



AYSGARTH SCHOOL

EYFS Safer Eating Policy

Reviewed: September 2026
Member of Staff responsible for this policy: Anna Brown
To be reviewed September 2027

INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out Aysgarth's approach to ensuring that all food and drink provided to Early Years children is safe, healthy, balanced and nutritious, in accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework and the EYFS Nutrition Guidance.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff working with Early Years children at Aysgarth, including Nursery (pre-school class) and Reception. It covers all meals, snacks and drinks provided by the school, as well as food provided as part of the taught curriculum, or special events. This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Safeguarding Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Care of Pupils and Boarders and Medical and First Aid Policies, including Administration of Medicines and Anaphylaxis and Allergy Policy.

Legislative Framework and Statutory Requirements

The EYFS statutory requirement states: Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious. From September 2025, providers must have regard to the EYFS Nutrition Guidance when implementing this requirement.

The school follows the principles of the Department for Education's *Allergy Safety in Schools* statutory guidance (July 2026), introduced following the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, and applies its principles to allergy awareness, staff training, allergy policies, Individual Healthcare Plans and emergency response. Further details are set out in Aysgarth's Allergy and Anaphylaxis Policy.

All Aysgarth staff receive allergy awareness and anaphylaxis training, including recognition of allergic reactions, emergency response procedures and the appropriate use of adrenaline auto-injectors. Training is refreshed in line with the school's training programme and relevant guidance.

Aims and Principles

This policy aims to ensure that:

All children receive healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drinks that support their growth, development, health and wellbeing

Children develop positive eating habits and relationships with food from an early age

All food is prepared and served safely to minimise the risk of choking and food-borne illness

Food allergies and special dietary requirements are effectively managed to keep all children safe

Mealtimes are positive, social experiences that support children's emotional and social development

Parents and carers are partners in promoting healthy eating and food safety

Roles and Responsibilities

Writes, reviews and monitors the implementation of this policy in line with the EYFS statutory framework and relevant safeguarding requirements.

Meets termly with the Catering Manager to review menus, nutritional requirements and any updates to guidance or practice.

Liaises with the School Nurse regarding children's allergies, dietary requirements and relevant healthcare plans.

Ensures Early Years staff are aware of individual dietary and allergy requirements and understand the procedures for food safety, choking prevention and responding to allergic reactions.

Works with the Catering Manager, School Nurse and wider school team to ensure appropriate information and procedures are kept up to date.

All Early Years Staff

Follow this policy at all times when preparing, handling or serving food

Supervise children during mealtimes and understand choking first aid procedures

Know which children have allergies and how to respond to allergic reactions

Communicate with parents/carers about children's eating and drinking

Catering Staff

Prepare food in accordance with food safety regulations and this policy

Ensure all food is prepared appropriately to prevent choking hazards

Manage allergen information and prevent cross-contamination

Parents and Carers

Provide accurate information about allergies and dietary requirements

Follow school guidelines when providing food from home

Work in partnership with the school to support their child's healthy eating

Healthy, Balanced and Nutritious Food

All food and drinks provided to children at Aysgarth must be healthy, balanced and nutritious. This means:

Meals contain appropriate amounts of nutrients and energy for growing children

A wide variety of foods from all food groups are offered across the day and week

Foods high in saturated fat, salt and/or sugar are avoided where specified by the EYFS Nutrition Guidance and otherwise limited in accordance with the guidance.

Portion sizes are appropriate for children's age and development

Providing healthy, balanced nutrition helps prevent children from becoming overweight or obese, supports optimal growth and development, and establishes positive eating habits that can impact long-term health.

The Four Food Groups

Children's meals and snacks are planned around the four main food groups:

1. Fruit and vegetables

Fresh, frozen, tinned (in juice, not syrup) or dried

At least one portion at each main meal and as part of some snacks

2. Starchy carbohydrates

Bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, cereals and other grains

A portion at each main meal

Wholegrain options are provided regularly throughout the week

3. Dairy and plain, fortified plant-based alternatives

Milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais

Three portions daily (including those provided at home)

4. Proteins

Beans, pulses, lentils

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu and meat alternatives

A portion of protein is provided as part of lunch each day, with a variety of protein sources offered across the week. Should tea be provided, it will also include a portion of protein in accordance with the EYFS Nutrition Guidance.

