# FOOD AND DRINK POLICY

**Eating safely. Making choices. Building independence.**



## RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL

INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

This policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework
and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures and guidance.

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

## OUR COMMITMENT

At Riverside Bridge School, every policy reflects our commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and ambitious school community in which every pupil is valued, every voice matters and every family is respected and supported.

Our policies translate our values into consistent practice. They support high expectations, clear responsibilities, effective partnership and informed decision-making, ensuring that the needs, rights, wellbeing and future outcomes of our pupils remain at the heart of our work.

We work collaboratively, act with integrity and continually reflect upon and improve our practice to achieve the best possible outcomes for every pupil.

## POLICY PRINCIPLES

Our Policy Principles underpin how we work together and guide the decisions and actions we take to support every pupil and their families.




## POLICY PURPOSE & FRAMEWORK

Riverside Bridge School policies set out the expectations, responsibilities and approaches that support safe, consistent and high-quality practice across the school. They translate our values, statutory responsibilities and professional expectations into clear guidance for everyday decision-making and practice.

Each policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures, statutory guidance and school frameworks referenced within the document.

Policies apply to the members of the school community identified within each document, including staff, governors, parents and carers, volunteers, contractors and other professionals where relevant. Everyone is expected to understand and apply the requirements appropriate to their role and to seek further guidance where clarification is required.

## CURRICULUM DRIVERS




Our Drivers provide a shared golden thread across curriculum, school life, policy and leadership, helping ensure that our decisions and practice remain focused on the experiences and futures we want for every pupil.

# STATEMENT OF INTENT

This policy sets out Riverside Bridge School's approach to food and drink and establishes the principles, responsibilities and arrangements through which safe, nutritious, inclusive and meaningful food and drink provision is maintained across the school.

Riverside Bridge School recognises that food and drink are fundamental to pupils' health, wellbeing, communication, learning and independence. As a specialist school for pupils with complex special educational needs and disabilities, we understand that eating and drinking are not simply daily routines. They provide important opportunities to develop communication, participation, physical health, social interaction, choice-making and the practical skills required for adult life.

The school is committed to providing food and drink that meets applicable statutory food standards and supports positive, healthy lifestyles. Pupils will have appropriate access to meals, drinks and food-related learning throughout the school day, with individual needs considered carefully and reasonable adjustments made where required.

Our approach reflects the school's Flow Curriculum, ensuring that food, nutrition and eating experiences are personalised to pupils' developmental stages, communication profiles and individual needs. Across all pathways, pupils are supported to develop increasing independence in making food and drink choices, preparing meals and snacks, understanding healthy lifestyles, exploring food and participating safely in eating and drinking activities.

Food-related experiences contribute to the school's five curriculum drivers - Sense of Self, Community, Culture, Wonder and Future. They provide meaningful contexts in which pupils can develop confidence, curiosity, communication, practical skills, social participation and increasing independence.

Riverside Bridge School recognises that many pupils require specialist support because of allergies, medical conditions, dysphagia, physical disabilities, sensory differences, communication needs or selective eating. The school will work in partnership with families, the Nursing Team and relevant multidisciplinary professionals, including Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Dietitians and other healthcare professionals, to ensure that appropriate plans, reasonable adjustments and professionally agreed arrangements are implemented.

Where clinical assessment or intervention is required, the school will act within the boundaries of its role. Clinical decisions, including those relating to dysphagia, food and fluid modification and healthcare planning, remain the responsibility of the appropriately qualified health professionals. School staff are responsible for implementing agreed plans safely and consistently and must not independently alter clinical recommendations.

Food and drink experiences also provide valuable opportunities to develop communication, participation and regulation. Mealtimes, snack times and cooking activities can enable pupils to express preferences, make choices, develop social interaction, experience different sensory properties and participate meaningfully within their school community. Through Total Communication and the principles of BridgeWorks, staff will make routines, choices, expectations and environments as understandable and accessible as possible.

The school recognises its particular responsibilities in relation to food allergy. Riverside Bridge School will comply with the statutory Allergy Safety in Schools guidance introduced in July 2026 and will maintain its allergy-safety arrangements through the school's Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy and associated operational procedures. The statutory guidance requires schools to maintain appropriate allergy policies, training, Individual Healthcare Plans where required and arrangements for learning from serious incidents and near misses.

This policy provides the strategic framework for food and drink provision. Detailed arrangements for food preparation, allergy management, dysphagia, specialist eating and drinking support, catering, curriculum delivery and day-to-day practice are set out within the school's related policies, frameworks, procedures and professional plans.

