SAFER EATING POLICY

Policy Owner:	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
ISSR Reference:	Part 3 – Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils Part 8 – Quality of Leadership in and Management of Schools
Date of review:	NEW Summer 2026
Approved by:	Group Board
Date of next review	Summer 2027

Version Control Information

Reason for Amendment	Role	Date	Main Changes
New Group policy	Chief Operating Officer (COO)	Group Board - Summer 2026	Creates a standalone Tier 1 policy for safer eating in the EYFS; establishes active supervision, an Anchor role, choking-prevention controls, incident learning and proportionate extension beyond the EYFS where individual need requires it.

1. Aims

St Dunstan's Education Group (SDEG, 'the Group') is committed to ensuring that young children can eat safely while in its care. Choking can be silent and can develop rapidly. Safe practice therefore depends on purposeful food preparation, suitable seating, uninterrupted active supervision and a swift first-aid response.

This policy establishes mandatory Group-wide requirements for all EYFS provision. Each setting must implement these requirements through a short local Safer Eating Protocol reflecting its rooms, staffing, catering model and emergency arrangements. Local arrangements may add detail but must not dilute this policy.

- safer eating is a welfare and safeguarding responsibility;
- “supervision” must mean active, attentive observation rather than general adult presence;
- one adult must have clear responsibility for overseeing each eating occasion;
- food must be prepared and presented with the child’s age, development and individual needs in mind;
- incidents and near misses must be recorded, reviewed and used to improve practice;
- children must be supported to eat safely, calmly and inclusively.

Scope principle
The full active-supervision and Anchor requirements apply to children in the EYFS. They are not a blanket requirement for every older pupil. Outside the EYFS, settings must use age-appropriate arrangements and apply equivalent or enhanced controls where an individual healthcare plan, special educational need, disability, developmental need or risk assessment requires them.

This policy applies whenever a Group setting is responsible for EYFS children and food or drink is consumed, including meals, snacks, breakfast and after-school care, holiday provision, curriculum activities, celebrations, events, trips and transport stops.

For older pupils, the principles of safe food provision, allergy management, first-aid readiness and proportionate risk assessment continue to apply under the relevant Group policies. The specific EYFS controls in this policy apply only where the circumstances or an individual assessment require them.

The Group has regard to the current Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers and the Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance. This policy supports compliance with the welfare, health and safety requirements of the Independent School Standards.

2. Legislation and Regulatory Framework

- Department for Education: Early years foundation stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers, current version.

- Department for Education: Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance, current version.
- Department for Education: Food safety: help for early years providers, including advice on reducing choking risk.
- NHS: First aid guidance for a child who is choking.
- Independent School Standards Part 3 – Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Group Board of Governors

- approves this policy and receives assurance on its implementation;
- ensures sufficient systems and resources are available to support compliance;
- receives significant incident themes and improvement actions through agreed assurance routes.

3.2 Chief Executive Officer

- is accountable to the Group Board for consistent implementation across the Group;
- ensures sufficient leadership, capacity and resources.

3.3 Chief Operating Officer

- owns and maintains this policy;
- sets Group-wide minimum requirements and coordinates assurance;
- reviews significant incidents, near misses and Group-wide learning with relevant leaders;
- reports material concerns to the Chief Executive Officer and governors as required.

3.4 Heads and Group Head of Nurseries

- ensure the policy is implemented in every relevant setting and activity;
- approve and maintain a concise local Safer Eating Protocol;
- ensure suitable staffing, seating, layout, training and first-aid cover;
- ensure individual needs are identified, assessed and communicated;
- ensure incidents and near misses are reported, reviewed and escalated appropriately.

3.5 Room, phase and activity leaders

- identify the Anchor before eating begins;
- ensure the environment, seating, food and staffing arrangements are safe;
- brief staff, including temporary or visiting adults, on their roles;
- stop or adjust the activity where safe supervision cannot be maintained.

3.6 The Anchor

- takes the designated observation position before children begin eating;
- maintains active visual supervision throughout;

- avoids competing duties and calls for support rather than leaving position;
- responds immediately to signs of choking or distress;
- reports any concern, incident or near miss.

3.7 Catering and food-handling staff

- prepare and present food safely and in accordance with verified dietary and texture requirements;
- communicate substitutions or changes before food is served;
- support allergen, hygiene and cross-contact controls under the relevant Group policies.

3.8 All staff and other adults

- follow this policy and the local protocol;
- complete required training and follow individual plans;
- do not distract or call away the Anchor except in an emergency;
- report unsafe practice, incidents and near misses promptly.

4. Safer eating management system

4.1 Active supervision and the Anchor

Before every EYFS meal, snack or food-tasting activity, the responsible room or activity lead must identify a designated supervising adult, referred to in this policy as the Anchor.

- The Anchor must be in position before children begin eating and remain until the final child has finished and left the eating area.
- The Anchor must be able to see all children for whom they are responsible and must actively observe them while they eat.
- The Anchor must not undertake competing duties, fetch items, complete records, use a personal device or be drawn into non-essential conversation.
- Other adults, referred to locally as Runners where helpful, may move around, serve food, fetch items and manage routine needs so that the Anchor remains focused.
- If the Anchor cannot maintain clear sight of every child, additional adult support or a different seating arrangement must be put in place before eating continues.
- A clear visible identifier, such as a lanyard, may be used to show who is the Anchor and should not be distracted.
- The Anchor or another adult immediately present in the eating space must hold a current paediatric first-aid certificate, in accordance with EYFS requirements and local deployment arrangements.

