

**Attitudes towards healthy breaks
schemes in primary and pre-
school/nursery settings in
Northern Ireland –
Views from principals, group
leaders and parents**

Healthy breaks

‘...This is part of education, because this is part of a healthy life choice... this impacts on how a child learns, it impacts on how a child can access various other activities during their life time...’

Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

Gilmore, G, Beattie, K, Wilmot E. Attitudes towards healthy breaks schemes in primary and pre-school/ nursery settings in Northern Ireland – views from principals, group leaders and parents. Belfast: Public Health Agency, 2017.

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Summary of key findings

This report explores the implementation of healthy breaks schemes in primary schools and pre-school/nurseries across Northern Ireland. Attitudes of parents, primary school principals and nursery/preschool group leaders towards current healthy breaks schemes are examined, as well as views specifically on the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme.

An overview of the foods and drinks recommended and not recommended in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme is displayed in the text box below.

Recommended	Not recommended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fresh fruit and vegetables or tinned in natural juice • white or wholemeal bread, rolls or baguettes, toast, plain bagels, wheaten, soda, potato or pitta bread spread thinly with a little margarine, low-fat spread or butter • plain bread sticks or crackers, a small sandwich with a sugar-free filling such as tomato, tuna, chicken, cheese etc. • tap water • unflavoured, still, bottled water • whole, semi-skimmed or skimmed unflavoured milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fruit tinned in syrup • dried fruit (e.g. raisins or sultanas) • processed fruit bars, such as Fruit Winders, Fruit Flakes • sugary spreads, e.g. jam, honey, marmalade or chocolate spread • peanut butter • cereal bars, or sweetened breads and pastries, e.g. pancakes, scones (plain and fruit), fruit bread, malt loaf, brioche, croissants or Danish pastries • fruit juices (including pure fruit juice) • smoothies • sparkling water, • squash • fizzy drinks – including those labelled ‘no added sugar’, ‘diet’ or zero’

In the 2015/16 academic year, 866 primary schools and 513 pre-schools were surveyed about the foods and drinks allowed at break time. In total, 411 primary schools and 316 pre-schools responded to the survey representing a response rate of 47% and 62% respectively.

In addition, eleven in-depth interviews with principals and twelve focus groups with parents were completed to explore operational aspects and attitudes to healthy breaks policies.

Some key themes emerging from the research revealed:

- **large variation occurs in the food and drinks included in current healthy breaks policies pre-school/nurseries and primary schools;**

- **discrepancies exist between the Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school issued by the Department of Education (DE) and the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme;**
- **there is substantial variation in the sources of children’s break time snacks and drinks with subsequent advantages and disadvantages;**
- **there is limited understanding of healthy food (particularly hidden sugars and fat) amongst all stakeholders;**
- **a lack of consistency in policy implementation and enforcement was found, with the lack of a ‘whole school’ approach;**
- **suggestions for additional resources for schools and parents were made for inclusion in the PHA Healthy Breaks pack; and,**
- **the importance of regular communication between parents and schools was emphasised by stakeholders.**

Each of these main themes is explored in more detail below.

1. Food and drinks items in current healthy breaks policies^a

Current break time schemes described by those who participated in the research can be grouped into three categories according to the food and drinks items allowed.

- Approximately 7% of all primary schools and 7% of pre-school facilities adhered to the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme.** These schools and pre-school facilities allowed only snacks low in fat, salt and sugar, in addition to fruit and vegetables (except raisins, and those canned in syrup) at break. Break time drinks included tap water or unflavoured, still, bottled water, and milk only. It was interesting to note that some schools within this group actually operated break time policies which were more restrictive than the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. Some these schools operated a fruit only policy, and did not allow bread products of any kind.
- The largest proportion of primary schools (56%) and pre-school school settings (47%) did not allow sweets, chocolate or crisps (thus adhering to the DE Nutritional Standards for Other Food and Drinks in School), but did allow other items non-compliant with the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme to be consumed either ‘sometimes’ or ‘most of the time’ at break.^b**

^a A breakdown of the individual foods and drinks allowed in pre-school and primary schools is provided in the tables included in Appendix 6.

^bThe School Catering Service is subject to the Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school, which differs from the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. Within these Standards items such as pancakes, scones and dried fruit are permitted, whereas these are not permitted in the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme. This inconsistency may explain the relatively large numbers of schools who operated healthy breaks policies allowing items such as pancakes or dried fruit, yet still adhered to the DE Standards.

- c) The final group of schools (38% of all primary schools and 46% of pre-schools) identified were those who allowed most or all foods and drinks.** These schools and pre-schools allowed children to consume sweets, chocolates or crisps, at break either ‘sometimes’ or ‘most of the time’.

2. Discrepancies exist between the Department of Education (DE) Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school and the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme

The PHA Healthy Breaks scheme is stricter in the range of food and drinks permitted than the current Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school, which were launched in 2008. The School Catering Service is required to adhere to Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school, where items such as sweets, chocolate or crisps are not recommended, whereas pancakes, scones and dried fruit *are* permitted (although none of these are recommended with the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme). Schools that allow consumption of pancakes, or similar bread products and dried fruit within their break time scheme - but not crisps, sweets or chocolate – are not in breach of the DE Nutritional standards. This could perhaps explain why some primary and preschools allow these latter items to be consumed at break time.

It is suggested that consistent messages are contained in the DE Nutritional standards and guidance issued by the PHA, in order to avoid confusion.

3. The source of children’s break time food and drink varied across the schools and pre-school facilities.

In some instances the school or pre-school setting was the sole provider of children’s break time snacks and drinks, whereas in others, parents themselves were exclusively responsible for providing break time snacks. Other schools adopted a model where both the school and parents provided children’s food and drinks. Those participating in the research suggested that each model of supply had distinct advantages and disadvantages. These are outlined below.

- a) Participants argued that the ‘school as the sole provider’ model could:**
- offer greater control over the foods and drinks consumed by children at break time (although it is important to note that all foods and drinks provided by school were not necessarily recommended by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme);^c

^c The research did not explore whether the foods and drinks provided by schools at break time were supplied by the School Catering Service or by the school personnel themselves. The Catering Service is subject to the

- encourage consumption of fruits and vegetables amongst children who would not necessarily have access to these foods at home (either because healthier foods were deemed too expensive by those from more deprived backgrounds, or simply because some children (and parents) would choose unhealthier options);
- offer a more cost-efficient means of supplying children with healthier foods, as school were able to take advantage of ‘buying in bulk’;
- allow all children to have break time snack, thus benefitting those who would not otherwise have been provided with break time food or drink; and,
- offer a more convenient option for parents, saving them from having to supply snacks compliant with school break time policy.

However, participants also reported potential negative issues associated with the ‘school as sole provider’ model:

- difficulties arose when money for break time snacks was consistently not paid, putting financial pressure on the scheme;
- some parents reported that the choice and variety of break time snacks available (especially fruit) could be limited; and,
- this model had considerable resource implications for schools, including the burden on staff time. It also necessitated suitable preparation facilities and adherence to food preparation regulations.

b) ‘Parents as sole provider’ model

Reported positive aspects of the ‘parents-only’ model of break time food and drinks supply included:

- more choice for children; and,
- greater parental control over what their children were eating outside the home.

However, primary school principals, pre-school leaders, and parents themselves described several shortcomings of this model of supply. These included:

- greater consumption of unhealthier food and drinks items at break time;
- more effort for parents to supply foods and drinks that are compliant with school’s current break time policy;
- a disproportionate burden on families from lower socio- economic backgrounds, as parents and principals reported healthy snacks were frequently more expensive than unhealthier items;
- compliant and non-compliant foods and drinks included in the school healthy breaks policy need to be effectively and frequently communicated to all parents of all year groups, with reminders on a regular basis;
- difficulties for schools in monitoring foods and drinks brought in for break;

Nutritional Standards for Other Food and Drinks in School, which differs from the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. Within these Standards items such as pancakes, scones and dried fruit are permitted, whereas these are not permitted in the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme.

- difficult to implement policy consistently throughout the school; and,
- can be difficult for schools to enforce policy if not clearly understood or adhered to by parents.

4. PHA Healthy Breaks resources for schools

While the majority of schools felt they implemented a healthy breaks policy, lack of awareness of the actual foods and drinks allowed in the PHA scheme may be one plausible contributor to policy variation.

While 89% of pre-school leaders were aware of the healthy breaks leaflet designed for parents, this number fell to 74% of primary school principals. The poster, which is the only current healthy breaks resource for use within the school setting, was recognised by 89% of pre-school leaders while awareness of this was limited to around 6 in ten primary school principals.

The research suggests permissible foods and drinks in current healthy breaks schemes in schools rely on the discretion of the principal or indeed individual teachers' knowledge of healthy break time snacks and drinks. Currently, information included in the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack about recommended and non-recommended food and drinks items is only found in the leaflet for parents. Although the booklet 'School Food: Essential Guide on healthy breaks' is referenced in the letter issued to principals as part of the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack, a printed copy of this booklet is not included, and relies on principals actively downloading this from the internet. This booklet also contains different information from that in the PHA Healthy Breaks leaflet. Thus the scheme lacks a comprehensive list specifically designed for schools, detailing recommended foods and drinks (as well as those not recommended). This may be a contributory factor to the wide range of foods and drink currently permitted in healthy breaks policies.

5. Limited understanding of healthy food

A variety of factors impacted on the wide spectrum of foods and drinks included in school break time policies. One of the most important factors emerging from the research was the general lack of awareness of what actually constituted 'healthy' snacks, amongst principals, pre-school leaders and parents.

Some principals and pre-school leaders maintained that their school did operate a healthy breaks policy not allowing sweets, chocolate or crisps to be consumed. However, as mentioned earlier, whilst in line with the DE Nutritional Standards, these

did not always align to the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, with foods high in salt, fat and sugar regularly consumed at break. The research revealed that the commonest foods permitted by schools operating a 'healthy breaks' policy were pancakes, as well as certain children's yoghurts or fromage frais, which are all high in sugar.

Likewise, focus groups revealed parents were unsure as to why foods such as pancakes, dried fruit or flavoured fromage frais were not considered 'healthy', and were confused as to why these were not recommended by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme.

When parents were shown the PHA Healthy Breaks leaflet, it was generally felt that this needed to include information on the fat, salt and sugar content of various products regularly consumed by children, with suggestions made as to suitable alternatives.

6. Lack of consistency in policy implementation

A consistent approach to healthy eating in schools was felt to be key to the success of any healthy breaks scheme. However, all of those who participated in the research commented on the variation and contradictory messages that were sometimes displayed by schools and pre-school facilities.

a) Presenting sweets, crisps or chocolate as a reward or 'treat'

29% of primary schools allowed pupils to consume sweets or chocolate, whilst 38% of pre-schools did the same. These were mainly given as weekly treats, and/or on birthdays or other occasions. However, in the interviews with principals, and focus groups with parents it became apparent treats were given on a regular basis in the school setting, and sometimes used to 'reward' children for adhering to healthy eating policies.

Most principals did not view giving children sweets, chocolate and / or crisps as contravening the healthy breaks policy. Although a small group of parents considered giving foods high in fats, sugar and or salt in the guise of a 'treat' as acceptable, most of those in the focus groups viewed this as sending mixed messages to children (and to parents themselves).

b) Whole school approach

While a whole school approach was viewed as fundamental to the effective implementation of healthy breaks policies, those who took part in the research reported a fragmented and inconsistent approach within some schools and pre-school facilities. Parents reported teachers' attitudes to the implementation and enforcement of healthy breaks varied substantially. Indeed parents with multiple

children within the same school noted variation in the foods and drinks allowed from year to year depending on the class teacher.

c) Lunch boxes

Akin to the provision / allowance of treats in schools, parents queried why healthy eating rules were evident only at break but conspicuously absent at lunch. This was felt by some parents to be unfair, whilst others maintained that this lack of consistency could suggest to children that eating healthily simply occurred at a set time rather than as a practice adopted throughout the course of the day. In contrast, some principals felt introducing healthy lunch box policies would be too difficult to enforce, and secondly, risked alienating parents.

d) Variation in enforcement

Various levels of policy enforcement were noted throughout the research. These ranged from confiscating non-compliant foods, to notifying parents when healthy breaks policy was flouted, while some schools simply took no action. Enforcement largely depended on the attitudes of the principal and school staff, and willingness to take affirmative action. While some principals were happy to do this others felt lack of a mandate from DE impinged on their ability to enforce any healthy breaks policy.

Principals with a well-established healthy breaks policy described the development of a self-policing mechanism whereby children themselves policed the scheme, thus reducing the burden on school resources.

7. Communication

Some principals reported pro-active engagement with children and parents in order to implement school healthy breaks policies effectively. Some felt that clear explanation of the policy, and unambiguous rules about the foods allowed and not allowed was critical to the successful implementation of any healthy breaks policy.

It was also felt to be important that the reasons why the policy was being implemented, and the potential benefits to children, needed to be explained to all those within the school community.

Regular and ongoing communication, with frequent reminders about the healthy breaks scheme were also regarded as important in getting parents (and children) to buy-in and support the policy.

However, some parents reported communication about healthy breaks schemes was poor. Some were unsure of what was or was not allowed for break, while in other

instances parents reported the break time rule centred on bringing the required payment rather than focusing on the ethos of healthy eating.

Many parents called for more information on what constituted a 'healthy break', as well as more suggestions for viable alternatives to snacks high in sugar, salt or fat.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The early formative years of childhood are considered a vital time to develop healthy sustainable dietary habits, however, evidence has shown deficits in fruit and vegetable intake and excess consumption of energy dense food among young children.^{1,2} Although the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) advise saturated fat and added sugar should each contribute no more than 11% to total food energy intake, these levels are exceeded in Northern Ireland.³ Research has shown children in Northern Ireland aged 4 to 10 years reportedly consume 13.6% of total energy from saturated fat and 14.6% of total energy from added sugars.²

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey for Northern Ireland reported primary sources of added sugars in children's diet were 'non-alcoholic beverages (including fruit juice)' 26-27%, 'cereals and cereal products' 23-29%, and 'sugar, preserves and confectionery' 23-25%.² These figures exceed the levels reported in England and may contribute to the observed higher proportion of NI children with severe tooth decay, 19% of children at age five and 36% at age 15 having severe or extensive decay compared to England (13% at age five and 14% at age 15).⁴

It is thought children consume 35-40% of their daily calories within a school day.⁵ This, coupled with the high prevalence of childhood overweight / obesity across the globe, has given rise to considerable emphasis on the introduction of school nutrition policies. Indeed a comprehensive mapping exercise of school food policies conducted in 2014 has shown all countries in the European Union (including Norway and Switzerland) had a national school food policy in place with around half of these policies being mandatory and over 90% of the policies specifically focused on addressing lunch and snack time foods.⁶

Comprehensive regional nutrition policies have developed and evolved in Northern Ireland schools since the introduction of the first pilot of nutrition standards in 2004. Subsequently, under the branding 'School food: top marks', mandatory nutritional standards for school lunches were introduced in 2007, limiting the amount of high fat, high sugar food items and drinks that could be served as part of a school meal.⁷ This was closely followed by the introduction of standards for other food and drinks sold in schools in April 2008⁸, however, due to a gap in existing legislation, the nutritional standards for other food and drinks provided by the school through tuck shops, vending machines etc. are not mandatory at present in the controlled and maintained school sectors. Nevertheless, the Department of Education is planning to take

forward an amendment to the existing legislation to address this gap. This will ensure all food provided by grant-aided schools is covered by compulsory standards. In the interim, the Department of Education expects all grant-aided schools to adhere to the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools.

Extensive guidance documents for schools accompanied the introduction of the nutrition standards in Northern Ireland. This guidance detailed aspects including, but not exclusive too, establishing and implementing a whole school food policy, healthier breakfast clubs and break time as well as improving the dining experience. This guidance aided to explain the benefits of healthier foods in schools and provided step by step guides to implementation.^{7, 8}

Implementation of the Northern Ireland nutritional standards have been widely evaluated from a multi-stakeholder's prospective. The latest programme evaluation reports have found exceptionally high numbers of schools in Northern Ireland have a whole school nutrition policy in place and that this has risen from approximately 67% at the initial introduction of the standards in 2007 to 75% in 2012.⁹ Furthermore increasing number of schools have adopted no fizzy drinks policies – (72%, 2007 - 79%, 2012) and healthy tuck shops (35%, 2007 to 71%, 2012). However, during this period it has also been noted there has been a decline in the number of schools which have a no chocolate, crisps or sweets policy – decreasing from 61% in 2008 to 53% in 2012.⁹

Healthy breaks policies are one of the most commonly adopted healthy eating policies in schools today, however since the introduction of the regional school standards there is little evidence for what individual school healthy breaks policies encompass or how the policies are advertised, implemented or enforced within the school setting.

Some initial work as part of the regional standards evaluation revealed that 73% of children surveyed consumed foods at break-time compliant with the standards. However, despite the consumption of non-compliant foods at break time declining from 44% in 2008, 3 in ten (30%) primary school children still consumed non-complaint foodstuffs at break-time in 2012.⁹

Interestingly, this research also demonstrated that four times as many non-compliant break-time snacks and drinks were brought from home rather than being bought in, or being provided by the school, suggesting challenges in the implementation of break time policies - particularly when food is brought in from home.⁹

Building upon the nutritional standards, The Food In Schools Policy, Healthy Food For Healthy Outcomes, was launched in 2013 by DHSSPS and Department of Education (DE).¹⁰ This is an overarching policy advocating a 'whole school approach' to all food provided in grant-aided schools, and to the development of the necessary knowledge and skills in relation to healthy eating and lifestyles. The aim of the policy

is to ensure that ‘food in schools... makes a significant contribution towards childhood nutrition...’. Although the remit of Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes does not extend to food brought into school, such as packed lunches or snacks, the policy does advocate that healthy breaks policies should be encouraged.¹⁰

1.2 Healthy break schemes

Localised healthy breaks initiatives have been in place in NI schools for a number of years, although these have varied in scope. In keeping with one of the outcome measures included in ‘A Fitter Future’, the Public Health Agency (PHA) and Food in Schools Forum (working in partnership with the community dental service and dieticians) developed regional healthy breaks resources for schools. The resources aim to develop a consistent approach to healthy eating within primary schools and pre-school settings.

The PHA Healthy breaks for schools resource pack was launched in October 2013 and was initially designed for use in primary schools. Currently, all primary schools and pre-school/ nurseries across Northern Ireland are sent the resource pack on a yearly basis. This pack includes one resource for schools, and another for parents.

The display poster for use in schools (see Figure 1), highlights examples of foods recommended by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme.^d Principals can download further information from an internet link provided.

The leaflet for parents of P1 or nursery children provides more guidance on the types of foods and drinks that are included and not be included in the PHA scheme. It also explains why certain foods are important to include in the diet (see Figure 2).

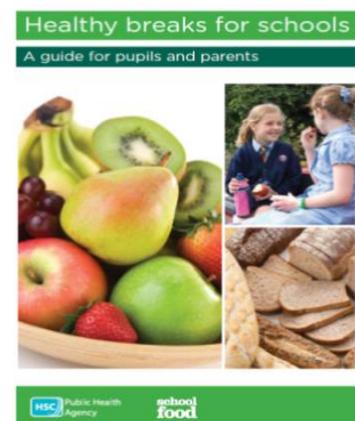
Some examples of information included in the parents leaflet are:

- Suggestions for drinks that are suitable for children at break time, including tap water or unflavoured, still, bottled water. All whole, semi-skimmed or skimmed unflavoured milk is also included in the scheme. Fruit juices (including pure fruit juice), smoothies, sparkling

Figure 1 Healthy Breaks Poster



Figure 2 Healthy Breaks leaflet for parents



^d This poster for schools does not detail food and drinks that are not recommended in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme

water, squash or fizzy drinks – including those labelled ‘no added sugar’, ‘diet’ or ‘zero’ - are not recommended.

- Information on what constitutes a portion of fruit and vegetables, including all fresh fruit and vegetables, and those in pots or tinned in natural juice. Fruit tinned in syrup or dried fruit (e.g. raisins or sultanas) and processed fruit bars, such as Fruit Winders, Fruit Flakes etc. are not considered suitable as they are high in sugar and can cause tooth decay, and are thus unsuitable as between meal snacks.
- The importance of bread based snacks to meet children’s energy needs is emphasised in the leaflet - suggesting white or wholemeal bread, rolls or baguettes, toast, plain bagels, wheaten, soda, potato or pitta bread, spread thinly with a little margarine, low-fat spread or butter; plain bread sticks or crackers, a small sandwich with a sugar-free filling such as tomato, tuna, chicken, cheese etc.
- Lists of foods unsuitable for healthy breaks include sugary spreads, such as jam, honey, marmalade or chocolate spread as these are harmful to teeth as well as peanut butter which is high in fat and salt. Snacks such as cereal bars, or sweetened breads and pastries, e.g. pancakes, scones (plain and fruit), fruit bread, malt loaf, brioche, croissants or Danish pastries are not recommended either, as these contain a lot of sugar and/or fat and salt.

The information in the leaflet for parents of primary 1 children was adapted for pre-school children to reflect their specific nutritional requirements. This is distributed yearly to nursery and pre-school providers from January 2014.

1.3 Healthy eating initiatives in school

As mentioned earlier, the literature on healthy breaks and their effectiveness is limited. However, a number of evaluations determining the effectiveness of healthy eating initiatives in school have been published.

A study evaluating the impact of the Fruit Tuck Shop initiative in schools in deprived areas in Wales found that, in isolation, fruit tuck-shops were not effective in changing children's snacking behaviour in school. However, a subsequent evaluation of the scheme found that fruit tuck-shops had a greater impact on eating behaviours in school when reinforced by other school policies that restricted the types of foods students were allowed to bring to school.¹¹

Another large-scale program designed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to improve the overall diet quality of school children by providing nutritious foods and helping children learn more healthful eating habits. Fresh fruits and vegetables were

provided to students during the school day, outside of normal school breakfast and lunch meals. Evaluation of the programme found that fruit and vegetable consumption was higher among students in schools who were participating in the programme, compared to those attending control schools. Moreover, those in the intervention group of schools also displayed more positive attitudes towards consumption of fruits and vegetables in general.¹²

Chapter 2 Research

2.1 Overall research aim and objectives

The research aimed to explore the attitudes of parents, primary school principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders towards healthy breaks schemes.

Over-arching objectives of the research were to examine:

- **current implementation of healthy breaks schemes** in pre-school settings and primary schools in Northern Ireland, specifically;
 - determining the types of food/drinks consumed at break and the source of these foodstuffs;
 - examining who is usually responsible for the day-to-day running and enforcement of healthy breaks schemes in each school and nursery unit;
 - looking at the consultation process and communication with school stakeholders about healthy breaks policies, including parents, pupils and the wider school community.
- **attitudes towards current healthy breaks schemes** (if in operation) at the school or nursery/ playgroup;
- **value placed on the scheme and rationale for implementation** of a healthy breaks scheme by participants; and,
- **attitudes towards the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme**, specifically focusing on:
 - opinions on the range of foods and drinks included in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme (i.e. too strict/ not strict enough)
 - additional support or resources required to implement the scheme more effectively.

2.2 Research approach

The research was split into a number of distinct strands. The first stage of the research included quantitative work with primary school principals and group leaders within pre-school/ nursery settings. This research took place between November and December 2015 and was used to further inform the second qualitative stage of the research. Interviews with primary school principals and pre-school/ nursery group, and focus groups with parents subsequently took place between February and May 2016.

