Orion Education

POLICY

SCHOOL FOOD

Approval Date	**2026/27 - AUTUMN TERM**
Review Date	**2028/29 - AUTUMN TERM**
Owner	Executive

Policy Type		
		Trust Policy to be adopted in full
	■	Trust Policy adapted by the Academy
		Academy Policy

Approval Body		
	■	Executive
		Trust Board
		Local Advisory Body (LAB)

Orion Education

Our Four Critical Questions

Why do we exist?

To improve outcomes, transform lives and enable social mobility.

How do we behave?

Trust • Kindness • Endeavour

What do we do?

We create a strong network of schools which transform the lives of students by enabling them to achieve high educational and personal goals, regardless of their background.

How do we succeed?

Through a clear backbone, strong culture, academic rigour and smart systems.

1. Aims

- This policy aims to ensure that our Trust schools provide an environment that encourages healthy food and eating, and helps our pupils make healthy food choices
- Food allergies and dietary needs are managed effectively
- Pupils have appropriate levels of responsibility and choice over the foods they eat
- Food safety and hygiene practices are followed, including avoiding cross-contamination
- All staff and parents/carers are aware of their roles in making sure that our pupils consume healthy, nutritious and safe food and drink

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy is based on the following legislation:

- Natasha's Law
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- Food Information (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2019
- Benedict's Law (from September 2026)

It is also based on the following Department for Education (DfE) guidance:

- School Food Standards practical guidance
- School food in England
- Allergy guidance for schools
- Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition - GOV.UK

3. Responsibilities of the school

Through its relationship with its external catering provider the Trust will make sure that this food and nutrition policy is properly implemented, and that food preparation, provision and nutrition procedures are followed in accordance with this policy.

In addition to the standards set out elsewhere in this policy, the catering provider is expected to:

3.1 Cost Management

The catering provider must ensure that meal prices remain affordable for parents by implementing cost-effective strategies without compromising on quality. They must regularly

review and adjust pricing to reflect changes in food costs and economic conditions, and share termly reports on meal costs, pricing strategies, and efforts to keep meals affordable with the school.

3.2 Family Dining

Where possible, the Trust, working with the catering provider, will implement family dining at primary and infant schools to foster a sense of community and encourage positive social interactions. Family dining involves students and staff sitting together at tables, sharing food, and engaging in conversation. This approach helps to create a supportive and inclusive dining environment, promotes healthy eating habits, and enhances the overall meal experience. The implementation of family dining will be regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of the school community.

3.3 Minimising Disposables

To promote environmental sustainability and encourage pupils to sit down together rather than eat on the go, the catering provider is expected to minimise the use of disposable items. This includes using reusable plates, cutlery, and cups wherever possible. By reducing disposables, we aim to lower our environmental footprint and foster a culture of shared meals and social interaction. Practices will be regularly reviewed to ensure they align with the school's values and contribute to a supportive and inclusive dining environment.

3.4 Lunchtime as an Extended Learning Opportunity

Lunchtime is treated as an integral part of the school day, structured to support students' continued learning through healthy choices, social development, and positive food culture. The Trust's schools will:

- Supervise dining halls to ensure mealtimes are relaxed, respectful, and conducive to developing social skills;
- Encourage staff to engage positively during lunch, modelling healthy food choices and good manners;
- Reinforce the value of food through PSHE, science, and enrichment activities that link nutrition to physical and mental health.

4. Responsibilities of parents/carers

We work in partnership with parents/carers to make sure all pupils are offered appropriate and nutritious food while at school.

We ask all parents/carers to:

- Inform the school of any allergies, medical dietary needs, food intolerances and religious or cultural dietary requirements.

- Encourage their child to try a variety of foods and eat a balanced diet at home and in school
- Give their child a healthy breakfast before arriving at school, unless their child is provided with money to buy breakfast at school or will attend our breakfast club
- Read and respond to food-related communication, including school menus
- In Primary Schools, select their child's food choices for the week ahead, using the online ordering system. When parents do not do this on the day, a default option of jacket potato is given to children.
- Keep the school informed of any changes to their child's dietary needs, and/or any concerns or information around their eating
- Take note of the school's scheduled mealtimes (see section 7) and understand that food will only be provided to pupils who are present at these times
- Read and follow our rules around bringing food from home, as outlined in section 12 of this policy.

