Magic Breakfast May 2023

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines

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magic breakfast fuel for learning





Contents & Thank yous

07 What do children and young 01 Foreword people have for breakfast? 80 02 **Busy mornings** Introduction 09 Learnings and 03 Hunger recommendations 10 04 Breakfast in school Key findings 05 Meet Julie and Emma Cost of living 06 Who's eating breakfast? References

Thank yous

Thank you to all the children, young people, parents and carers who gave their time to this research.

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01 Foreword

This report is based on surveys of children and young people like us, as well as their parents and caregivers. It's a chance for us to share our experiences and tell our own stories. It's also, crucially, a chance for researchers and policymakers to listen to them.

We are students at Leeds City Academy. Some of us attend our school's Magic Breakfast club every morning, while some of us eat at home or only attend the club every so often. Some of us eat a big meal early in the morning, while others are not hungry until later in the day. But all of us, no matter our circumstances, are united by a simple fact: we know the impact that hunger has in our school. Earlier this year, students from our class met with staff at Magic Breakfast to talk about these findings.

We were surprised to hear just how many secondary students across the country don't eat breakfast each morning. Even those of us who don't always eat breakfast ourselves didn't realise how common this was among other young people. We've

always been taught that breakfast is the most important meal of the day and we all agreed that all students should be supported in eating a healthy breakfast, and that no student should be unable to access breakfast if they want it.

It is important that policy that directly impacts us reflects our own experiences, views, and feelings. Many of us were surprised to be included in this research but at the same time were really pleased to have our voices heard. It was a great experience, and we look forward to continuing our work with Magic Breakfast to make our voices heard, and we hope that in reading this report, you will understand our experiences better.



02Introduction

Breakfast is important. No matter where you grow up, how you get to school or how old you are. Yet, despite an overwhelming number of children, young people and parents agreeing that breakfast is important, the start of the day is a busy time for many families and breakfast isn't always on the table. This is according to recent research commissioned by Magic Breakfast, which provided an opportunity for children, young people, parents and caregivers to reflect on their morning routines.

This research involved around 4,500 children and young people in Magic Breakfast partner schools, and over 4,600 parents of pupils in these schools. The data was collected via surveys, focus groups and interviews which asked about their breakfast eating habits, morning routines and the current challenges faced by households.

This is the largest piece of research Magic
Breakfast has done with parents and young people.

It's a snapshot of how they start the day and what it's like for families right now. Most importantly, this research allows us to tell the story of breakfast time from children, young people and parents' perspectives and provides us with insights which can be used to move towards a society where children are hungry to learn, not just hungry.

This research not only provided insight to the chaos and challenges that often accompany the start of the day but also how these are being amplified by the cost of living crisis, which is placing additional burdens upon families, especially around mealtimes. It also provides greater understanding of the families most consistently experiencing these challenges, primarily low income and larger families. Furthermore, it builds a picture of why some young people don't eat breakfast, in their own words.

Understanding is crucial, as missing breakfast, especially consistently, can have long-term consequences for children. A hungry child cannot concentrate, impairing their learning. Hunger can also lead to misbehavior which not only impacts a child's learning, but those around them. Equally concerning, food insecurity has been associated with a range of negative physical and mental health outcomes.

Providing breakfast at school helps overcome the challenges faced at breakfast time with parents describing school breakfast as integral to their morning routine. It can allow families to get their children to school on time and can provide stability which prepares children for learning. For some children and young people, school breakfast is the only opportunity to eat before morning lessons, for others it is a chance to socialise or catch up on homework. For many, it provides them with a calmer start to the day, so they are ready to learn when they sit down at their desk.

Through the voices of children, young people and parents this report brings to life the mornings of families across England and Scotland. And gives the depth and insight needed to ensure we design policies and systems that support children and young people to thrive.





Invest in Universal School breakfaSt provision

While those living in food insecurity are more at risk of morning hunger, this research highlights there are a multitude of reasons why children and young people start the day without breakfast. However, parents and children alike believe that offering breakfast at school means any child can have breakfast regardless of what happened that day or their household circumstances.



