

17th January 2025

Dear Parents/Carers

Thank you once again for your flexibility and support in providing home packed lunches for the children following the fire in our kitchen at the weekend. Pabulum, our catering team led by our chef, Mr Prince, have done an amazing job to get our full school meal offer up and running again so quickly, so from Monday we will no longer need to ask you to provide a packed lunch.

Inevitably, some parents have asked about whether they can continue to provide a packed lunch for their child instead of adopting the free school meals offer, so I thought I would write to outline the thinking behind why we promote our school meals so highly, and why it has been the case for many years at Hamstel Infants, that we have not accepted packed lunches from home unless a child has particular medical or dietary needs or allergies.

There are several reasons behind this thinking;

All children in our school are entitled to free school meals through the government universal free school meals (UFSM) offer – In the current climate, getting anything for free is a real rarity and we know how expensive food is currently, so we would like our parents to take advantage of this offer while it continues. Why pay out for additional food for packed lunches when your child is entitled to it and we are here to provide them for free?

We are a healthy school and we know 100% that Pabulum provide healthy, nutritious, well-balanced meals for our children. There are always hot meals, vegetarian meals, pasta or baked potatoes and sandwiches on offer each day, as well as freshly baked bread and a full salad cart to choose from. Pabulum provide adapted and allergy-free menus for children that need them.

We want our children to experience different foods and flavours, so if they are reluctant, they can join our 'tasting table' where children can sample smaller portions and build their confidence with food. We are sure that we can offer something that your child will enjoy.

We do also have more practical issues to consider. The first is around where to store packed lunch boxes as our classrooms are very busy and full of resources for learning, and our corridors are not wide enough to accommodate trolleys etc.



While this last week has also shown how difficult it is to monitor every child's lunch box for items that do not meet our healthy lunchbox expectations or more importantly, that contain nuts.

While we had no choice but to muddle through over the last week – we cannot afford to lose this valuable time from the children's teaching and learning on a long-term basis.

I would also like to stress that while the funding from the government offer allows us to keep our kitchen running, something many schools no longer have, it is in no way a profit-making scheme and all monies received go straight back into providing the high-quality meals that our children enjoy every day. It would have a huge impact on the Hamstel schools, both infant and junior, if we no longer had our kitchen provision on site.

We really hope that after reading the reasons above, you will understand why we are reverting straight back to our 'pre-fire' arrangements for lunches and our expectation to provide a high quality, free school meal to all our children.

Thank you again for your support and cooperation this week.

Best regards,



Mr. Roche

Principal