5. Communicating with parents/carers

We tell parents/carers by email, letter, or in person promptly if our staff notice any issues with their child's food consumption or habits at school, such as:

- Significant changes in eating habits, such as consistently eating very little food
- Concerns about wellbeing, such as a pupil's eating habits appearing to affect their mood, energy level or general wellbeing

We work together with parents/carers to address any problems promptly.

6. Sourcing food and ingredients

We work with our school caterer to provide healthy and nutritious meals.

We collaborate with our catering partner by:

- Holding regular meetings with our school caterer to review menus, discuss feedback, and plan future requirements;
- Carrying out regular checks to make sure the food provided is of a high standard, meets all relevant nutritional guidance, and is prepared safely and hygienically;
- Undertake regular surveys of parents, staff, and pupils.
- Participating in the menu planning process to make sure our food is appealing, balanced, varied and caters to the dietary requirements that our pupils have

The contract with our catering provider is reviewed and re-tendered periodically to make sure we receive the best possible service and value for money.

7. Providing food and drink at school

We follow the School Food Standards, except in relation to food provided in the following circumstances, to which the standards don't apply:

- At parties or celebrations to mark religious or cultural occasions
- At fundraising events
- As rewards for achievement, good behaviour or effort
- When teaching food preparation and cookery skills, including when the food prepared is served to pupils as part of a school lunch
- On an occasional basis by parents/carers or pupils

We provide balanced and nutritious meals, snacks and drinks, from the school canteens at timetabled mealtimes and break times.

Pupils are encouraged to eat balanced meals containing a wide variety of foods from the 4 main food groups.

Our menus are:

- Planned on a cyclical basis to make sure all meals, snacks and drinks are balanced, varied and nutritious, and include different foods, including global cuisines
- Planned to include substitutions and replacement ingredients for pupils with special dietary requirements
- Reviewed **at least** twice a year, to include seasonal produce
- Menus are shared on individual school websites with parents/carers to:
  a) Provide allergen information
  b) Help them balance food at home by providing varied meals
  c) Reassure them that their child is getting a nutritious and balanced diet at school
  d) Seek their feedback, particularly regarding cultural preferences

7.1 Specific food group requirements

We adhere to the following rules for the 4 main food groups across the whole school day:

Starchy foods:

- We include 1 or more portions of food from this group every day
- We offer 3 or more different starchy foods each week
- We provide 1 or more wholegrain varieties of starchy food each week.
- We offer bread with no added fat or oil each day

- In our Primary Schools we limit starchy food cooked in fat or oil to no more than 2 days each week
- We do not add salt to water when cooking pasta, rice and other starchy foods

Fruit and vegetables:

- We serve 1 or more portions of vegetables or salad as an accompaniment every day
- We provide 1 or more portions of fruit every day
- We offer a dessert containing at least 50% fruit 2 or more times each week
- We provide at least 3 different fruits and 3 different vegetables each week

Milk and dairy:

- We include a portion of food from this group every day
- In our secondary schools we make skimmed milk available as part of our cold drink offer.

Protein sources:

- We include a portion of food from this group every day
- We serve meat or poultry on 3 or more days each week
- In our primary schools we limit meat or poultry products, such as sausages, to no more than twice each week across the whole school day
- In our secondary schools we serve oily fish once or more every 3 weeks
- We provide a portion of non-dairy protein on 3 or more days each week (e.g. chickpeas, tofu or lentils)
- If we serve pulses as a non-dairy protein, we also provide a separate vegetable serving

7.2 General health and nutrition requirements

We adhere to the following rules for general health and nutrition requirements for food provision across the whole school day:

Each week, in our primary schools we serve no more than 2 portions of:

- Food we deep-fry, or coat in batter or breadcrumbs
- Food which includes pastry

In our Primary Schools we never serve or offer:

- Confectionery, chocolate or chocolate-coated products

- Snacks, other than vegetables and fruit with no added salt, sugar or fat
- Salt to add to food after we cook it
- More than 10g or 1 teaspoonful of condiments per serving

Any desserts, cakes and biscuits we do serve will not contain any confectionery, and any savoury crackers or breadsticks that are served are only provided at lunchtime alongside fruit, vegetables or dairy.

