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Secondary Spotlight: Breakfast, Belonging and Learning

About Magic Breakfast:

Magic Breakfast is the UK's leading school breakfast charity and makes a difference to over 300,000 children and young people every day by providing breakfasts and expert advice to tackle morning hunger in schools across England and Scotland. Alongside support in our partner schools, Magic Breakfast drives long-term change through research, advocacy and campaigning; working with policymakers to create a future where every child and young person is nourished, empowered and able to thrive.

The importance of secondary school breakfast provision

Breakfast is more than a meal. For secondary-aged pupils, it can mean the difference between starting the school day hungry and struggling to concentrate, or feeling nourished, focused and ready to learn.

Every child and young person deserves the chance to reach their full potential, without hunger standing in their way. Yet **2.2 million children across the UK are at risk of going hungry in the morning**, that's equivalent to five pupils in every class of 30.

Magic Breakfast's 2026 Annual Breakfast Survey highlights the pressures facing pupils and schools, and the important role school breakfast provision can play in tackling them. Our findings show that for secondary-aged pupils, **morning hunger sits alongside wider pressures on learning, including the cost of living and mental health and wellbeing**. At the same time, schools consistently report that **breakfast provision delivers benefits that extend well beyond food**, supporting concentration, attainment, behaviour, belonging, relationships and families.

"What many people miss about the need for free breakfast in secondary schools is that it isn't just a safety net for the poorest students, it is a critical tool for levelling the playing field for everyone."
- Magic Breakfast Partner School

Morning hunger and worry impact learning

Secondary schools are navigating a range of pressures that can make it harder for young people to learn and thrive.

- **97%** of Magic Breakfast partner secondary schools say pupils' learning is impacted by the **cost of living**.
- **94%** say pupils' learning is impacted by **mental health and wellbeing,** now the third most commonly identified factor, rising from fifth place in 2025.
- **93%** say **pupils' learning is impacted by hunger and access to food.**

These pressures do not exist in isolation. Hunger can make it harder to concentrate, while financial pressures and concerns at home can affect pupils' ability to engage in school. **Breakfast provides a practical way for schools to remove one immediate barrier at the start of the school day.**

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One less worry in the morning

The benefits of breakfast can extend far beyond the school gates. Among secondary schools:

- **79%** agree breakfast **alleviates pressure on families' budgets**.
- **80%** agree it **reduces household morning stress.**
- **83%** agree it **supports safeguarding and pastoral support** for pupils and families.

For families facing financial pressure, a reliable breakfast at school can mean one less cost to meet and one less worry at the start of the day.

School breakfast provision puts learning back on the menu

Schools tell us that breakfast provision can help young people feel **refuelled, regulated and ready to learn**:



- **92%** agree breakfast improves **concentration in class.**
- **84%** agree breakfast improves **educational attainment.**
- **76%** agree breakfast improves **general behaviour.**

This matters because breakfast is not simply about addressing hunger. It can help pupils make the most of the school day and support the conditions in which learning can happen.

Breakfast and belonging

Beyond the reassurance of something to eat, how breakfast happens matters too. It can be an opportunity for pupils to have a gentle start to the day and feel like school is a place for them. This is key, because we know that when children and young people feel they belong at school, their mental health and emotional wellbeing is better. **Almost two thirds of our partner schools** offer activities alongside breakfast, with our survey finding:



- **90%** agree breakfast helps pupils feel they **belong**.
- **88%** agree it enhances **staff and pupil relationships**.
- **81%** agree it supports improved **mental health and wellbeing**.

Breakfast provision can provide a calm, welcoming space where pupils can connect with peers, build relationships with trusted adults and take part in activities before lessons begin.

Our work in schools and our research highlights the strong relationship between breakfast, learning and belonging. **Hunger and the worries it brings can undermine young people's concentration, behaviour and attainment, with lasting consequences for their future prospects.** School breakfast provision is about more than tackling morning hunger: it supports mental health, strengthens social connection and helps young people feel like they belong.

To learn more about our work, schedule a meeting, or arrange an opportunity to see our breakfast provision in action, please do get in touch at advocacy@magicbreakfast.com.

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

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