

Lunchtime Expectations

Ripponlea Primary School



About Lunchtime Expectations

Lunchtime Expectations supports primary schools to develop an environment where children feel safe and supported while eating, and to nurture a students' relationship with food and their bodies. Facilitated by Better Health Network, Lunchtime Expectations guides education staff and families through reflection, capacity building and co-design.

Background

School settings play a critical role in shaping how children perceive and speak about their bodies, through lunchtime rituals, classroom learning, and staffroom conversations. **Teacher attitudes & language, curriculum content, peer relationships, and school culture** can either reinforce appearance-based norms or act as protective factors (Tylka & Piran, 2019).

Across the BHN catchment (Bayside, Glen Eira, Kingston, Port Phillip and Stonnington), body image remains a primary concern and priority for local schools. In the early years of a child's life, research highlights that:

- Up to 68% of primary school-age children have reported appearance-related teasing from peers (Damiano et al. 2018).
- At age 5, 90% of boys and 92% of girls have indicated a preference for not inviting children in a larger body to their birthday party, and perceiving thin-to-average sized children as 'good' (EMBoDIED Research, La Trobe University).
- The more children are surrounded by negative weight talk, the more likely they are to internalise negative weight-based stereotypes to judge themselves, which also leads to self-devaluation (Rancano et al. 2021).

School Profile

Ripponlea Primary School is located in the City of Port Phillip. The School has approximately 140 families and 256 students.

Across November and December 2025, Better Health Network Health Promotion team partnered with Ripponlea Primary School **teachers** (100%), **families** (40%) and **students** (35 across Foundation to Grade 6) to understand the eating opportunities, food learning and body/body image learning within the school.

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These learnings led to the co-design of **Food Environment Value Statements** that will support lunchtimes and positive body image at Ripponlea Primary School. Through reflective practice sessions, online surveying and co-design, the following Food Environment Values were identified:

1. Respectful Lunchtime Routine
2. Timing and Structure
3. Food Learning and Diversity

The values and practice guidance consider the **broader context** that Ripponlea Primary School exists in, the schools' strengths, and the limitations of the school environment, including:

- Acknowledging the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2022, "Teachers are entitled to a paid lunch break of not less than thirty minutes free from assigned duties between the hours 11:30am to 2:30pm."
- Snack Shack, the school canteen is available at recess on Wednesdays and Fridays.
- As of December 2025, lunch orders are made through Beaver Tails.
- There is a school garden led by the schools Productive Gardening Club which sells the produce at the Snack Shack or the Friday Market.
- Relevant policies include Healthy Eating at School, Bullying Prevention.

The Lunchtime Expectations project aligns with the Australian Curriculum, Curriculum Connection: Food and Wellbeing, through promoting a whole-school approach to food and wellbeing education. The four key focus areas of this approach are:

- Shared leadership and development
- Policy and procedures
- Curriculum
- Community partnerships

Ripponlea Primary School's Food Environment Goal

To foster a safe, inclusive, and positive food environment that respects diversity, models' neutral language and supports the wellbeing of every student.

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The Process



01

Teacher reflection session

Health Promotion Officers (HPO's) facilitate a focus group with teachers to explore what eating opportunities and food learning is currently like at the school. An online survey asking the same reflection questions is sent to all teaching staff.

02

Families reflection session

Facilitated focus group with families to explore what eating opportunities are like at the home and school. An online survey asking the same reflection questions is sent to all families.

03

Student voice

HPO's lead a student voice focus group to understand a child's view of lunchtimes and describing words for food.

04

Data analysis

HPO's analyse the data to find the similarities and differences in expectations.

05

Co-design values

A codesign session is facilitated with parents and teachers to inform development of food environment value statements at school, considering the similarities and differences reported. Capacity building is provided as needed.

06

Embedding your values

Food Environment Value Statements are embedded in practices and policy within the school. HPO's provide support in capacity building and further resource development if required.

07

Maintenance

HPO's visit the school and reflect on the process and changes with the teaching staff and discuss any next steps.

Food Environment Value Statement Respectful Lunchtime Routine



What we Heard

Both teachers and families expect eating times to be **respectful**, with a focus on **manners** and **being polite**. Teachers expressed a desire for students to have **pride in their classroom** and eating environment. Students reflected to us that during the eating time, they should be able to **chat with their friends** and families expressed that eating times should be a respectful time for connection and coming together.