Wider impacts of School breakfaSt

Breakfast at school is more than just feeding children. It can be a calm start to the day, it reduces anxiety, it gives students who might not be able to do homework at home a chance to catch up and can even be an incentive to get children to school on time. Previous research also shows it increases attendance, attainment and improves classroom environments.



BreakfaSt at School and childcare

Parents shared that school breakfast helps them to get to work or their studies on time. They also said it helps reduce challenges and barriers in the morning which can lead to children going hungry.

Every child and young person in the UK should have access to a school breakfast if they want it, without barrier or stigma. Long-term, sustainable funding must be made available to enable the implementation of hunger-focussed school breakfast nationally.

School breakfast should be viewed as an integral part of the school day for all children and young people. It should be delivered as part of other school-based interventions that support children and their families, such as well-being checks, to fully harness the wider benefits school breakfast brings to children and young people.

Breakfast at school must be considered as part of the wider childcare solution that supports parents to work or get back into work. Any form of morning wraparound childcare should be of high quality and include a breakfast offer, to ensure all children and young people are fed and ready to learn, no matter their start in the morning.

Learnings

03 Learnings and recommendations

Children, young people and parents

reflect on their morning routines



Research with Secondary School pupils

Secondary age pupils, especially girls, are less likely to eat breakfast and less likely to attend a school breakfast.



Special educational needs and disabilities

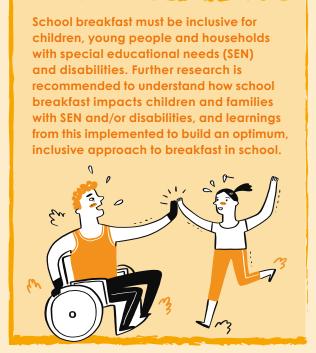
Households where members had an additional need or disability talked about the important role and benefits of school breakfast for them.



Minority ethnic households

While minority ethnic households are more likely to be at risk of hunger, and cited more challenges in the morning, they do not engage with breakfast at the same rate.







04 Key findings

What's for breakfast?

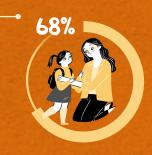
Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines



A fifth of children worry about not having enough food at home



of families are struggling to get enough **healthy** food to eat



of parents face barriers and challenges around breakfast time



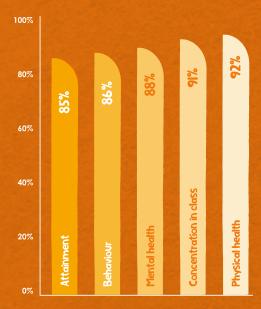
of children find it harder concentrate when they are hungry



of girls aged 11-14 do not eat breakfast because they are worried about putting on weight



Over half of secondary age pupils don't have breakfast every day



% of Magic Breakfast partner school parents that agree breakfast has a positive impact on each outcome area

Low income & larger families

face more challenges around breakfast time and are at a greater risk of **experiencing food insecurity**



Eight in ten

children and young people agree it is important to offer children something to eat for breakfast at school



Nine in ten

parents agree that every child should have **access to a healthy breakfast** at the start of the school day



This is Emma

She is 11 and the oldest of three. She lives in Yorkshire with her mum, her brother, and her sister. She recently started secondary school which she was quite nervous about. So far she is finding it OK but is struggling to keep on top of her homework!

Emma's day usually starts long before the first bell. She shares a room with her sister Sophie, which she doesn't mind. Her mum is so busy with her brother in the mornings, so Emma tries to make sure that Sophie is dressed and ready to walk to school.

She loves to watch YouTube videos about different types of plaits and practice them on her sister, putting matching bows in each hair tie. She learned how to make curlers out of old socks and gave Sophie a curly hairstyle for her class photo. She loves being a big sister, but it can be stressful to make sure Sophie is on time and she feels like she doesn't have time to think about herself.