4.2 Seating and eating environment

- Children must be alert and seated safely upright in a highchair or appropriately sized chair while eating.
- Where reasonably practicable, eating must take place in a designated space where distractions are minimised.
- Tables, chairs and adult positions must allow clear observation of every child.

- Children must not walk, run, play or lie down while eating.
- Food and drink must not be consumed in a moving vehicle unless the activity has been specifically risk assessed and active supervision can be maintained.
- The environment must remain calm. Staff must intervene promptly in unsafe behaviour, including food throwing or putting excessive food into the mouth.

4.3 Food preparation and presentation

- Food must be prepared and served in a form appropriate to each child's age, stage of development and individual needs.
- Staff must consider the size, shape and texture of food and follow current national safer-eating guidance, including cutting or modifying foods that present a choking risk.
- Children requiring modified textures, specialist feeding arrangements or additional support must have these documented and communicated to relevant staff.
- Food must not be changed, substituted or served where required dietary, allergy or texture information has not been verified.
- Adults must model safe eating and support children to take manageable mouthfuls, chew and finish before taking more.
- Food, drink, utensils and containers must not be shared or swapped.

4.4 Individual needs and inclusion

Children with allergies, medical conditions, developmental delay, dysphagia, sensory needs, special educational needs or disabilities may require additional controls. The setting must ensure that relevant plans, professional advice and risk assessments are understood by the adults preparing, serving and supervising food.

Additional support must be delivered in a way that protects the child's safety, dignity and inclusion. Where a child's needs cannot be met safely through routine arrangements, the Head, Group Head of Nurseries or nominated lead must agree an individual plan with parents or carers and relevant professionals before provision continues.

4.5 Activities, events and visits

- Food used in cooking, sensory play, celebrations, clubs or visits must be planned in advance.
- The activity lead must check allergy, dietary, texture and supervision requirements before food is offered.
- The Anchor principle applies to EYFS children eating off site or during Group-organised activities.
- First-aid cover and access to emergency medication and communications must be confirmed before the activity begins.

4.6 Emergency readiness

- Staff supervising children who eat must know how to recognise choking, summon help and begin the appropriate first-aid response.
- Required first-aid and emergency arrangements must be immediately accessible.

- A choking child must never be left alone. Emergency services must be called without delay where required by the child's condition and first-aid guidance.
- Parents or carers must be informed following any choking incident and any material near miss, in accordance with local procedures.

4.7 Training and competence

All staff who prepare, serve or supervise food for EYFS children must receive safer-eating instruction at induction and refresher training at intervals set by the Group. Training must be appropriate to role and recorded.

- the purpose and practical operation of the Anchor role;
- how choking may present, including that it can be silent;
- age-appropriate food preparation, size, shape and texture;
- safe seating and attentive supervision;
- individual allergy, dietary, medical and texture requirements;
- how to summon help and follow the current first-aid response;
- incident and near-miss reporting.

Paediatric first-aid training and deployment must meet current EYFS requirements. Local leaders must ensure that temporary, agency and visiting staff receive a role-specific briefing before supervising children who eat.

4.8 Incidents, near misses and learning

Every choking incident and material near miss must be recorded as soon as reasonably practicable. The record must be sufficient to establish what happened, the food involved, supervision arrangements, action taken, outcome and immediate controls.

- provide first aid and emergency assistance immediately;
- inform the parent or carer and relevant setting leader;
- preserve relevant information, including menus, packaging or food samples where appropriate;
- review food preparation, seating, visibility, staffing, Anchor deployment, training and individual plans;
- identify actions, owners and timescales;
- escalate significant matters through Group incident and risk procedures;
- share learning across relevant settings where it may prevent recurrence.

Reviews must be proportionate and learning-focused. Deliberate disregard of the policy, concealment or reckless practice remains subject to the Group's normal procedures.

5. Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Chief Operating Officer or sooner where required due to:

- legislative change;

- regulatory change;
- inspection findings;
- organisational change;
- a choking incident or material near miss.

Assurance activity will include local Safer Eating Protocol reviews, staff training compliance, paediatric first-aid coverage, observations of Anchor arrangements, audit findings, and review of incidents and near misses.

At every review, the policy will be approved by the Group Board of Governors.

6. Links with other policies

- Allergy Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical and Dietary Needs Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Nutrition Policy
- First Aid policies and procedures
- Educational Visits Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection policies
- Risk, Assurance and Compliance Policy

Appendix 1: Mandatory Local Safer Eating Protocol

Each relevant setting must maintain a concise operational protocol covering the points below. This is an implementation schedule beneath the Tier 1 policy, not a separate policy.

Required element	Local protocol must specify
Leadership	Named local lead; deputy cover; escalation route.
Eating occasions	Meals, snacks, tasting, celebrations, wraparound, trips and any other relevant activities.
Anchor deployment	How the Anchor is selected, positioned and identified; how cover is maintained; duties assigned to other adults.
Room layout and seating	Designated eating areas; child seating; adult positions; maximum groupings; visibility controls.
Food preparation	Local source of current cutting, texture and presentation guidance; arrangements for individual needs and substitutions.
First aid and emergency	Paediatric first-aid deployment; internal alert; emergency call arrangements; medication access; parent contact.
Training	Induction, refresher route, temporary-staff briefing and training records.
Reporting and assurance	Incident system; near-miss route; review lead; micro-audit frequency; action tracking.

Appendix 2: References and guidance

Department for Education: Early years foundation stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers, current version.

Department for Education: Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance, current version.

Department for Education: Food safety: help for early years providers, including advice on reducing choking risk.

NHS: First aid guidance for a child who is choking.

St Dunstan's Education Group: Allergy Policy; Supporting Pupils with Medical and Dietary Needs Policy; First Aid policies and procedures.