



**An Bille um Chaighdeáin Chothaitheacha le haghaidh
Béilí Scoile, 2026**
School Meals Nutritional Standards Bill 2026

Meabhrán Míniúcháin
Explanatory Memorandum



**AN BILLE UM CHAIGHDEÁIN CHOTHAITHEACHA LE
hAGHAIDH BÉILÍ SCOILE, 2026
SCHOOL MEALS NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS BILL 2026**

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Purpose of the Bill

The purpose of this Bill is to provide a statutory framework for the establishment of nutritional standards and related requirements for school meals provided under State or local authority funded school meal schemes. The Bill seeks to place the development of nutritional standards on a legislative footing by requiring the Minister for Health to make regulations governing matters such as portion sizes, food groups, preparation methods, permitted drinks and the provision of vegetarian alternatives. The Bill further provides for the enforcement of such standards by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and promotes a healthy food environment within schools through amendment of the Education Act 1998.

Background

The School Meals Programme has expanded significantly in recent years and now provides hot school meals to pupils across primary schools throughout the State. Budget 2026 provides almost €300 million for school meals and supports the completion of the roll-out of hot school meals to all primary schools. Existing nutritional standards have been developed administratively by Healthy Ireland, the Department of Health, safefood and the Health Service Executive and are currently implemented through programme guidance and service level arrangements.

Current standards provide for age-appropriate portion sizes and require meals to include prescribed servings from key food groups while limiting processed foods, salt, confectionery and sugar-sweetened drinks. Comparative research demonstrates that several jurisdictions provide statutory or regulatory nutritional frameworks for school meals. The Bill seeks to establish a legislative basis for nutritional standards in Ireland and to promote healthy dietary practices and food environments within schools.

Provisions of the Bill

Section 1 provides three definitions for the purposes of the Act, namely “local authority”, “Minister” and “school meals”. The term “school meals” is defined to cover schemes or programmes providing State or local authority funding to schools for the provision of meals to children.

Section 2 requires the Minister for Health, within 12 months of the coming into operation of the Act, to make regulations providing for nutritional standards and related requirements for school meals. It sets

out a non-exhaustive list of matters which may be included in such regulations and requires the Minister to consult certain parties and have regard to certain matters. It also provides for the enforcement of such regulations by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and/or an official agency, pursuant to the enforcement provisions of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 1998.

Section 3 amends section 9 of the Education Act 1998 to make it a function of a school to promote a healthy life and healthy food environment for students.

Section 4 contains citation and commencement provisions.

*Jen Cummins, TD,
Meitheamh, 2026.*