When this was further explored during our data co-design session, importance was placed on:

- Working with all teaching staff to develop a **“Ripper Lunch Routine”** that captures principles of respectful eating breaks during recess and lunchtime.
- Shared understanding that respectful eating breaks are two-way. When students are role modelled respect and manners by teachers, they will be encouraged to do the same.
- Predictability with the routine and flow of the recess and lunch break.
- Respect for food choices, culture, diversity and ensuring food and bodies are spoken about in a neutral/inclusive way.

Food Environment Value Statement

The school is committed to calm and predictable eating breaks that promote connection and mutual respect. Our practices support inclusive attitudes toward all foods and bodies, ensuring language and expectations reflect the diversity of our community.

This value will be practiced through:

- Eating breaks occur at consistent times each day, with smooth transitions to and from the classroom. Visual or auditory cues, such as a **bell or music** (see Structure and Timing value), will signal the start and end of eating.
- Teachers demonstrate polite manners, calm voices, and attentive behaviour during eating times.
- Students are **encouraged to take pride in their learning environment** and contribute to the care of shared spaces through wiping tables if needed, and disposing of waste correctly (e.g. recycling, compost, rubbish). Teachers guide and reinforce these actions, praising care and initiative.
- Teachers are to use **neutral, non-judgmental language around food and bodies** by avoiding labelling foods as “healthy”, “everyday”, “unhealthy” or “sometimes”. Being aware of lunchbox comments between students and ensuring these remain inclusive.
- Promote **quiet connection and polite interaction**. Encouraging students to talk politely, listen to peers, and share the space considerately. Reinforce skills such as waiting their turn, not interrupting, and engaging in calm conversation (e.g. rotate students that get to share a joke of the day, others listen while joke is told).
- Acknowledge and **reinforce positive behaviours** through class recognition or positive reinforcement for students demonstrating care and pride in their classroom. Encourage reflection on how their actions support a calm, respectful, and connected eating environment.

Food Environment Value Statement Structure and Timing



What we Heard

The teachers, families and students all expressed that the **allocated time** for eating is a challenge. It presented differently across the three groups.

- For teachers, eating time was seen, at times (e.g. mini snack), as a **disruption to learning**. They also felt that students were not making the most of the allocated eating time by prioritising socialising and chatting with their classmates instead of eating.
- For families, children are coming home with almost full lunchboxes indicating that they do **not have enough time** to eat what is packed, or children communicate to them that there was not enough eating time.
- For students, they expressed that sometimes their **teachers go overtime** with their lessons and as a result learning creeps into their eating time meaning they have less time to eat before going outside to play. They are also having to make decisions around the types of foods they eat from their lunchbox, prioritising the “quickest to eat food like muesli bars, cookies, crackers...”
- Families and students also communicated that not being able to bring lunchboxes outside is contributing to students not eating enough.

When this was further explored during our co-design session, importance was placed on:

- Having a **clear and consistent structure** around recess and lunch eating time that the whole school follows. Steps should be taken to ensure that learning time and eating time are clearly distinguished.
- Students being able to **bring their lunchboxes outside** if they have not eaten enough for their bodies during eating time.
- Establishing **clearly signed, designated eating areas outdoors** so students know where they are able to sit, eat and safely finish their food.

Food Environment Value Statement

We ensure students have protected and predictable eating times by implementing a consistent whole-school structure that provides adequate time to eat, along with flexible options for finishing food when needed.

This value will be practiced through:

- Designated **eating time of 10 minutes for both recess and lunch**. Eating time will be signified with a bell (10:50am recess and 1:20pm lunch). This will indicate that learning has stopped and that students can now eat their food before going outside to play.
- Designated **areas outside for eating**. They will be clearly signed, and students can bring their lunchboxes outside with them and continue eating in these areas if they wish too. Teachers on yard duty in those areas will provide supervision for safety.
- Morning mini-snack will be embedded for classes Foundation to Grade Four. This is an eating while learning opportunity to ensure students have access to nutritious food before the recess break.
- Acknowledging that this **guidance is limited by curriculum requirements** and may look different for some students with sensory needs (e.g. access to food during learning time, water bottles on table, access to food during the break time).

Food Environment Value Statement Food Learning and Diversity



What we Heard

Teachers expressed that they **do minimal explicit food learning** (outside of Foundation to Grade Two) with most of it being implicit through discussions and conversations with students. Teachers emphasised that they **didn't feel it is their role to teach about food, food literacy or include food learning within their classes**. Body teaching and body image, however, is taught explicitly through the Relationships and Sexuality curriculum. When explored with families, they expressed that **food learning, teaching of body image or body diversity should be taught within the teaching curriculum**.