**Our responsibilities to pupils and families**

Riverside Bridge School will ensure that food and drink provision is safe, inclusive, respectful and responsive to individual need. We will provide appropriate access to nutritious food and drinking water, meet statutory entitlements to school meals, identify and manage dietary and allergy risks and make reasonable adjustments to support pupils with medical, sensory, physical, communication, cultural and religious needs.

We will work collaboratively with families and relevant professionals, communicate important information effectively and ensure that staff understand and implement the plans relevant to the pupils they support.

Pupils will be supported to participate in eating, drinking and food-related learning with dignity and as much independence as is safely possible. Adult support will be provided where required but should not unnecessarily limit pupils' opportunities to make choices, develop skills or assume increasing responsibility.

Through these commitments, Riverside Bridge School aims to ensure that food and drink support health and safety while also becoming a meaningful part of pupils' communication, learning, social participation and preparation for healthy and fulfilling adult lives.

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | PURPOSE | 02 | LEGISLATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORK |
| 03 | PRINCIPLES OF FOOD AND DRINK PROVISION | 04 | ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES |
| 05 | FOOD AND DRINK PROVISION | 06 | INCLUSION, DIETARY NEEDS AND MEDICAL SUPPORT |
| 07 | FOOD SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT | 08 | MONITORING, EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT |
| 09 | RELATED POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS | | |


**APPROVED BY:** Governing Board

**APPROVED ON:** September 2026

**REVIEWED DUE ON:** September 2027

Section 01

# PURPOSE

Promoting health. Supporting participation. Developing independence.

The purpose of this policy is to establish Riverside Bridge School's strategic framework for the provision of food and drink, ensuring that pupils have access to safe, nutritious, inclusive and high-quality food experiences that promote health, wellbeing, learning and independence.

The school recognises that food and drink provision has several interconnected purposes. It must meet pupils' nutritional needs, comply with food-safety requirements and protect pupils who have allergies, medical conditions or specialist eating and drinking needs. It should also provide positive social and educational experiences through which pupils can develop communication, confidence, practical skills and increasing independence.

Food and drink therefore extend beyond catering. They encompass school meals, snacks, drinking water, packed lunches, curriculum food and nutrition activities, cooking, enterprise, enrichment, celebrations and community experiences, together with the individual support required for pupils to eat and drink safely.

The school is committed to providing food and drink provision that supports pupils' physical health while developing the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to make choices appropriate to their developmental stage and individual circumstances. Through a personalised approach, pupils are supported to develop increasing independence in:

- expressing food and drink preferences;
- making choices;
- eating and drinking;
- preparing food and drinks;
- using utensils and equipment;
- following routines;
- understanding hygiene and safety;
- accessing social eating experiences;
- developing healthy lifestyle habits.

Food-related learning forms an integral part of the Flow Curriculum and contributes to the school's curriculum drivers of Sense of Self, Community, Culture, Wonder and Future.

Meaningful experiences enable pupils to explore food, encounter different cultures and traditions, develop practical life skills, participate in shared social experiences and prepare for greater independence beyond school.

The school recognises that some pupils require significant specialist support to eat and drink safely. Medical conditions, allergies, dysphagia, sensory processing differences, physical disabilities, communication needs and highly selective eating may affect what, how, where and with what support a pupil is able to eat or drink.

These needs will be addressed through appropriate individual planning, reasonable adjustment, professional advice and partnership with families. Safety and dignity will remain fundamental while staff continue to promote the greatest level of independence that is appropriate for the pupil.

Detailed operational arrangements are maintained separately through the Food & Nutrition Curriculum Framework, Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy, food-safety arrangements, individual professional plans and associated procedures.

Section 02

# LEGISLATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORK

Meeting standards. Protecting health. Maintaining safe provision.

Riverside Bridge School will provide food and drink in accordance with current legislation, statutory guidance and recognised professional standards. The principal framework includes, where applicable:

- Education Act 1996, including statutory school-meal duties;
- Education Act 2002;
- Children Act 1989;
- Children Act 2004;
- Children and Families Act 2014;
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- Food Safety Act 1990;
- Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013;
- Food Information Regulations 2014 and applicable allergen-information requirements;
- Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014;
- SEND Code of Practice: 0–25 Years;
- Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions, current statutory guidance;
- Allergy Safety in Schools, current statutory guidance;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education, current edition;
- School Food Standards and associated Department for Education guidance;
- Food Standards Agency guidance;
- relevant NHS and professional guidance relating to eating, drinking, swallowing and nutrition.

The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014 remain the operative statutory school food standards in September 2026. The Government consulted during 2026 on updating those standards, but the proposed changes should not be treated as operative law until the relevant legislative changes are made. Current DfE guidance confirms that compliance with the 2014 Regulations remains mandatory for maintained schools, academies and free schools.