2.2.1 Quantitative work with school principals and pre-school leaders

Methods

Two questionnaires were developed for the first stage of the research; one specifically designed for use with principals of primary schools and the other for group leaders in pre-school or nursery settings. These differing questionnaires reflected the different healthy breaks guidelines within the school settings.

An introductory letter explaining the purposes of the research, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and a free post return envelope was sent to principals and pre-school leaders. Schools were also given the option to complete the questionnaire online.

All responses were tracked and non-responders were followed up by letter and/or phone call. Data collected via the questionnaires was initially entered into a data entry system and transferred to SPSS for analysis.

Sample

The whole population of 1379 schools (866 primary and 513 nursery/ pre-schools) in Northern Ireland were invited to participate in the research. **A sample size of 727 (411 primary and 316 nursery/pre-schools) was achieved, returning an overall response rate of 52.7%** (47% for primary schools and 62% for pre-school settings respectively).

The profile of all pre-schools/ nursery settings and primary schools sent and returned questionnaires is shown in Table 1, illustrating total counts and achieved response rates by school type, Education Authority and deprivation quintile assessed through the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM).^e

The final sample achieved was fairly representative of the total number of Northern Ireland schools, and therefore there was no need to apply any weighting. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate how the final sample used in the research compares to the total population of Northern Ireland pre-school settings (Table 2) and primary schools (Table 3).

^e A common proxy for deprivation in educational research is the proportion of school pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). However, it was decided to use the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) quintiles as many Early Years settings did not provide lunch for their pupils, and so the FSM indicator was redundant for a large part of the sample. The NIMDM provides a relative measure of deprivation in small areas across Northern Ireland. The NIMDM 2010 uses indicators grouped into 7 main types of deprivation: income deprivation; employment deprivation; health deprivation and disability; education, skills and training deprivation; proximity to services; living environment; and crime and disorder.

Table 1 Profile of schools participating in quantitative research

		Primary school		Pre-schools	
		NI Total	Returned	Total	Returned
Education Authority	Belfast	92	50 (54%)	68	41 (60%)
	Northern	207	98 (47%)	122	82 (67%)
	South Eastern	158	65 (41%)	102	72 (71%)
	Southern	228	109 (48%)	130	67 (52%)
	Western	181	89 (49%)	91	54 (59%)
Deprivation quintile	1	148	75(51%)	113	61(54%)
	2	219	108(49%)	129	78(60%)
	3	237	112 (47%)	115	74(64%)
	4	165	71 (43%)	99	69(70%)
	5	97	45 (46%)	57	34(60%)
	Total	866	411(47%)	513	316(62%)

Table 2 Representativeness of pre-school/ nursery sample compared to NI school profile

		Northern Ireland (DE stats)	% of Achieved sample	Number in achieved sample
Education Authority	Belfast	13%	13%	41
	Northern	24%	26%	82
	South Eastern	22%	23%	72
	Southern	24%	21%	67
	Western	17%	17%	54
Type	Controlled	13%	15%	48
	Catholic Maintained	6%	7%	23
	Private	12%	9%	27
	Voluntary	69%	69%	218
Location	Urban	54%	54%	172
	Rural	46%	46%	144
Deprivation quintile	1 (most deprived)	22%	19%	61
	2	25%	25%	78
	3	22%	23%	74
	4	19%	22%	69
	5 (least deprived)	11%	11%	34
Size of school	20 pupils or less	25%	23%	73
	21 – 24 pupils	25%	25%	80
	25 – 37 pupils	25%	23%	74
	38 pupils or more	25%	28%	89

Table 3 Representativeness of primary school sample compared to NI school profile.

		Northern Ireland (DE stats)	% of Achieved sample	Number in achieved sample
Education Authority	Belfast	11%	12%	50
	Northern	24%	24%	98
	South Eastern	18%	16%	65
	Southern	26%	27%	109
	Western	21%	22%	89
Type	Controlled	47%	48%	199
	Catholic Maintained	44%	42%	174
	Other maintained	3%	3%	14
	Controlled Integrated	2%	3%	11
	GMI	3%	2%	9
	Voluntary	1%	1%	4
Location	Urban	46%	46%	190
	Rural	54%	54%	221
Deprivation quintile	1 (most deprived)	17%	18%	75
	2	25%	26%	108
	3	27%	27%	112
	4	19%	17%	71
	5 (least deprived)	11%	11%	45
Size of school	86 pupils or less	25%	24%	97
	87 – 165 pupils	25%	22%	91
	166 – 276 pupils	25%	26%	108
	277 pupils or more	25%	28%	115

2.2.2 Qualitative work with school principals, pre-school leaders and parents

In order to explore attitudes to healthy break time schemes in more detail, a qualitative exercise was undertaken. The aim of this was to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the management, implementation, benefits and challenges of healthy break schemes. This work was conducted with principals (individual face-to-face interviews) and parents (focus groups).

Methods

Data from the quantitative exercise was analysed to examine the diversity of school break provision. From this analysis, the profile of schools and pre-school/ nurseries (area, deprivation, etc.) with differing types of healthy break policies was explored to

allow the development of a sampling strategy which would include schools with a wide range of break time policies in the qualitative research.

Based on these profiles twelve schools were randomly selected from a complete list of all primary and all pre-school settings in Northern Ireland. The PHA wrote to these schools requesting:

- permission to conduct an in-depth face to face interview with the school principal or pre-school/ nursery group leader;
- school or pre-school/ nursery support in recruiting parents of children attending the school for a focus group;
- permission for an external moderator commissioned by the PHA to conduct a focus group with parents within the school or pre-school/ nursery setting.

Eleven of the twelve principals or group leaders who originally agreed to take part in the qualitative research were interviewed,^f resulting in 11 face-to-face interviews lasting between 40 minutes and one hour. Interviews were conducted by members of the PHA Health Intelligence team within school working hours, and each interview was taped and fully transcribed. All interviews were conducted prior to the focus groups with parents ensuring the external moderator was broadly aware of the healthy break policy within the school. The discussion guide for in-depth interviews with principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders and the profile of participating schools is included in Appendix 2 and 3 respectively.

Ten focus groups (out of a total of twelve) were conducted with parents using an in school recruitment method.^g A school or pre-school/ nursery representative was asked to select every 'nth' pupil from the school or pre-school/ nursery register, and these individuals would be invited to participate in the focus group. The principal/school representative of each school or pre-school/ nursery was provided with a letter to be sent to these parents, and participants were offered an incentive (£30) to attend the discussion.

Although this in-school recruitment method had been designed to avoid bias in the sample and avoid recruitment of parents who had polarised views on the topic, during the research process it became apparent that some schools were unable to implement this random recruitment process. Due to resource implications some schools simply recruited parents for focus groups through a school newsletter, or a note sent home with children, thus removing the random sampling element which was originally intended to avoid bias in the sample. The recruitment of parents was reassessed during the implementation of the focus groups as it became apparent

^f One principal was leaving post and therefore the interview could not be facilitated at the time of the research. However, the focus group with parents recruited from this school still took place.

^g One primary school and one pre-school/ nursery who agreed to take part in the research were unable to recruit parents to attend a focus group discussion.

that the parents who were willing to volunteer their time were more likely to be those who were proactively engaged with the healthy breaks scheme, or those who had a personal interest in healthy eating.

Subsequently, rather than recruit parents directly through schools, an additional model of 'on street recruitment' was implemented to recruit a further two groups of parents who may be less likely to have an interest or engagement with the Healthy Breaks scheme directly. 'On street' recruitment occurred in two areas of high social deprivation in East Belfast and West Belfast. Recruiters used a recruitment questionnaire to assess parental socio-economic status, and asked bespoke questions about break time provision, in order to assess whether the parent fitted the required specification (i.e. their child is more likely to consume an unhealthy break / attend a school where the Healthy Breaks scheme is not strictly enforced). A total of two groups were facilitated using this adapted approach to recruitment, and each of these groups had parents from a range of schools in attendance. Information on the profile of schools involved in the focus groups is shown in Appendix 5.

The focus group schedule utilised with parents is included in Appendix 4. All twelve focus groups took place outside of school hours and were held either in the school or pre-school/ nursery attended by the child or children of the participant, or in a community group setting for the 'on street' recruitment parents. A total of 83 of parents with children in primary schools or in pre-school settings participated in the focus groups. On average focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes. All focus groups with parents were partially transcribed.

2.3 Quantitative and qualitative analysis

All quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. A variety of non-parametric techniques were used to interrogate the data, depending on the type of variable - namely Chi-Square, Mann-Whitney U Test or Kruskal-Wallis Test, and Spearman's rank order correlation. The key factors for analysis included legacy Education and Library Board area; school management type; school size and deprivation quintile for each school.

P-values are presented in the report to indicate whether or not an observed difference in percentages was statistically significant or if it may have occurred by chance. Differences between subgroups are shown with indicative significant associations at three specified levels (at a 95% level, where $p \leq 0.05$ (suggesting that the observed outcome would be expected to occur by chance only 5% of the time); 99% level, where $p \leq 0.01$ (suggesting that the observed outcome would be expected to occur by chance only 1% of the time), and a 99.9% level, where $p \leq 0.001$ (where the observed difference could only be expected to have occurred

by chance in 1 in 1000 times in repeated tests). Only significant differences are reported.

Focus groups and interviews were taped and partially transcribed. Content analysis was used to sort qualitative data into a framework of codes and categories. These were subsequently grouped into a number of main themes; including attitudes towards current provision in schools; knowledge about nutrition and healthy eating; attitudes towards having a healthy breaks policy in school; views on implementation of healthy breaks policies (including monitoring, policing and enforcement); and finally, attitudes towards the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. The diagram below (Figure 3) displays an overview of themes and sub-themes emerging from the qualitative work with primary principals and pre-school leaders, and parents.

Figure 3 Overview of main themes emerging from qualitative research with primary school principals, pre-school group leaders and parents of primary school and pre-school aged children.



2.4 Reporting

Findings from the research are detailed in this report. Results from the initial quantitative stage of the research (i.e. questionnaires with primary school principals and pre-school group leaders) are presented alongside qualitative findings from the focus groups and interviews where a common theme became apparent.

It was hoped that using this method of triangulation would give a more comprehensive picture of how healthy breaks policies are currently implemented in schools across Northern Ireland, as well as examining attitudes towards the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme in primary schools and pre-school settings.

Chapter 3 Attitudes towards healthy breaks

71% of primary schools and 82% of pre-schools/ nurseries had been operating healthy breaks policies for more than five years

3.1 Initiating a healthy breaks scheme

Those who participated in the qualitative research emphasised the importance of the current policy agenda, with the focus on obesity and children's health in particular, in influencing attitudes towards children's eating habits. Others described how this attitudinal shift provided a perfect back drop to introduce healthy eating policies in school. Healthy breaks schemes frequently were started initially due to the efforts of one individual, or were largely driven by a particular staff member, however, it was recognised by principals that unless everyone in the school subscribed to the policy, it was unlikely to succeed. This is an issue discussed in more detail later in this report.

One principal describes how current public healthy eating messages and initiatives facilitated the introduction of their school's healthy breaks policy, maintaining that this would not have been possible before the subject of childhood obesity had been brought into the public consciousness.

"I did benefit from what was happening in wider society, there was a move away from [unhealthy foods]. If I had tried to do that [introduce healthy breaks] 25 years ago, it wouldn't have happened. ... So I've benefitted from what's happened in society as well then, and that whole awareness..." Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

3.2 Attitudes towards excluding certain foods and drinks

Primary school principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders were asked about their attitudes towards a range of issues to do with healthy eating in schools. In terms of provision of healthy snacks, a larger proportion of pre-school/ nursery group leaders (95%) believed that schools or pre-school/ nursery settings should only provide children with healthy snacks, while 88% of primary school principals said the same. Nevertheless, similar proportions of both primary school principals and pre-

school/ nursery group leaders agreed that parents needed to encourage healthy eating by only sending healthy foods into schools (93% and 94% respectively).

When asked about specific foods and drinks being brought into school, primary school principals and pre-school/ nursery leaders appeared to have a more tolerant attitude towards chocolate bars, biscuits, sweets and crisps being brought into school than fizzy drinks. As can be seen from Table 4 below slightly more than half (52%) of primary principals agreed that schools should ban chocolate bars, biscuits, sweets, crisps, or cakes being brought into school, and three-quarters (75%) of pre-school leaders adopted the same position. In contrast, a more hard line attitude was demonstrated towards sugary or sweetened beverages (SSBs): 88% of principals, and 97% of pre-school leaders, felt that diet and sugary fizzy drinks should be banned.

Table 4 Principals’ and pre-school/ nursery leaders’ attitudes towards banning of specific foods and drinks in schools

	Pre-school (N=291)	Primary (N=399)
School should ban chocolate bars, sweets, crisps or cakes	75%	52%
Schools should ban sugary or sweetened beverages	97%	88%

These attitudes towards banning specific food items impacted on the implementation of healthy breaks programmes. Further analysis revealed that principals from schools where pupils were allowed to have sweets, chocolate or crisps at break time were least likely to agree with the statement, ‘Schools should only provide children with healthy school dinners and snacks’, compared to those where confectionary items were banned. For example, 43% of schools where confectionary items were allowed agreed with this statement, in comparison to 62% of schools where these items were banned ($p < .05$).

There was no variation in attitudes towards banning specific foods and any other school characteristic, including school size, Education and Library Board area or deprivation quintile.

Chapter 4 Current break time policies in schools

Almost all primary schools (98%) and pre-school facilities (99%) said they had a healthy breaks policy in place

4.1 Foods allowed at break time

One main objective of the research was to explore current break time food and drinks policy in primary schools and pre-school settings in Northern Ireland.

Table 5 (overleaf) shows the range of foods allowed to be consumed at break time in pre-schools and primary schools. Foods are grouped into various categories – those recommended within the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme (shown in green) and those not recommended (shown in pink).

- The majority of pre (95%) and primary (96%) schools allowed **fresh fruit or fruit tinned in juice** at break either sometimes or most of the time.
- Other foods recommended within the PHA guidelines including bread, bagels or crackers, cheese and vegetables were also commonly allowed.
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of primary schools and 78% of pre-schools allowed pupils to have **pancakes or scones** at break - items currently excluded from the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme.
- Half of primary schools (50%) allowed **cereal bars** to be consumed by pupils at break time, or allowed pupils to bring these in for break, although the corresponding number for pre-school facilities was lower, with one in ten (10%) allowing these.
- 81% of primary schools currently allowed pupils to have **dried fruit** as part of their break time snack. 52% of pre-school/ nursery settings allowed children to have raisins at break.
- Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that 29% of primary schools allowed pupils to consume **sweets or chocolate** 'sometimes'^h or 'most of the time' for their break time snack, while 38% of pre-schools said the same.ⁱ While the majority of this group maintained that these foods were only 'sometimes' allowed, the frequency of this provision is discussed further in Chapter 5.
- 26% of primary schools and 30% of pre-school facilities participating in the research allowed pupils to consume **crisps** at break time, either sometimes or most of the time.

^h 'Sometimes' was defined in the questionnaire as 'birthdays or treat days'.

ⁱ This is an issue discussed again in Chapter 5, where supply of these non-compliant foods is examined.

Table 5 Range of foods children are allowed to consume either sometimes or most of the time at break in pre-school/ nursery settings and primary schools (as reported by principals and pre-school/ nursery leaders).

	Pre-school (N=310)		Primary schools (N=407)		
	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	
Recommended by PHA Healthy Breaks scheme	Bread, bagels or crackers	12	86	14	66
	Fresh or fruit tinned in juice	1	94	3	93
	Vegetables	26	61	9	81
	Natural yogurt or fromage frais	23	38	12	61
	Cheese	26	64	16	55
	Plain breakfast cereals	20	43	10	34
Not recommended by PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme	Sweets or chocolate	37	1	26	3
	Crisps	29	1	18	8
	Pancakes, scones	31	47	23	51
	Croissants, Danishes, cakes	21	1	17	8
	Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	8	1	10	6
	Cereal bars	4	6	23	27
	Fruit in syrup	5	6	12	19
	Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	26	26	16	65
	Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	14	13	16	46
	Sugary breakfast cereals	4	2	8	7

4.2 Drinks allowed at break time

Table 6 (overleaf) shows the types of drinks allowed to be consumed at break time in pre-schools and primary schools participating in the survey. Beverages are grouped into various categories – those recommended within the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme (green section) and those not recommended (pink section).

- The most popular drinks allowed were those which were compliant with the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. For example, nearly all pre-school settings and primaries allowed **fresh drinking water** (99%) respectively.
- Similarly, 96% of pre-school settings and 94% of primary schools allowed children to consume **milk** at break.
- Relatively few primary schools allowed pupils to have **fizzy drinks (either diet or non-diet)** at break (4% respectively), while fizzy drinks of any kind were not permitted in any pre-school settings. One in 20 (5%) primary schools allowed **sports drinks** sometimes or most of the time: again, these were not permitted in any pre-school setting.
- One in ten (10%) pre-school facilities allowed **pre-packaged fruit squashes** (for example, Fruit Shoot). These appeared to be more popular in primary schools though, with 41% of schools allowing these at break time.
- **Dilute juice or squash** was one of the most commonly allowed non-compliant drinks in pre-school settings, with 41% allowing children to consume this at break either sometimes or most of the time. In primary schools the figure was 46%.
- Although only 8% of pre-school facilities allowed children to have **pure fruit juice** at break, this increased to more than half (52%) of all the primary schools. Pure fruit juice was the most commonly allowed non-compliant drink in primary schools who participated in the research.

Table 6 Range of drinks children are allowed to consume either sometimes or most of the time at break in pre-school/ nursery settings and primary schools (as reported by principals and pre-school/ nursery leaders).

	Pre-schools (N=307)		Primary schools (N=407)		
	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	
Recommended by PHA Healthy Breaks scheme	Fresh drinking water	-	99	-	99
	Still bottled water (unflavoured)	6	8	3	87
	Milk	-	96	3	91
Not recommended by PHA Healthy Breaks scheme	Fizzy drinks	-	-	3	1
	Fizzy diet drinks	-	-	3	1
	Sports drinks	-	-	3	2
	Pre-packaged fruit squash	9	1	18	23
	Dilute juice made up on premises	40	1	29	17
	Sparkling bottled water (unflavoured)	-	-	6	43
	Sparkling bottled water (flavoured)	-	1	7	22
	Still bottled water (flavoured)	-	1	10	30
	Pure fruit juices	7	1	15	37
	Smoothies	15	2	15	24

4.3 Snacks included in current healthy breaks policies

Given the major non-compliant items allowed to be consumed at break-times tended to relate to foods rather than drinks, further analysis was carried out on the snacks allowed. In general, the current break time schemes described by those who participated in the research can be grouped into three categories, according to a spectrum of permissible food items.

Group 1: At one end of the spectrum were schools and pre-school/ nursery facilities that adhered to the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, allowing only food and drinks that were compliant. Some of these were actually more restrictive than the current recommended model.

Group 2: The second group were primary schools and pre-school/ nursery settings where, in addition to foods and drinks included in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, other items not recommended, such as pancakes, scones or dried fruit were allowed. This group of schools did not, however, permit sweets, chocolate or crisps.

Group 3: The final group identified were those who allowed all foods and drinks, including sweets, chocolates or crisps.

4.3.1 Break time foods compliant with, or stricter than the PHA scheme (Group 1)

7% (n=29) of primary schools, and 7% (n=21) of pre-school facilities were either fully compliant or operated a policy stricter than the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme

This group of schools only allowed foods such as bread, bagels, crackers, fresh fruit, or fruit tinned in juice, vegetables (e.g. carrot sticks), natural yoghurt or fromage frais, cheese or plain breakfast cereals. Sweetened bread products or those high in fat (e.g. pancakes, brioche etc.) were not allowed, nor was dried fruit, such as raisins (due to the high sugar content).

However, even within this small group, there was variation – some schools offered some or all of the types of foods recommended by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, while others operated more restrictive policies, allowing only fresh fruit (see Table 7 overleaf).

- Although the majority of pre-school/ nursery settings who were in line with the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme allowed consumption of recommended bread products ‘sometimes’ or ‘most of the time’ (95%), this was not the case for

primary schools. Six in ten (59%) primary schools whose break time policy was aligned to the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme ‘never’ allowed bread, bagels, or crackers.^j

- The most popularly cited food allowed by this small group of pre-school facilities and primary schools who operated in line with the PHA Healthy Breaks policy was fresh fruit (91% and 72% respectively).
- It was interesting to note that the proportion of primary schools within this group ‘always’ offering or allowing vegetables as part of a break time snack was 36%. In pre-school facilities this was higher (55%).

Table 7 Breakdown of foods allowed in primary schools or pre-school/ nursery facilities compliant with or more restrictive than the PHA scheme (Group 1) (as reported by principals and pre-school/ nursery leaders).

	Pre-schools (n=21)					Primary schools (n=29)				
	Never %	Rarely %	Some times %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Never %	Rarely %	Some times %	Most of the time %	Don't know %
Bread, bagels or crackers	5	-	5	90	-	59	14	10	17	-
Fresh or fruit tinned in juice	5	-	5	91	-	7	21	-	72	-
Vegetables	5	10	30	55	-	43	7	11	36	-
Natural yogurt / fromage frais	48	24	14	14	-	79	10	7	3	-
Cheese	5	5	24	67	-	83	14	3	-	-
Plain breakfast cereals	45	10	10	35	-	90	3	-	7	-

One principal discussed why the school had decided to restrict break time snacks, even further than those suggested by the PHA scheme, banning bread products of any kind. This principal explained why the school had chosen a fruit only policy, citing difficulties in policing the scheme should certain bread products be allowed.

“I think the bread is very hard to police... could you imagine if a donut came in, well is it bread or is it cake, and all sorts of raisin bread with sugar. ... And you don't really have time at break time to go around saying

^j Care should be taken in interpreting results as numbers in analysis are small.

‘Show me your break’, whereas at a glance you can see when children are eating their apples or oranges or bananas...” Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

However, other principals and pre-school leaders did offer bread-based products in addition to fruit and vegetables. These individuals strongly believed that children needed the carbohydrates provided by bread-based snacks, especially those children who missed breakfast. These respondents maintained that children needed more than fruit in order to satisfy their energy requirements.

“I did introduce toast... I still find that children need bread...” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

“...For us, if a child is coming in hungry they need carbohydrates. I know fruit can be healthy but some of the children are coming in with no breakfast...” Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Provision of foods rich in carbohydrates was also raised in the focus groups with parents. Some parents agreed with the stance adopted by the principals above. These parents felt that their children needed more than fruit at morning break, particularly given some children’s high energy needs. These parents were strongly against the notion that bread-based products should be excluded from healthy breaks policies.

“Parent: I am so glad of the toast provided in school. Sometimes a handful of fruit isn’t enough to sustain them...”

Parent 2: But at least the toast sticks to them

Parent 3: Oh aye... I wouldn’t want them to stop having that” Focus group, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

4.3.2 Sweets, crisps and chocolate not permitted but items non-compliant with PHA Healthy Breaks scheme allowed (Group 2)

47% of all pre-schools and 56% of all primaries did not allow sweets, chocolate or crisps, but did allow other non-compliant items to be consumed either sometimes or most of the time at break.

The second group identified in the research allowed all the items on the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, but also allowed other items high in fat or sugar that are not recommended by the scheme. However, sweets, chocolate or crisps were not allowed at break time.