This is Julie

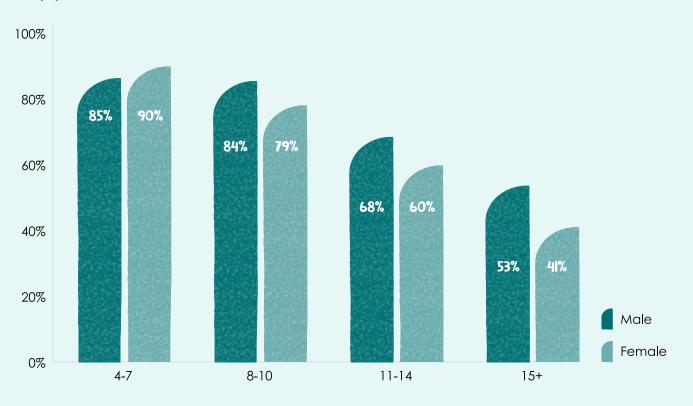
Emma's mum – and Sophie's and Matthew's. Emma is her oldest. Julie's so proud of Emma, not just for how well she does in school, but she's proud of how kind she is, how curious she is, how she spends those extra few minutes each morning putting Sophie's hair in French plaits before school.

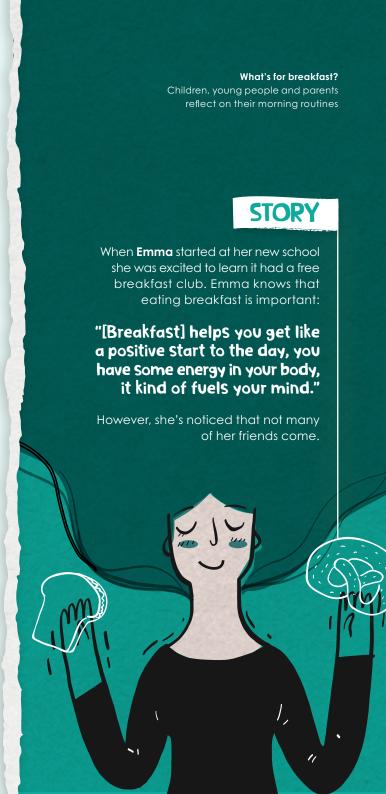
Julie works very hard to balance her work schedule and caring for her children. It's tough; she earns a bit too much to qualify for some things like Free School Meals, but with how expensive her energy and food bills are becoming, her salary doesn't stretch as far as it used to.

06Who's eating breakfast?

82% of children and young people agree it is important to eat breakfast in the morning. But despite this strong agreement not all pupils eat breakfast every day. The majority of children and young people (76%) in schools that offer breakfast eat breakfast every day or most days, however, this decreases with the age of the child, with older pupils less likely to eat breakfast.

% of pupils who said they eat breakfast every day or most days





06Age and gender

As well as breakfast eating decreasing with the age of the child, we also found a divide growing between girls and boys, with girls much less likely to eat breakfast as they get older.

Unsurprisingly, we found that the main reasons older pupils were not eating breakfast is because they don't feel hungry in the morning (58% of secondary age pupils) or they wanted to stay in bed longer (24%). This fits with research which highlights that adolescents sleep/wake cycle is later.

As well as older girls not eating breakfast for the above reasons, we also found that generally girls were more likely to cite they were not eating breakfast because they were worried about putting on weight. 17% of girls do not eat breakfast because they are worried about putting on weight, compared with 10% of boys. Not eating breakfast because they are worried about weight is most prevalent amongst girls aged 11-14 years old, with 20% of this group stating this as the reason they don't eat breakfast. This is despite the fact that the research also showed that those who skip breakfast are more likely to buy unhealthy snacks during the day because they are hungry (30%) compared with those who have breakfast every day (24%).

"I don't like breakfast because I gain weight plus you do not need three meals a day."

10, female, North West

We also found that older pupils were less likely to have breakfast at school, particularly older girls. This was for a range of reasons, but girls were far more likely to not eat breakfast at school because they were embarrassed to (17% of girls aged 15 and older compared with 5% of boys). Older girls also noted they were more likely to be led by their peers, with 19% of girls aged 15 years and older not having breakfast at school because their friends didn't, compared to 3% of boys.

What we can see here is a vicious cycle emerging with girls as young as ten being significantly less likely to eat breakfast than boys as a result of external pressures and body image. This is despite research showing skipping breakfast to lose weight is likely a flawed strategy with regular breakfast eating being linked to lower body weight in adolescents. Working with this cohort to understand how we can change these beliefs and increase healthy breakfast eating amongst this age group is not only key for older pupils' and girls' mental and physical health but it will also have long term positive outcomes for their attainment at school.

