

Water only primary schools policy

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Context

Schools are a key setting to teach children about nutrition and healthy beverage choices. School based interventions reach all children regardless of their background. 51% of parents say their children drink more water and 47% say their children are eating more fruits and vegetables as a result of healthy school activities¹.

Southwark has amongst the highest childhood excess weight and obesity levels in London, with 24.5% of reception age children and 41.5% of year 6 children measured as overweight or obese².

One reason for this is the high sugar diet that many children consume. For example, a can of Coca-Cola contains 35g of sugar and a can of Pepsi contains 36g of sugar which equates to 150% of the recommended daily sugar intake for children aged between 7 and 10 years³. Fruit juices and smoothies also contain high levels of sugar despite often being advertised as healthy.

High levels of sugar can also contribute to tooth decay. Approximately 22.2% of 5 year olds have tooth decay in Southwark⁴. Every day in the UK there are 180 operations to remove children's teeth due to tooth decay, at a significant cost to the NHS and to families⁵.

Some soft drinks, particularly sports and energy drinks, have high levels of caffeine. Such drinks can cause poor concentration in class, headaches, irritability, sleepiness, dizziness and can affect behaviour and attainment⁶.

Schools are required to take action to improve children's health. Promoting drinking water and banning fizzy drinks will reduce tooth decay, promote healthier choices and improve the health of pupils. On average, children should be provided with 6-8 glasses of water per day.

Policy introduction

Many schools in the UK have already adopted a water only policy to decrease the amount of sugar children are consuming, whilst increasing their hydration.

A water only school is one where the only drink available to students is water (and milk at least once per day). Schools should ensure that children are not bringing sugary drinks onto the school premises, including for after school or with their lunch.

The school food standards, *The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014*, state that lower fat milk must be available for drinking **at least once a day** during school hours.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726114/Obesity_healthy_eating_and_physical_activity_in_primary_schools_170718.pdf

2 <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/child-health-profiles/data#page/1/gid/1938133228/pat/6/par/E12000007/ati/102/are/E09000028>

3 <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/3/e010330>

4 <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/7301/JSNA-2018-Oral-Health-CYP-20180718.pdf>

5 <https://www.bda.org/news-centre/blog/counting-the-cost-of-tooth-extractions>

6 <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/child-caffeine.html>

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The *Eat better, start better* guidance advises only fresh tap water and plain milk are offered to children to drink (semi skimmed plain milk can be offered when they are older than 2 and growing and eating well).

Policy requirements

1. The only drinks to be available to primary school and nursery class children are:
 - Plain water
 - Plain reduced fat milk (including semi skimmed, lactose free and soya milk).
2. If a child has a medical condition that requires them to drink sugary drinks then this is treated as an exception to this policy and must be approved by the school leadership team.
3. Other drinks must not be made available from school canteens, caterers and in house teams must follow this policy, removing drinks other than water or milk from their offer. Free drinking water provided must be from water fountains and jugs on tables and not for sale in plastic bottles.
4. Pupils must have free access to drinking water throughout the day and be encouraged to drink it (see Appendix 1 for recommendations).
5. The water-only policy is to be applied to all breakfast and afterschool clubs, as well as extra-curricular events such as class parties, sports days and school fetes.
6. Teachers should be water-only role models and regularly drink water in front of their students to highlight the importance of hydration. Staff must not be seen to be drinking sugary or fizzy drinks by children.
7. Parents must not bring drinks other than water to the playground before and after school. Families must not pack drinks in lunch boxes (water is provided at lunch).
8. Banners and posters around the school should promote water consumption (Appendix 2). Schools can further promote healthy drink choices by participating in the annual [Fizz Free February campaign](#).

This policy support schools to meet the school food standards, *The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014*.

This policy meets the voluntary food and drink guidelines for Early Years settings in England. More information about these guidelines can be found in the '[Eat better, start better](#)' guide.

Policy scope and implementation

This policy will be mandatory for all primary schools in Southwark, including nursery classes and maintained nurseries from the start of the autumn term, September 2022.

Appendix 1: Recommendations and good practice

In 2019 Southwark Council commissioned Cookwise, nutritionists with experience in school catering, to undertake a study of school meals within a sample of Southwark primary schools. Cookwise found that in nearly all schools, water was freely available from dining room tables from either jugs or pre-poured drinking beakers.

In schools where water was pre-poured into beakers, children were seen to drink more water, whilst in schools where children had to collect a cup from another table, they often did not and so went without a drink over lunchtime.

Water jugs are often too heavy for younger children resulting in spillages. Cookwise recommends that for younger children, water should be pre-poured into beakers and topped up for them regularly to avoid spillages.

For older children, water should be positioned in a visible location e.g. on dining tables so it is more difficult for children to avoid or miss.

All children should be actively encouraged to drink water during their lunch break by dining room staff, teachers and midday meal supervisors.

Appendix 2: Change4Life

GLA water only toolkit

Examples of water-only posters that could be put up in schools to promote drinking water:



More resources are available online: <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/>