

# **THE SCHOOL AND NURSERY MILK ALLIANCE - WRITTEN EVIDENCE (FDO0031)**

## **Introduction to the School and Nursery Milk Alliance (SNMA)**

1. [The SNMA](#) is a coalition of organisations from the dairy, health and education sectors, working to champion the benefits to children of drinking milk and to encourage its increased consumption. As a membership organisation, the Alliance represents over 90% of the suppliers of milk to educational settings, as well as 10,500 nurseries, schools and other educational settings receiving milk across the UK.
2. The central purpose of our campaigning activity is to ensure that all children are able to access milk to which they are entitled through the relevant school milk scheme. We also work closely with Westminster and devolved governments to encourage the preservation and, where appropriate, the expansion of milk schemes.

## **Consultation response**

3. Our Alliance's core belief is that dairy should be an essential all children across the UK should be able to access milk at school for free or at reduced cost, and that the government has a key role to play in encouraging children to drink more milk.
4. In England, the government provides a nursery milk scheme and a school milk subsidy scheme. The nursery milk scheme ensures that all pre-school children aged under 5 who attend an early years setting for two or more hours a day, are entitled to a free daily one-third of a pint portion of milk. It is worth £49.3 million a year to English children. This scheme is administered by the Department for Health and Social Care.
5. The school milk subsidy scheme is available to children over the age of 5 and up to age 11. The scheme – previously the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme - is worth £2,699,471.33 in Government funds for England in 2022/23. It entitles all children over the age of five to receive a subsidised portion of milk and the Government has committed to continue the current funding arrangements until the end of 24/25 Academic Year. The scheme remains under review. Defra subsidises per 250ml (pence) 5.6700 per primary school pupil and 4.6736 per 250ml per secondary school pupil.

6. A review of existing research by Northumbria University concluded that drinking milk may support immediate and lasting dental and bone health in 5-11-year-old children and could have a positive effect on preventing childhood obesity, both of which are priorities for our health system.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that milk may support children's cognition, particularly when served as a mid-morning snack. It also staves off hunger, therefore helping children across socioeconomic backgrounds to do their best academically and avoid turning to sugary, unhealthy foods.<sup>2</sup>
7. The positive benefits to all age groups regularly consuming dairy products as part of a well-balanced diet is a well-researched field, with new research being published regularly. Research may also indicate that some assumptions about the negatives of regular dairy consumption may be over-inflated or disproportionate to the actual risk. For example, a recent meta-analysis on milk and dairy product consumption found a neutral or positive benefit from consuming milk and dairy to reduce risk of cardiovascular disease.<sup>3</sup>
8. The government also recognises the importance of children consuming dairy. The government's latest Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) report recommended that the current dietary recommendations for children as set out in the Eatwell Guide should be maintained.<sup>4</sup> The Guide advises that the fat in milk is a good source of calories for young children, and that milk also contains essential vitamins.<sup>5</sup>
9. The school and nursery milk schemes in the UK are successful policy initiatives from the government to encourage children to drink more milk, which has knock-on benefits to help children to consume healthier, more natural options rather than opting for unhealthy "junk food" or other sugary snacks.
10. The SNMA has a variety of recommendations to government to improve the milk schemes. We believe the following recommendations should be considered by the Committee as they

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<sup>1</sup> <https://snma.org.uk/nu-evidence/>

<sup>2</sup> More research about the positive impact of children consuming dairy products can be found here: <https://www.snma.org.uk/research>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31089735/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/649f000d06179b00131ae904/SACN-Feeding-young-children-aged-1-to-5-full-report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/milk-and-dairy-nutrition/>

would have the most impact on encouraging children to drink more dairy products and therefore reduce rates of obesity:

- a. The government should advise schools to serve milk as a mid-morning snack. Studies have shown that children who drink milk at this time of day are satisfied for longer and therefore are less likely to make healthier food choices for the rest of the day.
  - b. The government should more proactively advertise the scheme to all nurseries and schools in the UK, as some educational settings are not aware that the scheme exists.
  - c. In line with proposals made by the Scottish government, Westminster should consider trialling milk schemes for children in secondary school to encourage them to drink more milk.<sup>6</sup>
11. As the funding for the school milk scheme is agreed on a yearly basis, we would also encourage the government to offer a permanent funding settlement to provide more stability for the sector and, in turn, ensure that we are able to continue producing milk products for children. Without a secure funding settlement, we are struggling to invest in vital equipment, and this may have an impact on our members' ability to produce school milk products.
12. We would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee or recommend a representative of the SNMA to give oral evidence as part of the Committee's inquiry.

*4 April 2024*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=s6w-05617>