Lunch Box Policy

At The Early Years Academy, we provide a high-quality food service designed to meet a wide range of dietary requirements, while upholding exceptional standards of food hygiene and safety. Our approach ensures meals are safely prepared, with robust systems in place to prevent cross-contamination of allergens. This is regularly reviewed and monitored as part of our Food Standards Agency inspections, for which we are proud to hold the highest rating.

Our menus are developed in consultation with qualified nutritionists to ensure that every child receives well-balanced, age-appropriate meals that support healthy development. Mealtimes are also a valued part of the nursery day, promoting social interaction, routine, and the development of independence.

We recommend that children participate in our nursery meals as part of a holistic and healthy daily experience. However, we understand that some families may choose to opt out of our meal package. Where this is the case, families are required to follow our Lunch Box Policy in full to ensure we maintain a safe, inclusive, and consistent environment for all children. We require families who provide meals from home to complete food hygiene level 2 to ensure that all food provided meets health and safety and food safety regulations.

It reflects our duty to follow the EYFS 2025, Food Information Regulations 2014, the Eat Better,Start Better guidance, and the DfE Early Years Entitlements Operational Guidance.

For parents who choose to provide a lunch box and opt out of nursery cooked meals, the meals provided from home must be inline with our nursery menus and adhere to the following policy. They must also ensure they follow the Food Safety advice on choking hazards to ensure food does not cause a choking hazard.

Healthy Eating Guidelines

Packed lunches should reflect the Eat Better, Start Better guidance, and include a balanced combination of:

- **Starchy food** – bread, wraps, pasta, rice, chapati, crackers

EYFS 2025, Eat Better, Start Better, Food Information Regulations 2024, DfE early years funding 2025/2026, Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition - GOV.UK, Food safety advice on choking hazards in settings - Foundation Years

- **Cereal -** All breakfast cereals must conform to the 'green' food traffic light labelling
- **Protein** – lean meat, fish, eggs, beans, tofu, hummus
- **Dairy or alternatives (these must be unsweetened, for non-dairy alternatives these must be unsweetened and calcium fortified)** – yoghurt, cheese
- **Fruit and vegetables** – at least one portion of each
- **Drink** – water is provided throughout the day

Prohibited Foods List

The following items **must not** be included in any packed lunch:

- ❌ **Nuts or nut products** (e.g. peanut butter, Nutella)
- ❌ **Sweets, chocolate, or confectionery or crisps**
- ❌ **Fizzy drinks, juice, squash, or flavoured milk**
- ❌ **Whole grapes, cherries, blueberries**
- ❌ **Seafood or shellfish** (e.g. prawns, sushi)
- ❌ **Raisins or seeds**
- ❌ **Cocktail sausages**
- ❌ **Ready Meals**

Food Safety and Storage

Due to food safety regulations:

- Lunch is stored at room temperature, as we do not have refrigerated storage facilities. According to the Food Standards Agency, perishable foods should be kept at room temperature for a maximum of 2 hours.
- We do not reheat/heat food brought from home due to food safety and insurance restrictions.
- In hot weather, perishable items must not exceed 1 hour unrefrigerated
- Insulated lunch bags with a frozen ice pack must be used
- Lunchboxes must be labelled with your child's full name

- A written list of all ingredients and allergens must be included daily
- All prepurchased food items must be in their original sealed packaging with a clear use by date printed on it by the manufacturer. Food outside of the use by date will and best before dates will not be accepted.
- Lunch box food items must be food that your child has eaten previously on a regular basis to reduce the risk of an undisclosed allergy occurring. This is particularly relevant for babies, especially those who are navigating the weaning process. Please see our baby weaning policy for more information and help regarding this transition
- Warm foods must be delivered at the appropriate temperature (above 63 degrees) probed and recorded upon delivery and hot held no longer than food safety hygiene practices allow. If the food temperature drops below 63degrees food must be eaten within 2 hours. Food must be delivered in a sealed container, labelled with all allergens and the child's name.

Meals without allergen information **will not be served**.

In the event that a packed lunch does not meet the requirements outlined in this policy—such as containing prohibited items, missing allergen information, or posing a food safety concern—an emergency nursery meal will be provided where available. This will be charged at the standard daily meal rate and added to your account.

Parents whose children have allergies, intolerances or preferences, must complete the documentation as per our Allergic reaction and intolerance policy. Children will then have a place mat in line with this policy and their food will be served on a plate that matches their place mat.

Quantity and Session Length

Parents are responsible for ensuring that packed lunches contain enough food to meet their child's needs for the full duration of their booked session. For example:

- **Full day sessions** (e.g. 8am–5pm) require suitable provisions for:
    - Breakfast
    - Snacks
    - Lunch
    - Afternoon tea

- **Half-day or part-time sessions** should include enough food to cover mealtimes relevant to the hours attended.

Children must be provided with appropriate portions to maintain energy levels and support healthy growth throughout the day. Where insufficient food is provided, and a child requires additional meals, an emergency nursery meal will be given and charged at the standard rate. If a child refuses to eat the meals from home, we will contact parents to either provide an alternative in line with this policy or an emergency meal will be provided and charged at the day rate.

We understand that some families may choose to provide their own food, and we will always work in partnership to support that choice safely and respectfully.

However, we strongly encourage parents to take up our in-house meal provision wherever possible. Our meals are freshly prepared each day, designed with guidance from qualified nutritionists, and tailored to meet a wide range of dietary and developmental needs. They provide a well-balanced, age-appropriate diet and support children's health, independence, and social skills through shared mealtime experiences.

Choosing nursery meals offers both convenience and peace of mind, knowing your child is receiving nutritious food in a safe, familiar environment.

This policy was adopted on	**Signed on behalf of the nursery**	**Date for review**
August 2025		August 2026
September 2025		September 2026