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கல்வி, உயர் கல்வி மற்றும் தொழிற் கல்வி அமைச்சு 'Isurupaya', Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.

Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education

+94112785141-50
info@moe.gov.lk

+94112785818
www.moe.gov.lk

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My Ref.

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திகதி
Date

2026.02. 23

Circular Number: 03/2026

All Provincial Chief Secretaries
All Provincial Secretaries of Education
All Provincial Directors of Education
All Zonal Directors of Education
All Divisional Deputy/Assistant Directors of Education
All Principals
All Parivenadhipathi Theros

Maintaining Healthy Canteens in Schools

This circular shall be henceforth superseded the previous Circular No. 35/2015 dated 31.12.2015 issued in this regard.

Nutritional status of school students affects their physical and mental growth and development as well as their educational performance. Lack of access to healthy and nutritious food hampers their educational activities and increases their susceptibility to nutritional problems such as wasting, stunting, overweight and obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies, as well as their risk of developing non-communicable diseases(NCD's) such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and dental problems. Therefore, it is very important to provide experiences in the school environment to build healthy eating habits. For this, it is essential to maintain a healthy canteen to guide them in consuming healthy foods during school hours and to create an environment by which they can obtain those foods.

Proper management of the school canteen creates the environment for healthy food choices and subsequently, creates opportunities for healthy food choices. Providing health-promoting messages for a healthy lifestyle and making good use of the school canteen premises greatly contributes to the health of students.

By maintaining hygienic school canteens, it is expected for

01. Providing nutritious and clean food to school students
02. Promoting healthy eating habits and behaviors among school students
03. Increasing the percentage of school students with proper nutritional status
04. Reducing the incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD's) among school students
05. Socializing messages on correct eating habits and patterns through the school community.

The School Development Society should either maintain the school canteen or select a contractor following the procurement process outlined in the Procurement Guidelines issued by the National Procurement Commission in 2024 and hand over the work to that contractor. However, the Principal has the primary responsibility for maintaining the school canteen to the proper standard, while teachers, the School Food Committee, the School Development Society, school students, the school community and the education authorities are also responsible for this.

Special attention should be paid to the following 04 basic steps and elements to be followed in maintaining a school canteen with healthy and nutritious food.

01. Maintaining the school canteen and premises to the proper standards
02. Proper management and supervision
03. Human Resource Management
04. Providing healthy and nutritious food

01. Maintaining the school Canteen and Premises to the proper standards

It is the responsibility of the school authorities to establish a canteen/several canteens in each school, taking into account the number of students. A healthy school canteen is an integral part of a health-promoting school environment. The school canteen should be maintained in accordance with the food regulations, circulars and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Mass Media, the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education and the Provincial Education Departments.

The Food Act No. 26 of 1980 is the main statute governing restaurants and in accordance with Section 32 thereof, restaurants and the food sold must comply with the following regulations.

- Food (Packaging Materials and Articles) Regulations 2010 and its amendments
- Food (Hygiene) Regulations 2011 and its amendments
- Food (Registration of Premises) Regulations 2019 and its amendments
- Food (Labeling and Advertising) Regulations 2022 and its amendments

1.1 The School Canteen and its Premises

- 1.1.1 The canteen building is a risk for accidents due to its easily accessible space for students. It should be a safe and clean place without any obstructions (floor, walls, ceiling and electrical supply must be safe).
- 1.1.2 The canteen premises should be well lit and ventilated. Actions should have been made to provided with adequate proper procedures in place for children with disability in order to access the canteen and obtain food.
- 1.1.3 It should be free from dust, odor and smoke. Every student who comes to eat should be provided with display food in a way that makes it easy to select and order food in the short time available. Each and Everyone should be able to reach the counter where food is sold.
- 1.1.4 Enough attention should be taken to maintain this as an attractive place that encourages appetite for food.
- 1.1.5 The canteen premises must be designed to prevent dogs, cats, rats, birds or other animals from entering.
- 1.1.6 There should be separate areas where food can be separated, divided and placed to prevent food being unhygienic/contaminated.
- 1.1.7 Health messages on healthy eating and lifestyles should be displayed appropriately in the canteen and on school premises, including diagrams, posters, banners, and electronic screens.