**School Food Standards**

Food and drink provided by or on behalf of the school will comply with the applicable School Food Standards. The school will work with catering providers and other relevant partners to ensure menus and food provision satisfy current statutory requirements while accommodating pupils' additional needs wherever reasonably possible. Food provided as part of curriculum, enrichment or other activities will be managed in accordance with applicable food-safety requirements. Where the School Food Standards apply to the particular provision, they will be followed.

**Drinking water**

Free, fresh drinking water will be available to pupils at all times during the school day, subject to any individually assessed clinical restriction or modified-fluid requirement. Current school-food legislation requires free drinking water to be provided at all times on school premises. For pupils who require thickened fluids, specialist drinking equipment, restricted fluid intake or another clinically directed arrangement, staff will follow the current professionally agreed plan.

**Packed lunches and food brought from home**

Pupils who bring food from home will be provided with appropriate facilities and supervision to eat safely and socially. Current DfE guidance requires schools to provide suitable facilities free of charge for pupils not taking a school meal. Families will be asked to follow school arrangements relating to allergies and the safe management of food brought onto the premises. The school will promote healthy choices and may provide guidance to families about packed lunches, but any restrictions or specific requirements will be proportionate, clearly communicated and consistent with medical, allergy, cultural, religious and SEND considerations.

**Free school meals**

Riverside Bridge School will ensure that eligible pupils are able to access free school meals in accordance with current statutory requirements. From the beginning of the 2026-27 academic year, children in households receiving Universal Credit qualify for benefits-based free school meals regardless of household earnings, subject to the required claim and verification process. The national arrangements distinguish between targeted and expanded FSM for funding and accountability purposes. Pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 will continue to receive meals through the universal infant free school meals arrangements where applicable. The school will work with families and the Local Authority as required to support eligibility checking and access to entitlement. Administrative arrangements for FSM are managed separately and do not form part of the detailed operational content of this policy.

**Allergy safety**

Allergy safety is both a medical and whole-school safety responsibility. The statutory Allergy Safety in Schools guidance, published on 6 July 2026, sets expectations for schools including policy arrangements, staff training, identification of pupils requiring Individual Healthcare Plans and recording and learning from serious incidents and near misses. Riverside Bridge School's detailed allergy arrangements are established through the Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy and associated procedures. This Food and Drink Policy supports, but does not duplicate, those arrangements. Where allergy safety requirements apply to catering or food activities, staff and providers must follow the pupil-specific and school-wide controls in place.

**Medical conditions**

Under section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014, governing bodies must make arrangements for supporting pupils with medical conditions at school. The current statutory medical-conditions guidance remains in force alongside the new allergy-safety requirements. Food and drink provision will therefore be planned consistently with pupils' Individual Healthcare Plans, Emergency Healthcare Plans and other professionally agreed plans where relevant.

Section 03

# PRINCIPLES OF FOOD AND DRINK PROVISION

Including every pupil. Promoting wellbeing. Building independence.

Food and drink provision at Riverside Bridge School is underpinned by a set of principles that reflect the school's values, specialist SEND context and commitment to safe, inclusive and ambitious practice.
These principles apply across school meals, snacks, drinks, curriculum activities, celebrations, enrichment, enterprise and community-based food experiences. They are intended to ensure that food and drink are considered not only in terms of nutrition and safety, but also as part of pupils' communication, participation, social development, wellbeing and Preparation for Adulthood.

**Every pupil can participate**

Every pupil should be able to access food and drink experiences in a way that is safe, meaningful and appropriate to their individual needs. Riverside Bridge School recognises that participation will look different for different pupils. Some may eat and drink independently, make choices and prepare food with minimal support. Others may require adapted equipment, specialist positioning, modified food or fluids, communication support, sensory adaptation or direct adult assistance. The starting point should always be to consider how participation can be enabled rather than whether a pupil can be included. Where an activity cannot be accessed safely in its usual form, staff should consider whether the underlying purpose can be achieved through adaptation or an alternative approach. Adjustments should preserve dignity, learning purpose and opportunities for development.

**Health, wellbeing and nutrition**

The school promotes positive, healthy relationships with food and drink through appropriate provision, curriculum learning and everyday practice. Food and drink should contribute to pupils' physical health and wellbeing while also supporting emotional security, predictability and positive experiences around eating and drinking. Healthy eating will be promoted in a developmentally appropriate and non-judgemental way. Staff should avoid language or approaches that create unnecessary anxiety, shame or pressure around food. For pupils with restricted diets, allergies, dysphagia, sensory differences, feeding difficulties or other medical needs, nutritional expectations must be interpreted in the context of the pupil's individual circumstances and professional advice. The school recognises that for some pupils, maintaining safe and adequate nutrition, increasing tolerance, widening accepted foods or simply participating calmly in a mealtime may represent significant progress.