"I always wake up late so I don't have time to have breakfast at home."

KS3, East of England

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines



17% of girls do not eat breakfast because

they are worried about putting on weight



10% of boys do not eat breakfast because they are worried about putting on weight

What do children and young people have for breakfast?

The most popular food items among children and young people, across all households and according to parents in our partner schools, are toast and cereal. They also most commonly have juice (58%), water (57%) and milk (55%) with their breakfast.

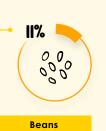
Eight in ten children and young people (83%) agree that they know the difference between a healthy and less healthy breakfast, and this matters.

Those that don't know the difference between a healthy and less healthy breakfast are more likely to sometimes choose or buy unhealthy snacks on a morning (37%) because they are hungry. This compares to 26% of children and young people that are aware of what a healthy breakfast is.

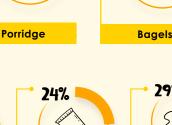
Children eat what they like and like what they know as their food preferences are strongly influenced by what they regularly consume.

As a result, exposure to healthy breakfast

foods, like those found at school breakfast, is key to supporting healthy eating habits in the morning.





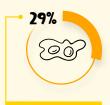


Cereal bar

72%

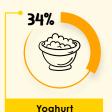
Toast

32%



35%





Fruit

83%

Cereal

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines

"[The children] don't want to eat healthier options like omelette or porridge, they prefer Sugary breakfasts and I don't know how to change this."

Parent, East Midlands



08Busy mornings

Breakfast time is busy for children and parents. An overwhelming number of families highlighted that breakfast is rarely a sit-down meal and for some families' breakfast is not as healthy as they would like. Not only can the morning rush lead to unhealthy choices, but it can also result in some children and young people missing breakfast altogether.

68% of families said they face challenges or barriers around breakfast time with their child or children. Across all household types, the most common stress factors in the morning were children not feeling like breakfast, fussy/picky eaters and the morning rush not leaving time for breakfast at home.

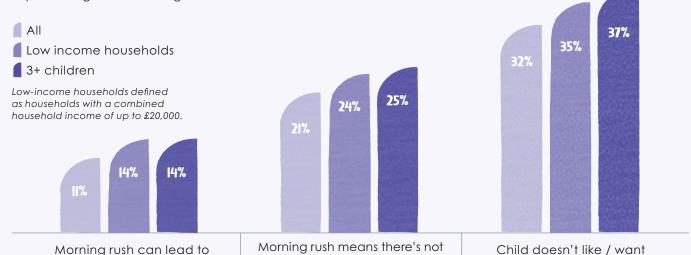
However, income and number of children in the household also has a significant impact on morning routines with low-income households and larger families experiencing more challenges around breakfast time.

unhealthy choices

"My children have breakfast every morning but because we have a long 40 minute walk to school if the children are not ready for food early enough we sometimes have the difficulty of having to pick between no breakfast or setting off late."

breakfast in the morning

Parent, North West



always time to have breakfast

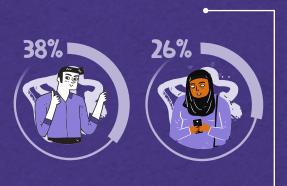
at home

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37% of parents with one child reported they face no barriers around breakfast time compared to 22% with four or more children



38% of households earning over £20,000 face no barriers around breakfast time compared to 26% of households earning under £20,000

08Busy mornings

STORY

Julie describes morning time as a struggle in their family and is so grateful for Emma's help with Sophie. Her son, Mathew, has autism and needs a little extra help which takes a lot of her time in the morning:

"Some mornings he has really bad meltdowns and it can take a long time to get through breakfast."

The pressure of getting to school on time can also impact on children and young people's chance to have breakfast. 40% of children and young people that don't have breakfast citing lack of time as the reason.

"Sometimes I don't end up getting breakfast because I've got to look after my [siblings], mum's gotta get dressed herself. And then by the time that I get them dressed, I've got no time to have anything to eat."