“We’re really asking them that fizzy drinks, sweets, chocolate and crisps are not consumed in school. That’s the directive.” Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

However, as mentioned earlier in the report, the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme is stricter in the range of food and drinks permitted than the current Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school, which were launched in 2008. The School Catering Service is required to adhere to Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school, where items such as sweets, chocolate or crisps are not recommended, whereas pancakes, scones and dried fruit are permitted (although none of these are recommended with the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme). Schools that allow consumption of pancakes, or similar bread products and dried fruit - but not crisps, sweets or chocolate – are not in breach of the DE Nutritional standards. This could perhaps explain why some primary and preschools allow these latter items to be consumed at break time.

While fruit, vegetables and recommended bread products such as bagels, or crackers were the most commonly allowed recommended foods within these schemes, these break time policies also included non-compliant items such as pancakes, dried fruits, or sweetened fromage frais or yoghurts (see Table 8). More than half (56%) of primary schools and 47% of pre-primary facilities who returned questionnaires had adopted this type of policy.

- The most prolific non-compliant items among this group were pancakes and dried fruits, such as raisins (see Table 8).
- Within the group, 90% of pre-school facilities and 73% of primary schools allowed pancakes to be consumed at break time either sometimes or most of the time.
- Almost half (49%) of pre-school settings in this group allowed dried fruits, such as raisins, while 89% of primary schools with a ‘no sweets’ policy did the same.

Table 8 Breakdown of foods allowed in primary schools or pre-school/ nursery facilities that do not allow confectionary items, but allow other non-compliant items at break (Group 2) (as reported by principals and pre-school leaders).

	Pre-schools (n=147)					Primary schools (n=222)					
	Never %	Rarely %	Some times %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Never %	Rarely %	Some times %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	
Recommended by PHA Healthy Breaks scheme	Bread, bagels or crackers	2		12	86	-	18	4	14	64	1
	Fresh fruit or fruit tinned in juice	5	-	1	93	-	1	-	3	96	-
	Vegetables	10	3	28	58	-	3	1	9	87	1
	Natural yogurt/ fromage frais	36	8	27	27	1	21	4	14	60	1
	Cheese	7	3	29	61	-	23	4	19	53	2
	Plain breakfast cereals	36	6	19	39	-	51	5	12	29	3
Not recommended by PHA Healthy Breaks scheme.	Pancakes, scones	6	4	41	49	-	20	5	24	49	1
	Croissants, Danishes, cakes	64	24	12	-	-	66	19	11	3	-
	Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	86	8	6	1	-	81	11	4	4	1
	Cereal bars	89	3	3	3	-	48	14	21	18	-
	Fruit in syrup	85	4	5	5	1	61	10	10	14	5
	Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	39	11	28	21	-	9	2	19	70	1
	Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	61	14	15	9	1	33	7	17	41	2
	Sugary breakfast cereals	91	6	1	1	-	83	5	6	3	2

The inclusion of these non-compliant foods was reflected on within the qualitative work, where a large proportion of principals and pre-school group leaders interviewed provided or allowed pupils to bring in high sugar items such as raisins, or sweetened breads like pancakes.

“Interviewer: Do you operate a healthy breaks policy?”

Group leader: All the children get a healthy break, and our policy is milk and water only... They have toast, crackers, rice cakes... and the wee brioche loaves and veda or pancakes... Petit Filous they like too...” Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

The above quote illustrates a lack of knowledge around healthy foods and what is included within this remit.^k This was a key theme running throughout the interviews and quantitative research, with approximately half of those in primary and pre-school settings believing they operated a healthy breaks scheme, yet simultaneously providing or allowing pupils to bring in items high in sugar, fat or salt.

This was also raised in focus groups with the parents, some of whom queried why certain items high in sugars or fats were allowed, and others were not. Moreover, unless parents actually worked in a nutrition or dietetic field, they were unlikely to be fully aware of the nutritional content of foods commonly served to children. When parents did check the nutritional content of food – particularly yoghurts - given to their children they were frequently surprised.

“Parent 1: I know that Squash ems and Frubes^l are not healthy due to the sugar but they are acceptable, yet they wouldn’t be far off a bar of chocolate.

Parent 2: I’m by no means a health freak and my kids do eat sugar. However sometimes you are sending in something that you think is healthy but it is just as bad as the junk food.” Focus group, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

One principal, although aware of the hidden sugars in children’s food, explains why his scheme doesn’t include dairy based foods. Although he acknowledges earlier in his interview that some types of yoghurt can be healthy, he alludes to several contentious situations that have arisen (both with staff and parents) because these items give the impression of being ‘healthy’, whereas they can actually have a high sugar content.

“It’s hard to convince somebody that a yoghurt isn’t actually good for you, particularly a Petit Filous⁹. They see milk and I see sugar. You could get yourself into a lot of arguments about that...” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

^k This lack of understanding of what actually constitutes a ‘healthy’ food item is revisited later in the report.

^l These are types of flavoured or sweetened fromage frais, primarily marketed at children.

4.3.3 Sweets, chocolate or crisps, plus other non-compliant items allowed (Group 3)

46% of pre-school facilities and 38% of primary schools operated healthy breaks policies allowing sweets, chocolates or crisps 'sometimes' or 'most of the time'.

A third group of schools and pre-school/ nurseries were identified in the research. These allowed pupils to consume items high in fat, salt or sugar similar to those in Group 2, as well as confectionary items at break either 'sometimes' or 'most of the time'. Almost two in five (38%) of those who returned a questionnaire said their healthy breaks policy allowed sweets, chocolate or crisps, either sometimes or most of the time (see Table 9).

- **Within this group, most of those who allowed sweets or chocolate or crisps to be consumed did so 'sometimes' rather than 'most of the time'.** For example, although 80% of these pre-schools/ nurseries allowed consumption of sweets or chocolate 'sometimes', only 1% indicated these were allowed 'most of the time'. Of the primary schools in this category, 68% allowed sweets and chocolate 'sometimes', but only 9% allowed these type of confectionary items 'most of the time'.
- **A larger proportion of both pre-school/ nursery facilities and primary schools in this category indicated that sweets and chocolate were allowed more so than crisps** – for example in pre-school/ nursery settings, 81% sometimes or always allowed sweets and chocolate compared to 64% who allowed crisps at break. Similarly, in primary schools, 77% allowed sweets or chocolate while 69% allowed crisps 'sometimes' or 'most of the time'.

The frequency of consumption of these foods is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Table 9 Breakdown of foods allowed in primary schools or pre-school/ nursery facilities that allow confectionary items, in addition to other foods non-complaint and compliant with the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme (Group 3) (as reported by principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders)^m

	Pre-schools (n=142)					Primary schools (n=155)				
	Never %	Rarely %	Some times %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Never %	Rarely %	Some times %	Most of the time %	Don't know %
Bread, bagels or crackers	1	-	13	86	-	4	3	14	78	1
Fresh or fruit tinned in juice	3	-	-	97	1	1	1	5	93	1
Vegetables	6	6	23	66	-	4	3	10	83	1
Natural yogurt or fromage frais	23	6	19	52		10	3	10	74	2
Cheese	5	2	24	68	1	12	3	14	69	3
Plain breakfast cereals	23	6	23	49	1	37	4	10	46	3
Sweets or chocolate	11	8	80	1	-	8	13	68	9	1
Crisps	23	13	63	1	-	18	12	48	21	1
Pancakes, scones	9	14	25	52		7	5	25	63	1
Croissants, Danishes, cakes	50	14	35	2	-	31	22	27	16	3
Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	68	20	12	1	-	50	14	21	12	3
Cereal bars	82	4	5	9	-	19	7	29	45	1
Fruit in syrup	80	5	6	8	1	34	13	17	31	6
Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	34	4	28	34	1	8	4	14	70	4
Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	55	9	16	19	1	14	4	17	63	3

^m Some schools who reported never allowing sweets or chocolates would allow the consumption of crisps and vice versa.

Chapter 5 Source of snacks and drinks at break

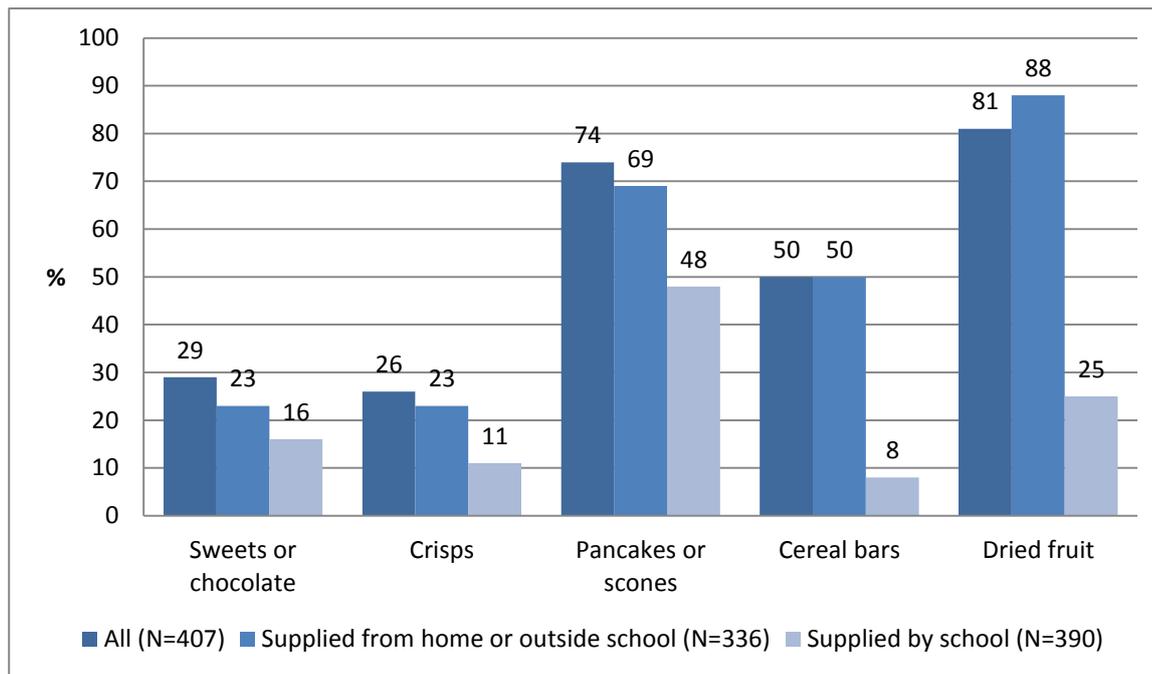
Implementation of healthy breaks schemes varied throughout the schools and pre-school/ nursery settings participating in the research. Some principals (and most of the pre-school/ nursery leaders) said break time snacks were provided by the school or pre-school facility, with children paying for their snacks on a weekly basis. Others maintained that all break time snacks were sourced from home. The remainder of interviewees said they adopted a mixture of the two approaches, with children able to either buy their break time snack from school or bring something in from home. The varying modes of delivery had associated benefits and drawbacks which are discussed below.

5.1 Access to healthier foods and drinks

Analysis of the quantitative data revealed that a larger proportion of primary schools who allowed pupils to bring in their own break also allowed consumption of noncompliant foods (including sweets and chocolate, crisps, pancakes and scones, cereal bars or dried fruit) compared to schools who actually supplied break time snacks themselves (see Figure 4).ⁿ Nevertheless, a large minority of schools who provided food still allowed the consumption of sweets or chocolate (16%), crisps (11%), pancakes or scones (48%), cereal bars (8%) and dried fruit (25%).

ⁿ Analysis has been done using primary schools only because pre-school facilities generally supplied all snacks and drinks at break time.

Figure 4 Sources of noncompliant break time snacks allowed in primary schools.



One major benefit of having schools as the sole supplier of break time snacks and drinks was the added control over the types of foods and drinks children had access to. Even though the majority of schools did not adhere to the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, schools and pre-school/ nursery facilities who were solely responsible for providing and preparing break time snacks maintained this allowed them to know what pupils were eating and drinking.

When supply of break time snacks moved to parents, more non-compliant foods were sent in, and healthy breaks schemes became more difficult to implement, monitor and enforce. The extract below is taken from an interview with a pre-school leader, within a setting that supplies all the break time snacks. She acknowledges that the current mode of supply helped in the implementation of the schools healthy breaks scheme, and recognises that it is more difficult to ensure children eat compliant foods when parents are responsible for the supply of their break time snacks.

“...I think it is very successful here... but it would be harder in schools where parents bring in things... like where I worked before a parent sent in her wee boy in with chocolate spread sandwiches... like a class of 30 pupils and only one teacher...” Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

Other parents who were expected to supply break time snacks from home, also described how this increased the chances of sending non-compliant foods into school with their children. Parents in the extract below discuss how even when there is a well-

established healthy breaks policy running in school, and where children want to abide by the rules, sometimes non-compliant snacks are sent into school.

Parent 1: I'm sure most kids would say 'Mum, I'm not allowed that'.

Parent 2: Aye, but unless there is nothing left in the house.

Parent 3: We've all been there

Parent 4: I've had times where I've had nothing healthy in the house and sent him in with a bag of crisps..." Focus group, medium sized urban/ rural primary school, Co. Antrim.

In the group below, parents displayed very positive attitudes towards the school as sole supplier of children's break time snacks. Although snacks for break are not provided by their children's current school, they were supplied by the nursery unit previously attended by their children. Parents commented on the benefits of having the school or pre-school supply break time snacks. When school provided the break time snack, parents were fairly confident their children would eat it, simply because their peers were doing the same. This gave parents a reassurance that their children were eating healthily in school.

Parent 1: In nursery we used to pay a fee and then the idea was that if they were all eating the same healthy food then kids would be more inclined to try it.

Parent 2: Yeah, it encourages them to try the different fruit and veg.

Parent 3: it's quite a good idea because peer pressure makes them eat healthy food.

Interviewer: Would that be something you would be open to if they done it (sic) here?

Parent 1: I think it would be great.

Parent 2: Yeah.

Parent 3: I personally think it would be great..." Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

5.2 The frequency of treats

Despite parents and those working in primary schools and pre-school/ nursery settings describing the benefits of having schools provide break time snacks and drinks, some voiced concern at the number of 'treats' made available to children within school.

The quantitative research explored the frequency with which children were allowed to consume each food type, with 'sometimes' defined within the questionnaires as 'birthdays or treat days'. However, the survey work could not definitively identify the actual number of treat days, or the number of break time days that children were allowed sweets, chocolate or crisps. The qualitative research did explore the frequency

of treat days in schools and pre-schools/ nurseries, demonstrating that the number of days where sweets and chocolate or crisps were allowed were quite prolific.

Most of the principals who took part in interviews indicated that their school had 'treat days' incorporated into break time routine, where sweets, chocolate or other confectionary items would be allowed at least once a week. The extract below is taken from an interview with a pre-school leader who describes her facility as operating a healthy breaks policy.

"On a Friday they get a sweet... On party days they get dilute juice... and they have chocolate spread on their pancakes on Pancake Day" Pre-school/nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

In the extract below, although the volume of treats children were getting in school is acknowledged, parents in this group (in the main) seem to feel that it would be somehow unfair not to allow children to have these – especially when the adults were having these types of snacks themselves.

"Parent 1: Yeah they have cake for birthdays, which I think is fine.

Parent 2: There are a lot of birthdays...

Parent 3: Yeah, but it's very difficult to say to kids that you cannot have a treat when you are having one yourself." Focus group, small sized urban pre-school, County Antrim.

However, in another focus group parents described how birthday treats, rather than being a one-off indulgence, had become the norm in school. The extract below illustrates that when sugary foods are brought in for every child's birthday in the class, this increases the frequency of children's consumption of these foods.

"Parent 1: My daughter is in P1, and there is a parent at the start of the year who on their child's birthday sending in a bag of sweets and lollies, so then other people thought that that was what you did if it was your child's birthday, so now it's at the point where there has been like three days in a row where she is coming out with lollies and sweets." Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

Parents in another focus group also felt that children were given too many treats in school (despite the school having a healthy breaks policy in place). In addition to birthdays, and other 'special' days, such as Easter, Christmas, Halloween and mid-term, children also received treats on a weekly basis. The parents below point out that treat days are now so frequent and commonplace that the novelty factor has worn off and getting treats has become part of the school routine.

"Parent 1: Sometimes there are treats on Friday's though.

Parent 2: I'm not arguing with anybody, but children just get given too many sweets and chocolate. It then doesn't become a treat anymore.

Parent 3: Yea – it just becomes a habit." Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

5.3 Convenience

Some principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders described the benefits reported by parents of having the school or pre-school/ nursery provide a healthy break. Some of those working in educational settings said that parents had reported to them that having a system in place where the school provides a healthy break means that the onus on them having to source a healthy break is lifted.

“I think a lot of parents are now trying to encourage healthy eating... and I think they feel it is easier if they are trying new stuff in here... it’s like ‘Well at least they are getting the fruit in here because they wouldn’t eat it at home for me’. It takes the pressure off them’. Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

This was expanded on in the focus groups with parents, where the ‘handiness’ factor of having children’s break provided by the school was discussed at length. Not only did this save parents from having to think about what they would include for a break time snack, it also saved them having to regularly buy items for break time snack. In the extract below, parents describe the difficulty of trying to provide fresh fruit for their children for consumption at break time. Unless parents can buy fruit every few days – which often isn’t convenient – it is likely to spoil.

“You don’t have the time either, some people can go every couple of days but I do my shop for the week and that is the only opportunity I have to do it so I can’t buy fresh every day and that means it doesn’t last.” Focus group, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Parents and principals also maintained that having the school provide break also took the everyday pressure of ‘planning what to pack for break’ from parents. Parents maintained that having the school provide a healthy break for their children removed the daily worries about firstly, what to send in to school that their child will eat; and secondly, supplying a snack that is compliant with the healthy breaks scheme operated by their child’s school. This was one of the main benefits of having break time snack provided by the school, and was particularly welcomed by working parents.

“Parent 1: I think we are all used to it for pure laziness of not having to provide anything other than your pound!” Focus group, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

“Parent 1: You have an awful lot to do before running out to work and stuff so if there was a scheme, say you pay a fiver a week for a snack, and it’s all sort of set out, all the fruit and pancakes and wee buttered muffins, at least you don’t have to worry about anything...” Focus group, urban mixed schools, West Belfast, County Antrim.

5.4 Choice

The choice of foods and drinks available was an important factor in determining attitudes towards healthy breaks schemes. The theme of choice was repeated throughout interviews with those working in primary and pre-school/ nursery settings, as well as with parents themselves. Parents whose children attended schools where break time snacks were solely supplied by the school itself were particularly vocal on the need for a sufficient choice. The quotes below, taken from two of the focus groups with parents, demonstrate parents' frustration when they perceive there to be little choice on offer for their children. This is exacerbated when they are not permitted to send in alternatives, and they have no option but to take the food offered by the school.

"Parent 1: Quite a few times they have run out of the thing that the children want... so they come home and say they haven't had anything to eat. It winds me up!" Focus group, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

*"Interviewer: Are there any negatives about the school providing break?
Parent 1: Well, in our school it is literally an apple, an orange or a banana, and that's it. That's your choice.... There aren't even strawberries or grapes or anything..."*

Parent 2: ... There is no variation for them

Parent 3: It's such a small and limited choice." Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

All principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders who supplied break time snacks and drinks recognised that having enough choice for children was key to the success of a healthy breaks scheme. Having enough different options for children at break time meant that all children could then find something that they enjoyed.

"We have to make sure that we have enough melon because all the children love melon, it's very popular... so we have to make sure we have enough, so that everyone has a chance to have what they want". Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

This was echoed throughout the interviews with those who operated stricter healthy breaks schemes. Participants argued that there had to be plenty of choice for children to choose from, so that they would eat at least one of the items of food on offer.

"I try to do a variety of fruit – apples bananas, strawberries and raspberries – I try to give them as good a variety as I can..." Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

Some parents voiced fears that their child might not eat the food on offer in the healthy breaks scheme, and be hungry. Parents with children of pre-school age were particularly concerned that if their child did not eat what was on offer, then they would

have no way of knowing this. However, one pre-school teacher offered a potential solution to the issue of letting parents know whether children had eaten their break time snack. She gave children a sticker when they ate their break. This served two purposes; not only did it encourage the children to eat their snack in order to be rewarded with a special sticker, but it also acted as an indicator to parents, who would then know whether their child had eaten or not.

“...One parent said to me ‘well I don’t know if he is eating his fruit or not’ and we can’t tell every individual parent every day... So they know if they have a sticker, they’ve ate their fruit”. Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized rural pre-school, County Antrim.

When the school did offer sufficient choice, and the quality of what was on offer was good, parents spoke very positively about the school as sole supplier. In the extract below, parents describe a pilot programme that had been running in their school. These parents normally supply break time snacks themselves, but the introduction of the new service was very well received, both by the parents and their children, largely due to variety of foods available on the scheme.

“Parent 1: There was a piloted programme where the school provided..."

Parent 2: Yes, that was great, for 20p.

Parent 1: It was good as you paid by the day so you knew your child was eating and getting variety...” Focus group, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

5.5 Quality of food available

The quality of food available was also raised as important for the success of any healthy breaks scheme provided by schools.

As discussed earlier in this report, the qualitative research suggested that most parents preferred the school to supply snacks and drinks for Healthy Breaks schemes, rather than having to provide these themselves. One reason given was the convenience factor, as parents found it hard to get fresh fruit on a regular basis, whereas schools could get fruit deliveries on a more regular basis. Parents felt that schools were able to provide food that was of a better quality and fresher than they themselves could supply.

“Interviewer: What are the positive and negatives about having the school provide foods?”

Parent 1: It’s a great thing that he is restricted... you find that you are buying (fruit) every couple of days and I know in school that it is fresh every day, and that he is eating it”. Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast.

However, some parents maintained that the quality of fruit available was questionable. In one group, parents said that their children reported the fruit they were given was stale, and past its best.

“Parent 1: My eldest used to complain that the grapes they provided were fluffy. And hearing that my youngest won’t touch the grapes at all. So that annoys me” Focus group, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

5.6 Cost of healthy eating, affordability and social deprivation

The issue of social deprivation and the cost of eating healthily was a major theme raised both by parents, principals and pre-school leaders throughout the research. The relatively high cost of healthy foods (particularly fresh fruit) compared to other foods that were usually of low nutritional value and high in sugars, fats or salt, was a major factor impeding the full implementation of schools’ healthy breaks schemes. Primary school principals and pre-school group leaders, as well as parents, emphasised the availability of cheap, high calorie foods. This was a particular issue when break time snacks were provided by parents.

“... the bottom line is that the foods that people can access, that are cheaper and more accessible, are those foods that you think ‘Oh heck’... so that’s the dilemma”. Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

“It’s always going to be a struggle, especially in areas of social deprivation, where people can’t afford the fruit and the vegetables... and the healthy breaks, I mean it is cheaper to go and get the multi-bags of crisps or sweets or chocolate. So you’re fighting a losing battle with that.” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Parents were vocal about the increased cost of healthier food items, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, when compared to other items of a lower nutritional value. Parents who were responsible for providing break time snacks themselves echo the concerns outlined by the principals above. They describe how much cheaper it is to buy confectionary items, which were frequently part of a multi-buy promotion, than fresh fruit.

“Parent 1: Sometimes I wish it could just be that wee bit less expensive, you go and buy all this fruit... you go into Tesco and spend £14 and you look into the basket and all that is in it is fruit

Parent 2: Aye but if you buy a packet of Mars bars it’s only a pound.

