



Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child's/children's school has decided to participate in the Food Dudes Healthy Eating Programme, a programme available nationally to primary schools in Ireland. The school has earlier taken part in the programme and funding has been made available for schools that previously ran Food Dudes to implement it for their new intake of students.

The Food Dudes programme aims to encourage children to eat more fruit and vegetables. Health experts recommend that children (and adults) eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. However, many children (and adults) currently eat less than this.

The programme receives financial support from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the European Union through the School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme - under which the EU has made funds available for the purchase and distribution of fruit and vegetables to schools.

The programme is managed by Bord Bia. It is based on a very successful large scale study developed by the Food & Activity Research Unit at Bangor University, Wales. It was trialled in schools in England and Wales and has reached more than 3,100 schools in Ireland with outstanding and long lasting results. The programme in Ireland received a "counteracting obesity" award from the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2006. The programme has two phases. Phase 1, where children receive free fruit and vegetables in their school for 16 days and are rewarded with stickers and small prizes for eating these foods, and Phase 2, when children are rewarded with certificates of achievements for bringing in and eating fruit and vegetables from home as part of their daily lunch diet. Please see overleaf for some suggestions and lunchbox ideas.

The programme depicts positive role models - young superheroes (the Food Dudes) involved in saving the 'life force' from a gang of baddies (the Junk Punks), who plan to take away the energy of the world by depriving it of fruit and vegetables. In a series of DVD adventures the Dudes go to battle with the bad guys, whilst eating lots of fruit and vegetables. There are also Food Dudes letters read out in class that urge children to help keep the life force strong by eating fruit and vegetables. Stickers and small rewards are offered for participation in the programme. The small rewards are designed for primary school children aged 4 years and over. As they are **not suitable for children under 3 years** please ensure proper supervision if there are younger children at home.

The aim of the programme is to encourage children to emulate the superheroes and repeatedly try fruit and vegetables so that with each successive trial, the children come to enjoy the taste of the foods and eat them for this rather than for the reward. They also come to think of themselves as healthy eaters who enjoy fruit and vegetables.

Beginning next week, for 16 days of the programme your child will receive a free piece of fruit and a portion of raw vegetables at school. You may wish to adjust the amount of food in your child's lunchbox to accommodate these additional foods. The programme takes only a small amount of time in school but will hopefully result in health benefits for all who participate. Your child will automatically be included in this programme. However, if for any reason you do not want your child to take part (e.g. if they are allergic to a certain type of fruit and vegetables), we would be grateful if you could inform the school.

We hope you and your child have fun with the Food Dudes!

- Your regional Food Dudes Project Manager