

Primary and nursery school dessert policy

Framework for school food service

Updated January 2025

Context

At a population level, too much sugar is being consumed, particularly amongst children. High levels of sugar intake increase the risk of tooth decay, with approximately one in six 5-year olds affected in Southwark¹. This is a significant cost to the NHS and families².

A high sugar intake is linked to excessive energy intake, which increases the risk of overweight and obesity². As of 2022/23, 21.7% of Reception children in Southwark are already overweight or obese by the time they start school in Reception, which increases to 42% of children in Year Six³.

Data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that 'sugar, preserves and confectionery' contribute the most sugar to children's diets⁴. However, desserts containing a higher proportion of fruit, milk and cereals (such as rice or oats) can be included as part of a healthy, balanced diet for young children and can contain essential nutrients such as calcium and iron⁵.

Policy Introduction

This policy is applicable to all primary, nursery schools and nursery classes schools in Southwark, as part of the Council's Free Healthy School/Nursery Meals (FHSM/FHNM) programme and has been in place since 2020.

This policy is informed by best practice guidance and aims to reduce the amount of free sugar served at lunchtimes. The policy meets the government dietary recommendations for children and current school food standards (see Appendix for further details).

Within this policy, free sugars are defined as "sugars added to food or drinks, and sugars found naturally in honey, syrups, and unsweetened fruit and vegetable juices, smoothies and purées"⁶.

¹ <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/OralHealthJSNA>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-achieving-the-20>

³ NHS England, National Child Measurement Programme 2023/24

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-7-and-8-combined>

⁵ <https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Eat-Better-Start-Better1.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/>

The Southwark primary school dessert policy

Primary school lunches (main course and second course) should complement each other to ensure balance and variety, and to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements. Primary school lunches are required to meet all of the following criteria:

- Each lunch to include a main course and a second course.
- A second course can be either a 'starter' or a 'dessert'.

Where dessert is served as a second course, the following must be applied:

	Type	Examples/Requirements
Three times a week	Fruit <u>served with</u> a dairy-based accompaniment	• A minimum of 50% of the dessert to be fruit • Fresh, dried or canned fruit (canned in juice and not syrup) can be used • Serve at least three different fruits each week • Examples include: Whole fruit, fruit platter, fruit salad, compote or stewed fruit • No jelly of any type The following dairy-based accompaniments can be served: • Natural or Greek yoghurt* • Fruit yoghurt once per week* • Dairy ice cream once per week* *Or non-dairy equivalents
Once a week	Savoury crackers or breadsticks <u>and</u> cheese <u>served with</u> fruit or crudites	• Savoury crackers or breadsticks must be low salt and wholegrain where possible • Hard and soft cheeses to be offered* • Served with fruit or crudites Fruit must be available as an alternative to cheese and crackers. *Or non-dairy equivalents
Once a week	Fruit-based pudding or cake	• This should contain minimal free sugars • Should consist of at least 50% fruit or vegetables when measured by weight of the raw ingredients • Examples include: ○ 50% fruit-based crumble, pie, sponge or cobbler – served with custard ○ 50% fruit-based cake, brownie or slice ○ 50% fruit-based rice pudding Fruit must be available as an alternative to the above.

Other guidance:

- Use fresh or dried fruit to sweeten dishes instead of sugar/alongside reduced sugar.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners when choosing or preparing desserts, puddings and cakes.
- Vary the desserts you offer with lunch each week.
- Whilst chocolate and chocolate coated products are not permitted, Cocoa powder is permitted for use in desserts.
- Ensure age-appropriate portion sizes (see Appendix 2 for links to portion size guidance)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – School Food Standards

Current school food standards for primary and secondary school lunches in England state that all fruit-based desserts should have a content of at least 50% fruit measured by weight of the raw ingredients (e.g. fruit crumble, fruit pie, fruit sponge, fruit cobbler, fruit jelly). Furthermore, no confectionery, chocolate or chocolate coated products are permitted throughout the whole school day⁷.

Appendix 2 – Government guidelines and recommendations for free sugars

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) guidelines recommends that the average population intake of free sugars should not exceed 5% of total dietary energy for age groups from 2 years upwards⁸. This equates to a maximum free sugar intake of⁹:

- 20g for males and 18g for females, aged 4-6 years
- 24g for males and 23g for females, aged 7-10 years

⁷ [School food standards - School Food Plan](#)

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-carbohydrates-and-health-report>

⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618167/government_dietary_recommendations.pdf

Appendix 3 – Recipe and portion size guidance

The School Food Plan provides portion size guidance for different food types¹⁰, with the most relevant food items for this policy extracted in the table below.