**Communication, participation and regulation**

Eating, drinking and food-related learning provide frequent and meaningful opportunities for communication. Pupils should be supported to express preferences, indicate hunger or thirst, request more, indicate finished, make choices, reject appropriately and communicate discomfort or difficulty.

Staff will use the pupil's agreed communication methods, which may include speech, signs, symbols, objects of reference, photographs, AAC, gesture, facial expression or other personalised systems. The school also recognises that food and drink can be closely linked to sensory processing and emotional regulation. Noise, smell, texture, temperature, presentation, seating, proximity to others, waiting time and changes in routine may all affect a pupil's ability to participate successfully. Mealtime and food-related environments should therefore be structured in ways that reduce unnecessary uncertainty and support pupils to understand what is happening, what is expected and what happens next.

**Independence and Preparing for Adulthood**

Food and drink provision should actively contribute to pupils' increasing independence. Support should be designed to enable pupils to do as much as possible for themselves while remaining safe. Adults should avoid routinely completing tasks that pupils can reasonably attempt or learn to undertake independently.

Depending on developmental stage and individual need, pupils may work towards increasing independence in:

- making choices;
- communicating needs;
- using cups, cutlery and adapted utensils;
- serving food or drinks;
- opening packaging;
- preparing simple snacks and meals;
- following food-safety and hygiene routines;
- clearing away;
- shopping and budgeting;
- accessing cafés, shops and community food settings;
- understanding their own dietary or health needs.

These experiences contribute directly to Preparation for Adulthood, particularly Independent Living, Good Health and Friends, Relationships and Community, with links to Employment where food enterprise, hospitality, teamwork or responsibility are relevant. Independence must always be developed within the limits of any current clinical or safety plan.

**Inclusive and personalised provision**

Riverside Bridge School recognises that pupils have diverse medical, sensory, communication, physical, cultural, religious and dietary needs.

Provision will therefore be personalised through reasonable adjustment, specialist advice and individual planning. Personalisation may include changes to:

- food or fluid presentation;
- texture or consistency where clinically directed;
- utensils and equipment;
- seating and positioning;
- environment;
- communication support;
- pace;
- portion size;
- supervision;
- timing;
- location.

Adaptation should not reduce ambition unnecessarily. The purpose is to remove barriers while continuing to support development, participation and independence.

**Dignity, choice and respect**

Food and drink are personal and sometimes sensitive areas of daily life. Pupils must be treated with dignity and respect during eating, drinking and personal support. Staff should avoid unnecessary attention to difference and should provide support discreetly and sensitively. Where pupils can express preferences or refusals, these should be respected unless there is an immediate safety issue or a professionally agreed plan requires a different response. Pupils should be offered meaningful choices wherever possible and should not be coerced into eating unfamiliar or unwanted food. Where food exploration is part of an agreed programme, expectations should be consistent with the pupil's individual needs and professional advice.

**Partnership with families and professionals**

Effective food and drink provision relies on accurate information, open communication and collaborative working. Parents and carers have important knowledge about pupils' preferences, routines, cultural requirements, dietary needs and responses to food. The school will work with families to promote consistency where this is helpful and safe. Relevant professionals may include Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Dietitians, the Nursing Team and other healthcare professionals.

Their advice will inform individual arrangements where required. Professional recommendations must be implemented accurately and within scope. School staff must not independently alter clinically agreed food textures, fluid consistencies, feeding methods or other specialist arrangements.

**Safe practice**

Food safety, allergy management, dysphagia management and safe eating and drinking practice are fundamental. Staff must understand the risks relevant to their role and to the pupils they support.

Where a pupil has an Individual Healthcare Plan, Emergency Healthcare Plan, allergy plan, eating and drinking plan or other professionally agreed arrangement, that plan must be followed. If staff are uncertain, they must seek advice before acting. Safety controls should support participation rather than create blanket restrictions. The school will aim to manage risk proportionately so pupils can continue to develop confidence and independence.

**Positive and inclusive mealtime culture**

Mealtimes should be calm, respectful and inclusive. They are opportunities not only for nutrition but also for communication, social interaction, choice-making, routine, cultural learning and developing independence. Staff should model positive behaviours and support pupils without creating unnecessary pressure. Where pupils require different arrangements because of allergy, dysphagia, sensory need or another assessed requirement, staff should ensure these adjustments are implemented in a way that protects dignity and inclusion.

