

School Breakfasts for improved Health and Wellbeing

Magic Breakfast is the UK's leading school breakfast charity, making a difference to over 350,000 children and young people by partnering with schools to provide breakfasts and expert advice across Scotland and England. Currently, over 7% of young Scots can access a "magic" breakfast every school morning supporting educational equity, reducing barriers to learning, and delivering for busy families. Our mission is to ensure that every child and young person in Scotland is nourished, empowered, and able to thrive.

[Recent warnings](#) from paediatric health leaders that **today's children risk becoming the unhealthiest generation in decades** have reinforced concerns about widening health inequalities, poor diet quality and the long-term impact of poverty on children's health. Against this backdrop, **Scotland's commitment to universal school breakfast provision in all primary and special schools provides an opportunity for Scotland to invest in prevention before problems escalate further.**

If Scotland is serious about reducing health inequalities, improving children's wellbeing, and easing long-term pressure on public services, prevention must start early. **School breakfast provision has the potential to be a practical, preventative health intervention**, supporting children and young people's physical health, mental wellbeing and healthy development before the school day begins.

Health inequalities start early in Scotland

Health inequalities remain one of the persistent challenges facing Scotland's children and young people.

- [Children](#) in the most deprived **areas are more than twice as likely to be living with obesity (13.9%)** compared to those in the least deprived areas (6.8%).
- [One in five](#) children and young people worry about not having enough food at home, contributing to anxiety and emotional distress.
- Mental health pressures are unevenly distributed, with [significantly higher child and adolescent mental health service \(CAMHS\) referral rates from Scotland's most deprived communities.](#)
- [Poor oral health remains a major issue](#), with **over a quarter (26.8%) of Primary 1 children showing signs of dental decay in 2024, and 18.5% of Primary 7 children showing signs of dental decay in 2025.**

When children arrive at school hungry, anxious, or struggling with poor health, they are less able to engage in learning, build positive relationships or benefit fully from their education. Food insecurity has been linked to poorer mental wellbeing, increased stress and anxiety, and reduced concentration, all of which can affect participation and long-term outcomes.

School breakfast provision supports healthier childhoods

Many children and young people in Scotland are growing up in environments where healthier foods are less affordable and less accessible. The result is that children can experience both poor nutrition and poor health outcomes despite consuming enough calories. Studies show that **children who regularly skip breakfast are more likely to experience poorer diet quality, [lower energy levels](#), [higher levels of anxiety and psychosocial difficulties](#), and an increased likelihood of being [overweight or obese](#).**

School breakfast provision helps tackle this challenge by providing access to a nutritious meal that meets school food standards while establishing positive routines and healthy habits from an early age. It also creates opportunities for children and young people to start the day feeling settled, supported, and ready to participate. Scottish Magic Breakfast partner schools [report](#) unanimously that breakfast provision is already supporting their pupils' health and wellbeing:

- **Physical health and wellbeing** (90% of primary schools, 72% of secondaries).
- **Mental health and emotional wellbeing** (90% of primary schools, 88% of secondaries).
- **Healthy eating habits** (90% of primary schools, 92% of secondaries).

[Research](#) commissioned by Magic Breakfast and undertaken by the British Nutrition Foundation found that freely accessible **school breakfasts can act as a nutritional safety net for children and young people**, particularly those living in poverty. The report found that **many young people are missing key nutrients needed for healthy growth, development and learning**, with half of adolescent girls not getting enough iron and one in five adolescents not meeting recommended levels of iodine or vitamin D. **Breakfast consumption was associated with better overall diet quality, while breakfast skipping was more common in young people living in deprived communities.**

What do parents say?

- **92% report positive impacts on their child's physical health.**
- **88% report positive changes on their child's mental health.**

"Before the school started the breakfast club, mornings were incredibly stressful. As a parent, choosing between putting money in the electric meter or buying enough cereal for the week is a heartbreaking position to be in. I used to worry constantly that the kids were starting their day at a disadvantage. Now, knowing they get a warm, healthy breakfast as soon as they walk through the school gates changes everything. It's a massive weight off my shoulders financially, but more importantly, my children are happier, they aren't anxious about being hungry, and their teachers say they are focusing much better in class." - Parent, Magic Breakfast partner school, Scotland

How MSPs can maximise the impact of school breakfast provision to improve children's health and wellbeing



The Scottish Government has already committed to introducing universal breakfast provision in primary and special schools from August 2027. The opportunity for Parliament is to ensure it delivers as much as possible. By viewing school breakfast provision as a part of Scotland's preventative health infrastructure, MSPs can support the implementation of this commitment to make sure that the national rollout can help tackle health inequalities, support mental wellbeing, encourage healthier eating habits and contribute to Scotland's wider ambition to shift public services towards prevention and early intervention. **That's why we're calling on MSPs to support our three-point plan by:**

- **Ensuring the Scottish Government delivers its commitment to provide universal school breakfast provision for all primary and special schools from August 2027.**
- **Scrutinising the delivery of the Scottish Government's commitment by drawing on the experiences of children and young people, schools and local communities to deliver effective and workable national guidance for all communities.**
- **Working with the Scottish Government to ensure national school breakfast provision is fully aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).**

If you would like to get in touch or learn more about our work, please don't hesitate to reach out to our Scotland team

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