7.3 Availability of water

We provide pupils with access to fresh, free drinking water throughout the whole school day from:

- Water fountains across the school
- Water jugs at the school's food serving counters during mealtimes

7.4 Provision of alternative drinks

Our Secondary school canteens are only permitted to sell:

- Fruit or vegetable juices – limited to 150ml per serving
- Fruit or vegetable juices combined with plain or carbonated water limited to 330ml, with a maximum of 150ml of juice per serving, and containing a minimum of 45% fruit or vegetable juice
- Plain soya, rice, or oat drinks enriched with calcium
- Plain fermented milk drinks, such as yoghurt drinks
- Fruit juice combined with lower-fat milk, plain yoghurt or plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium – with less than 5% added sugars or honey
- Cocoa and lower-fat milk – with less than 5% added sugars or honey
- Lower-fat flavoured milk – with less than 5% added sugars or honey
- Lower fat milk or lactose reduced milk
- Tea, coffee and hot chocolate
- Zero drinks sold in Sixth Form

8. Food safety and hygiene

Staff at our catering company use our food preparation area to prepare meals, snacks and drinks.

The area includes suitable facilities for hygienically preparing foods and sterilising equipment.

Staff at our catering company use colour-coded equipment and utensils, and defined areas are set for raw meat production. Where space is limited, raw meat production is limited to early morning production,

Staff with responsibility for food preparation and handling are competent and receive food hygiene training. Their training is renewed every 3 years.

All staff wash their hands regularly, particularly after helping unwell pupils or handling their belongings.

8.1 Procedures for managing food poisoning

If any pupil shows symptoms of food poisoning, we will:

- Contact parents/carers immediately to collect the pupil as soon as possible
- Prevent the spread of infection by isolating the pupil in a quiet area with easy access to a sick bowl and toilet
- Monitor the pupil for signs of dehydration, including a dry mouth or confusion
- Encourage the pupil to take small, frequent sips of water
- Parents/carers are advised not to return the pupil to school until they have been symptom free for at least 48 hours.
- The Trust will notify OFSTED of any food poisoning affecting 2 or more children as soon as possible, and **always within 14 days** of the incident.

9. Managing allergies and food intolerances

We take allergy and food intolerance management seriously and follow strict procedures to ensure that all pupils can eat safely.

Before a pupil joins our schools, we gather detailed information about any known food allergies or intolerances

All staff are trained to be aware of and understand information around food allergies by:

- Knowing the symptoms and treatments for allergies and anaphylaxis
- Understanding the difference between allergies and intolerances
- Being aware that pupils can develop allergies at any time

We share information about food allergies with all staff and make them aware of which pupils have allergies or intolerances so they can ensure that the pupil is given an alternative where the food served contains an allergen.

9.1 Procedures to manage allergies and intolerances

Orion Education

Our contracted school caterer plans menus to include food substitutions, where necessary, for pupils with allergies or intolerances. Please see the information below, which sets out their approach to managing allergies.

Primary Schools

We are committed to providing meals for all our customers/pupils and for those needing special diets for medical requirements, where possible. We work closely with our suppliers and have systems in place to ensure our kitchen teams have information as accurate as possible but it must be noted that they can only be guided by information that suppliers provide - this is similar to the process of a parent catering for a child's special diet at home.

To ensure the safety of each of our customers we must work closely together with parents, the school and the kitchen team. The contractor normally changes its menus on a termly basis and therefore regular meetings may be required to ensure we can offer your child a suitable menu option.

If you are happy to order a suitable dish from our published menu and the school are already aware of your child's special diet (including a referral letter from a medical professional such as a G.P/ consultant /dietician), then you don't need to do anything.

If your child is new to the school or the school are not aware of your child's special dietary needs, please advise us in writing and then submit to the school office with a referral letter from a medical professional (G.P/ consultant /dietician). If you need a special menu, please ensure you state this in your communications.

It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that allergies and special diets are reported to the school either with the school office, during enrolment or through written notice (however this method will only be accepted once the written notice has been acknowledged by both the school and the contractor).

All meals are ordered through our online meal ordering system. Meals will only be available to choose, where allergies or special diets do not conflict. If allergies are not reported, it is possible that you could order a meal that would not be suitable for your child.