**Continuous improvement**

Riverside Bridge School will regularly review the quality and safety of food and drink provision. Learning will be drawn from pupil experience, family feedback, staff observations, professional advice, incidents, near misses, complaints, audits and changes in statutory guidance. Where weaknesses or emerging risks are identified, the school will take proportionate action to strengthen systems, training, communication or individual arrangements.

Section 04

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Clarifying accountability. Working together. Maintaining safe provision.

Effective food and drink provision is a shared responsibility, but responsibilities must remain clearly defined. Educational, catering and clinical responsibilities are related but are not interchangeable.

**The Governing Board** provides strategic oversight and will:

- approve and monitor this policy;
- ensure appropriate arrangements exist to meet statutory school-food, allergy, medical, equality, safeguarding and health-and-safety duties;
- receive assurance regarding compliance with the School Food Standards;
- receive assurance that pupils with allergies and medical needs are appropriately supported;
- monitor significant risks or incidents where appropriate;
- receive assurance that food and drink provision supports pupils' health, wellbeing and educational outcomes.

**The Headteacher** has overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy is implemented effectively and that appropriate leadership, resources and systems are maintained.

The Headteacher will ensure that:

- responsibilities are clearly allocated;
- catering and school arrangements comply with applicable requirements;
- relevant staff receive appropriate information and training;
- clinical recommendations are implemented through appropriate school arrangements;
- serious concerns are escalated appropriately;
- provision supports the school's wider curriculum and Preparing for Adulthood priorities.

**The Designated Senior Leadership Team Lead** provides strategic oversight of food and drink provision.

This includes:

- co-ordinating implementation of this policy;
- monitoring the quality and inclusivity of provision;
- ensuring alignment with the Flow Curriculum and Preparing for Adulthood;
- overseeing relevant quality-assurance processes;
- ensuring appropriate links between curriculum, catering, medical and operational arrangements;
- supporting appropriate staff development;

- reporting significant issues and priorities to the Headteacher.

**The catering provider and catering staff** is responsible for delivering catering provision in accordance with its contractual, legal and food-safety responsibilities. This includes:

- meeting applicable School Food Standards;
- maintaining appropriate food hygiene and safety systems;
- providing accurate allergen information;
- implementing agreed dietary requirements;
- preventing avoidable allergen cross-contact;
- maintaining required records and controls;
- ensuring catering staff are appropriately trained and competent;
- communicating relevant changes or concerns promptly to the school.

The school retains responsibility for assuring itself that contracted provision meets the required standards.

**Curriculum leader and teaching staff** are responsible for ensuring that curriculum food and nutrition activities are purposeful, appropriately planned and safe. They will ensure that:

- activities reflect pupils' developmental pathways;
- allergy and dietary information is considered before food activities;
- risk assessments are completed where required;
- pupils receive appropriate communication and physical support;
- independence is developed deliberately;
- equipment and ingredients are suitable;
- food-related learning remains consistent with agreed clinical plans.

**The Nursing Team** retains clinical oversight within the scope of the commissioned nursing service and relevant healthcare arrangements.

Where food and drink interact with a pupil's medical condition or Individual Healthcare Plan, the Nursing Team will provide or coordinate appropriate clinical advice within its remit and liaise with other health professionals where necessary.

Individual Healthcare Plans and Emergency Healthcare Plans remain within the appropriate clinical/healthcare governance arrangements. School staff must not independently amend clinical requirements.

Where a pupil has dysphagia or another identified eating, drinking or swallowing difficulty**, Speech and Language Therapy** advice will inform the pupil's eating and drinking arrangements within the scope of the service and clinical assessment.

Professionally agreed recommendations may address matters including:

- food texture;
- fluid consistency;
- positioning;
- utensils and equipment;
- pacing;
- presentation;
- level or method of support;
- signs of difficulty;
- action to take where concerns arise.

Staff must implement the current professionally agreed eating and drinking plan exactly as written.

They must not independently change prescribed food texture, fluid consistency, positioning, utensils, pacing or feeding method because a pupil appears to be managing differently.

Any concern that a plan is no longer appropriate must be referred promptly through the agreed clinical route.

**Occupational Therapy and other specialist professionals** may advise on positioning, seating, equipment, sensory needs, physical access and independence.

Dietitians may provide specialist advice regarding nutritional adequacy, restricted diets, supplementation or other nutritional concerns.

The relevant professional remains responsible for clinical recommendations within their professional scope; the school is responsible for implementing agreed recommendations safely.

**All staff** involved in food and drink must:

- know the needs and plans relevant to the pupils they support;
- follow allergy, medical, dysphagia and food-safety arrangements;
- maintain good hygiene;
- support communication and choice;
- promote dignity and independence;
- work within their training and competence;
- report concerns, incidents and near misses promptly;
- seek advice rather than improvising where an individual arrangement is unclear.

