serve, we cannot allow to be eaten here.
- All food must be packaged to provide a clear & complete list of ingredients. Unlabelled food cannot be given to a child.
- Nuts & food containing nuts must not be brought into either setting under any circumstances.
- We do not have capacity for cold storage of packed lunches, drinks or snacks. Parents must pack food appropriately, with an ice pack where required, & the four-hour rule applies to perishable items.
- Sweets, chocolate, crisps, cakes & biscuits are not permitted, including as part of a packed lunch.
- Children accessing funded hours are entitled to the same quality of food & drink experience as those on enhanced packages. This policy exists in part to ensure exactly that.

7. Allergies, intolerances, medical & special diets

- Dietary requirements are sought from parents at the child's care plan meeting, recorded, & reviewed at least annually & on any reported change.
- Where a child has a diagnosed allergy or medical dietary need, an individual care plan is agreed with parents & retained with the child's record; allergen information is held in the kitchen & in each room.
- We act on written advice from a recognised medical practitioner — a dietitian, paediatrician or general practitioner. We are unable to act on preference presented as medical need without that written advice.

- Religious, cultural & ethical dietary requirements are respected & accommodated in menu planning.
- Where a child's additional needs affect eating, drinking or swallowing, provision is planned with parents, the SENCo & the relevant health professionals.

8. Safer eating & choking prevention

- Children are seated & supervised by a member of staff at all times while eating or drinking. Children do not walk, run or play with food or drink in their mouths.
- Food is prepared appropriately to the child's age & stage — grapes & similar foods quartered lengthways, sausages sliced lengthways, hard fruit & vegetables cooked or grated for younger children, stones & bones removed.
- Whole nuts, popcorn, marshmallows, jelly cubes & boiled sweets are not permitted for any child under five.
- All staff hold a full & relevant paediatric first aid certificate including allergy awareness, renewed three-yearly.

9. Food safety & hygiene

- Kitchen staff and all room staff hold current food hygiene certification appropriate to their role & our settings are registered with, & inspected by, the local authority environmental health service.
- Temperature, storage, cleaning & allergen control records are maintained & audited.
- Children & staff wash their hands before handling or eating food & after using the toilet.

10. Mealtimes as learning

- Mealtimes are social, unhurried occasions. Staff sit & eat with the children, modelling good eating & conversation.
- Children are encouraged towards independence — serving themselves, pouring their own drinks, using appropriate cutlery & clearing their place — at a level suited to their stage.
- Children are encouraged but never pressured to try new foods. Food is never used as a reward or a bribe, food is never withheld as a punishment, & a child is never denied food.
- Children are allowed plenty of time to eat. They are not rushed through a meal & are never drawn into conflict with an adult over food.
- Parents & carers are informed if their child is not eating well at nursery.
- Food, growing, cooking & healthy choices feature in our curriculum across the age ranges.

Celebrations

Birthdays & other occasions are marked without food. A child may be celebrated with a song, a birthday crown, a special helper role for the day, or a book chosen for the room in their name. Parents are asked not to send in cake, sweets or other treats.

This represents a change of practice. Our previous policy permitted sweets, crisps & sweetened drinks on special occasions with parental permission; that provision is withdrawn & no longer applies. We recognise that this will disappoint some families, & we have not taken the decision lightly. It is, however, the only position consistent with the standards we are required to meet & with what we ask of parents in respect of drinks.

11. Oral health

The EYFS requires providers to promote the good oral health of children. Given the dental health of children in this city, we treat that requirement seriously.

- Oral health is taught within the curriculum through stories, role play & discussion appropriate to age.
- Parents are given information on brushing — a smear of fluoride toothpaste for under-threes, a pea-sized amount from three, twice daily, spitting rather than rinsing.
- We signpost families to NHS dental registration, which is free for children & available from the emergence of the first tooth, & will assist families having difficulty finding a practice.
- Our drinks provision is itself an oral health measure & is the single most effective one available to us.

12. Hydration & toilet independence

Appropriate hydration supports toilet learning; excessive intake of sweetened drink obstructs it. We support toilet learning from approximately two years of age in partnership with parents, & our approach is set out in our Toileting & Intimate Care Policy. Where a child has a medical condition, additional need or developmental delay affecting continence, an individual approach is agreed with parents, the health visitor & the SENCo.

13. Working with parents & carers

- Menus, with allergen information, are displayed outside the kitchen, published on our website & shared with parents through Nursery in a Box (Parent admin).
- Key persons share information on what a child has eaten & drunk during the session & raise any concerns early.
- We consult parents on cultural & dietary preferences & welcome feedback on our menus.
- Parents receive our guidance document *Water, teeth & toilet independence* at registration & on any subsequent revision.
- Where a family is experiencing financial hardship affecting their ability to meet these requirements, we ask them to speak to the Manager in confidence. We would far rather help than see a child go without.

14. Staff responsibilities & training

- All staff complete induction on this policy & receive updates whenever statutory guidance changes.
- Room Leaders are responsible for day-to-day implementation & for raising concerns with the Manager.
- The Manager is responsible for menu oversight, record keeping & parent liaison. The Director holds overall responsibility for this policy.
- Staff model the standards this policy sets & do not consume prohibited food or drink in front of the children.
- All Staff complete Food Safety And Hygiene Certificate (Level 2) Course.

15. Monitoring & review

Menus, allergen records & food safety records are audited termly. This policy is reviewed annually, & sooner where statutory guidance, the EYFS framework or funding requirements change.

16. Related policies

This policy supersedes the Play Days Healthy Eating Policy dated March 2026 in its entirety. It should be read alongside our Packed Lunch & Safe Eating Policy; Meals, Snacks & Safe Eating Policy; Allergy & Allergen Management Policy; Administration of Medication Policy; Toileting & Intimate Care Policy; Special Educational Needs & Disability Policy; Unable / Unwilling to Pay Opt-Out Policy; & our Terms & Conditions.

Adoption

This policy was produced & adopted by Imelda Rylatt, Director, & is subject to review as & when the EYFS framework, DfE nutrition guidance or funding criteria change.

Date: September 2026

Review date: September 2027