- 1.1.8 Food-related advertising with audio, video, or pictures that include children under 12 years of age should not be carried out.
- 1.1.9 Banners, posters, and electronic/digital screens promoting ultra-processed and unhealthy foods screens, etc. should not be displayed within the school premises and in the school canteen.
- 1.1.10 Food prices should be clearly displayed.
- 1.1.11 The necessary procedures and safety measures should be in place to prevent accidents such as sudden fire damage/electrical leakage, and the canteen staff should be aware of them.

The school canteen must be registered with the Medical Officer of Health and a certificate must be obtained. It is the principal's responsibility to have the canteen inspected by the Public Health Inspector and obtain the relevant certificate upon request of the School Food Committee to ensure that it complies with the Food Act No. 26 of 1980.

Requirements to be met to obtain a registration certificate for a canteen premises

It is mentioned on page number 83 under the headings of Premises, Equipment and Tools in Annex 01 of the guidelines issued herewith. (As per Annexure 01) This certificate must be obtained again when the canteen is relocated to another location.

1.2 Hygiene Facilities

1.2.1 Water Supply

It should be ensured the provision of clean safe water continuously and adequately for food preparation, drinking and hand washing. Giving confirmation done for this, the following steps should be taken.

- 1.2.1.1 Drinking water should be taken from a clean source of water.
- 1.2.1.2 Filters should be placed in the canteen whenever possible to ensure clean drinking water (containers used to store chemicals-should not be used).
- 1.2.1.3 When storing water, food grade containers should be used and the containers should be clean.
- 1.2.1.4 The chemical and microbiological quality of the water source supplied to the canteen should be tested periodically (every 3 months - once a quarter) by the Public Health Inspector, but if there are practical difficulties, it should be tested at least once a year.
- 1.2.1.5 It is mandatory to have a separate area with sufficient hand washing facilities for the number of students and sufficient soap/hand wash should be provided.
- 1.2.1.6 A covered and secure water intake pit should be installed to systematically dispose of wastewater.

1.2.2 Waste Management

- 1.2.2.1 Students are provided with adequate, color-coded, designated garbage bins for waste disposal. It should be placed in an easily accessible place.
- 1.2.2.2 The containers must be covered with a secure lid. It is best to have a foot pedal to open the garbage bins
- 1.2.2.3 Garbage bins should not be broken and should be free of liquid leaks.
- 1.2.2.4 Keep garbage cans and the place where they are placed clean and free from water accumulation.
- 1.2.2.5 Actions must be taken to collect and disposed of daily collecting garbage's using an environmentally friendly method.
- 1.2.2.6 Toilets/latrines should not face the kitchen of the school canteen and food preparation areas should not be adjacent to the location.
- 1.2.2.7 Students should be provided with practical knowledge about garbage disposal, hand washing, and food selection in the canteen. For this, the support of the school's health promotion committee and related associations should be sought.
- 1.2.2.8 Using color codes for garbage bins
 - Green - Recyclable waste (food waste and biodegradable waste)
 - Orange - recyclable materials such as plastic, polythene, bottles, bags, and metal cans
 - Blue - recyclable papers
 - Red - glass bottles and pieces

1.2.3 Purchasing, storing, preparing and serving food

The following points should be followed when purchasing and transporting ingredients and cooked food required for food preparation to the canteen.

- 1.2.3.1 When purchasing ingredients required for food preparation, they should be purchased from premises/institutions that are clean/responsible/maintained in accordance with standards, in accordance with the procurement process prescribed in the relevant cases.
- 1.2.3.2 Places where prepared/cooked food is purchased should only purchase food that has been inspected by the Public Health Inspector and confirmed to be safe.
- 1.2.3.3 You should always buy freshly prepared food that is of good quality to the canteen.
- 1.2.3.4 Programmes should be developed and implemented to educate canteen owners and their employees on how to identify spoiled food.
- 1.2.3.5 A registry (documentation) must be maintained that includes the places and bills by whom raw materials and cooked food were purchased.

- 1.2.3.6 Spoiled and expired food that is harmful to health should not be purchased and the instructions in Annexure 02 and page number 84 of the guidelines issued herewith should be followed. Programmes should be prepared and implemented to inform canteen owners and employees about this.
- 1.2.3.7 Prepared food should be transported hygienically when brought to school canteens.
- 1.2.3.8 Food transport containers and pans should not be used to transport materials other than food.

The functions of above should be monitored and regulated by the School Food Committee.

