

Guideline on How to Promote Green Lunch in Schools

1. Target Users

1.1 School Management

Suggested sections: The Problem, Analysis of Meal Arrangements in Schools, Recommendations for School Management and Relevant Information.

1.2 School Lunch Suppliers

Suggested sections: The Problem, Analysis of Meal Arrangements in Schools, Recommendations for School Lunch Suppliers and Relevant Information.

1.3 Other Organisations

This Guideline also applies to other organisations that self-arrange or outsource group meals.

2. The Problem

2.1 The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) conducts on-site landfill survey once a year to monitor the local solid waste composition. Food waste accounts for the largest category of municipal solid waste disposed of in Hong Kong. In 2024, an average of about 10,510 tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) were disposed of in landfills every day, of which about 3,000 tonnes (29%) were food waste.

2.2 The current practice of disposing of food waste in landfills is not sustainable and is environmental undesirable, as it depletes the limited landfill space, creates odour nuisance and creates wastage of reusable organic resources. To protect our environment and enable students to practice green living, schools can contribute by formulating and adopting a suitable green lunch policy based on the principle of “Reducing Pollution and Minimising Wastage”.

2.3 In this Guideline, we will analyse the meal arrangements commonly used in schools and compare their pros and cons from the environmental protection perspective. We will also recommend effective ways to reduce and recycle food waste, and provide relevant information to help schools in effectively implementing and continuously improving these measures.

3. Analysis of Meal Arrangements in Schools

3.1 Overview of Meal Arrangements

Meal arrangements in schools can be mainly divided into two types: On-Site Meal Portioning and Off-site Portioning. Each type has its own characteristics and considerations.

- **On-Site Meal Portioning**

Lunch suppliers prepare rice and vegetables on-site at schools, while other pre-cooked food is delivered to schools and reheated. All meals are then portioned and distributed to students.

Benefits

- The amount of food portioned can be flexibly adjusted upon request, to reduce wastage of food and generation of food waste.
- According to teachers and students, comparing with having lunch individually in classrooms, having lunch in canteens can better foster interaction and communication among students.



Points to Consider

- Schools shall be spacious enough to accommodate a canteen and install relevant facilities such as steam cabinets and dishwashers.
- Lunch suppliers may need to invest on relevant facilities.
- Schools need to make detailed planning for meal arrangements, including student flow control, additional manpower, etc.



- **Off-Site Portioning**

Cooked food is prepared and portioned at the kitchens of lunch suppliers and delivered to schools in lunch boxes according to the amount ordered.

Benefits

- Lunch boxes are pre-portioned by lunch suppliers and the food containers are collected by the suppliers after meal.
- Schools can offer students with different portion sizes when ordering lunch boxes, which can help reduce food waste.



Points to Consider

- Although food portions can be slightly adjusted according to students' age or appetite, it is not as flexible as On-Site Meal Portioning. The effectiveness on reducing food waste is relatively limited.
- Students may not have the opportunity for social interaction and experience offered by having meals together in the canteen.

3.2 Suggested Arrangement

From waste reduction perspective, On-Site Meal Portioning is considered to be the most desirable option. It would be even more desirable if the lunch suppliers can also collect food waste for recycling.

3.3 Students Bring their Own Lunches

In addition, parents may also consider preparing lunch for students, which students can bring back to school themselves, or the parents can deliver it to the school during lunch time.



Benefits

- Parents are in the best position to prepare the right amount of food for their children. Food wastage can be reduced.
- This is also an economical option.

4. Recommendations for School Management

4.1 Portion Food in a Flexible Manner

- If On-Site Meal Portioning is adopted, excessive food portions should be avoided and additional servings should only be provided upon students' request.
- If food is portioned off-site and provided in separate boxes, school can offer choices of lunch box with different portion sizes to students based on their age and appetite.
- Parents are reminded to prepare appropriate portions for their children to avoid wastage.

4.2 Install Necessary Facilities

- If On-Site Meal Portioning is adopted, appropriate space for setting up a canteen should be reserved and necessary facilities (e.g. steam cabinets and dishwashers) should also be installed.
- Washing bays should be provided to students for cleaning lunch boxes and/or cutlery after meals.

4.3 Provide Correct Information and Practice Opportunity to Students

- Discuss with parents and students about the environmental policy on meal arrangement formulated and implemented by your schools; explain the pros and cons of different options and your final decision.
- Encourage students to cherish food and avoid wastage.
- Educate students to correctly separate food waste from other waste after meals to support food waste recycling and the sorting of other recyclables.
- Encourage students to raise their awareness on environmental protection, such as practicing food waste recycling at home, choosing restaurants that have signed the "Food Wise Charter" or participated in the "Food Wise Eateries Scheme".

5. Recommendations for School Lunch Suppliers

5.1 Portion Food in a Flexible Manner

- If On-Site Meal Portioning is adopted, excessive food portions should be avoided and additional servings should only be provided upon students' request.
- If food is portioned off-site and provided in separate boxes, suppliers can provide choices of lunch box with different portion sizes according to students' age and appetite, in order to reduce food waste.

5.2 Proper Handling of Food Waste and Containers

- Lunch suppliers are recommended to coordinate with schools to establish mechanisms for food waste separation and container collection, ensuring proper collection of food waste and reuse of containers.
- Suppliers should encourage their employees, school staff and students to work together in ensuring orderly and hygienic food waste recycling.
- For information on the free service of food waste collection provided by the Environmental Protection Department, please refer to: <https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en-hk/waste-reduction-programme/food-waste-recycling-schemes>.

5.3 Compliance with Regulation on Disposable Plastic Products

- Lunch suppliers should comply with the Product Eco-responsibility (Amendment) Ordinance (Cap. 603) and its subsidiary legislation.
- For more information on the legislation, exemptions and suppliers of alternative products, please visit the "Cut the Plastics" platform (www.cuttheplastics.hk).

5.4 Cooperation with School in Environmental Education

- Lunch suppliers can actively cooperate with schools in environmental education and promote the culture of "Cutting Plastics, Reducing Waste, and Cherishing Food."
- Lunch suppliers can collaborate with schools to organise briefings, exhibitions, or activities to promote sustainable dining practices and green habits to students and school staff, nurturing their awareness about cherishing food, minimising wastage, and reducing use of disposable plastics.

6. Relevant Information – Other Reference Materials and Technical Support

- 6.1 The Education Bureau has issued the "Guidelines on Meal Arrangements in Schools", covering various aspects such as healthy eating, green lunch, and selection of lunch suppliers. This guideline is available for download and reference in the following website: https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/meal%20arrangement%20guidelines_Eng.pdf

- 6.2 Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has also issued "Guidelines on How to Ensure School Lunch Ordered are Safe", which provides professional advice to ensure food safety for both On-Site Meal Portioning and Off-Site Portioning. This guideline can be downloaded in FEHD's following website:
https://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/multimedia/multimedia_pub/files/school_lunches_ordered_are_safe.pdf
- 6.3 Should there be any enquiries or follow up on this Guideline, please contact Environmental Protection Department's Customer Service Centre at 2838 3111 or email to: enquiry@epd.gov.hk.

– END –



Environmental Protection Department

First Edition: October 2007 (The Guideline on the Reduction of Plastic Foam Food/ Drink Containers is hereby replaced)

Last Revision Date: 30 Jan 2026