

Hutchison Catering Ltd Special Diet Policy for the Education Sector

Original February 2023

Updated July 2024

Introduction

A special diet is one which cannot be freely selected from the school menu. This may be due to an allergy or intolerance, a medical condition or for cultural reasons.

Around 5-8% of children in the UK live with a food allergy, therefore most school classrooms will have at least one pupil with allergies. Add to this, children suffering with food intolerances and medical conditions means school catering teams can have many menu variations to manage. 20% of severe allergic reactions to food happen while children are at school. This makes a robust special diet policy and procedure imperative to safely catering for school pupils.

Children in education are a more vulnerable group of the population and a school meal is an important part of their school day. So, it's imperative that we do our utmost to ensure that all children can safely eat a school lunch with their friends that is balanced, nutritious and similar or the same as the menu devised for the rest of the school.

To ensure this is achieved we have developed this policy and supporting procedure which must be followed in every Hutchison Catering school. We will do our utmost to cater for all children, where it is deemed safe to do so and individual menus will be put in place for each child registered with us as having a special dietary requirement. Catering teams must read the contents of this [Special Diet Policy & the accompanying Special Diet Procedure](#) and sign the appropriate declarations [on the Atlas system](#).

Please be advised that all data collected for the purposes of providing special diets will be completed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy, Privacy Notice and data protection law.

Summary of policy updates –July 24

- [Our Policy and Procedure document has been split into two separate documents.](#)
- [Declaration to confirm staff have read and understood the policy, to be carried out through Atlas.](#)
- [Addition of policy relating to catering for children with SEN needs.](#)
- [Medical notes – clarification provided on acceptable medical evidence.](#)
- [Clarification on menus and potential choices available for children with complex special dietary requirements.](#)
- [Addition of process for reporting and investigating an allergy incident.](#)

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Catering Manager Declaration

Once you have read this document you will be required to sign within Atlas to confirm that:

- you have read and understand the contents of the Special Diet Policy

Catering Staff Declaration

Once you have read this document you will be required to sign within Atlas to confirm that:

- you have read and understand the contents of the Special Diet Policy

Special diets

A special diet is defined as one which cannot be freely selected from the menu available for the rest of the school population. This may be for medical reasons, an allergy or intolerance, or for religious or cultural reasons or lifestyle choices.

Medical diets

A medical diet request will most commonly be due to an allergy or intolerance, but other medical diets will be present in schools, for example a PKU diet. The Company Nutritionist will provide support for these types of requests.

Diabetes

As with special dietary requirements, we are committed to supporting children with diabetes to ensure they can enjoy a balanced school lunch with their friends.

All our recipes are nutritionally analysed so we can provide the carbohydrate value of the meals we serve. We will work with individual schools and catering teams to work out the best approach to manage this.

Non-medical diets

Religious Faiths and Lifestyle Food Preferences

Requests to provide meals that meet other dietary requirements will also be catered for, where possible. This could be a lifestyle choice such as veganism (avoid all meat, fish, eggs, dairy foods and anything derived from animals) or for religious reasons, such as omitting pork and non-halal foods.

Vegan diets: Eating more plant-based (vegan) foods is recommended as part of a healthy diet and we will work to ensure that plant-based options are available throughout the menu cycle. However, it is hard to meet a child's nutritional requirements solely through a plant-based diet, therefore we will also include items on our menus that are not suitable for those choosing to follow a vegan diet, in line with school food standards.