1.2.4. Food storaging

- 1.2.4.1 A separate area/room should be reserved for storing food in a manner that prevents contamination and damage from insects, rodents, and other pests as to be used.
- 1.2.4.2 The location should be arranged to provide adequate lighting and ventilation.
- 1.2.4.3 Dry food should be packed and stored in dry containers of appropriate standards, as recommended.
- 1.2.4.4 The warehouse floor/store room should always be kept clean and dry.
- 1.2.4.5 The platform where food is stored on shelves and racks should be at least 18 inches above ground level and 9 inches away from the wall
- 1.2.4.6 Shelves should be dust-free, easy to clean, and cleaned daily.
- 1.2.4.7 Expired food/ingredients should not be stored.
- 1.2.4.8 Prepared and unprepared foods should be stored with appropriate labels.

1.2.5 Storing food in school canteen refrigerators

- 1.2.5.1 After purchasing fish or meat, it should be stored in a freezer and the temperature (less than 2 degrees Celsius) should be maintained properly.
- 1.2.5.2 Refrigerators and Freezers should be in optimal operational order and maintained in a clean condition on a regular basis.
- 1.2.5.3 If fresh milk or dairy products are stored, they must be kept at a temperature of 7 degrees Celsius or below.
- 1.2.5.4 Cooked food and raw food should be stored separately in the refrigerator.
- 1.2.5.5 All cooked perishable foods must be maintained at a temperature of 4 degrees Celsius or below.

- 1.2.5.6 Non-food items (such as chemicals, medicines) should not be stored in school canteen refrigerators.
- 1.2.5.7 All food in refrigerators and freezers should be well covered.
- 1.2.5.8 Never turn off the refrigerator when food is stored. In the event of a power outage necessary actions should be taken to minimize the impact on food in the refrigerator.

1.2.6 Preparing food safely and storing prepared food.

There are three basic steps for preparing food safely.

- 1.2.6.1 Preparing food safely
- 1.2.6.2 Storing prepared food
- 1.2.6.3 Displaying food for sale and serving

A programme should be prepared and implemented to make aware the school canteen owner and employees on the matters set out in Chapter 4.3 of the guidelines issued herewith, from page number 09 to 12. The Principal/School Food Committee should carry out relevant monitoring and regulatory activities in this regard and keeping relevant records.

Food and food recipes offered for sale should, whenever possible, be used the food recipes given in Chapter 09, on page number 46 to 82 of the guidelines provided herewith. Also, food recipes for Circular No. 14/2025 dated 01.04.2025 issued in relation to the Government Nutrition programme for providing food to school students may also be used.

1.2.7 Selling, displaying and serving food.

- 1.2.7.1 It should be placed in a cupboard or other suitable manner in Transparent, well-sealed glass cupboard to protect cooked food from insects and dust.
- 1.2.7.2 Food placed for sale must be covered with protective covers.
- 1.2.7.3 Printed papers should not be used (such as newsprint, printed paper) when cooking and serving the food.
- 1.2.7.4 Separate spoons and other utensils should be used for serving food.
- 1.2.7.5 Packed foods without labels should not be sold.
- 1.2.7.6 Food should be served in stainless steel, china clay, or glass dishes. In case of plastic containers are used, they should be made of plastic that is rated for food use.
- 1.2.7.7 Everyone serving food should use clean utensils to serve food (hand-touching should be avoided).

- 1.2.7.8 A clean cloth should be used to wipe down food serving areas.
- 1.2.7.9 The equipment, tools and all other physical facilities of the canteen must be of the required standard and hygienic level.
- 1.2.7.10 Food items for sale and their prices must be clearly displayed.

02. Proper Management and Supervision

Circulars and guidelines have been issued to ensure that healthy food is continuously provided to school students in the school canteen. It is the responsibility of the School Development Society led by the Principal, the School Health Promotion Committee, the School Food Committee, teachers and the Zonal Education Director, and the Zonal and Provincial Officers in charge of Health and Nutrition to constantly monitor and supervise whether the circular and guidelines are being implemented properly.

2.1 Procurement activities related to the school canteen

Code 2024 and No. 54/2023 issued by the National Procurement Commission and the circular issued by the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education dated 29.12.2023.

The representative of the Zonal Director of Education, who has been appointed as a member of the School Procurement Committee, should be appointed as a member of the School Canteen Technical Evaluation Committee.

2.2 Reporting school canteen income

The income received from the school canteen should be credited to the School Development Society account. The funds required for the maintenance and repair of the school canteen should be provided by the School Development Society.

