

The importance of secondary school 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.

Secondary school is vital to the long-term life chances of children and young people. Moving through broad general education to the exam years, the outcomes from the four or six years a young person spends in secondary education will set them up for life. At the same time, young people are going through the biggest physical and mental developments they might ever experience. Supporting this age group with breakfast provision shouldn't be an afterthought - we believe it needs to be central to enabling young Scots to develop and reach their fullest potential.



Research commissioned by Magic Breakfast shows the benefits of breakfast don't end at your Primary 7 leavers' assembly¹. Rather, they continue, expand, and deliver a foundation for secondary pupils to thrive on. Strong benefits can be seen in health and wellbeing, social belonging, life chances, and building a stronger society. **In Scotland, there is neither a centrally managed programme for secondary breakfasts provision nor any commitment to one.** Scotland's young people need bold policies to support their futures.

A healthy future: the health and wellbeing benefits of breakfast

Adolescence is a critical stage of physical, cognitive and emotional development. Unfortunately, it is also the stage at which diet quality deteriorates most, and breakfast consumption is at its lowest. Supporting **healthy breakfast choices aligns with young people's Article 24 rights** under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) to be as healthy as possible.

School breakfast provision can play a key role in supporting adolescents' health and wellbeing. Evidence in our report shows **breakfast consumption is associated with higher levels of positive wellbeing and happiness, including greater self-confidence, stronger social cohesion, and a sense of security and community.** Evidence in our report suggests possible **savings for health and social care services**, highlighting the wider societal and economic value of secondary-aged breakfast provision. By providing a safe and welcoming space for pupils to socialise, build friendships and practice social skills, **school breakfast provision can also foster social development, inclusion and a greater sense of belonging.**

A safer future: the social belonging and crime reduction benefits of breakfast

Poor diets and skipping breakfast have been linked to violence (fighting and aggression), low-level offences (shoplifting), and contact with the criminal justice system. As feelings of social belonging decline in adolescence, secondary-aged pupils may turn to gangs to fulfil the need for community, support and belonging. Food insecurity can exacerbate this vulnerability, with free fast food being a known recruitment tactic used by criminal networks.



¹ Magic Breakfast commissioned Rocket Science to conduct an evidence review that examines hunger among secondary-aged pupils and its implications on health and wellbeing, social belonging and crime, life chances, and social and economic benefits.

Evidence highlights the positive impact and the potential for school breakfast provision to foster improved feelings of social belonging among adolescents. Food programmes outwith Scotland such as the London Violence Reduction Unit's Holiday Hope initiative have been shown to help reduce the risk of child criminal exploitation. Similarly in London, a study recommended breakfast provision as an intervention to **support a reduction in knife crime and protect children from gang violence.** Moreover, the Youth Endowment Fund estimates **the impact of nutritional interventions on violent crime to be 'high' and that as a result of these interventions, there is an; 82% reduction in offending, a 52% reduction in anti-social behaviour and a 38% reduction in aggression.**

A stronger future: school breakfast provision and life chances

School breakfast provision can provide a space for social and extra-curricular activities, supporting enrichment and wider learning opportunities. **Magic Breakfast partner schools have integrated breakfast provision with a wide variety of enrichment activities,** including skills development, student leadership, volunteering, sports activities, art, music and reading. Supporting **breakfast provisions aligns with young people's Article 29 rights** (the right to an education which develops a young person's talents, personality, and abilities) under the UNCRC.

[Insights from partner schools](#) also demonstrate how **school breakfast provision can support improvements in concentration, learning, and attendance.** These outcomes contribute to long-term educational attainment, including improved academic grades. **Breakfast provision also provides opportunities for young people to take on leadership roles and develop key skills such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving.** Combined, these benefits could help increase the rates of Positive Destinations amongst young people.

A more prosperous future: the social and economic benefits of breakfast provision

Improved lifetime earnings are associated with consistent breakfast provision throughout childhood and adolescence. **Evidence from [a Swedish study revealed](#) increased lifetime earnings resulting from 9 years of free school food provision from ages 7 to 16.** Young people from lower socio-economic areas saw a 5.8% increase in lifetime earnings.

Investing in breakfast provision for secondary-aged pupils delivers substantial social, educational and economic returns. **Evidence from primary schools indicates that school breakfast provision can generate long-term economic benefits of around [£9,200 per pupil](#),** meaning that for every £1 invested, the return on investment is over £50.

A bold Parliament: delivering the benefits of breakfast provision

The 2026/27 Scottish Budget lays the groundwork for the delivery of universal breakfast provision in all of Scotland's primary and special schools from August 2027. **From Kirkwall to Kirkintilloch the 372,191 secondary pupils across the country won't benefit** from this. But as we've shown, it is just as vital to support them as it is to support other young people. Scotland provides young people with free tuition when they leave school because of the recognition of the vitality of educational opportunities, free bus passes are also provided because of the vitality of mobility. It's critical that the new Government also recognises the cross-cutting benefits of secondary school breakfast provision.



Our European neighbours are already taking steps to support their children and young people. With a similar population size, **[Finland's Kouluruokailu programme](#) already delivers a nationally funded and locally managed school breakfast policy for primary and secondary schools.**

When the school breakfast commitment is delivered in August 2027, Scotland's journey will only just be starting. **The seventh session of the Scottish Parliament has the opportunity to be bold and extend school breakfast provision for the six years of secondary education to create a healthier, safer, stronger and more prosperous nation.** To find out even more about the benefits of breakfast at secondary take a look at our [dedicated webpage](#). 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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