Little Acorns Montessori

Ascot | Bracknell | Crowthorne

Nutrition & Food Policy

1. Document Control

Version	Date of Issue	Review Date	Author	Role
1.0	June 2026	June 2027	Jonathan Duffy	Director/Owner

Policy Location: This policy is held in the main policy folder at each setting and on the nursery management system. All staff must familiarise themselves with its content on induction and upon each annual review.

2. Policy Statement

Little Acorns Montessori is committed to promoting the health, well-being and development of every child in our care. We recognise that good nutrition in the early years is fundamental to a child's physical growth, cognitive development and lifelong health outcomes.

We will provide and promote food and drink that is healthy, balanced and nutritious, in line with our statutory duties under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework. We will work in partnership with parents and carers to establish positive attitudes towards food, develop children's independence at mealtimes and ensure that individual dietary needs are always respected.

This policy applies to all staff, students, volunteers, parents and carers at Little Acorns Montessori across all our settings.

3. Statutory and Regulatory Framework

This policy fulfils and has regard to the following legislation, guidance and frameworks:

- This policy fulfils and has regard to the following legislation, guidance and frameworks:
- **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework for Group and School-Based Providers (2025, in force 1 September 2025)** — specifically the safeguarding and welfare requirements at paragraph 3.55 (*'Where children are*

provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious') and the Safer Eating requirements at paragraphs 3.62–3.72.

- **DfE Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance (April 2025, in force from September 2025)** — providers must have regard to this guidance and follow it unless there is good reason not to.
- **Childcare Act 2006** (section 39(1)(b)) — under which the EYFS safeguarding and welfare requirements have legal force.
- **Food Safety Act 1990** and associated Regulations.
- **Food Hygiene Regulations (EC) No 852/2004** (retained in UK law post-Brexit).
- **Regulation (EC) No 1169/2011** on the provision of food information to consumers (retained in UK law) — allergen labelling requirements.
- **Equality Act 2010** — our duty to make reasonable adjustments for children with food-related medical conditions, disabilities or religious/cultural dietary requirements.
- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** — our general duty of care to children, staff and visitors.
- **Ofsted Early Years Inspection Framework** — inspectors will assess how well the setting promotes children's physical development and health, including nutrition.

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4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Manager / Designated Lead for Nutrition

- Has overall responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and annual review of this policy.
- Ensures all staff receive appropriate training, including Food Hygiene.
- Approves menus and any changes to food provision.
- Ensures the setting's allergen register is maintained and up to date.
- Acts as the primary point of contact for parents and carers regarding complex dietary or medical needs.

4.2 All Staff

- Must read, understand and comply with this policy.
- Must hold, or be working towards, a Level 2 Food Hygiene qualification before handling food independently.
- Must follow safe food preparation and hygiene procedures at all times.
- Must act as positive role models during snack and mealtimes — consuming healthy foods and drinks in the presence of children.
- Must not consume sugary drinks or fast food in front of children.

- Must report any concerns regarding a child's dietary needs or health to the Manager immediately.

4.3 Parents and Carers

- Must disclose all known dietary requirements, allergies and medical conditions relating to food at the point of registration, and promptly update the setting of any changes thereafter.
- Are responsible for providing a healthy, balanced packed lunch where applicable (see Section 7).
- Are asked to support the setting's nut-free policy at all times (see Section 9).
- Are encouraged to engage with healthy eating guidance and any workshops offered by the setting or BFC Children's Centre.

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5. Allergen Management and Dietary Requirements

Little Acorns Montessori operates as a strictly nut-free setting. This means:

- No products containing nuts — including peanuts, tree nuts, or nut-derived ingredients — may be brought into or consumed on our premises.
- This restriction applies to all food brought in from home, including packed lunches, snacks, celebration cakes and party food.
- Parents and carers must check all food labels carefully before sending any item into the setting.
- If a product is found to contain nuts upon arrival at the setting, it will be removed and returned to the parent or carer. Staff will handle this sensitively and without judgement.