2.3 Supervising the school canteen

- 2.3.1 The evaluation, regulation and supervision of the operation of the school canteen is a task carried out by the Food Committee .
- 2.3.2.a It is the responsibility of the food committee to conduct the proper evaluation process and take appropriate action accordingly.
- b These inspections should be investigated by the Zonal Director of Education. (Zonal Director of Education / Deputy Director of Education (School Administration)
- 2.3.3 The principal has been delegated authority based on the recommendations of the committee to cancel the contract of the canteen in any case that does not comply with the tender.

2.4 School Food Committee

- Principal (Committee Head)/ Deputy Principal
- Teacher in charge of school nutrition programs (for schools where the nutrition programme is implemented)
- Teacher in charge of school health promotion activities
- Another teacher

- Public Health Inspector in the area where the school is located
- A member of the school health student club
- A member of the environmentalist group
- A member of the alumni association/OBA
- Member of the School Development Society
- Head prefect or other prefect
- A member of a school consumer circle

2. 5 Role of the School Food Committee

2.5.1 It is the responsibility of the School Food Committee to maintain the canteens at Grade A/B. The committee shall submit canteen monitoring reports to the Zonal Health Promotion Committee.

2.5.2 The Zonal Health Promotion Committee shall ensure that a healthy canteen is maintained. Appropriate measures should be taken to educate and empower canteen owners.

2.5.3 The School Food Committee should meet once every 2 months.

2.5.4 In the first quarter, the Public Health Inspector will issue a notification to the school canteens regarding the after grading according to H-1306, the recommendations are implemented and maintained throughout the year. The transformation is the responsibility of the school food committee.

2.5.5 The School Food Committee should conduct a comprehensive inspection of the canteen from time to time. For this purpose, the evaluation method specified in Annexure 03 should be used.

2.5.6 Based on the information from the inspection, canteen owners must be informed and ensuring provided with healthy and nutritious food and the transformation into such canteens should be carried out. In cases where the relevant instructions are not followed, the Zonal Director of Education and the Zonal Health Promotion Committee should be informed.

2.5.7 If the quality of the canteen is not at an optimal level during the second school term, the Zonal Health Promotion Committee should be informed.

2.5.8 "Whether school food committee meetings were held " should be used as an evaluation criterion in this meeting .

2.5.9 A check list on the school canteen should be submitted to the Education division office once a school term and then submitted to the Health Promotion Committee of the Zonal Education Office.

2.5.10 It is the responsibility of the Zonal Health Promotion Committee to monitor these monitoring.

2.5.11 It is the responsibility of the School Food Committee to take necessary actions based on the follow-up reports related to these inspections.

2.5.12 The Food Committee may make recommendations/take action to cancel the agreement with the school canteen owners.

- 2.5.13 Canteens must be warned and rectified within 2 weeks. Canteens that do not rectify their deficiencies should be closed by the relevant authorities of the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education.
- 2.5.14 The canteen should continue to operate / the contract should be cancelled based on the recommendations of the health authorities.
- 2.5.15 The above recommendation should be reported to the Director (School Administration) of the Zonal Office or the Zonal Health Promotion Committee. Such lists should be notified to the Procurement Committees. A certified copy of the certificate issued by the Public Health Inspector should be sent to the Zonal Education Office and these records should also be maintained in the school file. The responsibility in this regard lies with the Health Teacher in charge of the school.
- 2.6 Monitoring by health authorities
- 2.6.1 The Medical Officer of Health and the Public Health Inspector of the relevant Medical Officer of Health office in the area where the school is located supervise the schools within the relevant Medical Officer of Health area during the first term. School canteens must be supervised during the school health survey. Records should be kept of this.
- 2.6.2 For this purpose, monitoring form H1306 is used.
- 2.6.3 The owner of the school canteen should pay attention to the information contained in this leaflet and take care to maintain the required standards.
- 2.6.4 The canteen should be rated based on the final total score obtained at the end of the inspection.
- 2.6.5 The rating given to the canteen should be displayed so that others can see it within the restaurant.
- 2.6.6 Canteen ratings should be done once a year. This should be done in the first season.
- 2.6.7 This canteen rating is considered as a criterion in determining the quality of the school.