Parent 3: And they are always buy one get one free but they never do that with your melons or anything like that there.

Parent 2: Aye that’s true.” Focus group, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Principals in schools where break was provided described a potential solution to this prohibitive cost of fresh fruit and vegetables. Some schools or pre-schools/ nurseries argued that they could provide healthy snacks for a lower cost compared to that incurred by parents, should they be providing similar foods from home. Schools providing a healthy break charged pupils between £1 and £1.50 a week per child. Some described how they could implement 'economies of scale', and pass these lower costs associated with buying fruit and vegetables in bulk to pupils and parents. Others, such as the principal cited below, described how schools could forge relationships with different fruit and vegetable wholesalers that may not be available to the general public. She describes how her school can buy up the smaller sized fruit and vegetables that are unwanted by larger supermarkets, for a reduced cost:

"A pound a week covers everything now... Our supplier brings us the wee ones (fruit) that the supermarkets won't take and you get them for cheaper. And it suits the children..." Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

This was mentioned in some of the focus groups with parents as a major benefit of having break provided by the school. Parents below describe the benefit of simply paying £1, and have a healthy break provided by the school. This saved parents from having to buy a week's supply of fruit and vegetables or other nutritious foods, which could be expensive when parents were providing this themselves (as outlined above).

Parent 1: It's just handy to be able to pay your £1 and get it provided. As we said too, it's much cheaper too.

Parent 2: It even works out a lot cheaper. It might be £3 per week for me because I have three at the school, but that's just £3. I couldn't provide it myself for that amount. It would maybe be £3 per day!" Focus group, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

5.7 Staffing issues

Although the benefits of having school provide the break were highlighted by both parents and principals, it was also recognised by principals and pre-school leaders that there were certain disadvantages as well.

One of these disadvantages was the burden on staff resources. Principals and pre-school leaders across the board described the time burden of preparing break time snacks. The availability of staff frequently dictated whether the school could provide food and drinks consumed at break, or whether these had to be brought into school from home.

The difficulties associated with the staffing required to prepare healthy breaks were raised repeatedly in the interviews with school principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders who prepared breaks in school for the children.

“In the early stages we actually employed classroom assistants to try to prepare break, but we found that was just not working because of the whole process of ... buying the products, preparing them; and to be fair it was also taking classroom assistants away from their proper job...” Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

In the extract below, a pre-school group leader recognises that she is lucky to have enough staff in the pre-school to enable them to provide and prepare a wide range of different fruit, dairy and bread products. She acknowledges that this is not the case in other settings.

“I’m lucky because we have plenty of staff. Other people might find it a problem right enough. You would need a designated person just to do the snack...” Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

Other principals explained that – in addition to the extra staffing and time burden - they lacked the preparation facilities to provide healthy breaks. In the extract below, one principal describes the difficulties she would have in providing healthy breaks for her pupils.

“We neither have the facilities nor the time because we have to remember that we’re here to educate the children in the curriculum areas that ETI will inspect us on, and we simply no, it takes too much time... (and) we don’t have a kitchen”. Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Chapter 6 Policy monitoring

Some schools did not have a system for monitoring break time snacks and drinks, maintaining that they either did not have time to do this, or else simply felt that it was not the school's place to check what children were eating or drinking in school.

Others described a system whereby the teachers or staff were responsible for checking break time items while many schools adopted a pupil-led monitoring system, whereby the pupils themselves were responsible for monitoring what other children had for their break time snack.

6.1 Lack of monitoring

A minority of principals who did not monitor the school's healthy breaks policy felt that it was not the school's place to police what the children were having for break, as well as highlighting the time burden of constantly checking children's break time snacks.

"We have never gone into the detail of checking a yoghurt to see whether it's one of the healthier ones or not because that's just a step too far for a school that has everything else to manage" Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Principals voiced other reasons for not monitoring and implementing a healthy breaks scheme in full. One of the principals who took part in the research felt that it was not the remit of the schools to be addressing issues such as children's nutrition:

"I do believe there is a greater expectation of primary schools to fix all the woes of the world. But we're a school, we're not here to right every wrong in the world and bad practice..." Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

However, other principals disagreed with this approach, maintaining that schools did have a responsibility to address pupils' nutrition and other health related issues, believing that these had a direct impact on pupils' academic achievement. The principal below believes that if schools do not try to implement healthy eating policies they are hindering the pupils who most need help and support to achieve their full academic potential.

"Sometimes we do get the negatives ... 'Who do you think you are, you're there to educate' but I would keep saying, 'This is part of education, because this is part of a healthy life choice ... and professionals are telling us that this impacts on how a child learns, it impacts on how a child can access various other activities during their life time, ... you're actually disadvantaging the child.'" Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

Some principals also felt that it was up to the parents, rather than the school, to instil positive attitudes towards healthy eating in their children. The principals below maintained that parents' decisions should always override those made by the school.

"We always respect that the parents are the first educators of their children, and we always acknowledge that". Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

The issue of parental autonomy was also voiced in some of the focus groups with parents. Some parents agreed with the stance adopted by the principal in the quote above, with parents in one focus group maintaining that parents did 'know best' in matters concerning their children. However, as can be seen in the exchange below, this is contested by another parent in the same group.

"Parent 1: I think at the end of the day us as parents know what's good for our children and what's not.

Parent 2: I get what you are saying in terms of instincts but you see kids obese now so the truth doesn't bear that out." Focus group, small rural primary school, Co. Down.

Moreover, as was pointed out by others working in pre-school/ nursery and primary school settings, sometimes parents lacked the necessary skills, information and resources relating to children's nutrition and healthy eating. Those who weren't aware of the nutritional content of foods commonly consumed by children (and adults) could unwittingly be giving their children items which were high in fats, salts or sugars.

"A lot of parents like myself would only know a certain amount... they don't realise the full content of what their child could be eating" Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, Country Tyrone.

"Parents think that fruit juice is fine or the yoghurts are fine, but even somebody (should) explain 'Well, this is how many spoonfuls of sugar is in the yoghurt. A lot of that awareness isn't there – I mean the likes of that whole coffee scandal there a couple of weeks ago, how many sugars are in the cups of coffee in Starbucks and Costa that you never think of, you just think it is alright". Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

6.2 Staff and/or pupil-led monitoring

Some of the principals reported their staff checked break time snacks, and did this on a regular basis.

"The class teachers are very good... the teachers check as well. And I think with children, if you're not consistent, well then, a policy is not going to happen." Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

Some schools involved the children themselves in monitoring the healthy breaks schemes. This had two clear benefits. Firstly, it gave children ‘ownership’ of the policy, and thus they were more likely to adhere to the rules. Secondly, it relieved the time burden on teachers who otherwise would have been involved in policing what children were consuming at break, as highlighted in the extract below.

“The teachers would oversee it but generally we would have children who would take on the responsibility of keeping a chart of who was a healthy break eater, and they’re a better monitor than we are because if they see a child with something they’ll not give them a point unless they’re sure it is healthy.” Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

“Oh yeah, they’re very quick at telling tales... they were very quick for saying ‘Oh but she took this or he took this...’ They wouldn’t long dobbin’ you in!” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Moreover, there was a general consensus that as the healthy breaks policies ‘bedded in’ in school, there was less of a need for policing what the children consumed. Principals and parents both acknowledged that the children became accustomed to rules about what they could and couldn’t have at break, and in general abided by the rules.

“Well, as I say, it’s so well established in the school we don’t really... the majority of the children do it well, so there’s not a lot of need to do very much” don’t really have to do much” Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

Chapter 7 Enforcement

The interviews with parents, and principals or group leaders in primary and pre-school/nursery settings revealed a number of approaches to enforcement of their current healthy breaks policy. Similar to the actual food and drinks items allowed under each school's policy, the approaches to enforcement varied considerably also.

A number of different approaches were described. Some schools took no action when their healthy breaks policy was flouted, whereas others adopted a more hard-line approach, confiscating non-compliant items. Other schools addressed pupils themselves when the healthy breaks policy was flouted, either by speaking to the child, or invoking a system whereby house points were deducted. A fourth approach was to contact parents if unsuitable items were supplied, and ask for items compliant with break time policy to be sent in instead.

Schools used either one or a mixture of these different methods of enforcement, as discussed below.

7.1 The 'do nothing' approach

13% of primary schools never took any action when their healthy breaks policy was flouted, and another 13% 'sometimes' didn't take action

6% of pre-school settings never took any action when children brought in non-compliant foods at break, and another 3% 'sometimes' did nothing

Some principals and pre-school group leaders, although maintaining they had a policy that on paper outlined the types of breaks children were and were not allowed, when it came to actually enforcing the scheme, adopted a very laissez-faire approach. One principal described a healthy breaks policy in his school that allowed pancakes and raisins but stipulated 'no sweets, chocolate or crisps'. However, this policy was not enforced with pupils. The principal defends this noninterventionist approach, arguing that children need to learn to choose healthy foods over healthier food items, rather than simply being dictated to.

“Interviewer: How strict would you say the scheme is within your school?”

Principal: Well, we're not 100%... if a child is hungry and they need a packet of crisps or whatever, I'm not going to stop them... they have the freedom to choose to have a healthy break or not...” Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

However, others working in primary schools and pre-school settings took a more stringent approach to the implementation of the school healthy breaks policy,

disagreeing with the idea that children should have the choice as to whether to have a healthy break or not. In the extract below one primary school principal points out that children, if they are given the choice will usually always choose foods that are high in salt, sugar or fat over those of a higher nutritional value. In contrast to the principal cited above, who advocates that pupils should have the choice as to whether to have a healthy break or not, this principal feels that it is too much to expect pupils to ‘choose’ the healthier option.

“I know we are trying to teach children to make choices... but we know in P1 to P4 if we set in front of kids a box of biscuits and a box of fruit, it would be a hard test.” Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

The principal below operates a policy that is compliant (on paper) with the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme in terms of the food and drinks options allowed at break. However, when the enforcement of the policy was examined in more detail, little or no action is taken when children bring in non-compliant items for break. The principal explains why non-compliant items are not simply confiscated, maintaining that taking away non-compliant snacks would be viewed as confrontational and counter-productive to the success of the policy.

“We weren’t telling them, I mean we would never get a child to stand up and say ‘Why have you got that?’ because that’s what their mum packed.”
Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

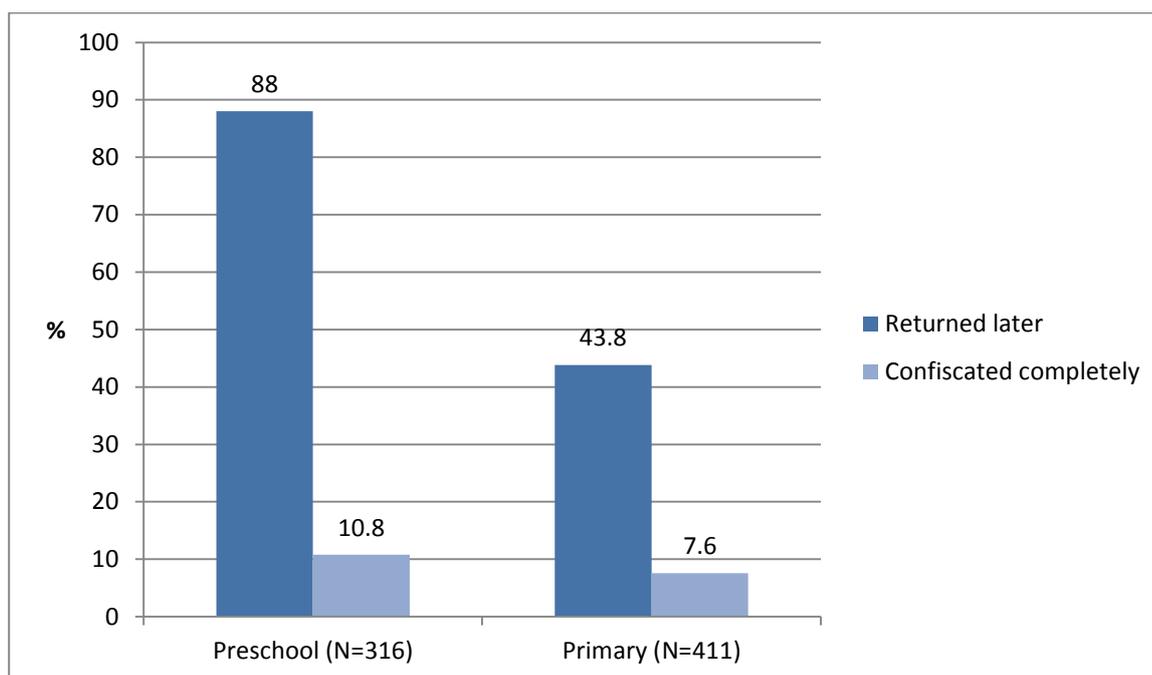
Other principals took no action because they were concerned that if they removed the non-compliant item, children could be left with nothing to eat until lunch time.

“We wouldn’t actually take food from a child if they didn’t have a healthy break, that’s the one thing I would say, because our children have long days and we wouldn’t want them to starve.” Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

7.2 Confiscating noncompliant items

Both primary schools and pre-school facilities were loath to permanently confiscate items that were not compliant with the school healthy breaks policy (see Figure 5). A more popular course of action in both primaries and pre-school settings was to temporarily confiscate non-compliant items, but to return them to the child after break time. In fact, this was the most popular action taken in pre-schools when their healthy breaks policy was not adhered to.

Figure 5 Action when school healthy breaks policy is flouted: noncompliant items confiscated either completely, or confiscated and given back later.



It is possible that those in pre-school settings felt able to confiscate noncompliant items because most nursery units, play schools and other pre-school facilities provided snacks for children at break themselves. This meant that a suitable alternative was easily available to replace the confiscated item. However, in primary schools where children brought in their own break time snack, and where schools were less likely to provide snacks themselves, finding an alternative snack for children to eat at break was more difficult. Principals were concerned that, unless a suitable alternative was available, pupils could go hungry if food was confiscated.

One principal who actually did operate a fairly strict healthy breaks policy acknowledged difficult situations, such as when children who had no break, or when non-compliant food items were brought in. In this school, the solution was that each teacher bought bananas at the start of the week that were then handed out to children who did not have the requisite item. This approach relied heavily on the good will of the teacher but was recognised as unworkable in the long term.

When asked about enforcement of healthy breaks schemes, although some parents' initial reaction was that there should be an element of flexibility, this was contested by others. Some parents felt that it was better to have unambiguous rules that were strictly implemented across the school. It was argued that unless a policy has strictly defined boundaries and rules, then it could become difficult to implement. In the extract below, parents discuss the implications of allowing some food items, such as low fat crisps, to be included within a healthy breaks scheme.

“Parent 1: I know I would like a certain degree of flexibility for some of the foods now and again, but in saying that, in a bigger school it is best to have all or nothing as that little bit of doubt creeping in causes uncertainty and affects everything.

Parent 2: It removes grey areas or ‘if that is accepted then this should be accepted’.

Parent 1: I suppose it could mean someone sending in lower fat or baked crisps thinking they are being good, then someone else sends in something slightly worse and it could roll on from there.” Focus group, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

Parents suggested that if children brought non-compliant items, these foods and drinks should be confiscated, and the children should be given something else instead. However, this was accompanied by an important caveat – parents (and children) need to have been made aware beforehand by the school of what food and drinks are actually allowed.

“Parent 1: I think it should be sent home because if one kid gets it then it becomes the norm...

Parent 2: It’s a rule... they broke the rules. They shouldn’t be allowed to just eat it because you can’t allow one and not everyone else. As long as they have something to replace it.

Parent 3: Yes, even if they were given an apple or something

Parent 4: If the parents have been informed then there should be no reason why it’s sent in...” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

7.3 Notifying parents

Analysis of the quantitative data showed that when healthy breaks policies were flouted, notifying parents to ask for suitable alternative snacks or drinks to be brought in was the most popular action taken by primary schools.

Table 10 Action when school healthy breaks policy is flouted: Parents asked to send something else in that is compliant with policy

	Primary principals (N=407)	Pre-school leaders (N=316)
Overall	70%	34%
Sometimes	32%	8%
Always	39%	26%

In the interviews principals described how they could have a 'quiet word' with parents if children were consistently coming into school with items that were prohibited under the school's healthy breaks policy. Frequently this was either just a reminder of the healthy breaks policy, and compliant and non-compliant items covered within this. Principals would also explain the reasons as to why certain items were excluded, for example certain children's yoghurts or fromage frais or dried fruit that were high in sugar, and consequently bad for dental health.

"Principal:In P1 whenever they come in and they're not too sure and parents are maybe not too sure, and that's just a quiet word with parents then just to say 'Actually no, I know raisins are considered sort of healthy but you know if children are not having their teeth brushed all day long, then it's not good'. Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

One principal, who runs a fruit only healthy breaks scheme in her school, describes how she will contact parents of pupils who consistently flout the rules by bringing in non-compliant items. However, because her scheme has the support of pupils within the school, she acknowledges that she does not have to do this very often.

"There's the odd time, when a new kid comes I've had to say [to parents]... 'Nobody else is eating crisps here at school... none of our kids have got any of that in school with them". Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

However, as was pointed out in the interviews, some principals felt unable to do this. Other principals maintained that they simply did not have time to contact parents every time children brought in non-compliant items. This was especially pertinent for schools where children frequently brought in non-compliant items.

*"Interviewer: How strict is the policy within your school?
Principal: I think on paper it's strict, in reality I think teachers push up to a point... for example, I will not phone a parent and say 'Your child's brought in a packet of crisps today, that's against our policy, even though it is. Maybe I should, but I don't have the time or I suppose the energy to get into that..."*
Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

7.4 Use of incentives

Another common method reported by principals in order to improve the nutritional content of break snacks was through the use of incentives. Some principals described how they had introduced various systems whereby pupils would be rewarded with 'points' if they brought in a 'healthy' snack. Conversely, if pupils brought in an 'unhealthy' snack, or drinks or foods contravening the school healthy breaks policy, then points were deducted.

“We encourage them by giving them extra House points if they have healthy snacks with them... Healthy being your normal fruits, any kind of fruit in any shape or form”. Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

However, another common method of incentivising pupils to comply with health breaks policies was to reward them with unhealthier foods, or ‘treats’.

In addition to the ‘normal’ treats children received on special days and birthdays as described above in Chapter 5, some principals described how treats would also be used to reward children for good behaviour. The primary school principal below describes a treats-based system that operates in his school. Although the system currently operating in this school does not permit bread based products, and is described by the principal as a ‘fruit only’ policy, there were certain exceptions. In the extract below the principal describes how children are actually rewarded with chocolate or sweets on a Friday if they have fruit for break for the rest of the week:

“...They get points for their table if they have a piece of fruit... so on a Friday the winning table gets a chocolate bar... or a Haribo packet”. Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

This was not viewed by principals as contravening the healthy breaks policy but simply seen as a treat or reward for children’s adherence to the scheme. However parents views on this form of reward system utilised by schools was mixed. Indeed parents argued that when the school gave children treats in the form of sweets or chocolate, this contradicted the ‘healthy eating’ message promoted at break time. In the extract below, one parent highlights this lack of consistency in the message given to children.

‘Parent 1: For the benefit of children it needs to be consistent. You can’t promote healthy eating and send them home with sweets on a Friday’.
Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

However, other principals described a different approach to awarding children unhealthier treats. Instead of offering high fat or sugary food items, such as sweets or chocolate, one interviewee describes how she offers a selection of healthier treats, which the children are allowed to choose from.

“... So we asked them (the children) ‘What would you like for your Friday Treat?’ ... We’ve like Dairylea, and Baby Bel and ordinary cheddar, and the Tuc (crackers) and Digestive. The Friday Treat without going too mad...”
Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

Other schools used a different approach, where non-food items were used to reward good behaviour or to mark a special occasion. Instead of giving children sweets or chocolate or other sugary food items to bring into school, parents were encouraged to buy something that the school could keep in order to mark special occasions, such as birthdays.

The principal below maintained that offering children foods high in fats, sugars or salts as a reward or for special occasions was contradictory to the ethos of her school's healthy eating policies, including their healthy breaks scheme. In the instance below, she describes an alternative approach that is used to highlight special occasions.

"We used to have umpteen birthday cakes appear in... We had a new library open in 2013 and we said if you want to celebrate you child's birthday with the class, please buy us a library book and we will put 'Donated on Lynne's 6th birthday, and it goes into the library instead of a cake.'" Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

Some parents adopted a similar stance to the principal above, arguing that non-food items could also be an effective reward for good behaviour. The extract below demonstrates that some parents were quite strong in their opposition to giving their children sweets as a reward for good behaviour. They suggest giving children something they can keep, such as a rubber or some kind of small toy.

"Interviewer: Does your school relax the rules about the types of food and drinks pupils are allowed...?"

Parent 2: In P1 as a treat if they get the table points then they get a sweet.

Parent 1: See I wouldn't use food at home for an incentive.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about that?

Parent 2: Well in P1 my daughter wasn't really having anything and then all of a sudden she was coming out of school with these sweets, but I have seen some children that get toys.

Parent 3: Yeah or a wee rubber or something...

Parent 1: I don't think that sweets should be a reward for good behaviour".

Focus group, large sized rural primary school, Co. Down.

Chapter 8 Facilitators of healthy breaks schemes

A number of key facilitators of healthy breaks schemes emerged from the research. These included being consistent in the types of foods and drinks allowed, and a consistent approach to policy enforcement. Other important issues were having a whole school approach, with principals highlighting the importance of support from colleagues within the school and the school management team, particularly the Board of Governors, parents and the pupils themselves. This whole school approach was facilitated by consultation about the policy, and regular communication with those within the school community. Another important facilitator was having an affordable healthy breaks scheme, where costs were kept to a minimum.

8.1 Consistency in implementing policies

One principal highlighted the importance of a consistent approach to the implementation of a successful healthy breaks policy. She described three elements that had led to the success of her school's healthy breaks policy. She maintained that in order for any policy to work efficiently, there were three key elements: the policy had to be applied uniformly to all pupils; the range of foods and drinks had to be the same for everyone; and thirdly, there needed to be clear ramifications if the policy was flouted.

“Interviewer: The parents are supportive of the scheme, why do you think that is?”

Principal: I think because it's been consistent, it doesn't change and it's enforced. And they know that I will send stuff home if it's not (compliant), and they know the teachers check as well. ... If you're not consistent then a policy is not going to happen...” Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

Parents held similar views in terms of the need for consistency in the implementation of healthy breaks schemes in schools, pointing out that rules need to apply to all children in the school. As one parent pointed out, if one child is allowed to flout the policy, then it becomes very difficult to enforce elsewhere.

“Parent1: It's because as soon as one child has something, they all want it... it's like an epidemic and it spreads” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

In the extract below, a parent describes how the lack of a consistently implemented policy directly impacts on the choice of snack she packs for her children. She maintains that if there were clearly defined and consistent rules about the types of foods allowed for break it would improve the chances of her sending in compliant items.

Parent 1: I'll be honest, I do put in a packet of crisps from time to time, maybe once a week. But I only do that because the other children are doing it and my children think that it is unfair that they don't get to have it. If there was a more strict policy, or if letters were sent home at least I would be able to point out that all the other children follow the same rules" Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Focus groups with parents highlighted the lack of consistency in schools when it came to implementing healthy breaks policies. For example, some teachers were regarded as 'stricter' than others. This could cause difficulties in sending in items that are compliant with the healthy breaks policy, as sometimes items considered as compliant or non-compliant could change according to what teacher the child had, or who was on break time duty within the school.

