

Supporting Scotland's special schools through breakfast provision

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.

The previous Scottish Government made a commitment to deliver universal breakfast provision in all primary and special schools by August 2027. For pupils in special schools, breakfast provision is about more than just food. It creates a calm, consistent and nurturing start to the day that supports wellbeing, regulation and readiness to learn.



Delivered well, breakfast provision helps realise children's rights under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) Articles 28 and 29.



Ensuring Scotland's school breakfast provision commitment delivers in practice will depend on early leadership and implementation choices that place the best interests of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) at the centre, including how breakfast provision is designed, staffed and funded in special school settings.

Magic Breakfast works closely with special schools across Scotland and supports hundreds of children with complex additional support needs every morning. We know that breakfast is foundational to the school day in these settings, underpinning attendance, regulation, wellbeing and the ability to learn.

Why breakfast matters in special schools

In special schools, the start of the day plays a decisive role in whether pupils are able to engage with learning. Long journeys, medical needs, sensory sensitivities and disrupted routines mean many pupils need support to settle before learning can begin.

When pupils arrive at school hungry or dysregulated, the impact is immediate. Concentration drops, anxiety increases, and learning is delayed before it has even begun. This compounds existing inequalities. Pupils with ASN already experience [lower attendance](#), higher exclusion rates, and poorer rates of [positive destinations](#).

Breakfast provision in special schools changes this starting point. It provides a calm transition into the school day and creates space for regulation and connection. It supports wellbeing and positive relationships, directly enabling children and young people to benefit from education and development in line with their rights under the UNCRC.

[Evidence](#) from Magic Breakfast's special partner schools consistently shows the difference this makes:

- In many schools, breakfast is a way for pupils to explore the developmental stages of eating food that helps expand their diet.
- By being given roles in school breakfast provision, special school pupils experience meaningful employment skills-building.
- 88% report school breakfast provision has reduced pressure on families facing ASN-related costs.
- Schools consistently describe calmer environments and smoother starts to learning because of school breakfast.

Scotland's promise to special schools

The previous Scottish Government's commitment to universal breakfast provision, explicitly including special schools, reflects an understanding that a nourishing, consistent start to the day supports wellbeing, readiness to learn and positive outcomes.

The challenge now is delivery. Special schools support pupils with a wide range of needs and operate within distinct environments and care requirements. School breakfast in these settings depends on skilled staff and provision that can adapt to pupils' needs.



This matters because special schools cannot be placed in the same context as mainstream primaries. Approaches that fail to reflect their realities risk undermining the stability, dignity and sense of belonging that breakfast provision is intended to provide. For MSPs, this creates a responsibility to ensure breakfast provision is designed with special schools from the outset, with the flexibility, staffing and support needed to embed nourishment and connection into every school morning.

What works in special school breakfast provision (and what doesn't)

Breakfast provision works best in special schools when it feels like a natural part of the school day rather than a separate intervention. When breakfast is delivered in a calm and familiar way, pupils have the time they need to settle after arrival and ease into the day. In [many special schools](#), breakfast clubs are also used as spaces for care, connection and skill-building, supporting:

- Emotional regulation and wellbeing
- Independence and life skills, such as food preparation and routines
- Communication and social interaction
- Positive relationships with peers and staff
- Sensory exploration within food and increasing variation within diets.

Crucially, this relies on fair, fully funded staffing. Breakfast provision in special schools is often delivered through relationships, supervision and skilled support. When staff have the capacity to do this work properly (through adequate time and training), breakfast supports children and young people with ASN in ways that carry through the rest of the day. These outcomes are central to children's rights to health and to an education that supports them to develop their abilities and potential to the fullest extent.

What does not work is provision designed around fixed assumptions rather than lived reality. Approaches that rely on rigid timings, underestimate staffing needs or fail to account for medical and sensory requirements risk limiting access and undermining impact.

Ensuring Scotland delivers on its promise by August 2027

Delivering universal breakfast provision by August 2027 will require early, focused leadership on special schools.



To realise children's rights to health, development and education under the UNCRC, implementation must reflect the realities of special schools from the outset. This requires early engagement with special schools, flexible and sustained funding, and recognition of staffing, supervision and coordination needs.

Clear milestones, national guidance and transparent monitoring will be essential. Above all, success depends on delivering breakfast provision *with* special schools, not *for* them.

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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