Year 4, North West

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines

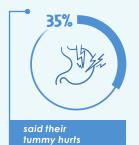


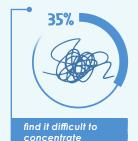
Emma describes mornings as "stressful and busy" and she doesn't always get breakfast at home especially if Sophie refused to get up, making them rush!

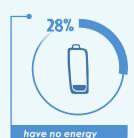
70 DO

09 Hunger

Hunger manifests in different ways for different children and young people but what they tell us is that hunger is a barrier to learning. When asked how they feel when they're hungry:







to do anything





Could you concentrate if you felt like this? A hungry child cannot learn but a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day can transform a child.

Interestingly, girls were more likely to reference a wider range of feelings associated with being hungry than boys, as were older pupils. This highlights that it is important for teachers to be able to understand different signs of hunger amongst different groups as sometimes these might not manifest in typical or the same way for all pupils.

"when you're hungry you get like, Stomach pains, moody and grumpy and Stuff. And you don't want that. And Some people just Start dozing off."

Year 5, North West

Impact on learning

Leeds University found that children who regularly eat breakfast achieve, on average, two GCSE grades higher than pupils who do not habitually eat their morning meal.^{iv}

"I get Sleepy to the point where I don't hear anything." KS3, East of England

"I[Breakfast] gives you energy early in the morning and will help with your mood and concentration".

Secondary age pupil, London

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parent reflect on their morning routine

STORY

Emma's old school didn't have free breakfast and sometimes she'd be running late so her mum would give her money and she would buy a muffin on the way to school. By breaktime Emma started to lack energy and would be in a bad mood.



Having access to breakfast at school, whether in a club, the classroom or on the way to lessons, supports children, young people and their parents, at this busy time of day.

Eight in ten children and young people agree it is important to offer children something to eat for breakfast at school



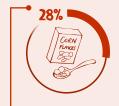
For some children and young people, breakfast at school is the only opportunity to eat before morning lessons, for others it is a chance to socialise or catch up on homework. For many it provides them with a morning routine and calmer start to the day, so they are ready to learn when they sit down at their desk. Other pupils highlighted that it allows them to get to school on time, that they like the variety of food offered and that it helps them feel ready for the day.

Nine in ten parents agree that every child should have access to a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day.



Magic Breakfast prioritises creating school breakfast provisions that children want to attend. We work with the school to understand their needs and encourage them to set up different delivery models, so all pupils feel comfortable accessing food at the start of the day. We know this is particularly important for secondary age pupils, who are less likely to engage with school breakfast, with 52% of secondary age pupils never engaging compared to 23% of primary age pupils.

When asking children and young people why they have breakfast at school:



because they enjoy the food



they are hungry again when they get to school



because it is free



because it is quick and easy



they don't have time for breakfast at home/it's rushed



they like having breakfast with my friends

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines

STORY

On days when she doesn't get breakfast at home, **Emma** is relieved her school has a free breakfast club.

She likes breakfast club and "feels energised" after attending.

She prefers it when her friends go and sometimes uses it to catch-up



"People are not feeling like ashamed or embarrassed to go and have their breakfast, because they're all doing it together."

Parent, Scotland

Breakfast in school provides an opportunity for all children and young people who might not have had breakfast at home to start their day ready to learn.

To do this, the school breakfast needs to have no barriers, like a charge, and be open to all, not just those entitled to free school meals (FSM), for example. This approach, championed by Magic Breakfast partner schools, is particularly valued by parents who emphasised that knowing their child's school provides breakfast is a huge relief when unexpected challenges arise.

69% of families in Magic Breakfast partner schools make use of school breakfast provision.

This highlights that school breakfast is there for all. We also know from this research that larger and low-income families are more likely to make use of school breakfast, as are White British households. While minority ethnic households are more likely to be at risk of hunger, and cited more challenges in the morning, they do not engage with breakfast at the same rate. Understanding this further could be key in ensuring all children and young people who need breakfast, access it.