"Parent 1: ...I gave her a bottle of diluted juice and then she said she wasn't allowed it so I think that different teachers have different rules..."

Parent 2: Ours is in the same year and school but different classes so it must just be down to the teacher". Focus group, urban mixed schools, West Belfast, County Antrim.

"Interviewer: What do you think would help the scheme run more smoothly?"

Parent 1: There is maybe a lack of consistency.

Parent 2: It was the same for me. My daughter told me she wasn't allowed crisps...

Parent 2: There might be a lack of consistency from class to class. Mine does take crisps and it's fine." Focus group, medium sized urban primary school, Co. Antrim.

8.2 Inconsistencies with lunch box policy

The issue of packed lunches emerged as a major theme in the qualitative research. It was interesting to note that, despite having healthy breaks policies (which were implemented to a greater or lesser degree); almost all schools who took part in the research did not have similar lunch box policies. This was viewed by some principals – and parents - as inconsistent with a school healthy eating ethos and impeding successful implementation of any healthy breaks policy.

Concerns were voiced about the lack of nutritious food in children's lunchboxes. Almost all of the principals who were interviewed acknowledged the nutritional content of children's lunch boxes in their school was poor. Some primary principals maintained that children's lunch boxes frequently contained sugary drinks, crisps and chocolate bars. As pointed out by some of those participating in the interviews, the difficulty was that even if a sandwich had been provided, this was frequently left until after the child had eaten all the 'junk', and the sandwich ended up being thrown out.

“Some of our packed lunch boxes you would look in them and cringe because it’s literally just chocolate bars and a bag of crisps. It’s awful, some of them are so bad but there’s little we can do.” Primary principal, Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Parents echoed the disparity between a strict break time policy compared to a very relaxed ‘anything goes’ approach to lunch boxes.

“Parent 1: Mine get like Fruit Shoots or Ribena cartons...”

Parent 2: Mine get that for lunch, but they would never get away with it at break. I think a lot of schools are strict like that now.

Parent 1: We can send anything in at all too for the packed lunch. Any juice really, it’s not monitored...” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

The lunch box issue was raised by all the stakeholders who participated in the research. Almost all the primary school or pre-school interviewees did not have a healthy lunch box policy. Some principals felt that the introduction of lunchbox policies was ‘a step too far’, and could risk alienating parents. Principals felt that by insisting on healthy lunch box policies, they could risk losing the momentum and support gained on the healthy breaks policies. Principals believed that while parents were more accepting of healthy breaks policies, if similar rules were introduced for packed lunches, parents would be ‘up in arms’.

“We don’t get strict on lunch boxes because I think you really become quite Big Brother ...” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

“I wouldn’t want to fall out with people (parents) who are very good all day, and they would argue that’s one treat...” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim

However, contrary to principals’ perceptions of parental attitudes, parents actually found it quite confusing that children had to bring in a healthy break, yet were allowed to eat what they liked at lunch time. The research revealed that the lack of any kind of lunch box policy had repercussions for the successful implementation of healthy breaks policies. The quotes below taken from three separate focus groups highlight parents’ perception of the disparity between break time and lunch time policies in schools.

“Parent 1: Yeah, you are allowed jam at lunch time but not at break time, because at break time it might be messier, but I don’t really understand that.

Parent 2: Yeah, I don’t get that either.

Parent 3: The school is promoting the healthy break but they are not strict about lunch at all”. Focus group, medium sized urban/rural primary school, Co. Antrim.

“Parent 1: I do think it’s defeating the purpose saying that you are not allowed this for break but you can have it for lunch...” Focus group, urban mixed schools, West Belfast, County Antrim.

‘Parent 1: I think it [the school’s healthy breaks scheme] should be made stricter. [ALL AGREE]

Parent 2: Maybe not stricter. It needs to be consistent.

Parent 3: If it is done at break time, it has to be done at lunch time.

Parent 4: It’s either done or it’s not done.

Parent 3: It currently isn’t implemented at all at lunch.

[ALL PARENTS AGREED IT NEEDS TO BE AN ALL DAY POLICY]’

Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Given the lack of nutritious foods in lunch boxes, one principal suggested that there needed to be the same weight given to improving the nutritious content of these, as was given to promoting healthy breaks. However, some principals felt that they lacked the guidance to tackle lunch boxes, and were unsure how they would go about this.

“I’d love to tackle lunchboxes and I’ve shied away from it because... I’m not sure where I would go with it. I’m not sure... I would just love the Department of Education to say, Right it’s healthy lunchboxes, these are the rules”.

Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

However, some principals had a whole-school healthy eating agenda, not only implementing a healthy breaks scheme, but also encouraging a healthy lunch box. In the extract below a principal describes the measures introduced in her school in order to promote healthy lunch boxes, and illustrates how these have resulted in most children having a more nutritionally balanced packed lunch.

“The packed lunch people get that ‘Are you packing a healthy lunch box’, and we did a workshop, and we do ‘Ideas for your lunch box’ and design your lunch box and everything. But 9 times out of ten they have something healthy in there, usually the sandwich and piece of fruit, or some of them bring in pasta in lunchboxes. There’s the odd child will have kept their crisps.”

Primary principal, Medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

8.3 Whole school approach

Analysis of the quantitative research revealed that principals and pre-school leaders perceived differing levels of support from different members of the school community^o. When asked about the importance of having a healthy breaks policy, the quantitative

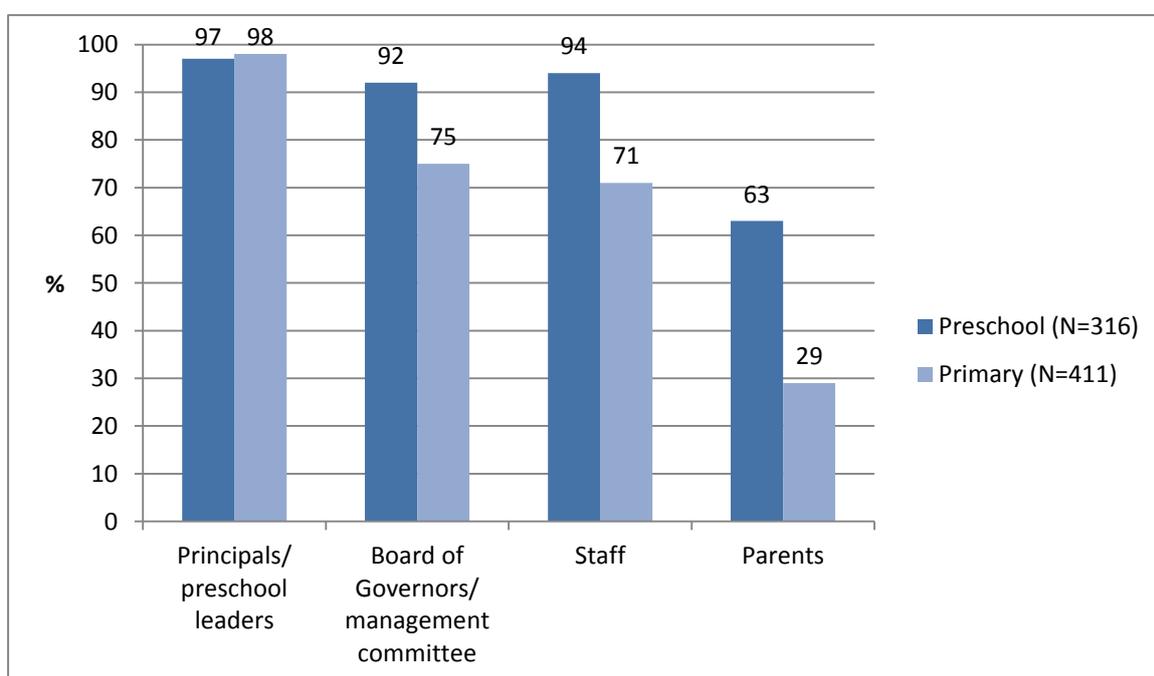
^o There were no statistically significant difference in perceived level of support in relation to the profile of primary schools or pre-schools.

research revealed that both **primary school principals and pre-school leaders felt that they themselves placed the most importance on this**, compared to other school stakeholders.

Pre-school/ nursery leaders tended to be more positive in their perceptions of the value other stakeholders placed on healthy breaks.

Both pre-school/ nursery and primary school principals felt that **parents were least likely to support healthy breaks policies** within the school or pre-school setting (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Primary school principals' and pre-school leaders' perceptions of stakeholder support for a healthy breaks policy.



Despite these findings, interviews and focus groups with principals and parents revealed varying levels of support for healthy breaks programme at all levels within the school community. Most of those who took part in the interviews maintained that healthy breaks schemes worked best when everyone in the school community was involved, and when everyone placed the same level of importance on having a healthy breaks policy in place.

8.4 School management and staff support

The support of the Board of Governors was regarded as important in developing and keeping the momentum of the healthy breaks Scheme. One principal described the

importance of having the support of his Board of Governors in trying to implement his own school's healthy breaks scheme.

"It's an item on the Board of Governors' report annually... I also have a governor who I would consult on healthy eating matters in school... You can work with them and say 'look, this is what we're trying to do'. So I've overwhelming support." Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

However, one group leader working in a pre-school setting described how difficult it could be to get the level of support needed to implement a healthy breaks scheme in the pre-school. This was largely due to the rolling nature of recruitment of the Pre-School Committee^p which meant the momentum in support gained during the year was lost when the next tranche of Committee members were recruited the following academic year.

"Group Leader: Support is quite hard to come by to be honest.

Interviewer: From what aspect?

Group Leader: Both parents and the Committee. Our Committee would change on an annual basis, so there's no consistency..." Pre-school Group Leader, small sized rural pre-school, County Antrim.

Indeed even within some schools principals described how some of their staff were initially opposed to the introduction of healthy breaks schemes, especially when it impacted on their own break time habits. However, once the scheme was underway, and with strong leadership, staff tended to come on board. In the extract below, a primary school principal demonstrates the initial teething problems he had when trying to introduce his healthy breaks policy.

71% of primary principals believed other school staff felt having a healthy breaks policy was 'very important'

"Interviewer: How was the healthy breaks scheme originally implemented in school?

Principal: Funny staff actually way back then were a bit harder to nudge... oh my staff love a biscuit! A pack or a box of biscuits would last no time at all... One of them actually said to me 'Would that be against my human rights' (sic), but I said 'I don't care if you eat a biscuit or not, just don't do it in front of the children'". Primary principal, Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

^p Similar to the Board of Governors in primary schools.

8.5 Parental support

Principals' within the primary school sector perceived limited support for healthy breaks policy from parents. However, by way of explanation, some principals maintained that parents - especially those from more deprived backgrounds – found obtaining foods permissible under healthy breaks policies problematic.

For example, the principal in the extract below acknowledges the high cost of buying healthy foods, such as fruit and vegetables, compared to less expensive (and unhealthier items) such as multipacks of crisps or chocolate is a substantive barrier for parents.

“I think sometimes they think (it’s) inconvenient because they don’t have fruit in the house because fruit is expensive and I understand that. And it’s cheaper to buy crisps... so you have to be realistic, a lot of our parents can’t afford the healthy break...” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

In the interviews with principals it became apparent that parental support for healthy breaks policies was more forthcoming if parents were told the reason why the policy was being introduced beforehand. Principals who had worked with parents to explain the potential health benefits for children and academic improvements arising from healthy breaks maintained that this fostered support for the school’s healthy breaks scheme.

“Most parents are quite reasonable and when we explain the reasoning behind it and the impact on children’s behaviour and the children’s work... (They are) generally accepting.” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Parents on the whole were supportive of healthy breaks schemes, citing improvements in their children’s consumption of nutritious foods. There was a recognition that the policies were in place in order to benefit their children’s health.

“Interviewer: What are your views on school rules about food and drink for break?”

Parent 1: It’s a good thing, like.

(ALL GROUP AGREE)

Parent 2: It’s definitely a lot healthier than when we were at school...

Parent 3: ...And I think it’s good because it encourages my son to eat things he would not eat at home...

Parent 4: They get enough treats at home.

Parent 5: Yes, I am happy that there is a policy in place...” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

However, some parents within the groups did acknowledge that support for healthy breaks was not consistent among all parents and a small minority regularly disregarded the school policies. Principals also acknowledged that it was difficult to win the support of all parents. The principal below maintains that although the vast majority of parents do support the school's healthy breaks policy, and abide by it, there are also a small number of parents who are harder to get on board.

“Ultimately you rely on the goodwill of parents, the majority of whom are sensible, but unfortunately you get a small group of people... that don't like being told by the school about what to do with their children, and it is a very, very small number but yet it's what you end up talking about (but) the vast majority of parents actually think it is a very good idea”. Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

8.6 Support from pupils

Likewise, principals also mentioned that pupils resisted the healthy breaks schemes when they were initially introduced. However, this initial resistance gave way over time as the scheme progressed. Principals also described how healthy breaks schemes, once implemented, became a way of life for pupils, with children accepting rules about the food and drinks that were compatible with school policy.

“The first year of it was a struggle because some kids did not want to give up their crisps or give up their sugary drinks... (but) by the end of it of the year we had half the school participating in it...” Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

This theme was echoed in the work with parents, some of who maintained that their children were reasonably content with their school break time policy, regarding it a normal and everyday part of school life.

“Interviewer: What do your children think of the rules about the foods and drinks allowed?”

Parent 1: I don't hear any complaints

Parent 2: I don't either...

Parent 3: They are used to it

Parent 2: They have accepted it...

Parent 1: It's just how it is.” Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Akin to the work with parents, principals described a number of key factors in getting the children on board with healthy breaks schemes. One key element was to explain to children the reasons why the policy was being introduced, rather than simply imposing rules about break time snacks with no explanation.

“Interviewer: Do you think your scheme is effective?”

Principal: I think it is very effective and I think it’s because... they know it is for health reasons. ... Now I would be a firm advocate of, if you explain things to children, rather than just saying ‘No, no you’re not doing that’, but saying why you’re not doing that...” Primary principal, Small sized rural primary school, County Down.

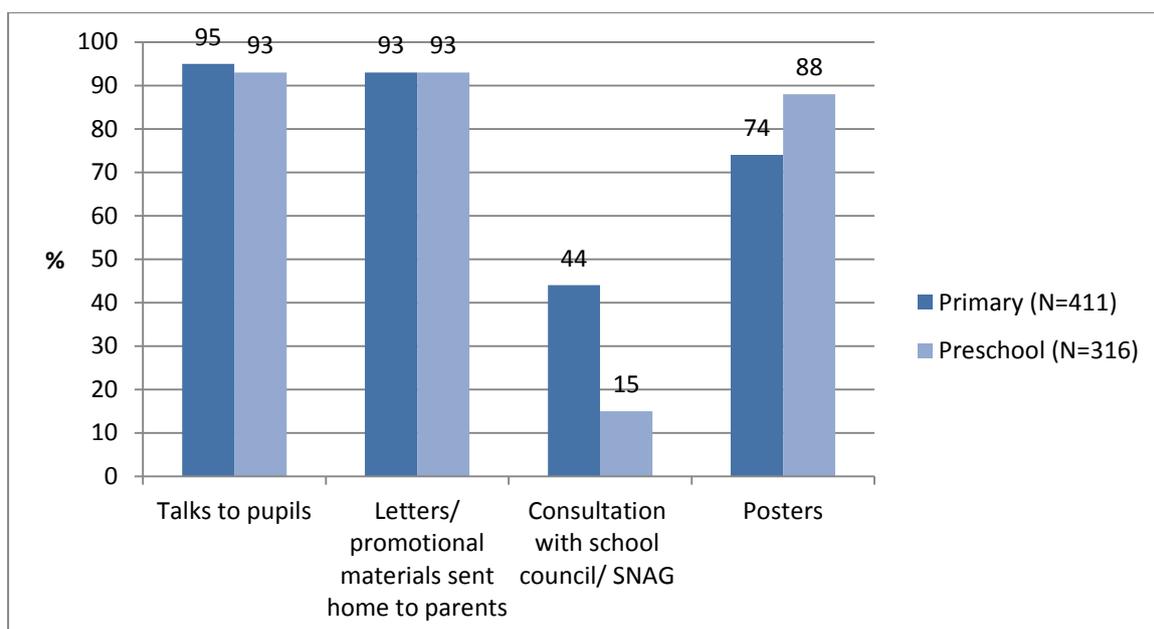
Some spoke about inviting speakers into the school, such as dieticians or dentists or other speakers from charity organisations to explain to the children why the scheme was being implemented, and showing children the damage that foods high in sugar, fat and salt could do to their health.

“We do the Chest, Heart And Stroke people... about realising that your diet as a young child affects your heart... so when that’s done in the school you can always hear them (the other children) whenever a kid goes ‘Well, I don’t like that fruit’ and they go, ‘Well, you should try it because it keeps your heart healthy’. Your hear them echoing the words from the training...” Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

8.7 Communication

The quantitative research explored how primary schools and pre-school facilities promoted their healthy breaks policies within the school community, and the various methods they employed to do this. Talking to pupils and letters or promotional materials sent home to parents were the most popular methods used by both primary schools and pre-school facilities to promote their healthy breaks policy.

Figure 7 Different methods used by primary schools and pre-school settings to promote their healthy breaks policy



Although the questionnaire did not explore the frequency with which this contact or communication took place, this was explored further in the qualitative element of the research.

The staff interviews and focus groups with parents revealed that although principals and pre-school leaders maintained that they did communicate about issues to do with their healthy breaks policy, frequency and type of communication varied considerably. In the interviews, some principals reported that they disseminated information on a weekly basis, while others sent communications out much less frequently, ranging from once a year to a single occasion when the child started school. Others simply had information relating to healthy breaks posted on the school website.

“There’s a policy sent home to parents every couple of years... All new parents receive it when they enter the school.” Primary principal, Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

However, in the focus groups with parents, one major theme emerging from all those who took part was the lack of communication about healthy breaks policies, and healthy eating in schools in general. Few parents who took part in the research had been asked their opinion about the healthy breaks policy in their school.

“Interviewer: How did you become aware of the schools’ break time rules?”

Parent 1: We haven’t really been told.

Parent 2: It’s just common sense.

Parent 3: It’s more what we think rather than being told. [ALL 8 PARTICIPANTS AGREE]”. Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

“Interviewer: How did you become aware of the schools’ break time rules?”

Parent 1: To be honest, I’m not really sure what rules are in place...

Parent 2: It wasn’t ever really about the rules of break, it was more that you have to pay your £1.50.

Parent 3: As they get older, I don’t think there is even a notice or a note home. It’s more that the child tells you.” Focus group, small sized rural primary school, Co. Tyrone.

In addition to the need for consistency (mentioned earlier in this report), one principal also highlighted the need for clarity as to acceptable and non-acceptable break time foods. He suggests that simply asking parents to send in ‘something healthy’ is impractical, partly due to parental lack of awareness of what constituted a ‘healthy’ snack. Instead, he suggests a prescriptive approach, telling parents exactly what is allowed.

“If you keep saying ‘look it’s fruit and vegetables, milk and water’, and you’re not chopping and changing, nothing changes so no-body has to ask

questions.” Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

This was echoed by parents whose children attended schools where the break was provided solely from home. These parents mentioned that they wanted more communication about the healthy breaks scheme – particularly about compliant and noncompliant foods. One group cited this was for purely practical reasons, so that they would know what foods and drinks to buy, thus avoiding wastage.

“Interviewer: Would you have wanted more guidelines about what is or isn’t allowed?”

Parent 1: I think it would be really needed. Because there’s people really wasting money on what isn’t allowed... it’s better to be told and it would make things much simpler...

Parent 3: I would like more guidelines...” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

This was repeated in other focus groups, with parents maintaining that, besides from a list of compliant and non-compliant foods, they should be given more information about the healthy breaks schemes, such as the length of time children have for break. It was felt that this type of information would help parents to send in snacks that were more suitable, or allow them to prepare snacks that were quicker and easier for children to eat in the limited time allocated for break.

“Parent 1: It would maybe be good if the school gave parents ideas on what to send in. I think a lot of parents don’t even realise how long they have for break, or what is realistically going to be eaten in that short time”. Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Principals emphasised the importance of consultation and regular communication with both parents and pupils in order for a healthy breaks policy to be implemented successfully. In the extract below, one principal describes the consultation process adopted prior to implementation of her school’s (fairly stringent) healthy breaks policy. She emphasises the importance of ensuring everyone has their voice heard, and getting the whole school community on board with the policy.

“Interviewer: Who was involved in the development of the healthy breaks scheme?”

Principal:... There was the staff, we would have brought it to the Board of Governors and then we would have asked parents if they had any suggestions or comments to make and obviously discussed it with the children... ‘Cause prior to that there would have been crisps coming in or biscuits... So obviously you wanted to have everybody involved to get everybody on board.” Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

Chapter 9 Benefits of introducing healthy breaks schemes

Principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders who had implemented healthy breaks schemes were asked about the reasons why they had done so, and if there were any benefits arising from the introduction of such schemes. Principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders perceived a range of benefits arising from their own healthy breaks policies, which were also spontaneously mentioned by parents participating in focus groups.

Perceived benefits included increased consumption of fruit and vegetables (particularly amongst children from lower-income families), and the subsequent improvements in children's health. Participants also cited fewer behavioural issues linked to decreased consumption of sugary foods and/or drinks at break time, and the implications of this for learning in school. Finally, principals cited the particular benefit of a nutritious break time snack to pupils coming to school without having breakfast.

9.1 Increased consumption of fruit and vegetables at school and at home

Principals and those in pre-school settings maintained that a major benefit of a healthy breaks policy was that children were encouraged to eat more fruit and vegetables.

This was particularly marked amongst children who normally didn't eat fruit and vegetables at home. Principals and pre-school group leaders commented on the impact of peer pressure in getting children to eat new foods that they wouldn't normally eat. Almost all of those who worked in pre-school settings mentioned the important role played by a child seeing other children eat foods they had never tried before.

“Principal... Children are maybe fussier at home than they will be in school. In school when they have the peer influence as well they'll eat stuff that they wouldn't at home...” Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

“Interviewer: ... Did you face any problems implementing the healthy breaks scheme initially?”

Pre-school group leader: No, we never had... I always say they [the children] eat better in company ...”. Pre-school/ nursery group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Antrim.

Others felt that children were more likely to try new foods in school or nursery for a number of reasons. Some described the persuasive skills used by those working in the primary or pre-school, and spoke about how these encouraged pupils to taste new

foods. In the extract below with a pre-school group leader, she also illustrates the different dynamic existing between the child and the teacher, and the child and his or her parent.

“A lot of them (parents) would say ‘He is so fussy, he wouldn’t eat that home’... Like with parents, they (children) are more likely to play them up, whereas in here they usually will try it... We encourage them to try it, say ‘Look at the colour’ and stuff”. Pre-school group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

Principals and pre-school group leaders also mentioned how if there was fruit and vegetables or other healthy snacks available at break time, then this particularly benefited pupils whose parents were on low incomes and couldn’t afford to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, especially if they weren’t sure the children would eat them.

“The children are getting to taste different fruit, because some of them would never have strawberries at home or blueberries or things like that... it’s just too expensive actually” Pre-school group leader, small sized rural pre-school, County Antrim.

