

19 July 2024

Education Bureau Circular No. 19/2024
Arrangements for Green Lunch and Reduction of Food Waste in Schools

[Note : This circular should be read by –

- (a) Supervisors and heads of all primary and secondary schools and kindergartens for necessary action; and
- (b) Heads of sections for information.]

SUMMARY

This circular serves to provide schools with practical guidelines on green lunch and reduction of food waste in schools. It supersedes Education Bureau (EDB) Circular No. 3/2016 and should be read in conjunction with EDB Circular No. 17/2009 on Meal Arrangements in School.

BACKGROUND

2. Resources conservation and waste reduction tops the agenda of environmental protection. The Government has been committed to promoting various waste reduction measures. To encourage the community to minimise the use of disposable tableware and cultivate the habit of using reusable tableware, the Government has adopted good practices at all eateries (including canteens, food kiosks and restaurants) within its properties and venues progressively since 1 January 2019 to avoid the use of disposable plastic tableware and disposable plastic food containers as far as possible. The good practices include providing reusable tableware rather than any types of disposable tableware for dine-in customers, and not providing disposable tableware by default or in sets irrespective of its materials nor disposable plastic tableware or food containers for take-aways¹. To this end, Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and relevant Government departments are committed to maintaining communication with the catering industry, to enable different parties to support and act in line with the Government's environmental measures. As for schools, the successful implementation of green lunch

¹ Tableware and food containers made of plastic-free materials (e.g. paper, wood, bamboo, plant fibre or metal, excluding polylactic acid such as bioplastics made of cornstarch, cassava roots or sugar cane) should be used to replace disposable plastic tableware.

and reduction of food waste in schools relies on the collaboration of all stakeholders. EPD has also issued guidelines to schools providing recommendations for school management on how to implement green lunch in schools in order to reduce food waste and avoid the use of disposable food containers and tableware.

DETAILS

I. Arrangements for Green Lunch

3. On the premise of promoting environmental conservation and education for sustainable development, we appeal to schools to further integrate awareness and culture of environmental protection into the daily lives of students through lunch arrangements in schools to assist students in developing environmentally friendly habits from an early age, cultivating in them a sense of responsibility and commitment to cherishing resources and protecting the environment. To put green lunch into practice, schools should adhere to the principle of reducing waste and minimising wastage at all times, and adopt the practices set out in paragraphs 4 to 17 below as far as practicable.

(A) Using Reusable Food Containers and Tableware

4. To reduce waste at source, schools should “go plastic-and-disposable-free” and stop providing disposable tableware of different materials and types, such as straws, stirrers, forks, knives, spoons, chopsticks, cups, dishes/ plates, bowls and meal boxes on school premises.

5. With regard to tableware, students should bring their own reusable water bottles for water refill using the water dispensers on school premises. Also, schools should facilitate students to use reusable tableware. If students forget to bring their own tableware, schools should provide spare reusable tableware.

6. As for food containers, schools are advised to request lunch suppliers to use durable, washable and reusable food containers instead of disposable ones. Schools may also consider making school-based arrangements and allow students to bring their own reusable food containers or use the ones provided by schools. Schools should remind parents to use reusable food containers if they prepare lunch for their children. Moreover, schools should encourage students to use their own reusable tableware, water bottles and food containers when buying takeaway lunch or in school activities/ meal gatherings (e.g. school picnics and festive parties).

7. Furthermore, the first phase of the Regulation on Disposable Plastic Tableware

and Other Plastic Products was implemented on 22 April 2024. As regards the circumstances of school lunches, in accordance with the amended Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance (Chapter 603), when lunch suppliers offer catering services such as on-site meal portioning to students, they are prohibited from providing nine types of disposable plastic tableware (including expanded polystyrene (EPS) tableware, straws, stirrers, cutlery (forks, knives, spoons), plates, cups, cup lids, food containers, and food container covers). As for providing takeaway services, such as supplying lunch boxes prepared at food factories to students directly, the suppliers are prohibited from providing the first five types of disposable plastic tableware (including EPS tableware, straws, stirrers, cutlery, and plates). For more details on the amended legislation, please refer to the relevant webpage (www.cuttheplastics.hk).

8. Schools are encouraged to work together to implement school-based green lunch measures and appoint suitable service providers/ lunch suppliers. It is hoped that the use of reusable tableware and food containers for school lunch can be fully implemented to realise substantial reduction of waste.