Drinks Policy

The only drinks provided to children are:

Fresh tap water (available throughout the day)

Plain milk (whole or semi-skimmed cow's milk or unsweetened fortified plant-based alternatives)

We do not provide follow-on formula or growing-up milks

Portion Sizes and Responsive Feeding

As a general guide, a portion for a young child may be roughly the size of their clenched fist; however, portions are adjusted according to each child's age, developmental stage, appetite and individual needs.

Start with small servings, and children can ask for more if still hungry

Never force children to finish everything on their plates

Do not offer rewards (stickers, dessert) for finishing food

Respond to children's hunger and fullness cues

Adjust portions based on individual children's needs

Menu Planning and Provision

Menus are planned to ensure variety and nutritional balance:

Menus are designed to cover a three-week rolling programme

Menus include a variety of foods from all four food groups

Different textures, colours, flavours and cultural foods are incorporated

Menus are reviewed and updated at least twice yearly to include seasonal produce

Menus and allergen information are shared with parents/carers

Parents/carers are consulted about cultural preferences and dietary requirements

Each lunch consists of two dishes: a main dish plus an additional dish (starter, side dish or second dish)

Choking Prevention and Food Safety

Choking is a significant risk for young children. All staff must understand and implement appropriate choking prevention measures at all times.

All food must be prepared to an appropriate size, shape and texture for each child's age and development

Staff must know the difference between gagging (normal learning process) and choking (emergency)

Children must be adequately supervised while eating and must be within sight and hearing of a member of staff.

While children are eating, at least one member of staff with a valid full paediatric first aid certificate, meeting the criteria set out in Annex A of the EYFS statutory framework, must be present in the room.

Understanding gagging vs choking:

Gagging (normal, protective):

Loud coughing/spluttering, watering eyes, red face

Child may retch or vomit

Child is breathing and can cough

Usually resolves on its own; do not intervene unless choking develops

Choking (emergency):

Difficulty breathing, speaking or coughing

Red, puffy face or blue colour

Signs of distress, pointing to throat or grasping neck

Quiet and unable to make sounds

Requires immediate first aid response

All EYFS staff receive choking training every term as part of the inset.

Choking Hazard Foods

The following foods are choking hazards and must either be avoided or modified appropriately:

Foods requiring particular care:

Whole nuts and whole seeds – not given to children under five; Aysgarth is a nut-free school.

Popcorn

Raw jelly cubes

Marshmallows

Whole grapes, cherry tomatoes (must be quartered lengthways)

Hard sweets, jelly beans, chewing gum

Chunks of meat or cheese

Hot dogs or sausages with skin (unless skin is removed and cut into strips)

Foods requiring modification:

Hard raw vegetables and fruit, such as carrots, apples and celery, are prepared appropriately for the child's age and developmental stage, for example by cooking until soft, grating or cutting into suitable pieces.

Grapes, cherry tomatoes, berries; cut lengthwise into quarters

Stone fruits (peaches, plums); remove stones and cut appropriately

Sausages; remove skins and cut lengthwise into thin strips

Hard cheese; grate or cut into thin strips

Food Preparation to Prevent Choking

All food must be prepared safely according to the children's developmental stage:

For Nursery children:

Food is cut into pieces appropriate to each child's age, developmental stage, eating ability and the type of food being served.

Cook hard vegetables (carrots, apples) until soft enough to pierce with a fork

Remove seeds, pits and skins from fruits

Grate or thinly slice hard cheeses

Cut cylindrical foods lengthwise into thin strips

Quarter round foods (grapes, tomatoes) lengthwise

Sausages are not served to EYFS children.

Food Standards Agency posters on preparing food safely to avoid choking are displayed in food preparation areas.

Safe Eating Environment and Supervision

To minimise choking risk, the following rules must be followed at all times:

Children must always sit upright while eating; never lying down, walking, crawling or running

Mealtimes are calm with minimal distractions and no rushing

Children are supervised at all times in accordance with statutory EYFS staff ratio requirements.