This was also backed up in the focus groups with parents. The extract below is from a focus group attended by parents recruited from a school operating a relatively strict break time policy, and where fruit is provided by the school itself. Parents discuss how healthy breaks policies not only result in increased consumption of fruit and vegetables in school, but also describe how these dietary habits can be carried home.

“Parent 1: When my child first started... he wasn’t keen on fruit. But now he is eating a lot of different fruits and he doesn’t have a problem with it anymore.

Parent 2: That was the same as my wee boy. He would only eat banana. Then one day the teacher pointed out that another boy was eating a red apple, and then he was happy to try it. They see someone else eating it and they are happy.

Parent 3: My children used to come in and go straight for the biscuits, crisps and chocolate, but now they love their fruit. I have no need to keep the other stuff as much as I did.” Focus group, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

In another group, parents discussed how the healthy eating habits picked up in school filtered into children’s home life as well. Participants in this focus group were recruited from a primary school operating a healthy breaks policy allowing fruit, milk and water only, and where parents supplied break snacks themselves.

“Parent: From my own perspective I thought it was a real positive thing... it allowed me to take stock of how much actual fruit we do buy for the house and this makes you buy fruit every single week meaning that our fruit bowl is constantly stocked whereas before that wouldn’t have been the case or it

would have gone off; now we eat it all'. Focus group, small sized rural primary school, Co. Down.

9.2 Improvements in children's health

Some principals felt that healthy breaks policies in schools had helped to improve the health of the children attending their schools. Some principals had introduced healthy breaks schemes and other health policies within their school in an attempt to combat childhood obesity. One principal had noticed that children in his school were getting heavier, so he implemented a holistic approach, employing a reasonably strict healthy breaks policy, coupled with physical activity programmes in addition to the normal physical education classes.

"It was something we had noticed, a number of children being more overweight. But not now..." Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Another principal described the effect of her healthy breaks scheme on the health of the children in her school. The healthy breaks scheme was implemented as part of a suite of general healthy lifestyle programmes, focusing on diet, exercise, and good sleep hygiene.

"Interviewer: Do you think your scheme is effective?"

Principal: I think it is... I think as part of the whole package it is working. We would have much fewer children who are even overweight looking... now there are a few who are large... but they would be minimal, whereas [before] we would have had a lot of rounder children." Primary principal, Medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

Another principal described the improvements healthy breaks policies and other school policies have made to the health of children attending her school, not only in terms of diet, but also with regard to dental health. Prior to this, children in this school which is located in an area of high deprivation and has a high proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals, had been measured as having comparatively poorer health outcomes.

"So we looked at diet, we looked at teeth... we can fix that wee bit for them. ... That's what the school nurse notices here – I have no what I would call chubby kids, very few ... That's when we started closing the gap for our kids..." Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

9.3 Behavioural issues

There was a perception amongst nearly all those who took part in the interviews, particularly principals in primary schools, that healthy breaks schemes had a positive impact on children's behaviour. Prior to the implementation of a healthy breaks scheme in the school, one principal described how other teaching staff in his school would comment on the negative impact of high fat and/ or sugary foods and drinks on pupils' behaviour. Staff maintained that after pupils consumed these types of foods at break time, their behaviour changed, with children becoming either listless or very hyper.

"...Teachers had complained that... between break and lunch children were becoming lethargic or else they were hyperactive... it took longer and longer to get them settled down to do any work, and it was harder to get them to stay focused so it was essential..." Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Principals described the change in their children's behaviour following the introduction of a healthy breaks scheme, where foods and drinks high in fats and sugars were banned. This change was also noted by others working in the school with the pupils, who reported resulted in fewer behavioural issues.

"But definitely, in the last school where they had no sense of healthy eating, they just had what they wanted and there were no restrictions. [After implementing a Health Breaks policy] I would say that after about two weeks the teachers noticed a huge difference in behaviour, and that sort of spoke volumes." Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

Another principal was so concerned about the effect of unhealthy foods on children's behaviour, not only had she introduced a healthy breaks policy in school, but she had introduced a parenting programme, running over a period of four months. The extract below demonstrates her belief that healthy eating should be carried beyond the remit of the school. She encourages parents to limit their children's consumption of high sugar items in order to improve their behaviour both inside and outside school.

"...We have our 16 week parenting programme, because diet affects children's emotions and behaviour... We would always say, Are you looking at their diet at home because if you minimise the sugar intake you will notice a big difference in your child's demeanour towards you..." Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

"So even our kids would come back after being off the week at Halloween and go, I'm hyper, I've had treats all last week...(But)I'm back to school so I'll be ok in a couple of days..." Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

Parents also recognised the benefits of regulating the types of foods and drinks their children consumed in school. In keeping with the principals' concerns about children's consumption of sugar and the subsequent impact on their behaviour, some parents also recognised that eating or drinking sugary drinks could lead to behavioural issues.

"I think sugar is a big thing in school because it can lead to problems into the teenage years, in my job I work with a lot of kids who drink excessive energy drinks and they are just banging off the walls so I can understand the big thing about sugar." Focus group, small sized urban pre-school, County Antrim.

The extract below is taken from a focus group with parents, where two participants agree that consuming foods or drinks high in sugar can impair their children's ability to concentrate in class.

"Parent 1: ... You don't really want kids hyped up on sugar when you are trying to teach them. It would be hard for them to concentrate.

Parent 2: Yes." Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

9.4 Benefits for children who do not eat breakfast

Some principals highlighted benefits of a healthy breaks policy for the children not having breakfast before school. Principals described how children who frequently skipped breakfast would be lethargic and unable to concentrate on their school work. When children who skipped breakfast at home either brought in a replacement snack, or purchased something to eat or drink on the way to school, these breakfast substitutes were frequently of low nutritional value. Principals explained how important it was to have some kind of healthy food available at morning break, giving pupils the energy needed for the school day ahead.

"We found that a lot of our pupils were coming in and they hadn't had breakfast... if a child is coming in hungry and hasn't had any breakfast, it's giving them some substance, giving them energy..." Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

"I think it's really important getting that mid-morning snack and making sure it's healthy because it wakens the brain back up again, the children who haven't had breakfast need that stimulus at that point of the day... it affects their work." Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

While some principals acknowledged that some children simply didn't feel like eating in the morning, or didn't have time to sit down to breakfast, others who took part in the research – particularly principals from schools with large numbers of children eligible for Free School Meals – maintained that some parents couldn't afford to give their children

break time snacks, so children were hungry until they got their free school meal at lunch time. In the extract below, the principal from such a school illustrates the importance of having a cheap and healthy break time snack available.

“...Our kids don’t come from an affluent area... we would have had children in the past sitting with nothing to eat, breakfast, break right through till they got their lunch at lunch time... And certainly getting their break has made a difference... here they’re giving a pound and it’s their break for the whole week...” Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

9.5 Reduced litter

Some primary school principals taking part in the interviews reported that an added bonus of healthy breaks schemes was the decrease in litter around school buildings. When pupils were only consuming fruit rather than wrapped confectionary items, the impact on the school environment could be dramatic, as noted by the primary school principals below.

“It has also cut down on the litter in the school, the amount of rubbish that is in our bins. And the care taker has noticed it as well... ‘cause biscuits all have wrappers on them, whereas fruit doesn’t.” Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

“And even from a litter aspect... we have very little litter around the school and one reason for that is that they’re not bringing in packets of crisps and eating outside...” Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

Chapter 10 Awareness of, and attitudes towards the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme

Attitudes towards the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme varied. Most of those participating in the qualitative research voiced surprise when they were made aware of the break time foods and drinks recommended – and more importantly, those *not* recommended - by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. This was mainly due to a lack of knowledge of healthy foods.

Some pre-school leaders and principals thought the variety and choice offered by the scheme was good, while others felt the scheme was too limited.

Other principals and pre-school leaders highlighted difficulties associated with the preparation of some of PHA recommendations, suggesting that these were not practical for most schools to implement.

Some principals also suggested that a clearer mandate needed to be in place from the Department of Education, making the healthy breaks policy a directive, rather than simply 'guidance'. Others mentioned the need for adequate resources in order to implement a healthy breaks scheme, whether this was appropriate literature, preparation or kitchen facilities, extra staffing or a monetary fund to cover start-up costs.

10.1 Awareness, use and attitudes towards the PHA Healthy Breaks resources

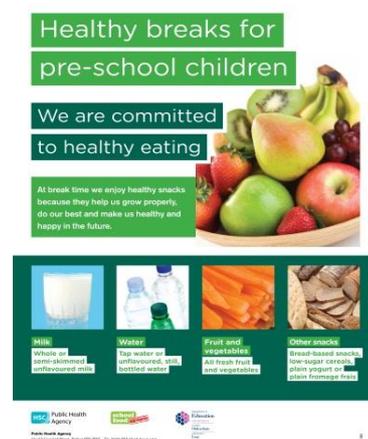
Both primary school principals and pre-school leaders were shown posters and leaflets included in the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack appropriate for their setting.

10.1.1 Pre-school resources

The **majority (89%) of pre-school leaders who participated in the quantitative research maintained that they had seen the 'Healthy breaks for pre-school children' poster** (see Figure 8).

- 59% of all the pre-school leaders said the poster from the resource pack was displayed in their reception area;
- 6% displayed it in pre-school corridors;
- 16% said the poster was displayed in classrooms or the main teaching room; and,

Figure 8 Healthy breaks for pre-school children poster



- 4% of pre-school leaders said the poster was displayed in the dining room.

Again, **the majority (89%) of pre-school leaders had seen the leaflet for parents** from the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack (see Figure 9).

- 87% of all pre-school leaders had distributed the leaflet to parents of children attending the nursery or pre-school facility;
- 58% of all pre-school leaders found the leaflet designed for parents 'very useful', while 23% found it 'quite useful'.

10.1.2 Primary school resources

Awareness of the PHA Healthy Breaks poster was lower amongst primary school principals than pre-school leaders: **63% of primary school principals recognised the poster contained in the resource pack** (see Figure 10).

- 22% of principals said the poster was displayed in the school reception area;
- 16% had it up in the school corridors;
- 3% said the poster was displayed in classrooms; and
- 22% had the poster up in their dining hall.

When shown the primary school leaflet for parents, almost three-quarters of primary school principals (74%) had seen it prior to the survey (see Figure 11).

- 44% of principals participating in the quantitative research had distributed it to P1 parents only;
- 25% had circulated it to parents of children in other year groups; and
- 40% found the leaflet for parents 'very useful', while 26% found it 'quite useful'.

Results from the qualitative research emphasised the importance of having an effective resource pack for the Healthy Breaks scheme. A number of the principals from primary schools, as well as those from the pre-school settings, thought that in order for the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme to work effectively, marketing and information materials were key.

Figure 9 Healthy breaks for pre-school children - a guide for parents

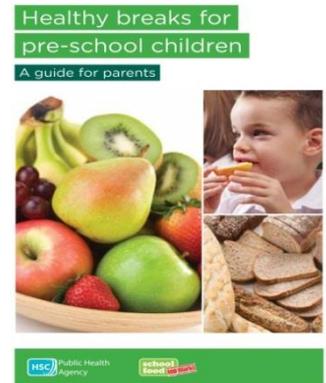
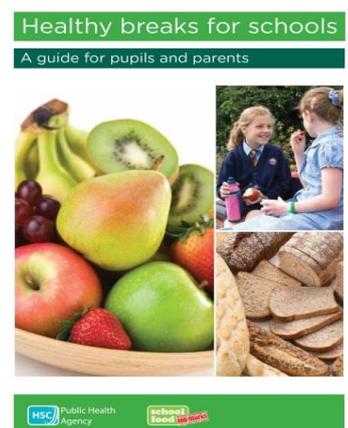


Figure 10 Healthy breaks for primary children poster



Figure 11 Healthy breaks for primary school children - a guide for parents



Primary school principals and pre-school group leaders suggested that these should take two formats. Some suggested a single summary sheet showing at a glance the permissible and non-permissible foods and drinks. However, participants also emphasised that any information going to parents needed to be bright and easy to read, so that it stood out amongst all the other information received from the school.

“...There needs to be more detail about what’s in those things and why they aren’t suitable, but some working parents (need) less detail and more pictures, where they can see at a glance. Like I know some of the letters we send home, they are just skimmed. But if it was in picture format – here’s what to eat and here’s what not to eat, plus glossy and bright it would have a bigger impact”. Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

“...Just keep the literature coming, if that literature stopped for us, because it’s all singing all dancing colour, we would be really struggling...” Primary principal, medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim.

However, given the poor levels of knowledge surrounding healthy foods, others also pointed out that any materials for parents (and/ or teachers) needed to include more information on why certain foods were acceptable and others were not, and details on foods which are high in sugars, fats and salts. In the focus group below, parents discuss their reactions to the PHA leaflet.

Parent 1: But again it comes down to the education of it.

Parent 2: Even this leaflet though, it can be difficult to go through everything in here, whereas something like that is easier.⁹ There should be pictures showing just how many tablespoons of sugar are in these things or in some way that people will understand.

Parent 1: Yes and show different ideas of what you can have instead of having that.” Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

10.2 Raising awareness of ‘healthy’ foods and other training needs

As highlighted earlier in this report, throughout the qualitative work there was an acknowledgement that sometimes it could be difficult for parents, children and those working in primary and pre-school settings to recognise when a food was high in fat, salt or sugar.

“We actually had a big debate in the staffroom about what a healthy break was...” Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

⁹ Pictures of healthier and less healthy foods shown to group participants.

It was interesting to note that although most of those in primaries and pre-school settings believed they were implementing a healthy breaks policy, when they were actually shown the types of foods and drinks allowed under the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, many were surprised. While they followed the policy in the main, most deviation occurred around the bread based products, or dried fruits with the majority of schools and pre-schools allowing items such as pancakes or raisins.

“Principal: I personally would have thought that pure fruit juice would have been ok. I know there is a certain amount of sugar but I still thought it was healthy. I personally would have thought that.

Interviewer: Do you think there should be more explanation as to why certain things are included or not included?

Principal: Yes, definitely – it would be helpful”. Primary principal, small sized rural primary school, Country Tyrone.

Focus groups with parents also highlighted the lack of knowledge surrounding the lack of awareness of what constituted a ‘healthy’ snack. Similar to principals and pre-school/nurse group leaders, parents were unaware of the hidden sugars, salts and fats present in foods not recommended by the PHA. Parents felt that it could be difficult to find genuinely ‘healthy’ snacks, and that issues such as food labelling could cause problems. Parents in one group reported that the packaging or labelling of snack items (particularly those aimed at children) could be misleading.

“Parent 1: It is just reinforcing what isn’t allowed.

Parent 2: My son came home and was saying that someone else had this yummy thing, and it was a ‘good’ thing, it was fruit and he was all biz about this – and it turned out to be a Fruit Winder.

Parent 3: It is so hard for them to understand whenever it is 100% fruit or fruit juice that it isn’t always healthy, the labelling is deceiving... and making us out to be liars!” Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

In order to address the lack of knowledge about hidden sugars, fats and salt in foods, principals and pre-school group leaders suggested that there was the need for training, not only for teachers and principals themselves, but also for parents. In fact, one school already provided a training course for parents, addressing issues like diet and physical activity issues. The need for more guidance to enable parents (and children) to make genuinely healthy choices was also raised.

“Interviewer: Do you think there should be more guidance...

Parent 1: ... I think that it would be beneficial for parents if they were better informed regarding sugar in foods. I’m by no means a health freak and my kids do eat sugar. However, sometimes you are sending in something that you think is healthy but it is just as bad as junk food...

Interviewer: How many of you would agree with that?

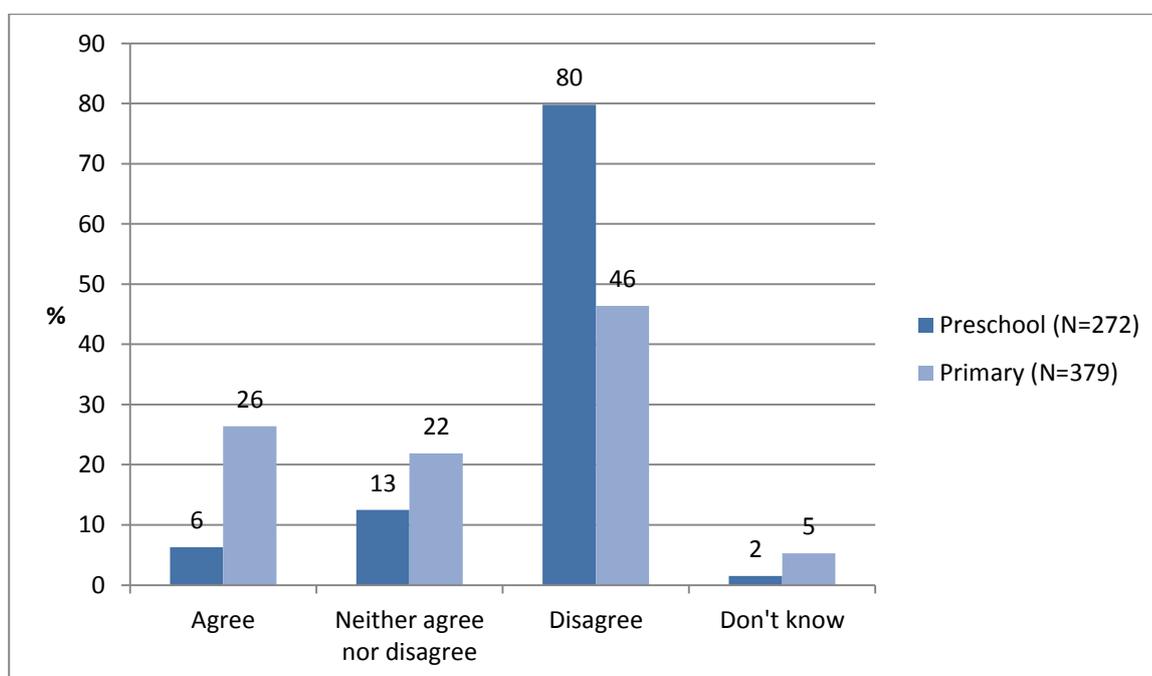
[EVERYONE AGREES]” Focus group, medium sized urban/rural primary school, Co. Antrim.

10.3 Variety and choice in PHA and School Foods Forum scheme

Data from the quantitative stage of the research revealed that the majority of those who participated in this stage of the research disagreed that the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme was too strict (see Figure 12).

However, a larger proportion of primary school principals (26%) than pre-school/nursery group leaders (6%) felt that the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme was too strict.

Figure 12 Principal and pre-school/ nursery group leaders’ views on whether the PHA and School Food Healthy Breaks Scheme would be too strict to implement in their school/ pre-school?



Some principals, particularly those who currently just offered fruit and vegetables in their own healthy breaks schemes, felt that the foods proposed in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme was wider than that they currently offered. While some of these principals thought they could implement the PHA scheme without too much difficulty.

“Interviewer: What do you think about the range of foods that are included (in the PHA scheme)?

Principal: No, I think the range is fine, the range there is actually more than we offer here to our children..." Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

Some of the parents who participated in the research (particularly those whose children attended schools operating strict healthy breaks schemes) felt that the range offered by the current PHA Healthy Breaks scheme was good.

"Parent 1: Well compared to her school at the minute, it's a free for all! I would like it for my wee girl.

Parent 2: There is still plenty of choice there. It's only break. It's only for their snack.

Parent 3: There is more than enough there to still be able to vary it through the week." Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

However, principals and pre-school leaders who offered bread based products that fell outside of the remit of the PHA scheme, particularly those who served pancakes, felt the scheme was unnecessarily strict. These principals felt that food items, such as brioche and pancakes should not be excluded from the scheme, although they acknowledged they could be higher in sugar than some of the other bread-based snacks. Principals felt that these offered children a much needed source of carbohydrate, and were a useful alternative to toast.

"I don't think there is anything wrong with them having the brioche and the pancakes, as long as it isn't every day. I don't think once a week would be that bad. I know they have more sugar in them but I think there is a happy medium too, you know?" Pre-school group leader, small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

Others specifically mentioned the 'handiness' factor of pancakes. Rather than having to spend a lot of time in preparation, pancakes were quick and simple to offer as a break time snack.

"And pancakes – they're not heated – we could have them buttered prior to school starting, and they're ready to go. Same with crackers, they're ready to go, whereas with toast you can't do that" Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

Parents were also asked about their views on the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, and asked to comment on the compliant and non-compliant foods listed. Similar to the interviews with principals and pre-school group leaders, parents picked up on some of bread items that were not recommended. In general, most parents were not happy about limiting the variety of bread-based products, particularly pancakes.

“Parent: I think it is better to have healthy eating in terms of saying ‘Don’t have your sweet bar or crisps or chocolate’... but allow them to have their fruit, yoghurts... and don’t narrow it down saying you can have these breads...

Interviewer: Is there anything not recommended but you should be able to bring in?

Parent 2 and 3: Pancakes! (laughter)

Parent 3: Aye, pancakes ” Focus group with parents, Medium sized urban/rural school, Co. Antrim.

“Parent 1: It makes you think, what piece of fruit am I going to put in with that very dangerous pancake! (laughter)” Focus group, small sized rural primary school, County Down.

In another focus group, parents were very vocal in their opposition to the exclusion of pancakes from the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. The vast majority (six out of seven respondents) in this focus group felt that that pancakes should be allowed under the PHA scheme, and couldn’t understand why they were disqualified from the scheme.

“Interviewer: If this was to be implemented, what would you think about it?”

Parent 1: The pancakes are an issue.

(majority in group agree)

Parent 2: If you can have potato bread or wheaten, why can’t you have pancakes?” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

Some parents also felt that fruit juices, fruit smoothies and dried fruit such as raisins should also be allowed in the scheme. However, it became apparent that parents (and some of those working in primary school and pre-school/nursery settings) were not aware of the amount of sugar contained in these items. This re-emphasises the need for information to be relayed to all stakeholders caring or working with children in regard to hidden sugars and fats in foods commonly consumed by children.

“Interviewer: Is there anything on the not recommended side that you would like to see allowed?”

Parent 1: Fruit juice, especially as my kids don’t eat all of the fruit so that would help.

Parent 2: Fruit smoothies...

Parent 3: ... I think dried fruit would be nice because the kids enjoy it and it feels like they are having a treat when really it is just fruit.” Focus group, small rural primary school, Co. Down.

Some parents were keen that any new healthy breaks scheme should promote vegetables as much as possible, rather than simply promoting fruit alone. Some of the parents in this group were concerned about the effect of the naturally occurring sugars in fruit, and the damage this could be doing to children’s dental health.

“Parent 1: The big thing for me is that I want to see more of the vegetables than the fruit.

Parent 2: Yes, like carrot sticks or something.

Parent 1: I dread to think what some of their teeth must be like eating fruit at that time of the day and then not giving them anything after it... So I think the option of vegetables would be a compromise on that.” Focus group, urban mixed schools, East Belfast, County Antrim.

“Parent 1: It seems to be quite geared towards fruit.

Parent 2: My kids love things like hummus and carrot sticks. It’s very fruit dominated.

Parent 1: And the vegetables are better for their teeth than the fruit.

Parent 3: Yes – it could be useful, but there needs to be more of a vegetable focus.” Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

10.4 Practicalities of food offered in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme

However, others pointed out that some of the foods listed in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme were impractical for schools to prepare, given the time constraints associated with break time and the kitchen resources needed to prepare some of the foods listed.

“Interviewer: Have you had any discussions... about implementing the PHA scheme?

Group leader: Not really... we don’t use any of that stuff (non-compliant foods) in here anyway...