**Parents and carers** are expected to provide accurate and current information about pupils' allergies, medical needs, dietary requirements and significant eating or drinking difficulties.

They should notify the school promptly where needs or professional recommendations change and provide documentation requested to support safe provision.

The school will work with families to promote consistent, safe and realistic arrangements while recognising that the school must follow current statutory requirements and professionally agreed clinical plans.

Section 05

# FOOD AND DRINK PROVISION

Providing well. Learning through experience. Supporting healthy choices.

Riverside Bridge School is committed to providing food and drink that promotes health, wellbeing, inclusion and independence while meeting the diverse needs of pupils across the school. Provision encompasses formal school meals and the wider food environment, including breakfasts where provided, snacks, drinks, packed lunches, curriculum food activities, celebrations, enrichment, enterprise and community learning.

**School meals**

School meals will meet the applicable School Food Standards and will be planned to provide suitable variety and nutritional balance. Where pupils require modified meals because of allergy, medical need, cultural or religious requirements or another identified need, appropriate arrangements will be considered with the catering provider and relevant professionals. Menus and significant changes to provision should be communicated in ways that enable families and staff to make appropriate decisions.

**Free school meals and access**

No eligible pupil should be prevented from receiving their statutory meal entitlement because of administrative barriers. The school will support families to establish eligibility and will maintain appropriate arrangements for the expanded 2026–27 FSM system. Meal arrangements should protect pupils' dignity and avoid unnecessary distinction between pupils receiving free meals and those whose meals are paid for.

**Healthy food and drink**

The school promotes balanced and varied food choices through provision, curriculum experiences and positive adult modelling. Healthy food education will recognise the needs of pupils for whom eating is complex. Staff should avoid inappropriate pressure, shame or moralising language about food. For pupils with selective eating, avoidant/restrictive patterns or significant sensory differences, expectations should reflect individual plans and specialist advice where available.

**Drinking**

Pupils will have regular access to drinking water throughout the day. Staff should support pupils to recognise and communicate thirst and to develop increasing independence in accessing drinks. Where a pupil has a clinical fluid-management plan, including thickened fluids, specialist cups, fluid restriction or monitored intake, that plan takes precedence over general arrangements.

**Mealtimes and social development**

Mealtimes are important social and learning experiences. The school will aim to create environments in which pupils can eat safely, communicate, make choices, interact with others and develop increasing independence. Staff should consider:

- seating and positioning;
- noise and sensory demand;
- communication access;
- pace;
- waiting time;
- peer interaction;
- independence with utensils;
- access to drinks;
- personal dignity;
- the level of adult support genuinely required.

Adults should support rather than unnecessarily take over tasks pupils can perform for themselves.

**Packed lunches**

Pupils bringing food from home will have access to appropriate facilities, furniture and supervision.

The school may communicate expectations about packed lunches to support healthy eating and allergy safety. Such expectations will be applied sensitively and must not conflict with clinically required diets, cultural or religious needs or reasonable adjustments.

**Snacks and food outside lunchtime**

Food and drink provided outside the main meal service will be considered within the school's overall food-safety and nutritional arrangements. This includes food used in:

- snack times;
- breakfast provision;
- rewards or celebrations;
- curriculum learning;
- clubs;
- enterprise activities;
- events;
- educational visits;
- community activities.

Staff must check relevant allergy and dietary information before food is offered or used. Food should not routinely be used as a reward where this could undermine healthy relationships with food or conflict with individual needs.

**Curriculum and Preparing for Adulthood**

Food and nutrition education forms part of the Flow Curriculum and supports functional learning and Preparation for Adulthood. For pupils working at the earliest developmental stages, learning may include sensory exploration, anticipation, cause and effect, making choices, accepting support and developing participation in routines. Progression may include:

- recognising food and equipment;
- making choices;
- pouring and mixing;
- preparing snacks and simple meals;
- using kitchen equipment safely;
- following visual recipes;
- hygiene;
- shopping;
- budgeting;
- understanding storage;
- preparing food for others;
- making healthy choices;
- accessing cafés and restaurants;
- contributing to enterprise activities.

Learning should be purposeful and appropriately challenging rather than being limited to repetitive low-level cooking activities.

**Enrichment, culture and community participation**

Food provides a valuable context for learning about community and culture. Pupils may encounter foods, celebrations and traditions from a range of cultural and community contexts. Such experiences should be respectful and meaningful rather than tokenistic. Food-related enrichment may include gardening, growing produce, enterprise, community shopping, cafés, restaurants, markets and other real-life experiences. These opportunities support communication, confidence, teamwork, money skills, decision-making and increasing independence.