When this was further explored during our data co-design session, importance was placed on:

- Increasing support and **capacity for teachers in navigating body image** and implicit conversations with students centred around bodies or food.
- **Developmentally and age-appropriate food learning for Foundation to Grade Two**, ensuring it is up to date with the most recent evidence for prevention of disordered eating.
- Acknowledging and **embedding diversity across teaching practice**, whether that be in conversations about food, connection to culture and the diversity of bodies.
- Broadening the definition of 'healthy'. **Moving away from a focus of good/bad food** dichotomy or linking health to body size or weight.
- Communicating the food garden beyond the sustainability group. Demonstrating how the garden is used to the wider school community.

Food Environment Value Statement

Our school is committed to a learning environment where conversations about food and bodies are safe, respectful, and celebrate the diversity of our community.

We support teachers to build confidence in these areas and ensure students receive inclusive, evidence-informed learning that broadens their understanding of health and fosters positive body image.

This value will be practiced through:

- **Building teacher capacity and knowledge** to mitigate risk factors and promote protective factors that impact children's body image, create supportive classroom and school environments and identify concerns in relation to body image and eating in students (e.g. Butterfly Body Bright teacher training).
- Establish school-wide practices to promote positive body image and a healthy relationship with eating and movement (e.g., Butterfly Body Bright whole school approach).

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Food Environment Value Statement Food Learning and Diversity



- **Explicit food learning** in Foundation to Grade Two will teach students about food concepts in a developmentally appropriate way (e.g., through Butterfly Body Bright ‘Thoughtful’ lesson plans). This looks like:
 - Using the **five senses** when talking about and discussing food e.g. “Bananas are yellow”, “Crackers and carrots are crunchy”.
 - Avoid labelling foods as “healthy” or ‘unhealthy’, ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘always’ foods. Students within this age group are egocentric thinkers and these labels can create confusing categories. Instead, **label food what it is** e.g. berries, chocolate, bread, lolly etc.
 - Talking to students about **where** food comes from, how it grows and how it gets to our plate.
- Implicit food learning can arise from **conversations during eating time**, celebration days, or in conversation between teachers. During classroom eating time, teachers should encourage students to share stories, talk about the day, or what they’re doing on the weekend, instead of focusing on the food in their lunchboxes. We want students to not compare foods, therefore teachers should role model this by not commenting on foods. Teachers may need to redirect student reactions or judgements of others food by using phrases such as “let’s not yuck someone else’s yum” or “everyone eats differently”.
- Respectful and **neutral language is used if talking about bodies**. Talk about what bodies can do rather than what they look like e.g. “our legs help us to climb the ladder”, “our hands can grasp things”. Positive compliments about appearance can reinforce the desirability of smaller body size (Tylka & Piran, 2019).
- Discourage positive or negative body commentary between students. Comparing one body to another is not helpful and the less students talk about appearance the better (The Embrace Collective, 2025).
- **Removing the ‘thin ideal’ and diet culture messaging** when body talk arises. This could look like a student saying, “I’m fat!” or “[child at school] is fat” – and instead of saying “You are not fat! You are great!” or “That’s not a nice thing to say” which can insinuate that fat is bad, respond by:
 - Exploring with the student what they mean by saying they are fat.
 - Listening without interruption.
 - Discussing body diversity. (“all bodies are different”, “imagine if all bodies looked the same!?”)
 - Identifying values around body diversity and fat neutrality (not labelling fat as bad).
 - Following up with a plan for any concerns that may be driving the statement, such as bullying, judgement, food comparison.
 - **Example Script:** “What do you mean by saying you are fat? Everyone has fat on their bodies. Why do you think that is? Some people have more fat and some have less. There is nothing wrong with having fat on our bodies. Your body is just the right size for you.” (Kids Eat in Color, 2023)

Food Environment Value Statement Food Learning and Diversity



- Promoting diversity through imagery, language and representation. Representation of all foods, bodies, cultural backgrounds and abilities within resources e.g. books, posters, videos etc. Actively seek resources that promote foods from all the food groups as well as people of all body shapes, sizes, cultural backgrounds and abilities.
- Helping students to broaden their concept of 'healthy'.
 - **Example Script:** "We cannot control our body size. What we can control is doing things that help us feel well, such as drinking enough water to stay hydrated, eating a variety of foods from all food groups, getting enough sleep and rest, going outside to play, and spending time with friends and family." (PACEY)



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