Interviewer: Do you think it’s just easier keeping to the fruit and toast?

Group leader: Yeah... we just wouldn’t have time to do anything more.” Pre-school group leader, small sized rural pre-school, County Antrim.

Another principal re-iterated the difficulty some schools would have in implementing the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme – pointing out the time needed to prepare some of the bread products suggested under the scheme.

“I can’t see many children eating soda unless it was toasted, or pitta bread unless it was warm – to me it’s not realistic if the teachers are doing it... If you have nearly 30 children toasting it, then buttering it and time for them to eat it... it is taking time out of teaching and learning time. It’s the time factor.” Primary principal, medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh.

Another pre-leader pointed out the difficulty in trying to source some of the foods suggested by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme. She highlighted two potential problems with one of the suggestions, plain fromage frais: firstly, this was difficult to source, and secondly, children probably wouldn’t eat it. She does suggest adding fruit to the fromage frais in order to make it more appetising for children, but acknowledges that this will require extra time to do this.

“I think you would struggle to get them to eat that (plain fromage frais). I suppose you could chop fruit into it... hmmm. It’s a bit fiddly though. And you can’t even get those little individual pots of that sort of natural fromage frais to make it more appealing to them, so you would have to make it up yourself and put it into little pots for them” Pre-school leader, Small sized urban pre-school, County Down.

Some parents also pointed out the practicalities of some of the foods on offer, based on their own children’s experiences. In one focus group, parents commented on the length of time children had allocated to eat break, which meant that their choice of snack had to be something which could be consumed within a relatively short period of time. As is demonstrated in the extract below, when children were given whole pieces of fruit (although this would cut down on the preparation time, and packaging), whole fruit frequently was not eaten, especially if it had to be peeled first.

“Parent 1: Then again it’s all whole fruit... like whole oranges and bananas, so it’s hard to get it ate.

Parent 2: They will chuck half of it.

Parent 3: And then some of them can’t even peel them.

Parent 1: Oranges are a disaster for them.

Parent 2: It’s hard work.” Focus group, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

10.5 Other training needs

In addition to an inherent lack of awareness about certain nutritional issues, such as hidden sugars contained in many children’s foods as highlighted above, other training needs were also voiced during interviews with school staff.

Some principals and pre-school group leaders who were or had tried to provide break time snacks within the school raised the issue of the food hygiene regulation[†] and the necessary documentation that went alongside this. Some found negotiating this process stressful, and it was suggested that training could help to prepare schools.

“... then we were questioned about hygiene, about using different boards for different foods, it just became a minefield.” Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

[†] There are a range of general requirements set out by EC and domestic legislation relating to food law. Regulations include The Food Information (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016; The Food Safety (Information and Compositional Requirements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016; The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.

10.6 Lack of mandate

A key theme emerging from the interviews with principals and pre-school group leaders was the current lack of mandate to enforce healthy breaks policies. Although all those interviewed had a healthy breaks policy of some sort in place, without a mandate making adherence compulsory, some schools felt unable to act when parents sent in non-compliant food or drinks items. This could result in a policy which 'looked good' on paper, but in practice was unable to be enforced. In the extract below, one principal describes how having a mandate in place would have given her the backing she would have welcomed when initiating her healthy breaks policy.

"At the beginning I felt as if we were pushing forward without any clear direction, or being able to say this is DE policy, or this is the Department of Health policy... that gives you more authority to say to people..." Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Down.

This view was backed by another primary school principal who expressed his frustration at being unable to insist upon healthy foods only being consumed in his school. Although he admitted most parents were on board with the policy, he felt his 'hands were tied' when parents refused to comply with his schools' healthy breaks policies.

"I have had parents have said that their child does not eat fruit, and... other bread based products and things, and we'll suggest 'Well... could you just send in something that's not chocolate or crisps?' And a few of them have said 'Well, it's my right' and we've just backed off from those ones because we've no authority". Primary principal, medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim.

However, not only would a mandate for healthy breaks prompt parents into sending in healthier food and drinks, but it would compel schools to comply. The extract below is taken from an interview with a primary school principal, whose current breaks policy allows pupils to bring in foods that can be high in fats, salts and sugars. The principal doesn't want to restrict items that pupils can bring in, maintaining that the current policy suits most of the school community. However, she does say that if a healthy breaks mandate were introduced by DE, then the school would comply with this.

"Interviewer:... Any comments that the parents have given you, like the ones that want to make it even more restricted... would you take those on board and adapt your policy?"

Principal: We haven't. We think the policy we have keeps the majority of people content. We would only adapt it if there was something that was backed by legislation as we all have to do." Primary principal, large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone.

Chapter 11 Discussion and recommendations

Despite nearly all primary (96%) and pre-schools (99%) reporting to have a healthy breaks policy in place, implementation of these schemes varied widely. For example:

- 7% of primary and pre-school facilities respectively were either fully compliant or imposed stricter break time regulations than those outlined by the PHA scheme;
- 47% of pre-schools and 56% of primaries allowed foods that were non-complaint with the PHA recommended guidelines, such as pancakes, scones etc. However, these schools did not allow sweets, chocolates or crisps, and:
- 46% of pre-schools and 36% of primary schools allowed non-complaint foods such as pancakes and scones, as well as sweets, chocolate or crisps.

The variation highlighted above indicates a lack of regional consistency in implementation of the current PHA Healthy Break scheme. A variety of factors contribute to this variation, including limited awareness of the guideline content, poor understanding of healthy foods, lack of appropriate information and resources for stakeholders, inconsistent policy implementation within schools and the absence of a mandate or best practice guidelines for implementation and enforcement of a healthy breaks scheme.

1. PHA Healthy break scheme food recommendations

While many schools felt the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme could be implemented within their school, over a quarter of primary school principals felt the policy was too strict. One reason for this could be that items such as pancakes, flavoured fromage frais and raisins (which were commonly permitted at break time by schools at the time of the research) are not recommended in the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, due to their high sugar content.

Throughout the research, it became apparent that levels of knowledge about the sugar and fat content of various foodstuffs was quite low among those working in schools and pre-schools/ nurseries. Given the lack of published resources addressing this issue, even those principals or pre-school leaders aware of the hidden sugars in these foods felt it was difficult to relay this information to parents. Likewise, focus groups revealed parents were unsure as to why foods such as pancakes, dried fruit or Petit Filous were not considered 'healthy', and were confused as to why these were not recommended by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme.

Furthermore parents, school leaders and principals commented that some of the foods recommended in the PHA scheme, such as soda bread, pitta bread or plain fromage frais, were either not practical to serve at break, or required too much time to prepare.

Recommendations: the current list of recommended foods needs to be reviewed to include appropriate foods for the setting and time restraints of break. In addition the leaflet for parents needs to be revised to provide clear visual information for parents on the fat, salt and sugar content of various products recommended and not recommended within the scheme, and suggestions made as to suitable alternatives. Any revisions to public leaflets should be tested with parents prior to production. (Action: PHA/ Food in Schools Forum)

2. Communication with parents

Principals reported that they disseminated information about healthy breaks on a weekly basis, while others sent communications out much less frequently, ranging from once a year to a single occasion (usually when the child started school). Others simply had information relating to healthy breaks posted on the school website. However, a major theme emerging from the focus groups with parents was the lack of communication about healthy breaks policies, and healthy eating in schools in general. Few parents who took part in the research had been asked their opinion about the healthy breaks policy in their school. Indeed, some parents were unclear as to what was or was not allowed within their own school's healthy break scheme and felt it was left to them to determine what foods were 'healthy' enough to be sent into school.

Recommendation: Frequent communication is needed to raise awareness and support in implementing the recommended healthy breaks policy. Clear and frequent communication channels should be established with parents. While a revised leaflet (as recommended above) would help clarify acceptable and non-acceptable items for consumption at break, schools need to ensure this is disseminated as widely and frequently as possible amongst parents and the wider school community. (Action: Schools and pre-school/ nursery settings)

3. Discrepancy between the DE Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school and the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme

At present the school catering service is required to follow the Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school produced by the Department of Education (DE). However, the current PHA Healthy Breaks scheme is stricter than the existing standards for other food and drinks in school. Within the DE standards, items such as sweets, chocolate or crisps are not recommended, whereas pancakes, scones and dried fruit are permitted (although none of these are recommended with the PHA scheme). Schools that allow consumption of pancakes, or similar bread products and

dried fruit - but not crisps, sweets or chocolate – are not in breach of the DE Nutritional standards. This discrepancy could perhaps explain why some primary and preschools allow these latter items to be consumed at break time.

Recommendation: It is suggested that messages contained in the DE standards and guidance issued by the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme should be consistent, in order to avoid confusion. Both documents should contain the same recommendations as to the food and drinks choices recommended in schools. (Action: PHA/ Food in Schools Forum)

4. Information and direction for schools

While the majority of schools felt they implemented a healthy break policy, lack of awareness of the actual content of the recommended PHA scheme may be another plausible contributor to policy variation.

While 89% of pre-school leaders were aware of the healthy breaks leaflet designed for parents, this number fell to 74% of primary school principals. The poster, which is the only current resource for use within the school setting, was recognised by 89% of pre-school leaders, awareness of this was limited to around 6 in ten primary school principals.

The research suggests permissible foods and drinks in current healthy breaks schemes in schools rely on the discretion of the principal or indeed individual teachers' knowledge of healthy break time snacks and drinks. Currently, information included in the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack about recommended and non-recommended food and drinks items is only found in the leaflet for parents. Although the booklet 'School Food: Essential Guide on healthy breaks' is referenced in the letter issued to principals as part of the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack, a printed copy of this booklet is not included, and relies on principals actively downloading this from the internet. Moreover, information and guidance in this DE booklet is different to that provided in the leaflet for parents included as part of the PHA Healthy Breaks resource pack. Thus the scheme lacks a comprehensive list specifically designed for schools, detailing recommended foods and drinks (as well as those not recommended). This may be a contributory factor to the wide range of foods and drink currently permitted in healthy breaks policies.

All stakeholders argued that a lack of consistency renders any healthy breaks policy unworkable, suggesting a whole school approach to healthy eating is needed. It is suggested that models of best practice be considered in the implementation of a regional healthy breaks policy, and the benefits of having a consistent approach to implementation emphasised to schools.

Some schools struggled to enforce their Healthy Breaks scheme, finding it difficult to engage all parents. Some principals called for the policy to be made mandatory in order to facilitate implementation. Indeed, an independent review of school food in England has suggested that food standards tend to work only when supported by legislation; where food standards simply exist on a voluntary basis, they have less impact.¹³ A systematic review investigating the effect of regulatory action in reducing the levels of artificial trans-fatty acids in foods found that these standards were only effective when backed by a legal mandate.¹⁴

Recommendation: Consideration should be given (following consultation with schools) to making any healthy breaks policy mandatory, in the manner of the Nutritional Standards for school lunches. This would encourage schools (and parents) to adhere to the regulations. However, as a minimum, best practice guidelines should be developed for schools including:

- *a comprehensive list of what is and what is not recommended within the guidelines (and the reasons behind these recommendations) should be included in the resource pack. It is also suggested that more emphasis be placed on trying to increase children's consumption of vegetables (as well as fruit) at break. Current findings suggest most schools tend to focus on encouraging consumption of fruit as a healthy snack.*
- *In order to raise awareness and get schools to buy-in to the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme, the policy should be advertised and promoted to schools and teachers in a comprehensive manner. Information on the benefits of healthier eating, including better concentration, attainment and engagement in school, in addition to general improvements to children's overall health and wellbeing should be highlighted, and the benefits of full implementation promoted.¹⁵*
- *Best practice guidelines on consulting with parents and children regarding the introduction of any healthy breaks scheme, approaches used to maintain channels of communication.*
- *Determining who should supply foods for any healthy breaks scheme (i.e. school provision, and/or parental provision). Findings from the focus groups suggested that parents would prefer schools to supply break time snacks, for a nominal charge. While, it is recognised that many schools do not have the facilities to offer this type of service, in general parents felt this was more convenient than having to supply break themselves. Parents felt that as long as there was enough choice and the snacks provided were of a good quality, their children would be more likely to eat the healthy options on offer than they would at home. Advice should be provided to allow schools to explore the feasibility of providing break time snacks, for example through canteen facilities or local producers to ensure low cost healthy foods are available to all children.*
- *Guidance on how to monitor and enforce the recommended healthy break scheme is needed. In the quantitative analysis, it became apparent that the majority of schools who responded did not adopt a hard-line approach to the implementation or enforcement of healthy breaks policies. However, the*

qualitative research found that schools who monitored (and subsequently enforced) their healthy breaks policies, reported greater policy adherence and increased numbers of children consuming healthier snacks at break.

- *Guidance should also be given to schools as to what action to take when pupils bring in foods or drinks that do not comply with the healthy breaks policy. In a similar vein, best practice examples should also be given to schools as to what to do when pupils do not have any break time snack.*
- *Alternatives to food-based rewards should be explored within schools and pre-school facilities. In particular, the use of sweets, chocolate or other foods high in fat, salt or sugar to reward pupils for healthy eating should cease, as the research suggests this sends mixed messages regarding healthy eating practices to children. (Action: PHA/ Food in Schools Forum)*

5. Whole school approach

While a whole school approach was viewed as fundamental to the effective implementation of healthy breaks policies, those who took part in the research reported a fragmented and inconsistent approach within some schools and pre-school facilities. Parents reported that teachers' attitudes to the implementation and enforcement of healthy breaks varied substantially; for example, those with multiple children within the same school noted variation in the foods and drinks allowed from year to year depending on the class teacher.

Recommendation: Schools and pre-school/ nursery settings need to ensure all staff in the school are knowledgeable and are fully implementing the healthy breaks policy and best practice guidelines consistently. (Action: Schools and pre-school/ nursery settings)

6. Consistency in healthy eating messages throughout the school day

While this research has focused on healthy breaks the issue of lunch boxes was raised by school and parents. Throughout the research both parents and principals commented on the lack of nutritious food in lunch boxes, commenting on the number of items high in sugars, fats and salt. Indeed, other research in the area has highlighted that few packed lunches meet the school meal standards. A recent survey of children's packed lunches in the UK found that 1.6% of packed lunches met all the food based standards for school meals in England.¹⁶

Not only is this detrimental to children's health, but the research suggests it also contributes to a lack of consistency in implementing healthy breaks policies and 'healthy eating' messages.

Recommendation: It is suggested that further research is carried out examining attitudes towards implementing a healthy lunch box policy in schools. (Action: PHA/ Food in Schools Forum)

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Pre-school questionnaire

Section 1 Break time policy

1. Does your pre-school setting^s operate a Healthy Breaks policy?

Yes

No Please go to Question 5

Don't know Please go to Question 5

2. How long have you been implementing a Healthy Breaks policy?

Less than a year

About a year

About 2 – 5 years

More than 5 years

3. And how do you promote your Healthy Breaks policy? Please answer for each row.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Talks to children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talks/ information given to teachers/staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with the Pre-school Council or Nutritional Action Group (if one exists)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters/ promotional materials sent home to parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promoted via your setting's website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promoted in your setting's newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Posters displayed in your setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify			

4. a) Does your Healthy Breaks policy apply to any of the following? Please answer for each row.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Food pupils bring into your setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food that is sold or provided by your setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drinks that pupils bring into your setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drinks that are sold or provided by your setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

^s "Pre-school setting" includes nursery schools, pre-school centres and playgroups

b) What happens if children bring in food or drinks which are not compliant with your Healthy Breaks policy? Please answer for each row.

	Always	Sometimes	No	Don't know
Noncompliant food/ drinks are confiscated and not returned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Noncompliant food/ drinks are confiscated but returned at the end of the day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents notified and asked to send in alternative break time options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We do not take any action	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify				

5. Can you tell us if the following foods are either sold or provided by your setting at break time?

Please answer for each row.

	Never	Rarely (e.g. fundraising days)	Sometimes (e.g. birthdays, Treat Days)	Most of the time	Don't know
Sweets or chocolate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bread, bagels, crackers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pancakes, scones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Croissants, Danish pastries, cakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crisps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cereal bars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fresh fruit (e.g. apples) or fruit tinned in juice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit tinned in syrup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vegetables (e.g. carrot sticks)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Natural yoghurt or fromage frais	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plain breakfast cereals (e.g. Weetabix, Cornflakes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sugary breakfast cereals (e.g. Coco pops, Cheerios)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Can you tell us if children are allowed to bring the following foods into your setting to consume at break time? Please answer for each row.

	Never	Rarely (e.g. fundraising days)	Sometimes (e.g. birthdays, Treat Days)	Most of the time	Don't know
Sweets or chocolate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bread, bagels, crackers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pancakes, scones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Croissants, Danish pastries, cakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crisps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cereal bars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fresh fruit (e.g. apples) or fruit tinned in juice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit tinned in syrup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vegetables (e.g. carrot sticks)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Natural yoghurt or fromage frais	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plain breakfast cereals (e.g. Weetabix, Cornflakes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sugary breakfast cereals (e.g. Coco pops, Cheerios)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Can you tell us if the following drinks are either sold or provided by your setting at break time? Please answer for each row.

	Never	Rarely (e.g. fundraising days)	Sometimes (e.g. birthdays, Treat Days)	Most of the time	Don't know
Fresh drinking water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Still bottled water (unflavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sparkling bottled water (unflavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Still Bottled water (flavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sparkling Bottled water (flavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pure fruit juices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fizzy drinks (e.g. Coke, Fanta)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diet fizzy drinks (e.g. diet Coke)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports drinks (e.g. Lucozade Sport)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smoothies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Milk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-packaged fruit squash (e.g. Fruit shoot)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dilute juice made up on premises (e.g. Robinson's)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Can you tell us if children are allowed **to bring the following drinks into your setting to consume at break time?** Please answer for each row.

	Never	Rarely (e.g. fundraising days)	Sometimes (e.g. birthdays, Treat Days)	Most of the time	Don't know
Fresh drinking water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Still bottled water (unflavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sparkling bottled water (unflavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Still Bottled water (flavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sparkling Bottled water (flavoured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pure fruit juices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fizzy drinks (e.g. Coke, Fanta)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diet fizzy drinks (e.g. diet Coke)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports drinks (e.g. Lucozade Sport)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smoothies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Milk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-packaged fruit squash (e.g. Fruit shoot)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dilute juice made up on premises (e.g. Robinson's)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. The next questions ask for your opinion and also what **you** think other people in your setting feel about implementing a Healthy Breaks policy. Please circle one response for each question, where 1 = not important and 5= very important.

	Not important	1	2	3	4	Very important	5
How important do <u>you</u> think it is that your pre-school has a Healthy Breaks policy?	1	2	3	4	5		
How important do your <u>Board of Governors/Management Committee</u> think a Healthy Breaks policy is for your setting?	1	2	3	4	5		
How important do <u>parents</u> think it is that the pre-school has a Healthy Breaks policy?	1	2	3	4	5		
How important do <u>your staff</u> think it is that the setting has a Healthy Breaks policy?	1	2	3	4	5		
How important do your pre-school <u>children</u> feel it is to have a Healthy Breaks policy?	1	2	3	4	5		

Section 2 Your thoughts on the PHA Healthy Breaks Resource

10. Did you receive a Healthy Breaks For Schools resource pack produced by the Public Health Agency?

Yes No Please go to question 13 Don't know Please go to question 13

11. If you did receive the PHA Healthy Breaks for Schools resource, did you use it?

Yes No, but will in the future Please go to question 13 No, and don't intend to Please go to Q 13

12. If you did use the PHA Healthy Breaks for Schools resource, how did you use it? Please answer for each row.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Distributed the information to staff in your setting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distributed the information to parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used <u>all</u> of the information to implement a Healthy Breaks scheme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used <u>part</u> of the information to implement a Healthy Breaks scheme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please tell us			



13. Have you seen this poster?

Yes No Please go to question 15



14. Is this poster displayed in your setting? Please tick all that apply

No Yes, in reception area
 Yes, in school corridors Yes, in classroom
 Yes, in dining hall Yes, somewhere else



Healthy breaks for
pre-school children
A guide for parents



15. Have you seen this leaflet?

Yes No Please go to question 18

16. Was it distributed to parents?

Yes No Don't know

17. How useful was the leaflet?

Very useful Quite useful Not useful Don't know

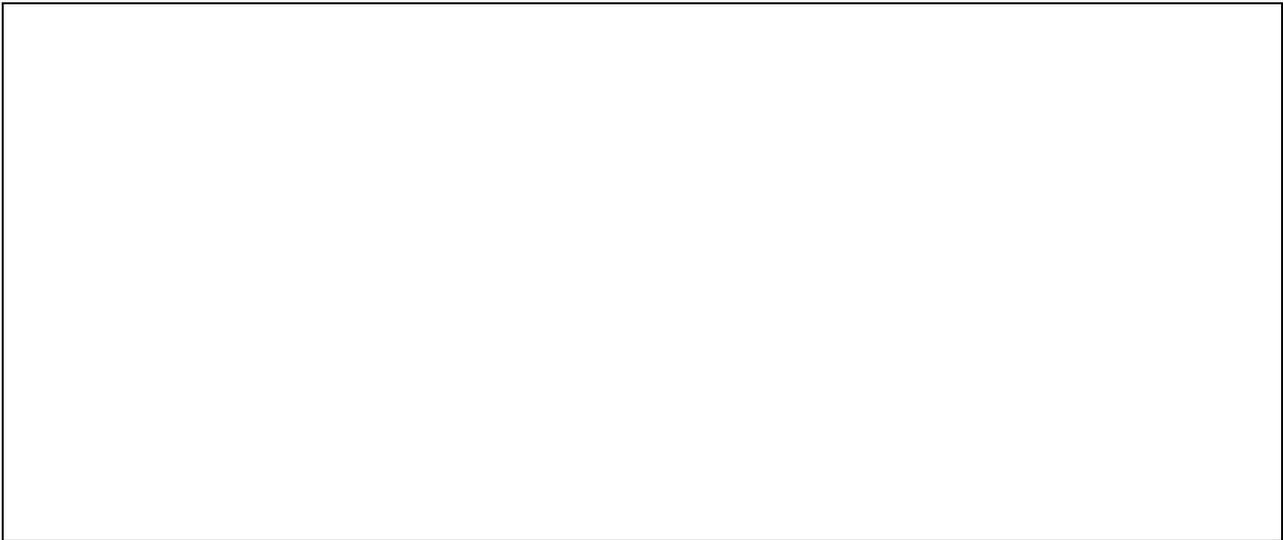
18. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Please answer for each row.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Pre-schools/ play groups should only provide children with healthy snacks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-schools/ play groups should ban chocolate bars, biscuits, sweets, crisps, cakes etc. being brought into school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-schools/ play groups should ban all diet and sugary fizzy drinks being brought into school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents need to encourage healthy eating by only sending healthy food into pre-school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. The pre-school PHA Healthy Breaks scheme recommends only fresh fruit and vegetables, low sugar bread-based snacks, low sugar cereals, plain yoghurt, milk and water. Do you think this scheme would be...

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Easy to implement in your setting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too strict to implement in your setting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficult to implement due to pressure from <u>staff</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficult to implement due to pressure from <u>children</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficult to implement due to pressure from <u>parents</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. And finally, is there anything else that would help you implement a healthy breaks policy in your setting?



Very many thanks for completing this questionnaire. Please return it in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided.

Thank you for your help!

