

Parliamentary Briefing

Addressing Poverty **Through Education**



5/2/2025

A Call to Action

While Bright Start Breakfasts is a welcome step, it does not adequately address child poverty in its current state. Magic Breakfast calls on the Scottish Government to:

1. Commit to a clear timetable for universal breakfast provision for all primary and special school pupils.
2. Ensure long-term funding for school breakfast programmes to avoid reliance on short term grants.
3. Provide schools with flexibility in how they deliver breakfast, whether through grab and go, classroom models, or traditional breakfast clubs.
4. Strengthen partnerships between the Government, local authorities, and third sector organisations like Magic Breakfast to expand provision efficiently.

Context

On the 9th of December 2024, the Scottish Government announced the Bright Start Breakfasts initiative, a £3 million programme aimed at supporting primary and special schools in providing free breakfasts to children in need. This initiative seeks to improve attendance, readiness to learn, and family wellbeing by ensuring that no child starts their school day hungry. While this is a step forward in tackling child poverty and improving learning outcomes, the scheme remains limited in scope, leaving many children and young people in food insecurity without universal provision.

Addressing poverty through education requires ensuring that all children and young people, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to learning opportunities. Providing a free breakfast at the start of every school day is a proven method to support this goal. Hunger is a significant barrier to learning, and breakfast provision helps close the attainment gap, particularly for children and young people from disadvantaged areas.¹

Child poverty remains a pressing issue in Scotland:

- ✓ 260,000 children and young people live in poverty (26% of the population).²
- ✓ 42% of children in poverty live in food insecure households.³
- ✓ 71% of Magic Breakfast partner schools believe child poverty has increased in their school community in the past year.⁴

¹ Education Endowment Foundation, *Magic Breakfast Evaluation Report and Executive Summary*, November 2016 (updated November 2019), [Education Endowment Foundation and Magic Breakfast - Magic Breakfast](#)

² The Scottish Government, *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23*, March 2024, <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Magic Breakfast, *Measuring and Monitoring Survey 2023/24*, [Magic Breakfast: Measuring and Monitoring survey 2024 - Magic Breakfast](#)

The postcode lottery of breakfast provision in Scotland means that children's access to food depends on where they live, rather than their level of need.⁵

How Universal Breakfast Provision Addresses Poverty and Boosts Educational Outcomes in the School Setting

Breakfast and Education

- The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that providing free, nutritious breakfasts led to an extra two months of attainment in core subjects like English and Maths for Primary 3 pupils.⁶
- Free breakfasts help to close the attainment gap by giving disadvantaged pupils the energy and focus needed for learning.⁷
- 75% of Magic Breakfast partner schools agree that breakfast provision has improved test and exam readiness.⁸
- The Institute for Fiscal Studies reported that breakfast provision improves classroom behaviour, concentration, and learning outcomes – even benefitting children who do not directly attend the breakfast club.⁹
- Teachers report that pupils who eat breakfast at school are calmer, more engaged, and ready to learn.¹⁰
- Breakfast has been shown to strengthen staff-student relationships – allowing staff to build positive relationships with students outside of the classroom, which benefits behaviour inside of the classroom.¹¹
- 92% of Magic Breakfast partner schools said that breakfast provision has positively impacted the energy levels and alertness of pupils in class.¹²
- 94% of Magic Breakfast partner schools said that breakfast positively impacted pupils' concentration in class, lessening disruption.¹³

Breakfast, the Economy and Poverty

- There is a strong link between high levels of poverty, income inequality and low levels of social mobility. High levels of child poverty are a contributing factor to low levels of social mobility as child poverty can lead to low levels of educational outcomes, risk of health issues, and reduced child development.¹⁴

⁵ Magic Breakfast, *Hidden Hunger – The State of UK Breakfast Provision*, 2022, [Hidden Hunger - Magic Breakfast](#)

⁶ Institute for Fiscal Studies, Magic Breakfast, November 2016, [Magic Breakfast | Institute for Fiscal Studies](#)

⁷ Education Endowment Foundation, *Magic Breakfast Evaluation Report and Executive Summary*, November 2016 (updated November 2019), [Education Endowment Foundation and Magic Breakfast - Magic Breakfast](#)

⁸ Magic Breakfast, Measuring and Monitoring Survey 2023/24, [Magic Breakfast: Measuring and Monitoring survey 2024 - Magic Breakfast](#)

⁹ Institute for Fiscal Studies, Magic Breakfast, November 2016, [Magic Breakfast | Institute for Fiscal Studies](#)

¹⁰ Magic Breakfast, *Scotland 2024 Measuring and Monitoring Survey*, 2023/24

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Social Mobility Commission, *State of the Nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic*, July 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2021-social-mobility-and-the-pandemic/state-of-the-nation-2021-social-mobility-and-the-pandemic--2#foreword>

- Pro Bono Economics found that for every £1 spent on school breakfasts, there is a return of £50 in benefits due to better educational attainment and long-term social gains.¹⁵
- Providing breakfast at school reduces the financial burden on low-income families, allowing parents to allocate resources to other essentials like heating and housing¹⁶.
- Offering breakfast clubs before the start of the school day enables out of work parents to return to employment, by removing the barrier to accessible childcare.¹⁷ One Magic Breakfast partner school said: "We have several parents now able to access work or training opportunities."¹⁸
- 87% of Magic Breakfast partner schools agree that breakfast provision has alleviated pressure on families.¹⁹
- 83% of Magic Breakfast partner schools agree that breakfast has positively impacted pupil's mental and emotional wellbeing.²⁰
- 79% of Magic Breakfast partner schools agreed that breakfast provision has positively impacted student's eating habits and relationships with food. One school was quoted: "Children whose food is restricted at home are more comfortable about food and understand that food will be available each day."²¹

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¹⁵ Pro Bono Economics, The Economic Cost-Effectiveness of The Magic Breakfast Model of School Breakfast Provision, February 2021, [Download.ashx](#)

¹⁶ Magic Breakfast, Scotland 2024 Measuring and Monitoring Survey, 2023/24

¹⁷ Magic Breakfast, Measuring and Monitoring Survey, 2023/24, [Measuring and Monitoring survey 2024 - Magic Breakfast](#)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.