Canteen rating according to H1306

- Grade A** - The canteen is known as an exemplary canteen.
Be eager to maintain and improve that status.
(75 points or more)
- Grade B** - The relevant conditions must be improved within 3 months according to the recommendations given.
(Between 74-61 points)
- Grade C** - Relevant officials will take steps to close the school canteen.
(60 points and below)

It is the responsibility of the Principal and Food Committee to maintaining their canteen being designated as a Grade A canteen.

03 Human Resource Management

- 3.1 The school canteen staff should have training or awareness in the following areas.
 - 3.1.1 The Food Act, No. 20 of 1980
 - 3.1.2 Food (Packaging Materials and Articles) Regulations 2010 and its amendments
 - 3.1.3 Food (Hygiene) Regulations 2011 and its amendments
 - 3.1.4 Food (Registration of Premises) Regulations 2019 and its amendments
 - 3.1.5 Food (Labeling and Advertising) Regulations 2022 and its amendments
 - 3.1.6 Circulars, guidelines and advisory letters issued by the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education regarding school canteens
 - 3.1.7 Healthy School Canteens Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Mass Media
 - 3.1.8 Taking steps to ensure the safety of food (when purchasing food, preparing it, (in making and serving)
 - 3.1.9 Personal hygiene
 - 3.1.10 School canteen owners and staff should have received training and certification from the Medical Officer of Health-MOH in the area.
 - 3.1.11. A certificate issued by the Public Health Inspector and a copy of the Canteen Circular must be retained with the owner of the canteen.
- 3.2 All canteen employees must be undergone with medical examinations as recommended by the Medical Officer of Health must undergo an examination and be certified fit for duty by a medical officer.
(Further information on this can be obtained from the Public Health Inspector)
- 3.3 Food handlers must have received the flu vaccine.
- 3.4 All the medical reports must be set and maintained as to be able to present all of such to the supervising officer when required.
- 3.5 Any employee who is suffering from a communicable disease or has symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, fever, or has unhealed wounds or ulcers should not be employed for canteen duties.
- 3.6 Details and records of food handlers in the canteen should be maintained within the school. (Name, permanent residence, National Identity Card number, telephone number, training certificate)
- 3.7 Everyone should wear clean clothes. Aprons should be worn over the clothes and should be washed and cleaned daily.

- 3.8 To prevent hair from contaminating food, a head covering that completely covers the hair should be used.
- 3.9 Face masks must be worn.
- 3.10 Jewelry, rings, watches, plasters, or bandages should not be worn when working directly with food products.
- 3.11 Properly closed footwear must be worn at all times when working in the canteen.
- 3.12 Nails should be kept short and clean, without nail polish or false nails.
- 3.13 Hands should be washed thoroughly and clean and dry towels should be available for wiping hands.
- 3.14 Employees must wash and disinfect their hands with clean water every time after using the toilet/laundry.
- 3.15 While working in the school premises, canteen premises and canteen, betel nuts, cigarettes, the use of alcohol or any other type of drug is prohibited.
- 3.16 There should be adequate first aid facilities.

04. Providing healthy and nutritious food

In order to provide healthy and nutritious fresh food to school students, those foods should be placed for sale in the school canteen. A description of those foods is contained in Annexure 01 of this circular .

05. Foods prohibited from being sold in school canteens and school premises

Poor eating habits and lifestyle habits of children directly contribute to the increase in nutritional problems among children and the later increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and cancer.

Due to the variety of unhealthy foods available in the market today and the unethical marketing of them, children are accustomed to unhealthy eating patterns. With the aim of minimizing the consumption of such unhealthy foods and ensuring the good nutritional status of children, the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education has banned the sale and advertising of certain foods in school canteens and school premises, on the recommendations of the Ministry of Health and Mass Media.

Those main food groups are,

1. Foods containing unhealthy fats
2. Foods high in salt and artificial sweeteners
3. Foods high in sugar
4. High-calorie foods with little nutritional value
5. Ultra-processed foods