(B) On-site Meal Portioning

9. To implement effective green lunch practice, schools have all along been encouraged to adopt on-site meal portioning. Schools should note that unless there are exceptional circumstances with justifiable reasons acceptable to EDB, schools with tuck shop-cum-central portioning area as part of the standard provision of school facilities² should purchase furniture and equipment items with reference to EDB's "Furniture and Equipment List for New Schools" to practise on-site meal portioning to ensure effective use of resources.

10. Aided schools³ without central portioning area and the necessary facilities to implement on-site meal portioning may consider seeking funding support from the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) for carrying out the necessary conversion works and installing basic kitchen facilities. Applications can be made to the ECF under the funding programme of "On-site Meal Portioning Projects in Schools". Please refer to the ECF webpage (<https://www.ecf.gov.hk/en>) for details. As for government schools, they may apply for funding from the Minor Building Works block vote of Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) to carry out the necessary alteration/improvement works for adopting on-site meal portioning. Upon approval, ArchSD will

² Schools built according to the EDB's Schedule of Accommodation updated in 2009/10 are provided with a tuck shop-cum-central portioning area as part of the standard provision of school facilities.

³ Schools other than aided schools (including private schools, English Schools Foundation schools and international schools) may also seek funding support. The ECF Committee may consider the applications case by case as appropriate if the objectives and scopes of the project applications submitted by schools meet the criteria of the funding.

take up the necessary alteration/ improvement works. The application forms of Minor Building Works can be downloaded from the Central Cyber Government Office webpage (<http://archsd.host.ccgo.hksarg/mbw/>). Schools may contact the Property Services Managers of the Property Services Branch of ArchSD for further details.

11. Should the ECF-funded infrastructure for on-site meal portioning (e.g. building services installations for on-site meal portioning) require repairs in future, aided schools may submit applications for such purpose to EDB in accordance with the prevailing procedures. As for maintenance and replacement of relevant equipment (e.g. electrical appliances and food utensils for on-site meal portioning), aided schools may flexibly deploy the Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant/ Operating Expenses Block Grant/ Composite Furniture and Equipment Grant or other resources to cover the costs.

12. If the school environment does not allow students to take meal in a designated eating area, schools should, where appropriate, consider arranging students to take their portioned meal in classrooms as an alternative. If it is not feasible to install the necessary facilities or difficult to implement on-site meal portioning, schools may consider adopting meal portioning on each floor or in each classroom. For example, schools may request lunch suppliers to have cooked food delivered to each floor or classroom and portioned to students as appropriate.

(C) Reducing and Recycling Food Waste

13. To reduce food waste, schools should themselves or require lunch suppliers to flexibly arrange the amount of food portioned out to students for lunch. If on-site meal portioning is adopted, schools should avoid serving students excessive food and give additional serving only on request. If lunch boxes are opted for, schools should consider providing lunch boxes with different food portions for students to choose from. Students are also encouraged to bring their own lunch, and parents should be reminded to prepare suitable amount of food for their children to avoid food wastage.

14. Green lunch practices also include efforts to minimise disposal of food waste. Students should be taught to separate food waste from general waste after meals so that food waste and other disposed recyclables can be recycled separately. Schools can consider installing small food waste composters, demonstrating the conversion of food waste into compost for campus planting and educational purposes, where feasible. Schools can also require lunch suppliers to collect and transport the sorted food waste to food waste treatment facilities for recycling.

15. In addition, EPD would consider factors, including the quantity of food waste and collection locations, in order to provide free food waste collection services for lunch

suppliers and schools through EPD's Pilot Scheme on Food Waste Collection. The collected food waste generated from school lunches will be delivered to the Organic Resources Recovery Centre Phase 1 (O·PARK1) or other government facilities, where it can be converted into energy and compost.

16. Teachers can build up students' self-discipline and self-management abilities, and help them develop environmentally friendly living habits, as well as proper values and attitudes such as love and care for environment and cherishing resources through guidance and daily practice. Schools can also regularly measure the per capita food waste generated, provide feedback to students, and share the results of their efforts. Schools are advised to refer to the Guidelines of Food Waste Measurement issued by EPD for details (https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/sites/default/files/2021-07/Green%20Lunch_Food%20Waste%20Measurement%20Guideline_Eng.pdf).