Adjusted diets to meet SEN requirements

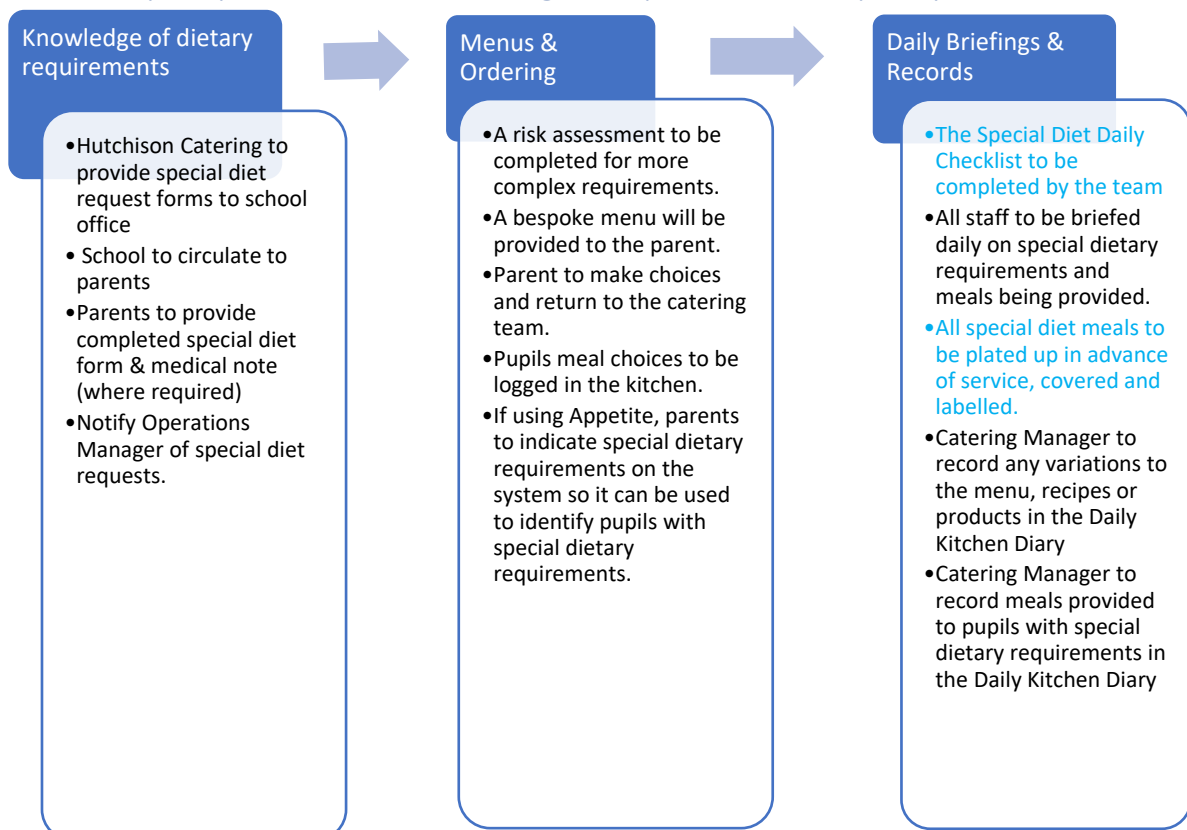
Where a child has Special Educational Needs (SEN) and is either in receipt of SEN Support or has an education, health and care plan (EHCP) we will work with the school and the family to discuss reasonable adjustments to the menu, in line with school food standards and considering other demands within the kitchen.

Policy Statement

Hutchison Catering are committed to catering for all children with special dietary requirements where it is deemed safe to do so.

- For medical diets we will provide a bespoke menu to ensure that pupils are provided with a balanced & nutritious menu that is in line with the choices provided to their peers.
- Carbohydrate information will be available for any child that is diagnosed with diabetes.
- For non-medical diets, we will aim to provide a balanced and nutritious meal, providing a bespoke menu for pupils where necessary. Where there is a large proportion of the school that requires a particular religious diet, such as halal, this will be reflected on the menu options. If it is not school wide, we will, where possible, work on an individual basis to tailor the offer.
- A special diet request form will be provided to schools to share with parents. A completed form and medical note (where appropriate) are required for all children with a special dietary requirement.

Summary of process for catering for special dietary requirements



Partnership approach

School pupils are a vulnerable group who may be at higher risk if they have allergies. Customers in this age group are also at a key stage of growth and development so it is important they have access to balanced and nutritious food whilst at school.

To provide a meal for a pupil with an allergy that is balanced, safe and something they like, it is important that schools, caterers and the parent (and/or pupil in secondary schools) work in partnership. It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that we are provided with accurate and detailed information about their child's dietary requirements and to provide updates in writing if these change at any point whilst we are catering for their child.

The Company Nutritionist with the Operations Managers & Catering Manager will work with the school & parents to provide school lunches for pupils with special dietary requirements where it is deemed safe to do so.

Knowledge of pupil's requirements

Schools will be provided with our Special Diet Request Form and asked to share this with parents of children with special dietary requirements. Completed forms need to be returned to Hutchison Catering.