Section 06

# INCLUSION, DIETARY NEEDS AND MEDICAL SUPPORT

Understanding need. Making adjustments. Supporting safe participation.

Riverside Bridge School recognises that pupils may require highly individualised support to access food and drink safely and successfully. Provision will take account of communication, developmental stage, medical needs, allergy, sensory processing, physical ability, cultural and religious needs and professionally assessed eating and drinking requirements.

**Personalised provision**

Reasonable adjustments will be made to remove barriers while protecting safety and dignity. Adjustments may include changes to:

- food texture or consistency where clinically directed;
- utensils;
- crockery;
- seating;
- positioning;
- environment;
- presentation;
- portion size;
- pace;
- communication support;
- level of assistance;
- location of eating.

Clinical modifications must only be made on the basis of current professional advice.

**Allergies**

Pupils with allergies will be supported in accordance with the school's Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy, Individual Healthcare Plan where required and current statutory allergy-safety guidance. Allergy information must be communicated appropriately to staff and catering personnel who need it. The school will maintain arrangements for:

- identification of pupils with allergies;
- individual planning;
- staff awareness and training;

- allergen information;
- avoidance and risk reduction;
- emergency response;
- access to prescribed adrenaline auto-injectors;
- use of school-held spare adrenaline auto-injectors where permitted and appropriate;
- recording serious incidents and near misses;
- review and learning following incidents.

Detailed clinical and operational requirements remain within the Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy and associated procedures rather than being duplicated here.

**Dysphagia and eating, drinking and swallowing needs**

Dysphagia may present a significant health risk, including choking and aspiration.

Where a pupil has an assessed eating and drinking plan, all staff supporting that pupil must know and follow the current plan. Plans may specify:

- permitted food texture;
- permitted fluid consistency;
- appropriate utensils;
- positioning;
- pace and portion size;
- degree and method of assistance;
- environmental considerations;
- signs of fatigue or distress;
- signs of aspiration or swallowing difficulty;
- action required if concerns arise.

Staff must not independently trial a different texture or consistency or relax a clinical recommendation because they believe the pupil may be ready. Changes require appropriate clinical reassessment. Where coughing, choking, wet/gurgly voice, breathing changes, distress, recurrent chest concerns or other signs of swallowing difficulty are observed, staff must follow the pupil's agreed plan and escalation procedures.

**Choking risk**

Choking risk will be considered separately from allergy risk. Food preparation, portion size, texture, positioning, supervision and the pupil's individual eating skills must be considered. Staff supporting pupils identified as being at increased choking risk must receive appropriate information and training and understand the relevant emergency response.

**Selective eating and sensory needs**

The school recognises that highly selective eating may be associated with sensory processing, communication, autism, anxiety, medical conditions or other needs. Staff will avoid coercive approaches. Where food exploration forms part of an agreed programme, expectations will be appropriately structured and reviewed with relevant professionals and families. Exposure to unfamiliar food does not necessarily require a pupil to eat it. Progress may include tolerating food nearby, touching, smelling, interacting with or otherwise exploring it.

**Cultural, religious and ethical requirements**

Reasonable steps will be taken to respect cultural, religious and ethical dietary requirements. These will be considered alongside statutory nutritional standards, safeguarding, allergy controls and the practical capacity of school and catering provision.

**Tube feeding and other specialist nutritional support**

Where pupils receive enteral feeding or other specialist nutritional intervention during the school day, arrangements will be governed by the pupil's current clinical plan and the school's Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy. Only appropriately trained and authorised staff may undertake specialist procedures. Such pupils should still be included in appropriate social, communication and curriculum experiences around food where this is safe, meaningful and consistent with clinical advice.

**Promoting independence safely**

Dependence on adult support should not automatically become permanent. Where safe, staff will deliberately develop pupils' independence by fading support and enabling them to assume greater responsibility for choices, utensils, drinking, preparation, clearing away and associated routines. Independence must never be promoted by disregarding clinical or safety requirements.

Section 07

# FOOD SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Managing safely. Controlling risk. Protecting everyone.

Riverside Bridge School is committed to maintaining high standards of food safety, hygiene, allergy management and risk control. Food must be prepared, stored, handled and served in accordance with applicable legislation, food-safety systems and local procedures.

**Food safety**

Appropriate arrangements will address:

- safe sourcing of food;
- storage;
- refrigeration and freezing;
- temperature control;
- cooking and reheating;
- prevention of contamination;
- cleaning;
- hand hygiene;
- equipment;
- waste;
- pest control where relevant;
- allergen information;
- safe service.

Detailed food-safety controls sit within the school's operational arrangements and catering-provider procedures.