(D) Installing Water Dispensers

17. Since February 2018, the automatic vending machines in government venues including government schools have ceased to sell plastic bottled drinking water measuring one litre or less. Besides, government schools in new school buildings or having major renovation works will be installed with water dispensers connected to water mains in accordance with the latest Development Bureau and Environment and Ecology Bureau Circular on Green Government Buildings (<https://www.devb.gov.hk/filemanager/technicalcirculars/en/upload/336/1/C-2015-02-01.pdf>), with a view to fostering a "bring your own bottle" culture among students. Other schools are encouraged to make reference to the above practice and provide an adequate number of water dispensers on the school premises to motivate students to bring their own reusable water bottles and avoid consuming bottled water⁴.

II. Relevant Resources and Information

(A) Guideline on How to Promote Green Lunch in Schools

18. Successful implementation of green lunch and reduction of food waste in school relies on the concerted efforts of different stakeholders. Schools should draw up plans for implementation of green lunch, take measures to reduce general waste and food waste as far as possible, and work together with parents, suppliers and students to review the arrangements for green lunch on an ongoing basis. Schools should refer to

⁴ School users should follow the Health Advice on Using Water Dispensers published by the Centre for Health Protection (https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_use_of_drink_fountain_public.pdf) to ensure proper environmental and personal hygiene.

the Guideline on How to Promote Green Lunch in Schools issued by EPD (https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en/schools/green_lunch.htm). The Guideline provides a comparison of the meal arrangements commonly adopted in schools, and recommendations on how to implement green lunch initiatives, aiming to reduce food waste and promote full implementation of using reusable tableware and food containers.

(B) Handbook of Selection of Lunch Suppliers

19. To assist schools in selecting lunch suppliers which are capable of providing healthy, delicious and green lunches for students, Department of Health, together with EDB, EPD, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and Independent Commission Against Corruption, has developed the Handbook of Selection of Lunch Suppliers. The Handbook includes templates such as “Procedures of Selecting School Lunch Suppliers”, “Lunch Supplier’s Pledge”, “Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier” and tender documents (https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/en/content_salt.aspx?id=6204). Schools can refer to the Handbook to obtain relevant information.

20. In order to promote environmental protection, schools should make every effort to refer to the recommendations on green practices and waste reduction in the Handbook when selecting lunch suppliers. Meanwhile, schools should make reference to the proposed flow charts and templates in the Handbook during the selection process to develop school-based measures for choosing suitable lunch suppliers to help practise healthy and green eating in schools.

(C) Food Waste Reduction Good Practice Guide

21. Besides, to assist schools in promoting food waste reduction, the Government has issued the Food Waste Reduction Good Practice Guide for Educational Sector through the “Food Wise Hong Kong Campaign”. Schools are encouraged to visit “Hong Kong Waste Reduction Website” (<https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en-hk/waste-reduction-programme/green-lunch>) to obtain relevant information. We also encourage schools that are interested in food donation to refer to the relevant webpage (<https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en-hk/resources-centre/food-donation>) to learn more about the details.

(D) A Waste Reduction Guidebook for Large Scale Event Organisers

22. When organising large scale events or gatherings, schools should remind teachers and students to support environmental protection by bringing their own reusable tableware, including food containers and water bottles, and reducing the use of disposable items as far as possible. Schools may make reference to the relevant parts

of A Waste Reduction Guidebook for Large Scale Event Organisers issued by EPD (https://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/sites/default/files/green_event/GreenEvent_Guidebook_Eng.pdf). In addition, in order to promote the green practice of “going plastic-and-disposable-free”, EPD and Environmental Campaign Committee (ECC) have launched a programme which involves lending reusable tableware to large-scale event organisers for free to encourage them to reduce the use of disposable tableware so as to jointly reduce waste and carbon emissions. Schools requiring the tableware lending service may complete the application form based on their requirements for different types and quantities of tableware, and submit the application to the ECC Secretariat. The application form can be downloaded from the ECC website (https://www.ecc.org.hk/en/resources/Reusable_Tableware_Application_Form_Eng.pdf).

ENQUIRIES

23. For further enquiries regarding the arrangements stipulated in this circular, please contact respective Senior School Development Officer; for details of individual schemes or measures, please approach the following relevant parties:

Subject matter	Contact points
Arrangement for green lunch in schools	EPD Customer Service Centre Tel.: 2838 3111
“On-site Meal Portioning Projects in Schools” under ECF	Secretariat of the Waste Reduction Projects Vetting Subcommittee Tel.: 2835 1337
“Reusable Tableware Lending Programme”	Environmental Campaign Committee Secretariat Tel.: 2835 1258
Participation in “Food Wise Hong Kong Campaign”	Secretariat of “Food Wise Hong Kong Campaign” Tel.: 3918 5312

Ms Rio CHEUNG
for Secretary for Education