

LUNCH, A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE SCHOOL DAY

Dear parents,

At EEB1 we are aware of the need to influence the eating habits of our children. We believe that having a nourishing lunch in the middle of the day - either from the school canteen, from the school cafeteria or a packed lunch from home - is a much better choice for our students than a random snack from the shops around the school. **This is why we encourage you to try to steer your children's choices at lunchtime towards a healthier option.**

Our school canteen has made considerable efforts over the last years to ban hydrogenated fats and use mainly olive oil to cook the food we serve. We have increased the portion of vegetables (soup, salad bar) and fruits, and we choose the best meat we can afford, so that our children receive a sustaining balanced meal at lunchtime. In the school cafeterias as well, we try our best to have good snacks on offer (sandwiches, salads, soup and fruit). We believe that staying at school for lunch is a good healthy choice for your child!

Here are some statistics to remind us of the importance of a healthy midday meal (*):

- 92% of children consume more saturated and/or hydrogenated fat than is recommended, 86% too much sugar, 72% too much salt and 96% do not get enough fruit and vegetables (1).
- Childhood obesity is increasing (2). Obesity in children under 11 has risen by over 40% in ten years. If this trend continues, half of children will be obese or overweight by 2020.
- The financial impact of obesity is huge (3).
- Junk food diets are causing other health problems too. For example, type 2 diabetes - once known as "late onset" and traditionally found in the over 40s - is increasingly found in adolescents.
- A poor diet also has significant effects on children's behavior concentration and mood. Children with diets lacking in essential vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids tend to perform worse academically, cannot concentrate and are more aggressive.

A 2009 study confirmed the significant benefits that Jamie Oliver's campaign in the UK - shifting from low-budget processed meals high in saturated fat, salt and sugar towards healthier options - had on educational attainment. The research showed that healthy school meals significantly improved educational outcomes, and led to a 15% reduction in absenteeism due to sickness (4).

Helping children adhere to healthy eating habits is part of our responsibility as a school. We trust that we can count on your support. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

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(*) We have used UK statistics, where childhood obesity is in the mid range among EU rates – a little higher than in Belgium but lower than those in southern European countries.

- (1) Sustainweb Children's Food Campaign: November 2006 Statistics from The National Diet and Nutrition (2) National Child Measurement Programme 2010/2011 (3) Foresight: Tackling Obesities: Future Choices: October 2007 (4) Healthy School Meals and Educational Outcomes: Institute for Social and Economic Research: January 2009