Portion Size	
Food	Primary aged children (4-10 year olds)
Fruit pies, sponge puddings or crumbles	80-100g
Fruit jelly (portion size excludes fruit)	80-100g
Cakes, tray bakes, muffins	40-50g
Flapjack	25-30g
Savoury crackers, bread sticks (served with fruit, vegetables or dairy foods); <i>portion size excludes fruit.</i>	10-15g 1-2 crackers

The School Food Plan website provides example recipes which have been checked by the Children's Food Trust against the School Food Standards, best practice guidance and recommended typical portion sizes. Ingredients are aligned to the Government Buying Standards for Food & Catering Services nutrition criteria (GBSF) and allergens are listed. The recipe screenshots overleaf have been extracted from the School Food Plan, 'What Works Well' Recipe Hub and demonstrates dessert menu suggestions and typical portion sizes in practice¹¹.

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/786339/School-Food-Standards-Guidance.pdf

¹¹ <http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/articles/view/517?title=%27what%20works%20well%27%20recipe%20hub>



Number of portions this recipe makes:
10 primary servings (90g)
8 secondary servings (115g)



Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 35 minutes



Allergy information:
Oats (gluten), sulphites, sulphur dioxide, wheat (gluten)



Top Tips
Vary the fruit to what's in season.

OATY APPLE CRUMBLE

50% fruit-based dessert: This recipe counts towards the standard to provide a 50% fruit-based dessert at least twice each week.

Recipe adapted from: Eden Foodservice

Ingredients

100g unsaturated fat spread, cut into pieces
163g plain white flour
55g wholemeal flour
90g soft dark brown sugar
0.5g (½ tsp) ground mixed spice
0.5g (½ tsp) cinnamon
50g oats
50g dried apricots, diced
410g cooking apples, washed, peeled and sliced

Method

1. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Grease a tart tin.
2. Gently rub the margarine into the flour then add the sugar, spices and the oats.
3. Place the apples on the base of greased tart tin.
4. Sprinkle the diced apricots evenly over the fruit.
5. Sprinkle the crumble mix over the fruit, level and push the mix into corners.
6. Bake in oven until golden brown.
7. Remove from the oven, portion and serve.

Serving suggestion: with yoghurt or custard.

Government Buying Standards for Food & Catering Services
Using the GBSF nutrition criteria to buy ingredients helps to reduce the amount of salt, saturated fat and sugar in children's diets.

For this recipe: choose oils based on unsaturated fats and ensure at least 50% of desserts provided are based on fruit.



Number of portions this recipe makes:
80 primary servings (100g)
65 secondary servings (125g)



Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 30 minutes



Allergy information:
Milk, wheat (gluten)



Top Tips
Change fruits with the seasons.

PEACH & RASPBERRY COBBLER

50% Fruit-based dessert: This dessert counts towards the requirement to provide fruit-based desserts (containing at least 50% fruit) at least twice each week, and the requirement to provide fruit each day at lunchtime.

Recipe adapted from: Sam Ward, Catering Manager, Collaton St Mary Primary School

Ingredients

3.7kg peaches, sliced
1.5kg raspberries, plugged
100g caster sugar
1.4kg plain flour
90g baking powder
340g soft vegetable margarine
340g caster sugar
700ml semi-skimmed milk

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4.
2. Slice peaches and place into a deep tin with the raspberries and sprinkle with sugar.
3. Prepare the cobbler by sifting the flour and baking powder into a bowl.
4. Rub in margarine until it resembles breadcrumbs. Stir in the sugar and mix.
5. Add the milk slowly to form a dough.
6. Turn the dough onto a floured surface and roll to 1cm thick. Cut out 6cm rounds and arrange over fruit.
7. Brush with some extra milk.
8. Bake in oven for 30-35 minutes or until golden brown.

Serving suggestion: prepare the cobbler with half wholemeal flour.

Government Buying Standards for Food & Catering Services
Using the GBSF nutrition criteria to buy ingredients helps to reduce the amount of salt, saturated fat and sugar in children's diets.

For this recipe: choose spreads based on unsaturated fats and milk which is reduced fat (i.e. has a fat content of no more than 1.8g/100g).