Children are reminded to take small bites, chew thoroughly and swallow before talking

No games or play with food during mealtimes

Adequate time is allowed for meals and snacks

Paediatric First Aid Requirements

Whilst children are eating, there must always be a member of staff in the room with a valid Full paediatric first aid certificate.

Aysgarth requires all Early Years staff to maintain current Full paediatric first aid certification

Staff must be confident in administering choking first aid for infants and children

Staff must know when and how to call emergency services

Regular refresher training is provided to maintain competency

Food Allergies and Intolerances

Food allergies can be life-threatening and must be taken very seriously. Children can be allergic to any food, not just the major allergens listed above.

Food intolerances

Food intolerances (e.g. lactose intolerance, non-coeliac gluten sensitivity) are different from allergies:

Do not involve the immune system

Are not life-threatening

Cause unpleasant symptoms (abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhoea, rashes)

Must still be carefully managed in consultation with parents/carers and health professionals

Coeliac disease

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition requiring strict avoidance of all gluten-containing foods and prevention of cross-contamination.

Managing Allergies and Special Dietary Requirements

We must obtain detailed information about food allergies and dietary requirements BEFORE a child is admitted to the setting.

Parents/carers complete detailed allergy information forms

Allergy action plans are developed with parents/carers and, where appropriate, healthcare professionals

All staff are informed of which children have allergies

Allergy information is kept up-to-date and reviewed regularly

Photos of children with allergies may be displayed in food preparation areas

Catering staff are responsible for providing the correct food for children with special dietary requirements. Once labelled/boxed meals have been handed over to Early Years staff, the receiving member of staff is responsible for checking that the meal is provided to the correct child in accordance with their dietary requirements. Staff should use the child's name and, where appropriate, the child's photograph or other agreed identifier to support this check. Children may be encouraged to recognise and communicate their own dietary requirements as part of developing independence and self-advocacy; however, responsibility for ensuring that the correct food is provided remains with adults.

Prevention of cross-contamination:

Foods containing allergens are stored separately from allergen-free foods

Staff must be aware at all times of particular children with allergies to ensure cross-contamination is prevented

Staff wash hands thoroughly before and after handling allergen-containing foods

Visitors are informed of rules about bringing food into the setting

Children are taught not to share food

Anaphylaxis Emergency Procedures

Anaphylaxis is a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction requiring immediate treatment.

Symptoms may include:

Swelling of the throat, tongue or airways

Difficulty swallowing or breathing

Wheezing, noisy breathing, persistent cough

Dizziness, confusion, sudden sleepiness

Feeling faint or loss of consciousness

Pale, clammy skin

Emergency response:

All staff working with children with known severe allergies are trained in recognising anaphylaxis, emergency response protocols and using adrenaline auto-injectors.

Religious and Cultural Dietary Needs

We respect and accommodate religious and cultural dietary requirements:

Engage in open communication with parents/carers about specific requirements

Provide halal, kosher or vegetarian/vegan options as required

Incorporate traditional foods from different cultures into menus

Ensure inclusive mealtimes where all children can participate

Children with Additional Support Needs

Some children may have specific dietary needs related to physical, developmental or sensory needs:

Sensory needs related to food (sensitivity to textures, tastes, smells); menus are adapted, and the mealtime environment is adjusted

Medical conditions requiring special diets or adaptations; written confirmation from a healthcare professional is required

Dietitian recommendations are followed for children with complex needs

Food Brought from Home

Food from home is not routinely encouraged within the Early Years setting. However, there may be occasions where, due to special circumstances, celebrations or particular events, families may be asked or permitted to provide food, such as a birthday cake.

All food brought into the Early Years setting from home must be accompanied by the school's completed **Food and Allergen Information Form**.

Parents/carers must provide accurate information about the ingredients and any allergens contained in the food.

Staff will check the allergen information provided against the dietary requirements and allergy information for the children before food is served.

Food must not be given to a child where the ingredients or allergen information cannot be confirmed.

Appropriate measures will be taken to prevent cross-contamination, and children will be reminded not to share food.