**Curriculum food preparation**

Cooking and food preparation undertaken as part of teaching remains subject to food-safety requirements. Staff should consider pupils' developmental level and risks arising from:

- knives and sharp equipment;
- hot surfaces;
- ovens and hobs;
- electrical equipment;
- raw ingredients;
- cross-contamination;

- allergens;
- cleaning substances;
- physical or sensory needs.

Risk assessment should support participation rather than result in pupils being prevented from developing practical skills that can be taught safely.

**Allergy management**

Food-safety systems must support the school's allergy arrangements. Labels, ingredient information and allergen communication must be accurate and current. Staff should never assume that a product is safe because it has previously been used; ingredients and manufacturing information may change. Where food is prepared for a pupil with an allergy, agreed measures to reduce cross-contact must be followed. If required information is unavailable or there is uncertainty about whether food is safe for a pupil, it must not be provided until the position is clarified.

**Risk assessment**

Food-related risk assessment may consider whole-school activities, curriculum environments and individual pupil needs. Individual assessment may be required where a pupil's medical, sensory, regulation or physical needs create additional risk.

**Staff competence**

Staff must work within the limits of their role, training and competence. Appropriate training will reflect responsibilities and may include:

- food hygiene;
- allergy awareness;
- emergency allergy response;
- use of adrenaline auto-injectors;
- choking response;
- dysphagia/eating and drinking plans;
- specialist feeding procedures;
- safe equipment use;
- individual pupil requirements.

Training in a school procedure does not qualify a member of staff to make clinical decisions.

**Incidents and near misses**

Food-related incidents, allergy events, choking incidents, errors, near misses and other significant concerns will be recorded and escalated through the appropriate school system.

Serious allergy incidents and near misses will be reviewed in accordance with the statutory allergy-safety arrangements. Review should consider whether changes are required to:

- individual plans;
- communication;
- staff training;
- food procurement;
- catering arrangements;
- supervision;
- environment;
- risk assessment;
- operational procedures.

The purpose of review is to identify learning and prevent recurrence.

Section 08

# MONITORING, EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring quality. Evaluating impact. Strengthening provision.

Riverside Bridge School will monitor food and drink provision to ensure that it remains safe, inclusive, nutritionally appropriate, educationally purposeful and responsive to changing pupil need. Monitoring will consider both statutory compliance and the quality of pupils' experiences. Quality assurance may include:

- review of curriculum implementation and pupil outcomes;
- monitoring compliance with the School Food Standards;
- menu and catering review;
- food-safety and hygiene monitoring;
- allergy-safety assurance;
- review of serious incidents and near misses;
- scrutiny of individual plan implementation;
- review of dysphagia and specialist eating/drinking arrangements where appropriate;
- pupil voice and observation of pupil experience;
- family feedback;
- staff feedback;
- external professional advice;
- review of participation and reasonable adjustments;
- internal audit;
- relevant external inspection or assurance activity.

The quality of provision will not be judged solely by whether food is served safely. Monitoring should also consider whether pupils are developing communication, choice, confidence, practical skills and increasing independence.

The designated SLT lead will work with curriculum leaders, catering providers, the Nursing Team and other relevant professionals to identify strengths and improvement priorities.

Clinical compliance remains subject to the governance arrangements of the relevant health service and professional plan; school quality assurance should verify implementation rather than attempt to replace clinical supervision.

The Governing Board will receive appropriate assurance that food and drink provision:

- meets applicable statutory requirements;
- supports pupils' health and safety;
- manages allergy and dietary risks effectively;
- is inclusive and appropriately personalised;
- supports curriculum and Preparing for Adulthood outcomes;
- responds appropriately to identified incidents and risks.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner where changes to legislation, statutory guidance, professional standards or school arrangements make this necessary.

This policy will also be reviewed if revised School Food Standards are brought into force following the 2026 consultation.

Section 09

# RELATED POLICIES & FRAMEWORKS

Connecting practice. Strengthening consistency.

This policy should be read alongside the following Riverside Bridge School policies, frameworks and operational arrangements.

**Related policies**

- Curriculum Policy
- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Medical Needs, Medication and Allergy Safety Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Management and Risk Assessment Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Positive Support Policy
- Equality, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy
- Preparing for Adulthood Policy
- Educational Visits Policy
- Total Communication Policy

**Related frameworks, procedures and professional plans**

- Flow Curriculum Framework
- Food & Nutrition Curriculum Framework
- BridgeWorks - Structured Teaching Policy
- Food Safety operational procedures
- catering-provider food-safety arrangements
- Individual Healthcare Plans
- Emergency Healthcare Plans
- professionally agreed eating and drinking plans
- dysphagia guidance
- allergy management procedures
- moving and handling plans where relevant
- relevant Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Dietetic and Nursing guidance