If there are not suitable options on the published menu then please ensure you request a meeting with the team to explore if a menu can be offered which meets your child's allergy or special dietary requirements.

Please note that the contractor are unable to provide medical diets for food allergies that fall outside of the recognised 14 major allergens. Due to the complexity of allergen and intolerance-related medical diet requests and to ensure the delivery of safe school meals for pupils with medical dietary requirements, we can only provide medical diets for children with no more than a combination of two specified food allergies/intolerances plus tree nut, peanut or shellfish.

The contractor reserves the right to refuse to provide a meal if it is deemed to be too complex or high risk to safely manage at location level. Despite our best efforts, our food/drink is prepared in areas where cross contamination may occur and therefore, we are unable to guarantee that our dishes/drinks are free from any allergen.

We make sure that our food is safe for pupils with an allergy or intolerance by:

- *Showing allergen ingredients information for the meals served, as outlined in this policy*
- *Checking any product changes with our food suppliers*
- *Ensuring our staff/caterers read labels and product information before using a product*

Through ongoing discussions with parents/carers and health professionals, if appropriate, we create an allergy action plan for each pupil to help manage their allergy or intolerance.

9.2 Procedures for managing allergic reactions and intolerances

If a staff member suspects a food intolerance, or is the first to identify an allergic reaction in a pupil, they will:

- Administer the pupil's prescribed medication immediately in line with our First Aid & Medication Policy available in the Policy Hub on the Trust's Sharepoint site.
- Contact emergency services immediately after administering the medication
- Monitor the pupil and administer a second dose of medication, if required
- Safely move the pupil to a location away from the allergen and stay with them at all times

If a staff member suspects that a pupil has reacted to a food for the first time, they will:

- Immediately seek urgent medical attention if this is considered necessary
- Immediately tell the senior member of staff on duty, who will contact the pupil's parents/carers
- Safely move the pupil away from the allergen and stay with them at all times
- Comfort and reassure the pupil to keep them calm

Staff members suspecting a food intolerance will work alongside parents/carers to keep a diary of foods eaten in school and at home, including any symptoms experienced.

10. Allergen food labelling – Contractor's approach.

The 14 allergens that we track and highlight are:

- *Celery*
- *Cereals containing gluten, such wheat, barley, oats and some flours*
- *Crustaceans, such as prawns, crabs and lobsters*
- *Eggs*
- *Fish*
- *Lupin, such as bread made with lupin seeds*
- *Milk*
- *Molluscs, such as mussels and oysters*
- *Mustard*
- *Peanuts*
- *Sesame*
- *Soybeans*
- *Sulphur dioxide and sulphites, if they're concentrated at more than 10 parts per million*
- *Tree nuts, such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts*

We include information about the presence of any of these allergens in our dishes on our menus, which can be accessed on the schools' websites.

10.1 Prepacked food and prepacked for direct sale food (PPDS)

Prepacked food is food that is fully or partly packaged before being sold and can't be altered without opening or changing the packaging.

PPDS is prepacked food that is packaged and sold on the same premises (e.g. salads and sandwiches that are made and packed in the school kitchen).

These foods are packaged before they're ordered or chosen, and they include food that pupils pick for themselves (e.g. from a food display cabinet), and food kept behind a counter (e.g. in the school canteen).

We comply with Natasha's Law regarding allergen food labelling by having a full ingredients list on the packaging, with the 14 allergens (listed above) labelled in bold every time they appear.

10.2 Non-prepacked foods

Non-prepacked foods include goods such as bakery products, take-away meals and deli counter foods.

We display allergen information for every non-prepacked food item that contains any of the 14 allergens (listed above), by:

- *Displaying a menu that includes allergen information*
- *Displaying a clearly visible written notice explaining how pupils and staff can get allergen information*

11. Managing other special dietary requirements

We are committed to supporting pupils with special dietary requirements and food intolerances, ensuring that every pupil can eat safely and in accordance with their cultural needs and preferences.

Before a pupil joins our school, we gather detailed information about any special dietary or health requirements, food preferences and intolerances. We share this information with **all** staff involved in preparing and handling food.

Our caterers plan menus to include food substitutions, where necessary, for pupils with special dietary requirements.