This nut-free policy is in place to protect children with severe nut allergies, for whom accidental exposure can be life-threatening. We are grateful for the co-operation of all our families.

5.1 Registration and Recording of Dietary Needs

- At the point of registration, a member of staff will ask parents and carers to complete a Dietary Needs and Preferences Form, covering: all known food allergies and intolerances; medical conditions requiring dietary management (e.g. coeliac disease, phenylketonuria); religious or cultural dietary requirements; strong food preferences or aversions.
- All information recorded on this form will be transferred to the child's individual care plan and the setting's Allergen and Dietary Needs Register.
- The Allergen and Dietary Needs Register must be reviewed and updated at least termly, and immediately upon any change notified by the parent or carer.
- For children with medically diagnosed food allergies or intolerances, the setting will obtain a Healthcare Plan (or equivalent written instruction) from the child's GP, paediatrician or allergy specialist where appropriate.

- Staff must consult the Allergen and Dietary Needs Register before preparing or serving any food to a child.

5.2 Allergen Controls

- All food provided by the setting is checked for allergens before being served to children.
- Separate utensils, plates and preparation surfaces must be used when preparing food for children with allergies or intolerances, to prevent cross-contamination.
- To protect children with allergies, children are discouraged from sharing or swapping food with one another.
- Any child with a known severe allergy will have an individual risk assessment in place, reviewed at least annually or following any allergic reaction.
- Where an adrenaline auto-injector (e.g. EpiPen) is prescribed, it will be stored according to the child's Healthcare Plan. Staff will be trained in its use.

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6. Food Hygiene and Safe Food Handling

- All staff who handle food must hold, or be actively working towards, a Level 2 Award in Food Safety in Catering (or equivalent), recognised by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) or equivalent awarding body.
- All staff must wash their hands with soap and warm water for a minimum of 20 seconds before handling food and after using the toilet, handling waste, or touching surfaces that may be contaminated.
- Children must be supported and encouraged to wash their hands before eating and after meals.
- Food preparation areas must be cleaned and sanitised before and after use, in accordance with the setting's Cleaning Schedule.
- Raw and ready-to-eat foods must be stored separately to prevent cross-contamination.
- Refrigerators must be maintained at 0–5°C and temperatures recorded daily on the Temperature Monitoring Log.
- Freezers must be maintained at or below -18°C.
- Food must not be used beyond its use-by or best-before date.
- Any food that appears spoiled, damaged or out of temperature control must be discarded immediately and recorded on the Food Waste Log.
- The setting's Food Hygiene Rating must be maintained at 4 or 5 stars. The most recent rating is displayed at the entrance to each setting.

6.1 Safer Eating

Little Acorns Montessori is committed to ensuring that all mealtimes and snack times are safe as well as enjoyable. The following requirements apply at all settings in accordance with the EYFS 2025 Statutory Framework (paragraphs 3.62–3.72).

- **Paediatric First Aid at Mealtimes** At all times when children are eating or drinking, a member of staff holding a valid Paediatric First Aid (PFA) certificate must be

present in the room. PFA training is renewed every three years in accordance with Annex A of the EYFS Statutory Framework. A Training Matrix is maintained at each setting to identify when individual certificates require renewal, and the Manager is responsible for ensuring that PFA coverage at mealtimes is planned into staffing arrangements and rotas.