All communication regarding special diets must be confirmed in writing and shared between all parties (school, caterer & school). [A child will not be taken off a special diet menu until the changes in dietary requirements have been confirmed in writing by the parents. A form can be provided to support this request.](#)

Medical Notes

For any requests to cater for a child with a medical dietary requirement, e.g. due to an allergy or intolerance, it is our policy to have a [note from a health professional \(Doctor or Dietician\) confirming a child's needs. This can be a letter for a health professional confirming the diagnosis, an Allergy Action Plan or an exert from medical records which are freely available from GP's or through the NHS app.](#) Adjusting a child's diet should only be done under the guidance of a medical professional therefore medical evidence is an essential requirement to support a request for medical diet menu. [We cannot accept results from private laboratory testing such as the York test as these are not valid methods of testing for allergies and intolerances.](#)

This medical evidence has 2 key functions:

- It provides us with clear information about the diagnosis and severity of the allergy or intolerance, which allows us to carry out a risk assessment on the safety of providing a meal for that child. It provides us with clear information about what the child can safely have and can't have.
- It helps to minimise the number of menu variations the kitchen has to deal with daily. We are often asked to cater for a child's varied requirements (preferences) which are not medically diagnosed. This can lead to increased pressure on the kitchen and ultimately increased risk for the other children requiring a special diet meal.

In schools using the Appetite system, parents are required to indicate any special dietary requirements within the system, in addition to completing a special diet request form and providing medical information (where appropriate). (See page 8 for more information on Appetite).

Re-introduction of allergens to a pupil's diet

Allergens should only be re-introduced onto a pupil's menu once an allergy has been confirmed to have ceased in writing from the parent or by updated medical evidence. We cannot be responsible for the gradual re-introduction of ingredients (such as re-introduction of milk using the 'milk ladder', or the provision of foods in moderations or specific forms e.g., 'cooked egg only') to a pupil's diet.

Hutchison Catering Ltd are committed to keeping families personal and special category data safe and secure and handling it in accordance with our legal obligations. We will only collect the personal information necessary to safely provide a special diet menu for a pupil and communicate with parents on this matter. Personal information will be kept secure and not shared with any third party. Personal and Special Category information will be destroyed once we no longer cater for the pupil or when our contract ceases with school. Any data collected, stored and processed is completed in line with our data protection policy, privacy notice and the relevant data protection law.

Legal requirements

Provision of adjusted meals

The provision of medical or special diets in schools is not legally defined. The Department of Education states that schools should make reasonable adjustments for pupils with particular requirements, for example to reflect medical, dietary and cultural needs (School food in England, Advice for governing boards, March 2019, updated June 23). It is the responsibility of the school and/or caterer to decide if provision of a meal for a pupil with an allergy is feasible and reasonable efforts should be made to cater for all pupils' needs.

If allergies are particularly complex or severe, a risk assessment will be carried out to assess if it is safe to cater for the child. We will use the LACA School Allergens Guidance and Risk Analysis Process Tool to establish the level of risk associated with providing a meal for a child. In addition, we will carry out our own kitchen risk assessment to ensure all processes to minimise risk are in place.

Where a child has Special Educational Needs (SEN) and is either in receipt of SEN Support or has an education, health and care plan (EHCP) we will work with the school and the family to discuss reasonable adjustments to the menu, in line with school food standards and considering other demands within the kitchen.

Provision of allergen information

Under the Food Information Regulations (2014) it is a legal requirement that school kitchens have information available on the presence of the 14 EU defined allergens. This information can be provided verbally, in writing and/or on menus.

All staff must follow steps in the special diet procedure to ensure accurate allergen information is available.

Natasha's Law

Under 'Natasha's law', all pre-packaged foods for direct sale require full ingredient declarations.

Primary Schools will refrain from packaging any items that are served on site. The only items to be packaged, are pre-ordered lunches, for example, packed lunches for a school trip, which are not

required to be labelled. Therefore, Natasha's Law does not apply to our Primary Schools. We manage allergen requirements with bespoke menus as outlined in this document.

In Secondary Schools, we have an agreed range of items that can be offer packaged, along with approved ingredients, recipes and labels to ensure these are accurate. Individual pupil allergen requirements will still be managed separately between the catering manager & pupil (plus parent where necessary).