Where food cannot safely be provided to a child because of an allergy, intolerance or other dietary requirement, the school will provide an appropriate alternative where possible.

All food brought into school must be suitable for safe storage and consumption and must comply with the school's food safety and healthy eating requirements.

Food Hygiene and Storage

All staff involved in preparing and handling food must be competent to do so and follow food safety regulations.

Food preparation/storage follows the relevant food safety legislation and Food Standards Agency guidance, including appropriate temperature control, storage and prevention of cross-contamination.

All staff complete food hygiene training appropriate to their role

Hands are washed thoroughly before preparing, handling or serving food

All food preparation surfaces and equipment are cleaned before and after use

Communication with Parents and Carers

Effective communication with parents and carers is essential for promoting healthy eating and food safety. We:

Share menus in advance - on the school website and displayed on the EY Notice Board.

An overview of the snacks provided is also displayed on the EY Notice Board.

Provide this policy to all parents/carers and discuss our approach to food

Use Form Teacher relationships to maintain ongoing dialogue about children's eating and drinking, and careful monitoring/tracking where necessary

Food, Learning and Sustainability

Food experiences are an important part of the Early Years curriculum and provide opportunities for children to develop a positive relationship with food, support their wellbeing, build independence, develop practical life skills and an understanding of healthy choices.

Cooking activities and food workshops provide opportunities to explore nutrition, food safety, different cultures, tastes and textures.

Growing activities, including herbs, fruit and vegetables, help children understand where food comes from and explore seasonal produce.

Children learn about healthy eating and the four food groups through play, stories, songs, discussions and practical experiences.

Mealtimes provide opportunities to develop language, social skills, independence and an awareness of colours, textures, smells, tastes and quantities.

Children are encouraged to try new foods but are never forced to eat or participate in food activities.

Children are never required to participate in cooking or food activities involving their known allergens.

Children are encouraged to develop independence by making appropriate choices about food and serving themselves where this is safe and suitable.

Sustainability is incorporated through growing, cooking, reducing food waste and caring for the environment.

Children are encouraged to take appropriate portions and understand the importance of not wasting food. Where appropriate, food waste is recycled or composted.

Children are encouraged to develop an understanding of how food choices can affect the environment and to develop positive attitudes towards caring for the world around them.

All cooking and food activities follow appropriate food hygiene and safety procedures, with particular attention to choking prevention, allergies and allergen management.

Mealtime Environment

Mealtimes should be positive, social experiences that support children's development:

Staff help to create a calm, relaxed atmosphere

Tables are set appropriately with child-sized utensils, and safe seating appropriate for the age of the children.

Children are encouraged to serve themselves at snack time to certain foods (with support) to develop independence, in addition to learning to use a knife and fork.

Conversation and social interaction are encouraged

Staff model good eating behaviours and try new foods alongside children

Children are encouraged but never forced to try new foods

Positive language is used about all foods

Food is never used as a reward or punishment

Children's choices and preferences are respected

Adequate time is provided, so mealtimes are not rushed

The mealtime environment promotes children's emotional well-being, social skills, independence and positive relationships with food.

Monitoring, Review and Quality Assurance

The Head of Early Years meets termly with the Catering Manager and School Nurse to review:

menus against the DfE Nutrition Guidance

allergen information and children's dietary requirements

food hygiene and allergy awareness training

appropriate paediatric first aid coverage during mealtimes

choking prevention procedures

food brought into school

children's experiences at mealtimes

feedback from parents, children and staff

any food-related incidents or near misses

any areas for improvement.

RELATED POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

In forming this policy, we follow all statutory guidance in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Aysgarth Early Years Policy

Aysgarth School Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Health and Safety Policy

Care of Pupils and Boarders and Medical and First Aid Policies, including Administration of Medicine.

Administration of Medicines (EYFS) Policy

Inclusion and Equality Policy

Aysgarth's Allergy and Anaphylaxis Policy

FURTHER INFORMATION

This policy is informed by:

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework for Group and School-Based Providers, effective from 1 September 2026

Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance (DfE, May 2025)

Department for Education – Allergy safety in schools statutory guidance (July 2026)

Food Standards Agency guidance on food safety and allergen management