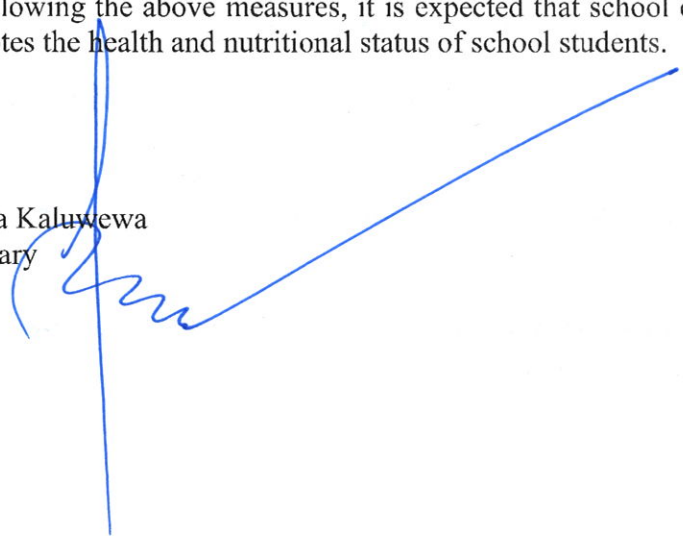
The sale of the foods listed in Annexure 02 of this circular is strictly prohibited in the school canteen and on school premises.

No assistance, goods or equipment provided by various commercial establishments for the purpose of promoting foods prohibited for sale in the school canteen or school premises should be obtained, and no banners, leaflets, posters, electronic and other advertising media related to this should be placed in the school canteen or school premises.

Detailed guidelines regarding the operation of healthy canteens in schools are hereby forwarded to you and you should act in accordance with the guidelines prepared in this regard.

By following the above measures, it is expected that school canteens will be transformed in a way that promotes the health and nutritional status of school students.

Nalaka Kaluwewa
Secretary



Foods to promote daily

Types of food for main meals	Types of foods that can be served as snacks
• Types of rice • Types of milk rice • Pongal rice • Types of pittu • String hopper • Hopper/ Egg Hopper • Kos Kottu/ Indiappa Kottu • Types of Roti (Nutritional Roti/Kurakkan Roti) • Dose/Mung Dose/Masala Dose • Idli • Vegetable stew • Uppama • Rice flour/kurakkan/ breadflour noodles • With boiled potatoes, grated coconut and lunumiris or umbalakada sambol • Boiled/ curried pulses (lentils/chickpeas/peas/soybeans/mung beans) • Tempered flaked nuts • Egg/Tuna Salad/Vegetable Sandwich • Vegetable/meat/fish/egg wraps • Types of vegetable salads • Leaf mold/ pala mallum • Vegetable curry • Fish/meat curry • Pickles, moju	• Fruit • Fruit kebab • Mixed fruit cups, no added sugar or salt • Cut raw vegetables into pieces/cook and prepare into cups • Corn kernels/ popcorn/(no added sugar/salt/coloring/flavoring) • Chickpeas/cups • A handful of seeds and nuts such as cashews and peanuts in packets/cups • Fermented milk • Low-sugar waffles • Kithul flour paste Beverages • Water • Fresh liquid milk • Types of porridge - Rice porridge/Kurakkan porridge/Mixed grain porridge/Coconut milk porridge/Green porridge/Sau porridge/Green bean milk porridge/Kitul flour porridge (Without adding too much sugar and salt) • Soups (without flavor enhancers) • Tea/coffee (with less sugar) • Herbal drinks (Iramusu/ Ranavara/ Beli Mal/ Coriander) • Orange, watermelon, coconut water • Natural, fresh fruit juice (low sugar/salt added)

Foods prohibited from being sold in school canteens and on school premises

- Highly processed meats and fish (such as sausages, meatballs, bacon, ham)
- Foods made with highly processed meats (sausages buns, burgers, hotdogs, submarines, pizza)
- Sugary buns (such as cream buns, jam buns)
- Types of pastries
- Deep-fried snacks
- Chili paste added with artificial flavourings
- Soup cubes, seasoning powders, and instant soups
- Highly processed sauces - such as tomato sauce, soy sauce
- Types of instant noodles
- Highly processed packaged/canned pickles
- Sugary foods like chewing gum, toffee, lollipop, dosi, lozenges, kisses, jujubes, Bombay Motai, and Bultto.
- Ice packs, ice palms
- Jellies and foods high in gelatin
- Bundi, Muscat, Dodol
- Salty fast foods like bites and chips
- Extruded crunchy snacks
- Types of chocolate
- Snacks like donuts and eclairs
- All types of biscuits
- Types of cakes
- Puddings with high sugar content
- Ice cream and frozen desserts
- Carbonated drinks
- High-sugar drinks, drinks and drink packets with artificial flavor enhancers and colorings
- Flavored and colored milk and yogurt drinks
- Energy drinks
- Flavored fruit drinks, nectars and cordials
- Instant tea and coffee varieties