

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Press Release



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Many children rely on breakfast clubs to eat in the morning

Almost half (45%) of education staff believe that without a breakfast club, pupils who attend them wouldn't have any food before lessons, according to a survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

Almost a quarter (23%) believe that parents are having to rely on breakfast clubs to feed their children due to lack of money at home, caused by unemployment.

According to 77% of respondents, making sure pupils eat the most important meal of the day means that pupils' concentration is better while 71% say it also improves their ability to learn.

A classroom teacher from a primary school in Kent said: "Although there is a charge for our breakfast club, we have accessed funding for those pupils on free school meals and the breakfast club had an effect on their attendance, concentration and being in school for the start of lessons."

Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents say pupils attend a breakfast club because their parent or carer has to go to work early and needs to leave them at school, plugging a gap in early-hours childcare. With more parents working full-time, many are relying on schools' breakfast clubs.

Judith Bainbridge, a primary teacher from Durham said: "Quite a lot of pupils went to childcare before school, but because of costs, parents could not afford to do it anymore and decided it was much cheaper to send them to school to a breakfast club."

When questioned whether the government should provide funding to support more breakfast clubs, three-quarters believe that they should, with one support staff member in a primary school in Dudley commenting: "Many children from poorer homes who receive free school meals should also be able to access a breakfast club free of charge."

This was echoed by a member of special educational needs staff in a secondary school in Kent who said: "I think breakfast clubs should operate in all schools and colleges. So many students do not have breakfast for whatever reason and they should be free to low income families and could be subsidised for others."

The survey also looked at school lunches, with a third (33%) believing there is not a good enough selection of food on offer in their school or college, and just over a quarter (26%) thinking that the portion size is inadequate for the age of the pupils. A quarter also stated they do not think lunchtime food is good quality.

A member of special educational needs staff in a secondary academy in Northamptonshire said: "Unfortunately, not only are the prices disproportionately high, but the quality is significantly lacking; many of the options on the hot food menu are high in saturated fats, salts and sugars."

Keith Holmes, a teacher and member of management in a secondary academy in Sheffield, said: "I get annoyed that school meals have to satisfy nutritional standards yet students can choose a selection which is not nutritionally balanced e.g. two biscuits and a fizzy drink, or chips with gravy instead of chips, fish and peas."

A newly qualified teacher in a secondary free school in Kirklees said: "I find it funny that the school isn't allowed to put butter in jacket potatoes due it being high in saturated fat but they are allowed to provide chocolate cookies, chocolate muffins and foods soaked in saturated fat!"

On a more positive note, 67% say their school or college encourages pupils to eat healthy food for lunch. Alexis Watkins, a head of department in a secondary school in Derbyshire, said: "We have a points system for the food that pupils buy - the pupils with the most points over the term in each year group get a prize for being the healthiest eaters."

Almost four-fifths (79%) say their school or college teaches practical cooking skills where pupils actively get involved, and although just over a half (51%) don't grow their own food on the premises, 85% of schools and colleges ensure they teach pupils where food comes from.

Sue Willans, a member of special educational needs staff in a primary school in Hertfordshire, said: "Many of our parents themselves can't cook and have poor knowledge about healthy eating. Next year our school will be including cooking for all children. Information on healthy eating is already part of our school curriculum and is embedded into all aspects where food is involved."

Jackie Read, a teacher in a primary school from Surrey, said: "I think it is important to educate children on cooking healthy food and part of that should look at budgeting and how to look around for good buys. It should also make them aware that healthy options are not really expensive."

Almost all (99.5%) respondents stated they believe it is important that pupils learn about food and healthy eating, including basic cooking skills.

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of ATL, said: "Getting a good nutritious start to the day has a huge impact on children's ability to learn and concentrate at school. Many schools do everything they can to ensure children eat well during school term-time.

"But there are many children living in poverty, who we fear won't be getting a decent meal a day in the holidays and this is something the government urgently needs to address.

"Although families in need have access to food banks, these can only be used a limited number of times when in dire need. The government needs to stop shouting about 'skivers' and think about the children who are affected by the poverty of their parents whether they are in or out of work."

ENDS

ATL surveyed 552 teachers, lecturers, support staff and school leaders working in primary and secondary state schools and academies in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland between 27 February and 4 March 2013.

Key survey results:

Does your school/college offer a breakfast club for pupils?					
Answer Options			Response Percent	Response Count	
Yes			54.0%	298	
No			41.8%	231	
It did, but it had to stop			4.2%	23	
answered question					552
In your opinion, what are the main reasons pupils attend a breakfast club? Ticking all that apply.					
Answer Options			Response Percent	Response Count	
The only way the pupil will get access to a meal in the morning			44.7%	247	
Lack of money at home due to parent/carer unemployment			22.6%	125	
Lack of money at home due to changes/cuts to benefits available for parents/carers			15.2%	84	
Parent/carer goes to work early and needs to leave pupil at club before school/college			76.8%	424	
So the pupil can socialise			17.6%	97	
Unsure			5.8%	32	
Other (please specify)			6.3%	35	
answered question					552
Do you believe that offering breakfast to pupils has a positive or negative impact on their... Ticking all that apply.					
Answer Options	Better	The same	Worse	Don't know	Response Count
Concentration	77.3% (426)	14.3% (79)	1.3% (7)	7.1 (39)	551
Ability to learn	71% (387)	20.2% (110)	0.7% (4)	8.1 (44)	545
Behaviour	57.9% (318)	30.6% (168)	2% (11)	9.5% (52)	549
Social skills	60.2% (325)	29.6% (160)	0.4% (2)	9.8% (53)	540
Other (specified)					16
answered question					552
Do you believe that the government should provide funding to support more breakfast clubs?					
Answer Options			Response Percent	Response Count	
Yes			75.5%	417	
No			13.0%	72	
Don't know			11.4%	63	
answered question					552
Does the price of lunch charged to students in your school/college represent value for money?					
Answer Options			Response Percent	Response Count	
Yes			59.2%	327	
No			27.9%	154	
Don't know			12.9%	71	
answered question					552

In your opinion, are lunches served in your school/college... Ticking all that apply.				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response Count
affordable for the majority of pupils	71.3% (393)	16.7% (92)	12% (66)	551
of a healthy standard/good nutritionally	70.5% (389)	20.3% (112)	9.2% (51)	552
an adequate portion size relevant to the age of the pupil	67.3% (370)	25.6% (141)	7.1% (39)	550
of a good quality	66.1% (362)	25.4% (139)	8.6% (47)	548
well presented/appealing	63.1% (344)	29.7% (162)	7.2% (39)	545
providing a good choice/selection	60.6% (329)	33.1% (180)	6.3% (34)	543
answered question				552

Are pupils encouraged to choose healthy items for lunch?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	67.4%	353
No	32.6%	171
answered question		524

Does your school/college teach practical cooking skills where pupils actively get involved?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	79.5%	439
No	17.9%	99
Don't know	2.5%	14
answered question		552

Do you think it is important that children and young people learn about food and healthy eating, including basic cooking skills?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	99.5%	549
No	0.2%	1
Don't know	0.4%	2
answered question		552

Does your school/college grow some of its own food, or at least teach pupils where food comes from?				
Answer Options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response Count
Grow your own food	46% (248)	51.4% (277)	2.6% (14)	539
Teach pupils where food comes from	85.4% (450)	6.3% (33)	8.3% (44)	527
answered question				552

Note to editors:

- The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' Annual Conference is taking place at Liverpool BT Convention Centre, from 25-27 March 2013.
- The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 170,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
- ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
- ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.