Our Lady of Good Counsel School

Coeliac Disease & Gluten-Free Safety Policy

Policy Title: Coeliac Disease & Gluten-Free Safety Policy
Applies To: All staff, volunteers, students, visitors, and contractors

Ratified by the Board on 08/06/2026.

Chairperson: Billy Murphy

Principal: Aisling Power.

Review Date: Annually or as required

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1. Rationale

Our Lady of Good Counsel School is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all pupils, including pupils diagnosed with Coeliac Disease or those requiring a strict gluten-free diet for medical reasons.

Many pupils in a special school setting may have communication difficulties, cognitive delays, sensory needs, impulsivity, or reduced awareness of risk. These factors increase the risk of accidental gluten exposure and contamination.

This policy aims to minimise risk, promote awareness, and ensure all staff understand their responsibilities in maintaining pupil safety.

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2. Definition of Coeliac Disease

Coeliac Disease is a serious autoimmune condition where eating gluten damages the small intestine. Gluten is found in wheat, barley, rye, and foods contaminated by these products.

Even small amounts of gluten or cross-contamination can cause significant illness and long-term health consequences.

Long-Term Health Consequences

Coeliac Disease is a lifelong autoimmune condition. Even small amounts of gluten can trigger an immune response that damages the small intestine.

Long-term exposure to gluten can lead to serious health consequences, including:

- Nutrient deficiencies (iron, folate, B12, calcium, vitamin D) due to impaired absorption
- Extreme fatigue and low energy levels
- Unexplained weight loss or poor growth in children
- Anaemia
- Osteopenia or osteoporosis
- Fertility issues
- Increased risk of other autoimmune conditions
- Delayed puberty
- Neurological symptoms such as headaches, brain fog, or peripheral neuropathy

These risks highlight the importance of strict gluten avoidance at all times.

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3. Aims of This Policy

The school aims to:

- Protect pupils with Coeliac Disease from gluten exposure
- Reduce the risk of cross-contamination
- Ensure all staff understand the seriousness of Coeliac Disease
- Promote safe food handling practices
- Support pupils who may not understand or communicate dietary risk
- Ensure clear procedures are followed in the event of accidental gluten ingestion

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4. Responsibilities

Principal

The Principal will ensure:

- Appropriate staff training and awareness
- Safe food procedures are implemented
- Relevant pupil dietary information is shared appropriately with staff
- Risk assessments are completed where necessary

Staff

All staff must:

- Treat Coeliac Disease as a serious medical condition
- Follow strict gluten-free safety procedures
- Prevent food sharing between pupils
- Supervise pupils appropriately during meals, cooking, outings, and celebrations
- Understand contamination risks
- Report concerns or incidents immediately

Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians should:

- Inform the school of medical dietary needs
- Provide up-to-date medical information
- Supply safe snacks or foods where agreed
- Inform the school of any dietary changes

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5. Gluten-Free Safety Procedures

Food Safety

– **Food Storage, Preparation & Cross-Contamination**

To ensure safety, the following practices must be followed at all times:
• Gluten-free food must be stored separately from gluten-containing food
• Separate utensils must be used for preparing or serving gluten-free food
• Tables must be cleaned thoroughly before and after eating using clean cloths designated for gluten-free use
• Hands must be washed before handling gluten-free food
• Gluten-containing crumbs, spills, or residue must be removed immediately

Colour coded plates and flags will be used exclusively for Gluten Free Food across the school setting.

These measures are essential to prevent cross-contamination, which can cause seriously illness.

6. Special School Considerations

Due to pupils' additional needs:

- Increased supervision may be required during eating times
- Staff must actively monitor pupils who may take food from others
- Visual supports or social stories may be used to teach safe eating practices
- Risk assessments may be required for pupils who mouth objects, impulsively eat food, or have limited danger awareness
- Cooking activities must include safe gluten-free planning where relevant
- Staff must remain vigilant during school trips, celebrations, fundraisers, and community outings

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7. Classroom Activities & Celebrations

- Staff must check ingredients before using food in sensory, art, baking, or play activities
- Gluten-free alternatives should be considered to support inclusion. Gluten-containing play materials must be avoided.
- This includes items such as traditional play dough, pasta, sensory bins containing cereals, or any craft materials made with wheat.
- Safe alternatives include certified gluten-free play dough, cornflour-based slime, or commercially produced gluten-free craft materials.

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8. Signs of Gluten Exposure

Symptoms may include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach pain
- Bloating
- Distress or behavioural change
- Fatigue
- Skin rash
- Headache

Some pupils may not be able to communicate symptoms clearly.

