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Beer cheers up Belgian school dinners

## School dinner? Mine's a lager, please

**Andrew Osborn in Brussels**  
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**Guardian**

British schoolchildren caught swigging beer know they will be punished but in Belgium, where quaffing ale is a national sport, schools are to start supplying pupils with beer at lunchtime believing it to be healthier than fizzy drinks.

In a scheme that makes Britain's now defunct milk promotion campaign look tame by comparison, a Flemish beer lovers' club has approached 30 schools and suggested that they substitute low-alcohol beer called tafelbier for sugary drinks such as lemonade and Coca-Cola.

Apparently unconcerned at the prospect of pupils falling asleep at their desks in the afternoon, at least two schools have already agreed and one has launched a pilot scheme.

Almost 80% of children who took part in the pilot scheme in Belgium's Limburg province said they had enjoyed having beer instead of a soft drink and other schools are expected to follow suit when the new school year begins in September.

According to the chairman of De Limburgse Biervrienden, the beer club behind the scheme, pupils will be able to choose between lager and bitter, neither of which will be stronger than 2.5% alcohol.

"Beer is for the whole family," its chairman, Rony Langenaeken, said. "And this scheme will be for children between the ages of three and 15."

Citing a Belgian study which shows that soft drinks and fruit juice can increase the risk of obesity and even cancer in children, Mr Langenaeken argues that beer is healthier because it contains less sugar. "It's good for their figure and very healthy as well."

He dismissed the idea that pupils may become too intoxicated to concentrate on their studies. "You'd have to drink five or six litres of the stuff to get drunk and these will just be 25cl or 33cl bottles. I used to drink it when I was just six years old and I still do every day."

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