Parents noted that breakfast at school supports a calmer morning routine and can even be an incentive to get the child to school. They noted that socialising and developing independence were also positive impacts of school breakfast. Alongside this, families with children with additional needs or disabilities or

households with disabilities, noted that school breakfast supported managing these in the morning. Parents also saw it as a 'back-up option' and found it reassuring in scenarios such as not having food in the house or time to eat, that their child would still be fed at school.

Attendance

Parents found that breakfast at school acted as an incentive for getting their child to school. Some children that were often late, or at risk of being late (either because parents were trying to ensure children ate a good breakfast at home, or because of additional incentive to get to school on time, which wasn't there in the past) are now regularly getting to school early or on time. Young people themselves also noted that breakfast at school ensures they arrive on time, with 9% of those aged 11-14 citing this as the reason they had breakfast at school.

This is increasingly important with research highlighting that severe absence is a growing issue in England. But there is a proven link between attendance and breakfast, with the Education Endowment Foundation finding that in schools offering breakfast, attendance increased, with 26 fewer half-days of absence per year, in a class of 30. The study also shows that there was a small reduction in late arrivals.

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines



69% of families in Magic Breakfast partner schools make use of school breakfast provision

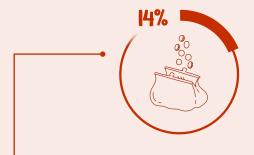


9% of pupils aged 11-14 have breakfast at school because it allows them to get to school on time

Working families



A fifth of parents say breakfast at their child's school enables them to get to work or study on time



Say it reduces pressure on the family budget

This supports previous research by Magic Breakfast and Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) which found that school breakfast can make a profound difference for working families through reducing childcare costs. Vii In addition to this, breakfast can also reduce spend on food and for low-income families this is significant as every little bit counts. This is increasingly important given 71% of children living in poverty are living in working families. Viii

"Breakfast club is amazing; it means I can go to work and my child will have a healthy breakfast every day. I do not have to worry about cost, and she gets time to play before school. I can speak to staff if I have any issues too."

Parent. Yorkshire and the Humber

Households with disabilities and additional needs

Several families highlighted the benefits of breakfast at school in relation to either additional needs and disabilities their children have, or they as a parent have.

Some families spoke about their children being required to take medication at certain times and needing to eat a certain amount of time before or after this. It was reassuring to these families that their children could get something to eat at school before lessons began, and staff would encourage their child to eat.

Other families spoke about the particular needs of their children who are on the autistic spectrum, with routine being key. Parents also discussed their own disabilities which could make mornings a struggle; their children being able to have breakfast at school meant that this was one less pressure on the family.

What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines

STORY

For **Julie**, free school breakfast club means when she is having a tough morning and Mathew is taking up most of her attention, or when money is stretched, she doesn't have to worry about ensuring Emma gets breakfast at home.

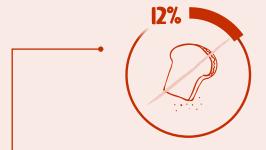
"I don't qualify for any free School meals or anything, but I'm a Single parent. And So, it's really helpful. And it just means that I don't have to, you know make that choice."



Mental and emotional wellbeing



A fifth of children worry about not having enough food at home



12% of children say they don't have breakfast because there is nothing to eat at home

"The children who attend club at our School, have improved their relationships with Staff, and they enjoy Seeing familiar faces around the School. They also make friendships with other children of different ages.

The children who attend enjoy a choice of healthy breakfaSt which improves their concentration, energy levels and keepS them motivated throughout the day.

Overall, our children's emotional wellbeing has improved Significantly."

Teacher Magic Breakfast Partner School, North East

Worrying about food has been associated with emotional and psychological stress among children, which can exert a negative effect on mental health outcomes.ix

Not only can school breakfast reduce worry through providing a healthy meal to start the day, every school

day, but it also provides additional emotional support for children. It can give children and young people a chance to settle before learning begins with many vulnerable pupils coming from chaotic households. It is also a chance for children and young people to chat with teachers about their fears or worries ahead of the school day.

"It's awful if you need food and have anxiety, it's like two punches in the Stomach."