9. Procedure if a Pupil Eats Gluten

If accidental gluten ingestion occurs:

1. Remain calm and reassure the pupil
2. Inform the class teacher immediately
3. Notify the Principal/Deputy Principal
4. Contact parents/guardians promptly
5. Monitor the pupil closely for symptoms or distress
6. Follow any individual healthcare plan in place
7. Record the incident according to school procedures
8. Review how the exposure occurred to prevent recurrence

Note: Coeliac Disease is not typically treated with emergency medication like an allergy/anaphylaxis response. However, accidental exposure can cause serious illness and discomfort and must always be treated seriously.

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10. Training & Awareness

- All staff will receive awareness training regarding Coeliac Disease and contamination risks
- Substitute staff and volunteers should be informed of relevant pupil dietary needs
- Information should be shared respectfully and confidentially verbally, and presented at front of yellow folder.
- A risk assessment will be carried out for all new staff who may be unfamiliar with Coeliac Disease.
- This assessment should include:
- • Training on Coeliac Disease and gluten-free protocols
- • Awareness of cross-contamination risks
- • Review of food handling procedures
- • Understanding of emergency procedures if accidental gluten exposure occurs
- This ensures consistency of care and reduces the risk of accidental exposure.

Coeliac UK YouTube Channel

- “What is Coeliac Disease?”

- “Cross Contamination – What is it and why is it so important?”

These videos provide clear, accessible explanations and are suitable for staff who are new to supporting individuals with Coeliac Disease.

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11. Confidentiality & Dignity

The school will ensure that pupils' medical and dietary needs are managed sensitively, respectfully, and in line with GDPR requirements.

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12. Monitoring & Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required following:

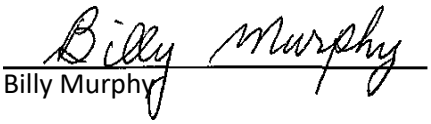
- A significant incident
- Updated medical guidance
- Changes to pupil needs
- Recommendations arising from risk assessment or review processes

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Yours sincerely,



Aisling Power
Principal



Billy Murphy

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Coeliac Disease Risk Assessment Checklist for Existing and New Staff

1. Understanding Coeliac Disease

- [ ] I understand that coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition, not an allergy.
- [ ] I know that even tiny amounts of gluten (crumbs, cross-contamination) can cause harm.
- [ ] I am aware that symptoms may not be immediately visible but can still cause serious internal damage.
- [ ] I know which foods commonly contain gluten (e.g., wheat, barley, rye, most breads, pasta, cereals, cakes, many processed foods).

2. Awareness of Individual Pupil Needs

- [ ] I have read the Individual Care Plans for pupils with coeliac disease.
- [ ] I know which pupils in my class or care group require a strict gluten-free diet.
- [ ] I understand the pupil's specific triggers, symptoms, and emergency procedures.
- [ ] I know who the designated medical lead or SEN coordinator is for coeliac-related queries.

3. Food Handling & Cross-Contamination Prevention

- [ ] I wash hands thoroughly before handling any food for pupils with coeliac disease.
- [ ] I use separate utensils, chopping boards, and preparation areas for gluten-free food.

- [ ] I check that shared equipment (toasters, microwaves, sandwich presses) is either not used or has a gluten-free-only alternative.
- [ ] I ensure gluten-free food is clearly labelled and stored separately.
- [ ] I never assume a food is gluten-free without checking packaging or confirming with senior staff.
- [ ] I prevent pupils from sharing food, snacks, or drinks.

4. Classroom Activities & Learning Materials

- [ ] I check all materials used in sensory play, baking, art, or science (e.g., playdough, pasta, flour) for gluten content.
- [ ] I ensure gluten-free alternatives are provided when needed.
- [ ] I clean surfaces thoroughly before and after activities involving food or craft materials.
- [ ] I ensure pupils with coeliac disease are never excluded from activities due to dietary needs.

5. Mealtimes & Snacks

- [ ] I supervise to ensure pupils with coeliac disease receive only approved gluten-free meals.
- [ ] I confirm that school meals labelled gluten-free have been prepared according to policy.
- [ ] I check all snacks brought into class (including birthday treats) for gluten content.
- [ ] I ensure pupils sit in a safe area where cross-contamination risk is minimised.

6. Communication & Reporting

- [ ] I report any suspected gluten exposure immediately to the designated medical lead.
- [ ] I record incidents according to school policy.
- [ ] I communicate clearly with colleagues about any changes in a pupil's dietary needs.
- [ ] I know how to contact parents/carers if required.

7. Policy Compliance

- [ ] I have read and understood the school's Coeliac Disease & Allergy Management Policy.
- [ ] I agree to follow all procedures without exception.

- [ ] I understand that failure to follow policy can put a child at serious medical risk.
- [ ] I know who to speak to if I am ever unsure about a food item, activity, or procedure.

8. Staff Declaration

- [ ] I confirm that I understand the risks associated with coeliac disease.
- [ ] I agree to follow all school policies and procedures to ensure pupil safety.
- [ ] I will seek guidance whenever I am uncertain about gluten-free requirements.

Signed:_____

Principal:_____