- **Choking Prevention** All food provided by the setting must be prepared in a way that is appropriate to each child's age and stage of development, so as to prevent choking. Staff must follow the DfE and NHS food safety guidance on the preparation of high-risk foods. Examples include: grapes, cherry tomatoes and large strawberries must be halved or quartered; whole nuts must never be served to children under five; raw carrot sticks and similarly hard foods are avoided for younger children; and large, round or hard foods are cut into small, manageable pieces.
- Where food is brought from home, the key worker or designated staff member must, before the child eats, satisfy themselves that the contents are consistent with the child's allergen register entry and are prepared in a way appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Where a concern exists, staff must act on it sensitively and, if necessary, prepare the item differently before serving.
- **Supervision During Eating** Children must always be within both the sight and hearing of a member of staff whilst eating. Choking can be completely silent; sight alone is not sufficient. Where possible, staff should sit facing children whilst they eat, so they can monitor for signs of choking, discourage food sharing, and be alert to any unexpected allergic reaction. Where a choking incident occurs that requires intervention, the details must be recorded on an Incident/Accident Form and parents and carers informed on the same day. Records of choking incidents will be reviewed periodically by the Manager to identify any trends or patterns that could be addressed to reduce risk.
- **Age-Appropriate Equipment** The setting will ensure that appropriate equipment is available for children of different ages and stages, including high chairs, suitably sized tables and chairs, and age-appropriate cutlery and crockery. This supports both safe eating and the development of independence.

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7. Snacks and Drinks Provided by the Setting

7.1 Snack Provision

Little Acorns Montessori provides a daily snack for all children. The following standards apply, in accordance with the DfE EYFS Nutrition Guidance (April 2025):

- All children will be provided with a fruit or vegetable snack daily. We may also invite parents to bring in some fruit or vegetables to be divided amongst the children.
- In addition to fresh fruit and vegetables, breadsticks and crackers may also be offered as part of the snack provision.
- Snacks are free from, or low in, added sugars and salt.
- Highly processed foods and those containing artificial additives, preservatives or colourings are avoided.
- Snacks are varied across the week to expose children to a broad range of foods from different cultural backgrounds.

7.2 Drinks Provision

- During session times, only milk and water will be offered to children.
- Milk (whole cow's milk for children over 12 months, or a suitable alternative for younger children or those with intolerances) is provided at snack times.
- Fresh drinking water is available to children at all times throughout the session.
- Fruit juices, squashes, flavoured milks and carbonated drinks will not be provided by the setting.

Water Bottles: We request that children's water bottles are filled with plain water only before arriving at the setting. Please do not add juice, squash, flavoured water or any other drink to the bottle. This applies in line with the EYFS Nutrition Guidance (September 2025) and our commitment to dental health.

These standards have regard to the EYFS Nutrition Guidance (DfE, April 2025, in force September 2025).

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8. Packed Lunches and Food Brought from Home

Where children attend a session that includes lunchtime, families are asked to provide a healthy, balanced packed lunch. Little Acorns Montessori recommends the following:

8.1 Recommended Lunchbox Format

- We encourage families to use a bento-style lunchbox, which supports independence by providing separate compartments for a variety of food groups.
- A healthy packed lunch should include: a source of protein (e.g. chicken, egg, cheese, hummus); a starchy carbohydrate (e.g. wholemeal bread, pasta, rice); a portion of vegetables or salad; a portion of fruit; a dairy item or alternative (e.g. yoghurt, cheese).
- Drinks should be water only, in a suitable sealed container. Juice, squash or fizzy drinks should not be included.

8.2 High-Sugar Items

- Items that contain high levels of sugar (e.g. sweets, chocolate bars, crisps, fizzy drinks, sweet biscuits) will not be made available to children during the session.
- If such items are identified in a child's lunchbox, they will be set aside and returned to the parent or carer at collection. Staff will handle this sensitively and without judgement.
- A polite note or verbal explanation will be given to the parent or carer in order to maintain a supportive and open relationship.

8.3 Home Food — General Principles

- All food brought from home must be clearly labelled with the child's full name.
- All home-provided food is subject to the setting's allergen and nut-free policy.
- Before a child eats food brought from home, the key worker or designated staff member will check that the contents are consistent with the child's allergen register entry and are prepared in a way that is appropriate to their developmental stage and safe from a choking perspective. This check is carried out at every mealtime and snack time. Where any concern is identified, staff will act on it sensitively before the food is served.
- The setting is not responsible for the overall nutritional content of food brought from home; however, we reserve the right to set aside any food that poses a risk to the health or safety of children in our care.
- **Celebration food:** Families wishing to mark a birthday or special occasion are warmly encouraged to do so. However, in accordance with the DfE EYFS Nutrition Guidance (April 2025), the setting discourages the bringing in of cakes or confectionery, due to both nutritional and allergen considerations. We encourage families to consider alternatives such as a small fruit platter or savoury items. Any food brought in for a celebration must be agreed with the Manager in advance and must comply with the setting's allergen and nut-free policy. The Manager is happy to discuss suitable options with families at any time.

