

Breakfast in School is Brilliant!



Acknowledgements

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Breakfast in school is brilliant

Many researchers have suggested that insufficient food intake in young people at the beginning of the day may be detrimental to children's intellectual and physical performance, nutritional status and health¹. This has led to a number of schools choosing to provide breakfast for their pupils.

During a previous Breakfast Week, two secondary schools in Wales experimented with breakfast for a trial period of one month. Fifty five pupils regularly attended breakfast, and of these 44 per cent said that eating breakfast regularly was new to them. Fifty two per cent recognised that they didn't feel so hungry in the morning as a result of school breakfast, and 36 per cent reported being able to concentrate better in class².

This booklet is written to help those schools who are thinking of offering breakfast in school. It has been prepared following discussion with schools who offer breakfast to their pupils and is a summary of their experiences. A number of other people have been consulted including catering services, environmental health officers and school insurers.

The quotes throughout the text are all from pupils who have experienced breakfast in schools.



The importance of breakfast

Breakfast is an important meal which literally means 'break the fast'. When you get up in the morning you may not have eaten for 12 hours or more.

Hungry children may be too sleepy or easily distracted to pay attention to learning tasks ³. Several studies have demonstrated that children who miss breakfast have diminished attention spans and are unable to perform a variety of tasks as well as their nourished counterparts ^{3,4,5}.

Breakfast has an important role in supplying vital nutrients. For example, a typical serving of a fortified wholegrain breakfast cereal with semi-skimmed milk contributes useful amounts of protein, iron, fibre, calcium, vitamins and minerals ⁶.

'The best thing ever in school'

Regular consumption of breakfast cereal has also been associated with lower blood cholesterol levels in children ⁷.

Children who eat breakfast cereals regularly tend to acquire less of their energy intake from fat – high levels of fat may be linked to obesity which can, in later life, lead to diabetes, heart disease and cancer ⁸.

Finally, several studies have investigated benefits from school breakfast provision on school attendance, and have consistently demonstrated positive results ³. Children's arrival earlier in the morning in order to eat breakfast has the added benefit of ensuring that they are on time for the first lesson.



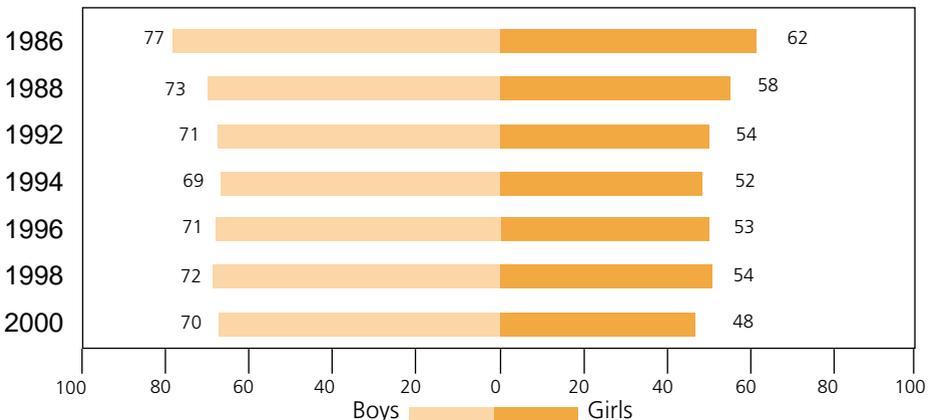
Trends in meal eating

The habit of eating breakfast diminishes as children get older. Surveys from 1986 to 2000 show that the proportion of 11-16 year olds reporting to eat breakfast every day has fallen for all age groups apart from 11-12 year old boys. By 2000, fewer than half of 13-16 year old girls reported eating breakfast on a daily basis ⁹.

Consumption of lunch and dinner also fell over this period, particularly among girls. Eating regular meals also declines with age ⁹.

This skipping of meals tends to suggest that children are replacing meals with other alternative foods. Consumption of snacks such as potato crisps is high, with one half of 11-13 year-olds reporting to eat these foods daily; more than 45 per cent of girls and over 50 per cent of boys aged 11-15 years report eating sweets or chocolate every day. At age 11 years, only 60 per cent of girls and 56 per cent of boys report eating fruit every day, and these percentages decline with increasing age ⁹.

Percentage 11-16 year olds eating breakfast every day: Wales 1986-2000



Why? What? When? and How?

Q. Why is it a good idea?

Teachers at one primary school report that children who have had breakfast are less fidgety and have better concentration. They also believe that such a positive start to the day can exert a calming influence, particularly for those children whose life is less than calm. Breakfast at school will also allow children to socialise more with their friends and provide an opportunity to get into the positive habit of sitting at a table and sharing a meal together.



'I am glad we have breakfast at school'

Q. How do we start a scheme?

It's a good idea to get an estimate of numbers interested before you start planning. This could involve asking pupils, but also writing to parents to get their views. The scheme will work better if people have been consulted and have given their support.