Menus & meal ordering

A bespoke menu will be provided for a pupil with a special dietary requirement that is in line with the menu available for the rest of the school. [Due to complexities in these scenarios, it is not always possible to offer more than one choice of a special diet meal. This decision is never to single out pupils, discriminate or to remove choice, it is made solely based on what is operationally safe to provide.](#)

It could take up to 10 working days to provide the special diet menu for a pupil, depending on the complexity and severity of the dietary request. During this time, we will be able to provide the pupil with a jacket potato or sandwich with appropriate filling.

Once a menu has been provided, the parents will need to ensure that the pupil's choices are provided to Hutchisons Catering (Catering Manager).

Appetite

In schools using Appetite, parents or the school office are required to indicate on the system any information about dietary requirements. A bespoke menu for each child with an allergy or intolerance will be provided as outlined above and parent's will be required to return the child's choices to the catering team. [Where bespoke menus are in place, parents do not need to order through Appetite.](#)

Recipes & allergen information

We are required by law to keep a record of all recipes and the associated allergy information. These are provided in the Appetite or Indicator systems depending on the school and contract. Our special diet procedure outlines steps managers are required to take in their kitchens to meet this legislation.

Hutchison Catering primary kitchens are nut free environments, our secondary schools may serve products that state 'may contain nuts. We take every precaution to eliminate cross contamination with all allergens, however, we cannot guarantee 100% allergen free.

Preparation and service of allergy meals

[Kitchen teams are required to follow Safer Food Better Business to ensure the safe preparation of all meals, including minimising any risk of cross contamination of allergens during the preparation of special diet meals. Kitchen team must refer to and follow the 'How to Control Allergens' guide.](#)

Special Diet Daily Checklist

[A Special Diet Daily Checklist is in place to ensure all steps of the special diet procedure are carried out. The Catering Manager is responsible for completing the Special diet Daily Checklist daily and sign in the Kitchen Diary to confirm this has been completed.](#)

Identifying pupils with special dietary requirements

Our Appetite system supports with identifying pupils at the counter. For schools not using Appetite, an alternative system for identifying pupils with special dietary requirements will need to be put in place in agreement with each school. This could be coloured bands, a lanyard or ticket. Schools or parents may be asked to provide up to date photographs of pupils to support with this, [however, photos should not be the sole identification method](#). Where these are held in the kitchen, they will only be visible to those working within the kitchen.

Added extras

Theme Days

Theme days will be incorporated into our offer throughout the year for census days and to celebrate special occasions and events. Recipes and allergy information will be provided in both Appetite and Indicator for these menus and guidance will be provided on amendments to the core offer to meet special dietary requirements. It is the responsibility of the Operations Manager and Catering Manager to communicate this to school and parents.

School Trips

When pupils are taken off site for a school trip and a packed lunch is offered, packed lunches will need to be ordered in advance using the Packed Lunch Order form, to help us meet Natasha's Law and safely cater for children with special dietary requirements.

Hospitality

We can provide catering for a special event or meeting within school. The Food Information Regulations & Natasha's Law apply to these occasions and catering teams must follow guidance outlined in the Special Diet Procedure to meet these requirements.

Schools are requested to provide details of special dietary requirements in advance of a hospitality event.

Staff Meals

Meals for school staff are available throughout the year, as well as for school visitors. In these instances, information about the 14 allergens within those meals will be available if requested.

Incident Reporting & Investigation

[In the unlikely event that an allergy incident occurs, this must be reported to the school & Operations Manager immediately. The incident will be investigated by the Operations Manager, Nutritionist or a Director within 24hrs of the incident being reported.](#)

Staff Training

Managing special dietary requirements is the responsibility of everyone in the kitchen & serving meals to the children. Therefore, all members of staff will be trained as follows:

- All cooks/chefs must complete **Food Hygiene Certificate -CIEH Level or equivalent NVQ 2&3 Food Safety - A recognised training course on food allergy awareness.**
- Catering Assistants must complete the following mandatory courses: **Basic Food Hygiene Certificate & Food Allergies Awareness Level 2 (VTQ)**
- Any cover staff must read through the special diet procedure and be briefed on the special dietary requirements catered for, the meals those pupils will be served and the process for

identifying them at the counter. Where possible, cover staff should not serve meals for children with allergies & intolerance.

- All staff are provided with regular internal training on a variety of topics, including food safety, special diets and allergens. If there are any updates to legislation or procedures, these internal sessions will be used to notify and train staff.
- All staff will be required to re-read the special diet policy and procedure every 6 months (September & March) and sign on Atlas when completed.