

Update re. School Meals and After-School Care

Dear Parents,

Please see below updates on

1. School Meals
2. After-School Care

SCHOOL MEALS

We were recently informed that the Department of Education School Meals Procurement Unit (SPU) with the support of the Interdepartmental Working Group on School Meals is currently finalising the development of standard procurement documentation for the Hot School Meals Programme, the use of which will be a mandatory requirement for participation in the scheme. We are told that these documents should be available early to mid-August to facilitate schools commencing procurement, selecting a provider, applying for funding and rolling out Hot School Meals from January 2026.

We are told that the documents are being updated to support and protect schools through the procurement process ensuring that contractual arrangements comply with food safety legislation, planning, building regulations, and health and safety requirements. Following this process will also ensure schools avoid unintentionally becoming food business operators and taking on related legal responsibilities.

As we await the Hot School Meals procurement documentation, we have the option of applying for Cold Lunches from the start of the 2025/2026 academic year until the end of December 2025. On enquiry, we were informed that procurement documentation for Cold Lunches is also being finalised, so we would have to wait until this is ready to apply for Cold Lunches.

Our initial survey suggested a significant interest in Hot School Meals. Our school is limited in its ability to facilitate Hot School Meals for logistical reasons. We have neither the space nor the electrical capacity to accommodate ovens or external pod regeneration facilities. Due to our particular circumstances, we appear to have only one option in this regard: delivery of hot meals to the school immediately before lunchbreak and collection of food waste immediately following lunchbreak. The disadvantage of this method of delivery is a significant loss in instructional (teaching) time and recreational (time spent playing in the yard.) The impact of this loss of time should not be underestimated. Cold Lunches would be much easier to facilitate in all of these respects.

We now need to decide the following:

1. Do we apply for Cold Lunches until December 2025 with a view to having Hot Lunches available from January 2026?
2. Do we forego the opportunity to avail of Cold Lunches and focus on having Hot Lunches available from January 2026?

3. Do we apply for Cold Lunches exclusively and abandon the ideal of Hot Lunches?
4. Do we abandon the idea of School Meals entirely?

Please help us to decide by clicking on the link to a one-question survey that will inform the Board of Management's decision.

AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

The Board has been liaising with potential providers and with our Patron with a view to making an after-school service available out of our school. A lot of work has been done to date, but there remains a lot to be done before we can confirm the availability of this service. Setting up after-school care is far from straightforward, given our school's particular circumstances and the administrative demands and red tape involved. The Board acknowledges that there is a clear need and demand for the service, and will do all we possibly can to get it up and running as quickly as possible.

All we can confirm for now is that:

- when it is established beyond doubt that we will be in a position to make the service available, it will not be available from September 2025
- we are making every effort to get the service up and running as soon as possible