> Secondary age pupil, Yorkshire & the Humber

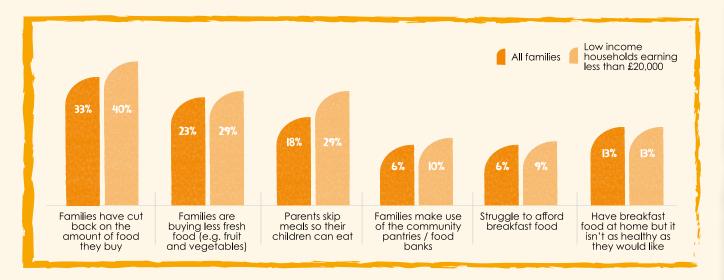


11 Cost of living

While the cost of living crisis is affecting everyone, some families are experiencing it more acutely than others, particularly low income households and larger families.

Food insecurity is also increasing in Magic Breakfast partner schools according to the data collected in Autumn 2022. **76% of families are not able to get enough healthy food to eat.** This not only impacts children and young people now, but long term can have implications on their health, with children living in deprived areas twice as likely to be living with obesity by the end of primary school compared with children growing up in less deprived areas. This is because, as many parents point out in the research, more nutritionally dense food is often more expense and can even be harder to come by in more deprived areas. *i

With so many families experiencing the impacts of the cost of living crisis, there is a growing need for inclusive school food programmes. By making breakfast available to any child at the start of the day, regardless of their circumstances, this means even if a family is experiencing food insecurity or an unexpected change in circumstances for the first time, the child can still access breakfast. Having breakfast at school can not only fuel a child for learning but is one less meal a parent or child has to worry about.

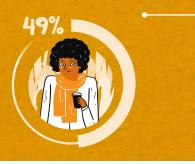


What's for breakfast?

Children, young people and parents



of parents are concerned about not having enough money to live on



have reduced the amount of heat used at home



have missed a bill payment

11 Cost of living

STORY

Julie is worried about the future and is being very careful with every financial decision she makes.

"I think carefully before Shopping and now have to be much more rigid and less flexible – this is the only bill I can control, as we have cut everything else because we are on a low income and so are using hot water bottles, blankets around the house and now it's food we are cutting back on."

"Me and my husband do skip meals a lot just to feed our children. With the cost of living going up it's getting worse."

Parent, East of England

"Healthy foods are more expensive and fresh produce go off quickly so can be hard to eat healthy sometimes."

Year 4, North West



References

Magic Breakfast

Magic Breakfast is a registered charity providing healthy breakfasts to children and young people in the UK who arrive at school too hungry to learn, and expert support to their schools. Over 200,000 children and young people are on roll at Primary, Secondary, ASL / Special Educational Needs Schools and Pupil Referral Units that the charity works with, in disadvantaged areas of Scotland and England. Providing breakfast ensures that children start their school day with the energy and nutrition they need to be able to make the most of their morning lessons. Magic Breakfast also undertakes research, and campaigns for long-term solutions to end hunger as a barrier to learning.

Method

Research was undertaken by QA Research on behalf of Magic Breakfast. It took place between 26 September – 19 December 2022 across England and Scotland. 4,232 surveys were completed by children and young people in Magic Breakfast partner schools. 4,651 surveys were completed by parents and carers of pupils in Magic Breakfast partner schools. All surveys had a 'prefer not to say/answer' option for every question. Anyone selecting 'prefer not to say/answer' has been removed from the figures shown for the individual question, therefore the total base figures for each question vary.

18 focus groups with pupils in Magic Breakfast partner schools took place across England and Scotland and 20 telephone interviews with parents.

For more details on the research please contact katie@magicbreakfast.com

Further Resources

- 1. For more information on Magic Breakfast visit our website
- 2. To learn more about the level of morning hunger in the UK read Magic Breakfast's Hidden Hunger report
- 3. If you are a school and would like Magic Breakfast support, please complete an <u>expression of interest form</u>
- 4. To access resources on school breakfast visit Kellogg's resource hub

Notes

- 5. Emma and Julie are a fictionalised family based on data supplied by those who participated in this research. All quotes used as part of their story are direct quotes provided by children and young people, and their parents.
- 6. Throughout the report we use the term parent to refer to both parents and caregivers of children in Magic Breakfast partner schools. We know that parents and carers go by many names.

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