Make it clear what will be available, how it will work and what it will cost, otherwise pupils may be put off by misinformation.

'It's important to eat breakfast because it gives me energy'

Q. What time do schools usually serve breakfast and for how long?

All the schools we spoke to start serving breakfast about 45 minutes before school commences, and finish serving 5-15 minutes before the bell; allowing about 30 minutes for the meal. An early morning break with breakfast offered may be a good idea where pupils travel a long way.



Q. We haven't got a separate dining room. How can we cope?

Although it's easier with a separate dining room that doesn't need to be used for assembly, schools have found ways around the problem.

It's worth remembering that the whole hall will not be used for breakfast; four or five tables will probably be enough with pupils arriving at different times. As long as breakfast finishes 10-15 minutes before school starts there is enough time to clear away.

Another alternative is to alter the time of assembly. Some schools have found an assembly works immediately before or after the morning break.

One school approached the on-site youth centre and discussed the problem with them. As a result the youth centre started providing breakfast.

'You should have breakfast – it's the most important meal of the day'

'Breakfast club is a great idea and all the people are really kind'



Q. How can we staff breakfast?

The most cost-effective way of staffing breakfast is for the school meals service to run it with existing canteen staff. In many cases these staff are on site at this time and the service will also increase its profits by providing breakfast. In some areas the school meals service already offers breakfast to a number of schools. Teachers and other staff may see the positive benefits of punctual attendance and better concentration of pupils and be willing to be involved.



'I think school dining is a good idea'

In some schools a breakfast club is part of childcare, and is available as part of a longer session. In this case qualified play leaders run the club.

Q. Do we need a teacher present?

School governors should consult their insurance policies to ensure that their provision meets the requirements. Schools are normally required to 'take due care', but specific policies need to be consulted for the detail of what this means.

'It's alright. They have nearly everything you want'

Most of the schools we spoke to have a teacher prepared to be in school and take responsibility, although they are not actually involved with the breakfast provision.

In the case of the youth centre, a qualified youth worker is in charge.



Q. What food should we offer?

The best advice is not to be too ambitious. A basic menu usually includes a few cereal choices such as corn flakes, bran flakes, rice crispies and wheat biscuits; toast or bread; and a choice of drinks such as orange juice or tea. This can be added to as appropriate with items such as yoghurt, fresh fruit and high fibre biscuits.

'It helps kids to get to know each other'

Q. How much can we charge?

The price of breakfast in school needs to be comparable to the cost of the crisps and sweets that pupils may otherwise buy on the way to school.

'Breakfast is very important, it livens you up in the morning'

One primary school breaks even at a charge of 50p for cereal, toast and a drink, as long as 30 pupils attend. Breaktime toast at 20-25p and fruit juice at 30-50p have been acceptable to pupils in secondary schools.

Other schools have sought sponsorship from outside agencies to enable them to keep costs even lower. For example sponsorship received from a breakfast cereal manufacturing company has enabled one school to offer free cereal, with toast and juice costing just 10p each.

'It was the best and most brilliant thing I've ever done'

Q. What about food hygiene regulations?

If breakfast is being provided by individuals other than the canteen staff then the local environmental health officer should be



consulted, although there is unlikely to be a problem as long as food is only served to pupils in the school. For a cereal and toast breakfast the main requirements are refrigerated storage for the milk and butter/margarine.

'If you sleep late you don't have to worry about missing breakfast because of the school breakfast'

Q. How many pupils do you think will come to breakfast?

This will vary with the catchment area, particularly whether children need to catch buses. One secondary school of 800 pupils has up to 100 attending in winter, but only about 20 in summer. Numbers in primary schools of approximately 230 pupils range from 20 to 60; again with a drop off noted in the summer.



Q. When is the best time to start?

The autumn term is probably a good time to start as a few schools have noted a drop off in the summer. A month's trial may be a good idea in order to see the likely response.

Q. Can we link breakfast to curriculum work?

It is important that any health-related work in the curriculum is linked to good practice in the school. One primary school found that a termly topic on 'Healthy eating' was the springboard

'Breakfast at school is a good thing because people go there you don't know so you can make friends with them'

for a breakfast project. Year 6 pupils planned to provide breakfast for themselves for a week, and then for every other class for one day each.

This provided a wealth of mathematics work as they visited the local supermarket to check prices, and calculated quantities required. It also met with the pupils' approval as a comment book showed.

'To year 6 it was the best breakfast in the world. Thank you.'

Q. Have you identified any problems?

The timing of breakfast before school means that pupils who travel by bus are unable to attend. Schools may, as an alternative, be able to offer breakfast provision at morning break.

Finance has been a concern but by using existing staff and offering a limited menu it is possible to break even. Schools have also been successful in securing sponsorship and feel that the benefits to children outweigh the financial difficulties.

'Breakfast in school is a good idea for people who can't be bothered to have breakfast or don't feel hungry earlier on'



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