We also:

- Require our caterer to check any product changes with their food suppliers
- Require our caterers to read labels and product information before using a product

11.1 Provision for cultural and dietary preferences

We understand that food preferences can be linked to cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, or personal choices, such as vegetarianism.

We create an inclusive eating environment that caters to the cultural and dietary needs of all pupils by:

- Communicating openly with parents/carers to understand specific food preferences or needs, such as halal or kosher

- Being sensitive to certain customs, and how these affect meal and snack times
- Adapting menus to include foods from different cultures
- Always having a vegetarian option available
- Encouraging parents/carers to share traditional recipes and give feedback on our menus

11.2 Pupils with additional support needs

For pupils with physical, developmental, or sensory issues affecting their eating, we work with parents/carers and health professionals to:

- Adapt food preparation methods
- Offer one-to-one support if needed
- Adjust the eating environment (e.g. limiting noise)

For medically required special diets not covered in this policy, we need written confirmation from a health professional to make sure we meet the pupil's specific nutritional needs.

12. Food brought in from home

When pupils join the school we share the following guidance with them, with annual reminders, to help them understand our requirements and encourage healthy choices for packed lunches, and any other food brought from home.

Containers and drinks

- Packed lunches should be brought in a suitable, named container.
- Please send only water. We do not allow fruit juice, fizzy drinks, cans or glass bottles (including glass-type vacuum flasks).

Food and nutrition

We ask that packed lunches are healthy and balanced. As a guide:

- Include a main item such as a sandwich, wrap or pasta.
- Add fruit and/or vegetables — these are also the only snacks permitted at morning break.
- One small biscuit, cake or low-fat, low-salt crisp portion is fine as an occasional treat.
- Please do not include sweets, chocolate (including chocolate spread), or high-sugar snacks.

Allergy Aware Schools

Our schools are "allergy aware" environments. For this reason, please do not include nuts or nut-based products in any form — this includes peanut butter and chocolate spread. This is a safety requirement for children in our school community with severe nut allergies.

12.1 Safety and hygiene

Staff will check all food brought from home for potential allergens to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.
For pupils with allergies, staff will store packed lunches separately to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.

Due to food safety reasons, we do not provide refrigeration for packed lunches or reheat food from home unless this is specifically agreed with parents/carers, in writing.

We store packed lunches in designated refrigerators, ensuring we follow the food safety, hygiene and allergy procedures outlined in this policy.

If no refrigeration is available, we only store food outside of chilled conditions for up to a **maximum of 4 hours**, and never more than once.

We ask parents/carers to remind their child to:

- Use insulated sealed bags for perishable foods
- Label their lunch bags and their contents with their name

12.2 Celebrations

If parents/carers/pupils, visitors, volunteers or school staff wish to bring in food for special occasions, we ask that they only do this in the following instances:

- When asked to by the school
- When it has been agreed in advance with a member of staff e.g. class teacher.

Food brought into school **must not contain nuts.**

We ask that they follow the following guidelines:

- Provide healthy celebration options (e.g. fruit platters) or non-edible items (e.g. books) to share with the pupils, to promote consistent healthy eating messages
- Consider sharing healthy dishes during wider school celebrations.

13. Monitoring and Review

13.1 Catering Audits

Termly audits of the catering provider will be conducted against this policy, including student feedback and meal observations. The catering provider is expected to share termly reports on

meal uptake, Free School Meal (FSM) usage, waste reduction, and nutritional analysis of menus with the school.

13.2 Free School Meal Focus Reviews

Uptake and satisfaction among FSM students will be tracked termly. Where engagement or quality falls below expected standards, targeted action will be taken. FSM meals must be indistinguishable in quality and appearance from paid meals; no pre-packaged or downgraded meals may be provided to FSM students.

13.3 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically by the Trust's leadership team, with input from school leaders, student representatives, and parents.

14. Accountability

The catering provider will be contractually bound to comply with this policy. Non-compliance will trigger a formal review and may result in termination of contract. School Principals are responsible for overseeing day-to-day implementation of this policy and reporting concerns to the relevant member of the Trust's leadership team and then on to the CEO, and Trust Board. The Trust Board hold corporate responsibility for the safety of both staff, pupils and visitors on Trust premises.