Appendix 2 Interview schedule for principals and pre-school/ nursery group leaders

Moderator introduction

- INTRODUCE SELF, AND ROLE.
- REASSURE RESPONDENT THAT THERE IS NO RIGHT AND WRONG ANSWERS.
- EXPLAIN HOW RESPONSES ARE BEING RECORDED, AND CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES.

Intro: Attitudes to healthy breaks

- Could you tell me what you think about schools restricting various foods and drinks at break time?

Healthy break scheme overview

- Do you operate a Healthy Breaks Policy? How long have you had a scheme?
- Is food provided by school or from brought in from home/ outside school.
- And what does your schools scheme involve briefly? ie what food (s) / drink (s) allowed / not allowed.
- Is Healthy Breaks implemented in the same way throughout the school?
- If not, explore why only implemented within some year groups.

Initial development

- How was the healthy breaks scheme initially developed in your school?
Probe: evolved from any other programme / initiative e.g. HAZ or SureStart, developed by School Nutrition Action group (SNAG), school council
- Who was involved in this development –staff, principal, external partners (who), parents, children, Board of Governors.
- Do you think the level of support you received has aided the implementation of the scheme in your school? Tell me how?

Scheme management and implementation

- Could you tell me who if anyone, is responsible for overseeing the Healthy Breaks scheme in your school?
- Could you tell me how the scheme is implemented in your school?

- Who is involved in implementing the scheme in your school
Probe: principal, specified teacher, all teachers.
- Are teachers encouraged to remind pupils about the healthy breaks scheme?
- Is this a regular occurrence throughout the year or adhoc?
Probe: if adhoc if this is dependent on compliance
- Are pupils informed about what they can and can't bring in for break?
- Do you feel the pupils are supportive of the scheme? Why?
- How has the Healthy Breaks scheme been advertised to parents?
Probe: is this on a regular basis to all parents or just to new parents?
- Is it advertised that certain foods/ drinks are allowed or not allowed or simply as recommended foods.
- Are reminders given throughout the year to parents to re-enforce Healthy Breaks and Healthy Eating?
- Do you feel parents are supportive of the scheme? Why?
- Have you adjusted your scheme as a result of what parents have said/fed-back to you?
Probe: How was scheme adjusted and why?

Scheme enforcement

- How strict is the scheme in your school? Why?
- What happens when children bring in food they shouldn't?

Factors to success

- Do you think your scheme is effective? Tell me why?
- What you do think has made your scheme a success?

Barriers to implementation

- Was there any problems implementing the Healthy Breaks policy?
- If yes, explore further any problems mentioned e.g. non-compliance from staff , parents, pupils? - any suggestions for how these could be addressed.
Probe: any specific food(s), drink(s) that are an issue – dealt with in class or whole school reminder approach

PHA Healthy Breaks scheme

INTERVIEWER TO DESCRIBE PHA SCHEME

- Have you heard of this Healthy Breaks scheme?
- Have you seen this resource?
- Do you use this within your school?

Those not implementing PHA Healthy Breaks scheme	Those implementing PHA Healthy Breaks scheme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this scheme? Probe – too strict, not strict enough, practical or not • Are there specific elements of this scheme that you do not think you could implement? • Could you implement this scheme within your school? Why, why not? • Do you think you would be able to implement this scheme if you had additional support? Probe: what additional support would you need? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you send this leaflet home to new pupils? • What do you think about this scheme? Probe – too strict, not strict enough, practical or not • Have you had any discussions within the school or with parents about implementing this scheme? • Have you adjusted your Healthy Breaks policy (if any) to be in accordance with this guide. • Are there specific elements of this scheme that you do not think you could implement? • Could you implement this scheme within your school? Why, why not? • Do you think you would be able to implement this scheme if you had additional support? Probe: what additional support would you need?

Closing

- Anything else you want to tell me about healthy breaks or other elements of food in schools?

THANKS AND CLOSE

Appendix 3: Overview of schools and pre-school/ nurseries where principals or group leaders participated in interviews.

School location / type	Management type	Food brought from food/ purchased or provided in school	Treats allowed (yes or no) and how regularly	Foods allowed
Large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone	Catholic maintained	P1-P2: School provides break. P3-P7: Break brought from home, and supplied by school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly treat. Sweets used as incentive for good behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit, wheaten bread, yoghurt, crackers, cheese, yoghurts, breadsticks, pancakes Milk and water only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.
Small sized rural primary school, County Down	Catholic maintained	Break brought from home.	Not mentioned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit and vegetables only. Milk and water only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.
Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim	Catholic maintained	Break brought from home, and also supplied by school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friday treat Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) Random open tuck shop days. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit, scones and pancakes allowed, but enforcement varies. Milk and water only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.
Small sized rural pre-school, County Antrim	Voluntary	Break provided by pre-school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birthday treats Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toast, fresh fruit, cereal. Milk and water only.
Large sized rural primary school, County Down	Controlled	Break brought from home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birthday treats Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) Sweets used as incentive for good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit and bread based products, including pancakes Sweets, chocolate and crisps are discouraged, but enforcement varies. Water or milk only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.

School location / type	Management type	Food brought from food/ purchased or provided in school	Treats allowed (yes or no) and how regularly	Foods allowed
			behaviour.	
Medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh	Controlled	Break brought from home, and also supplied by school.	Infrequent treat days (e.g. school trip)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagels, muffins, wheaten bread, fresh fruit, crackers, cheeses, and yoghurt. Designated fruit only two days a week. • Healthy eating rules also apply at lunch time
Small sized rural primary school, Country Tyrone	Controlled	School supplies break.	Infrequent treats mentioned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit, toast. Special arrangements for P1 to include fruit, toast, pancakes, cereal, crackers. • Can eat/ drink whatever they want at lunchtime.
Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim (Medium)	Controlled	Break brought from home, and also supplied by school.	Friday treat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit, vegetables, pancakes, cheese and yoghurts (including yoghurts high in sugar), processed fruit bars, dried fruit., but enforcement varies • Milk or water, plus dilute juice for older pupils. • Can eat/ drink whatever they want at lunchtime.
Medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim	Controlled	School supplies break.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday treat: cheese, plain biscuits and yoghurts. • Monthly treat: a custard cream or bourbon biscuit • Birthday treats mentioned (but 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit only (Monday to Thursday). • Water to drink.

School location / type	Management type	Food brought from food/ purchased or provided in school	Treats allowed (yes or no) and how regularly	Foods allowed
			phasing these out).	
Small sized urban pre-school, County Antrim	Voluntary	Pre-school provides break.	Birthdays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit, vegetables, pancakes, muffins, cheese and yoghurts, dried fruit. • Milk or water only.
Small sized urban pre-school, County Down	Voluntary	Pre-school provides break.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birthdays • Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit, vegetables, brioche, pancakes, veda, petit filous. • Milk, water, dilute juice on treat days.

Appendix 4 Parents focus group topic guide

Warm up (5 mins)

- Introduce research and self
- Explain how focus groups work – no right or wrong answers etc.
- Explain use of audio recorder/video recorder
- Ask participants not to talk over the top of each other, makes it hard to make out what people are saying!
- Explain confidentiality and reporting procedures
 - Ask participants to introduce themselves – first name, who lives with them at home (age and gender of children),

Current behaviours (10-15 minutes)

1. **What do your children usually have to eat for school break? Anything else?**
2. **Who provides the food they eat for break?**
 - PROBE: E.g. parent, provided by the school, purchased in school, purchased on way to school, or combination of people
 - IF COMBINATION OF PROVIDERS, PROBE for different sources of healthier and unhealthier foods.
3. **And what do they have to drink for school break? Would they ever have anything else?**
4. **And can I ask who provides the drinks your children have for break?**
 - PROBE: E.g. parent, provided by the school, purchased in school, purchased on way to school, or combination of people.
 - IF COMBINATION OF PROVIDERS, PROBE for different sources of healthy and unhealthier drinks.

General awareness of current school Break Policy (30 minutes)

5. **Does your school have rules about the types of food and drinks allowed for break?**

IF YES	IF NO
6. Does your school relax the rules about the types of food and drinks pupils are allowed on certain days or special occasions? PROBE: e.g 'Treat' Fridays, birthdays,	6. Would you support your school if they <u>did</u> put rules in place about the types of foods and drinks pupils could have at break? PROBE: Why/Why not?

Easter etc.	
<p>7. What food or drinks are <u>not</u> allowed for break?</p> <p>PROBE: SUGARY DRINKS, DIET DRINKS, CHOCOLATE, CRISPS, SWEETS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe: Are these rules or recommendations? • Probe: are these rules/ or recommendations the same for all year groups in the school 	<p>7. If the school was to make rules about what pupils could have for break, what kind of foods and drinks should NOT be allowed?</p> <p>PROBE: SUGARY DRINKS, DIET DRINKS, CHOCOLATE, CRISPS, SWEETS</p>
<p>8. What foods or drinks are allowed for break?</p>	<p>9. What kind of foods and drinks should be allowed?</p>
<p>10. For those parents who are able to provide snacks at break time- Did the school give you suggestions about the types of food and drinks to give your child for break?</p> <p>PROBE: were these helpful?</p> <p>PROBE: What suggestions would you have liked?</p>	<p>9. Would you want suggestions for food and drinks for break?</p>
<p>11. How did you become aware of the school's break time rules ?</p> <p>PROBE: e.g. posters about the scheme/ Leaflets or other information?</p> <p>Probe: are you given reminders about the healthy break schemes? If yes how often?</p>	
<p>12. For those parents who are able to provide snacks at break time What happens when/if your child comes to school with food/drink that is not</p>	<p>12. What do you think should happen if pupils bring in food and drinks that are not allowed?</p>

<p>recommended by the school for break?</p> <p>PROBE: WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD HAPPEN?</p>	
<p>13. What are your views on the school's rules about food and drink for break?</p> <p>PROBE: Do you support/disagree with it – why?</p> <p>Probe: acceptability and practicality of these rules?</p> <p>Probe: Any differences between views on foods and drinks and why these exist?</p> <p>What are the positive / negatives about the school providing foods.</p>	
<p>14. What do your child(ren) think of the rules about the food and drinks allowed within their school?</p>	
<p>15. Has the school asked for your views on this scheme?</p>	

16. What type of impact, if any, does your schools breaks scheme have on you as a parent?

17. What type of impact, if any, does your schools breaks scheme have on your child(ren)?

Probe: at home

Probe: at school

Views on PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme (5 minutes)

18. Have you received this leaflet from the school? **SHOW LEAFLET**

If yes, what your views on the leaflet?

Direct parents' attention to the foods/visual aids used to display the foods included in the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme.

Content and implementation of Healthy Breaks (40 minutes)

19. **READ OUT FOODS ALLOWED AND NOT ALLOWED ON PHA HEALTHY BREAKS SCHEME** What do you think about the food allowed on the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme?

PROBE: What are your thoughts on the range of foods included in the scheme - Too strict/ not strict enough?

20. Are there any foods included within the scheme that you think should be removed?
21. Are there any other foods you think should be considered for inclusion in the scheme?
22. What do you think about the food that is not allowed on the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme?

PROBE: Too strict/ not strict enough?

23. Only for those parents who are able to provide snacks at break time - How likely is it that you would send in FOODS for break that are included in the healthy breaks scheme? Why?

READ OUT DRINKS ALLOWED AND NOT ALLOWED ON PHA HEALTHY BREAKS SCHEME

24. What do you think about the drinks allowed on the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme?

PROBE: What are your thoughts on the range of drinks included in the scheme - Too strict/ not strict enough?

25. Are there any other drinks you think should be ALLOWED in the scheme?
26. What do you think about the drinks that are not allowed on the PHA Healthy Breaks Scheme?

PROBE: Too strict/ not strict enough?

27. Only for those parents who are able to provide snacks at break time How likely is it that you would send in DRINKS for break that are included in the healthy breaks scheme? Why?

28. Do you think there should be any flexibility in how the healthy breaks scheme is run?

PROBE: treat days/ birthday etc.

29. What type of impact, if any, do you think the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme could have on you as a parent?

30. What type of impact, if any, do you think the PHA Healthy Breaks scheme could have on your child(ren)?

Probe: at home

Probe: at school

30. What do you think would help the scheme run more smoothly?

PROBE: is there anything you think, as a parent, you would need e.g. more ideas for break time snacks and drinks;

PROBE: How should this information be delivered? E.g. leaflets/ anything else, school talks,

Closing (5 mins)

31. Any further comments or suggestions?

THANK AND CLOSE

Appendix 5: Overview of schools and pre-schools/ nurseries where parents participated in focus groups.

School location / type	Management type	Class representation	Number of attendees	Food brought from food/ purchased or provided in school	Treats allowed (yes or no) and how regularly	Foods allowed
Large sized rural primary school, County Tyrone	Catholic maintained	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6 and P7	8	P1-P2: School provides break. P3-P7: Break brought from home, and supplied by school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly treat. Sweets used as incentive for good behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit, wheaten bread, yoghurt, crackers, cheese, yoghurts, breadsticks, pancakes Milk and water only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.
Small sized rural primary school, County Down	Catholic maintained	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7	6	Break brought from home.	Not mentioned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit and vegetables only. Milk and water only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.
Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim	Catholic maintained	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7	7	Break brought from home, and also supplied by school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friday treat Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) Random open tuck shop days. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit, scones and pancakes allowed, but enforcement varies. Milk and water only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.
Small sized rural pre-school, County Antrim	Voluntary	Pre-school	8	Break provided by pre-school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birthday treats Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toast, fresh fruit, cereal. Milk and water only.
Large sized rural primary school, County Down	Controlled	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6 and P7	8	Break brought from home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birthday treats Special days (e.g. Christmas, Easter etc.) Sweets used as incentive for good behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh fruit and bread based products, including pancakes Sweets, chocolate and crisps are discouraged, but enforcement varies. Water or milk only. Can eat whatever they want at lunchtime.

School location / type	Management type	Class representation	Number of attendees	Food brought from food/ purchased or provided in school	Treats allowed (yes or no) and how regularly	Foods allowed
Medium sized rural primary school, County Fermanagh	Controlled	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6 and P7	5	Break brought from home, and also supplied by school.	Infrequent treat days (e.g. school trip)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagels, muffins, wheaten bread, fresh fruit, crackers, cheeses, and yoghurt. Designated fruit only two days a week. • Healthy eating rules also apply at lunch time
Small sized rural primary school, Country Tyrone	Controlled	P1, P2, P4, P5 and P6	4	School supplies break.	Infrequent treats mentioned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit, toast. Special arrangements for P1 to include fruit, toast, pancakes, cereal, crackers. • Can eat/ drink whatever they want at lunchtime.
Medium sized urban/rural primary school, County Antrim (Medium)	Controlled	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7	7	Break brought from home, and also supplied by school.	Friday treat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit, vegetables, pancakes, cheese and yoghurts (including yoghurts high in sugar), processed fruit bars, dried fruit., but enforcement varies • Milk or water, plus dilute juice for older pupils. • Can eat/ drink whatever they want at lunchtime.
Medium sized urban primary school, County Antrim	Controlled	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and P7	8	School provides break.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday treat: cheese, plain biscuits and yoghurts. • Monthly treat: a custard cream or bourbon biscuit • Birthday treats mentioned (but phasing these out). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit only (Monday to Thursday). • Water to drink.

School location / type	Management type	Class representation	Number of attendees	Food brought from food/ purchased or provided in school	Treats allowed (yes or no) and how regularly	Foods allowed
Small sized urban pre-school, County Antrim	Voluntary	Pre-school	6	Pre-school provides break.	Birthdays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit, vegetables, pancakes, muffins, cheese and yoghurts, dried fruit. • Milk or water only.
Mixed schools urban, East Belfast, County Antrim. (6 schools represented)	Mixed	P1, P2, P3, P4 and P6	7	Mixture of different sources within the group	Not asked.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some from schools operating a strictly implemented fruit only policy, to those from schools allowing jam and pancakes on a regular basis for break. • Blanket ban on fizzy drinks at break time. • Can eat/ drink whatever they want at lunchtime (all).
Mixed schools urban, West Belfast, County Antrim. (5 schools represented)	Mixed	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6 and P7	9	Mixture of different sources within the group	Frequency of treat varies – both within the group and also within schools. Largely dependent on teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some from schools operating a strictly implemented fruit only policy, to those from schools allowing jam or chocolate spread and pancakes on a regular basis for break. • Can eat/ drink whatever they want at lunchtime (all).

Appendix 6

Table 11 Break time snacks EITHER provided by pre-schools or brought in by children (as reported by pre-school leaders).

	FOODS EITHER SOLD/ PROVIDED BY THE PRE-SCHOOL OR THAT CHILDREN ARE ALLOWED TO BRING IN FOR BREAK (N=310) ^t					
	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Missing %
Sweets or chocolate	33	29	37	1	-	1
Crisps	41	29	29	1	-	1
Pancakes, scones	10	12	31	47	-	1
Croissants, Danishes, cakes	58	18	21	1	-	1
Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	77	13	8	1	-	1
Cereal bars	86	4	4	6	-	1
Fruit in syrup	82	5	5	6	1	2
Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	38	9	26	26	-	1
Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	58	12	14	13	1	2
Sugary breakfast cereals	85	7	4	2	1	2
Bread, bagels or crackers	2	-	12	86	-	-
Fresh or fruit tinned in juice	4	-	1	94	1	-
Vegetables	8	5	26	61	-	1
Natural yogurt or fromage frais	31	8	23	38	-	-
Cheese	6	3	26	64	1	-
Plain breakfast cereals	30	6	20	43	-	1

^t Those who didn't answer all of the items in Q5 and all of the items in Q6 have been removed from the analysis, leaving an overall base of 310

Table 12 Break time snacks EITHER provided by primary schools or brought in by children (as reported by principals).

	FOODS EITHER SOLD/ PROVIDED BY SCHOOL OR THAT PUPILS ARE ALLOWED TO BRING IN FOR BREAK (N=407) ^u					
	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Missing %
Sweets or chocolate	45	25	26	3	7	0.2
Crisps	55	18	18	8	1	0.5
Pancakes, scones	19	6	23	51	1	0.7
Croissants, Danishes, cakes	55	19	17	8	1	0.5
Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	70	12	10	6	1	0.5
Cereal bars	40	11	23	27	1	0.2
Fruit in syrup	52	11	12	19	5	1
Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	14	3	16	65	2	.5
Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	30	6	16	46	2	.2
Sugary breakfast cereals	75	7	8	7	3	.7
Bread, bagels or crackers	16	4	14	66	1	0.2
Fresh or fruit tinned in juice	2	1	3	93	1	0.2
Vegetables	6	2	9	81	1	.5
Natural yogurt or fromage frais	21	4	12	61	2	.2
Cheese	23	4	16	55	2	.2
Plain breakfast cereals	48	5	10	34	3	.2

^u Those who didn't answer all of the items in Q5 and all of the items in Q6 have been removed from the analysis, leaving an overall base of 407

Table 13 Drinks either sold/ provided by pre-schools or that children are allowed to bring in in pre-schools (as reported by pre-school leaders).

	DRINKS EITHER SOLD/ PROVIDED BY SCHOOL OR THAT PUPILS ARE ALLOWED TO BRING IN FOR BREAK (N=307) ^y					
	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Missing %
Fresh drinking water	1	-	-	99	-	-
Still bottled water (unflavoured)	79	7	6	8	-	3
Sparkling bottled water (unflavoured)	94	3	-	-	-	3
Still bottled water (flavoured)	96	3	-	1	-	3
Sparkling bottled water (flavoured)	93	3	-	1	-	3
Pure fruit juices	82	8	7	1	-	2
Fizzy drinks	95	1	-	-	-	3
Fizzy diet drinks	96	1	-	-	-	3
Sports drinks	96	1	-	-	-	3
Smoothies	67	11	15	2	-	4
Milk	2	1	-	96	-	1
Pre-packaged fruit squash	77	11	9	1	-	3
Dilute juice made up on premises	24	32	40	1	-	3

^y Those who didn't answer all of the items in Q7 and all of the items in Q8 have been removed from the analysis, as were all of those who selected the option for 'never' for all responses in Q7 and Q8, leaving an overall base of 307 pre-schools for analysis.

Table 14 Primary schools providing OR allowing pupils to bring in different drinks for break time (as reported by principals).

	FOODS EITHER SOLD/ PROVIDED BY SCHOOL OR THAT PUPILS ARE ALLOWED TO BRING IN FOR BREAK (N=408) ^w					
	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Missing %
Fresh drinking water	1	-	-	99	-	-
Still bottled water (unflavoured)	9	1	3	87	-	-
Sparkling bottled water (unflavoured)	42	7	6	43	2	-
Still bottled water (flavoured)	51	9	10	30	1	-
Sparkling bottled water (flavoured)	60	8	7	22	2	1
Pure fruit juices	38	9	15	37	1	1
Fizzy drinks	88	8	3	1	-	1
Fizzy diet drinks	88	8	3	1	-	1
Sports drinks	90	5	3	2	1	1
Smoothies	50	9	15	24	1	1
Milk	5	1	3	91	-	-
Pre-packaged fruit squash	51	7	18	23	1	1
Dilute juice made up on premises	43	11	29	17	1	-

^w Those who didn't answer all of the items in Q7 and all of the items in Q8 have been removed from the analysis, as were all of those who selected the option for 'never' for all responses in Q7 and Q8, leaving an overall base of 408.

Table 15 Foods offered by schools supplying break time snacks, and foods that schools allowed to be brought in for break time consumption.

	FOODS SOLD/ PROVIDED BY SCHOOLS (N=336) ^x						FOODS BROUGHT INTO SCHOOLS (N=390) ^y					
	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Missing %	Never %	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Most of the time %	Don't know %	Missing %
Sweets or chocolate	54	30	16	-	-	2	59	19	19	4	1	2
Crisps	69	19	11	-	-	3	63	13	15	8	-	2
Fruit yoghurts/ luxury yoghurts	67	5	13	13	2	4	31	6	15	47	1	2
Pancakes, scones	39	13	27	21	-	5	25	5	19	50	1	2
Croissants, danishes, cakes	73	17	10	-	-	3	59	17	14	9	1	3
Jam, chocolate spread, peanut butter	86	7	7	1	-	3	72	13	8	6	1	4
Cereal bars	86	6	5	3	-	4	38	12	24	26	-	2
Fruit in syrup	86	6	5	2	2	3	53	12	11	20	4	3
Dried fruit (e.g. raisins)	66	8	14	11	1	3	12	3	16	67	1	1
Sugary breakfast cereals	85	5	6	3	1	5	82	6	5	6	2	3
Fresh or fruit tinned in juice	13	4	11	72	-	1	3	1	5	90	-	1
Vegetables	46	7	19	28	1	3	7	2	10	82	-	1
Bread, bagels or crackers	33	7	17	42	-	3	19	3	16	61	1	2
Natural yogurt or fromage frais	60	7	12	19	2	4	22	4	13	61	1	2
Cheese	57	7	16	18	2	2	25	4	14	57	1	2
Plain breakfast cereals	61	2	11	26	1	3	62	7	7	22	3	2

^x Those who indicated that they 'never' provided any of the foods listed in the table have been removed from analysis, as were those who did not answer any of the questions in the section. The proportion of 'missing' respondent in the grey banded column are those who did not provide a response to that particular food item.

^y Those who indicated that they 'never' provided any of the food from the list in the table have been removed from analysis, as were those who did not answer any of the questions in the section. The proportion of 'missing' respondent in the grey banded column are those who did not provide a response to that particular food item.