Note for parents: While we are unable to compel families to follow EYFS nutrition guidance in relation to packed lunches, we encourage you to review the DfE EYFS Nutrition Guidance (gov.uk) and the NHS guidance on healthy lunchboxes. We are happy to discuss lunchbox choices with you at any time.

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9. Promoting Independence and a Positive Food Culture

- Snack and mealtimes are planned as social occasions, allowing children and staff to sit together, talk and enjoy food in a calm and relaxed environment.
- Children are encouraged to be independent during mealtimes — for example, by serving their own food, pouring their own drinks and clearing their own plates.
- Staff sit with children at mealtimes and model positive eating behaviours.
- Children are never pressured or coerced into eating, and portion sizes are responsive to individual appetites.
- Children are offered a wide range of foods from a variety of cultural backgrounds to broaden their food experiences.
- Food is never used as a reward or withheld as a punishment.

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10. Physical Activity and Healthy Lifestyles

Little Acorns Montessori recognises that good nutrition forms only one part of a healthy lifestyle. We also:

- Provide daily access to outdoor play and physical activity across all settings.
- Embed health and well-being into our Montessori curriculum and daily routines.
- Support parents and carers to understand the health risks associated with poor diet, physical inactivity and obesity in the early years.
- Signpost parents and carers to appropriate evidence-based healthy eating advice and local services through BFC Children's Centre and other local authority resources.
- May arrange workshops on site, delivered in partnership with BFC Children's Centre, to support families in understanding the importance of healthy eating and active lifestyles.

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11. Reporting and Recording

The following records must be maintained at each Little Acorns Montessori setting:

- Allergen and Dietary Needs Register — updated upon registration and reviewed at least termly.
- Individual child care plans (including Healthcare Plans for children with medically diagnosed food allergies or conditions) — stored securely in the child's file and accessible to all key workers.
- Food Hygiene Temperature Monitoring Log — completed daily.
- Food Waste Log — completed as required.
- Staff Food Hygiene Qualification Records — stored in individual personnel files.
- Paediatric First Aid Training Matrix — a record of all current PFA certificates held by staff across each setting, with renewal dates, maintained by the Manager and reviewed at least termly to ensure PFA coverage at all mealtimes can be demonstrated.
- Any incident involving an allergic reaction, choking, or food-related safeguarding concern must be recorded on an Incident / Accident Form on the day it occurs. The Manager and parent or carer must be notified immediately. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) must be informed if the incident raises any safeguarding concerns.
- All records are stored securely in line with the setting's Data Protection and Records Retention Policy and the UK GDPR (UK General Data Protection Regulation).

12. Key Contacts

Role	Name	Campus
Designated Officer / Nominated Individual	Jonathan Duffy	All Campuses
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Elaine Eastham	Ascot Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Agata Payne	Bracknell Campus
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Emma Gray	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Jessica McGrath/Katy Cooley	Ascot Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Joanne Broughton	Bracknell Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Martine Loveridge	Crowthorne Campus
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)	Kira King	Crowthorne Campus (in the absence of Emma and Martine)
Manager on Duty	As rostered	All Campuses

13. Policy Review

This policy must be reviewed at least annually, or sooner in the event of:

- A change in relevant legislation or statutory guidance (including any update to the EYFS Statutory Framework or DfE Nutrition Guidance).
- A significant change in the setting's food provision or operating procedures.
- An incident or near-miss relating to food safety or allergen management.
- A recommendation arising from an Ofsted inspection.

The Manager is responsible for ensuring that all staff are informed of any changes to this policy and that training is updated accordingly.

14. Sign-Off

Role	Name	Date
Owner/Director	Jonathan Duffy	June 2026