

2022 School Meals Report

From ParentPay, Cypad and LACA



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Who we are

ParentPay

ParentPay Group is the UK's largest education technology business, and trusted by schools UK wide to deliver a seamless cashless payment and paperless meal management service. Our products use cloud-based technology to streamline processes, improve engagement with parents and simplify meal management for catering teams and schools. It's no wonder 11,000 schools and 200 Local Authorities across the UK trust ParentPay to take their payments and meals paperless.

www.parentpay.com

Cypad

Cypad is the technology behind the specialist meal & kitchen management solutions within ParentPay Group, which fully integrate with our key group products. Designed to provide a paperless catering management solution across single or multiple sites, Cypad allows kitchens to become fully digital and centralised, whether you are a MAT managing school meals in-house, a contract caterer with a school meal contract for hundreds of schools, or a single primary school with a school cook. Using Cypad technology, ParentPay Group can help you maximise and maintain the safeguarding of your pupils and give parents total peace of mind.

www.cypad.com

LACA

Established in 1989, LACA is the leading body representing professional catering managers and chefs working in the school sector across local authorities, private contractors and individual schools and academies. Since its inception, LACA has set out to inform, develop, represent and support its members through a range of initiatives and services which include:

- Campaigning and lobbying industry and Government to improve the school food service.
- National and regional events and networking opportunities including the annual LACA Main Event and School Food Show.
- Competitions to promote excellence in school food including School Chef of the Year and Finishing Touches.
- Learning and development tools and support including allergen risk assessment guides, menu checking services and e-learning courses.

www.laca.co.uk



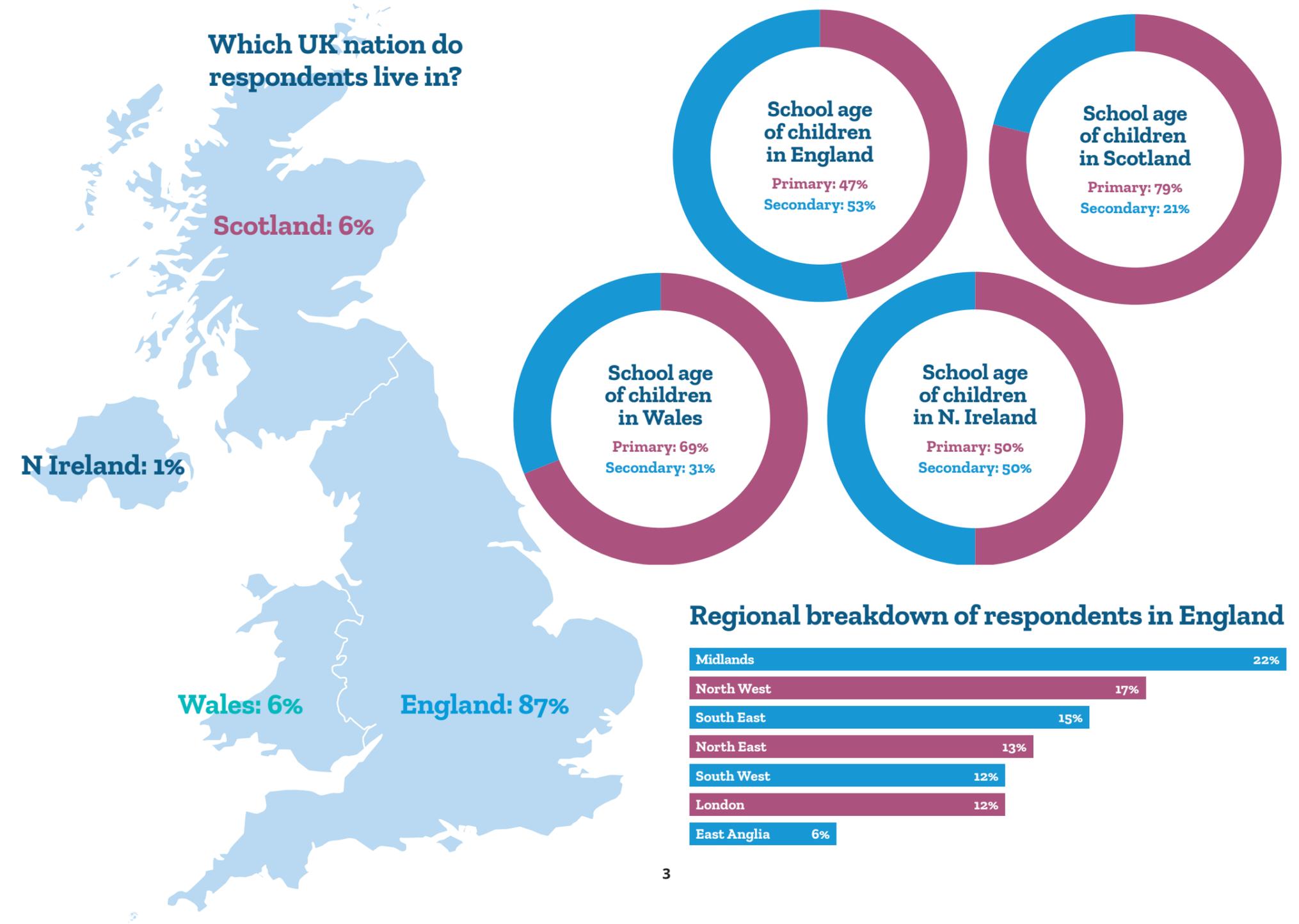
Introduction

The aim of this research is to understand the parental view of the school meal service and offering available to their children. Building on the success of the 2021 survey, ParentPay, Cypad and LACA have again conducted one of the largest studies ever undertaken with parents on school meal provision in the UK.

The survey attracted an overwhelmingly positive response and totalled 306,354 respondents, providing an extremely robust overall sample size across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as within the regions of England.

As an organisation in its 31st year, LACA has long been recognised as an association representing and supporting school catering organisations and teams across the country, with 80% of school catering services being delivered by its members. Assist FM have also contributed to the report and gave their full support for the responses from parents across Scotland.

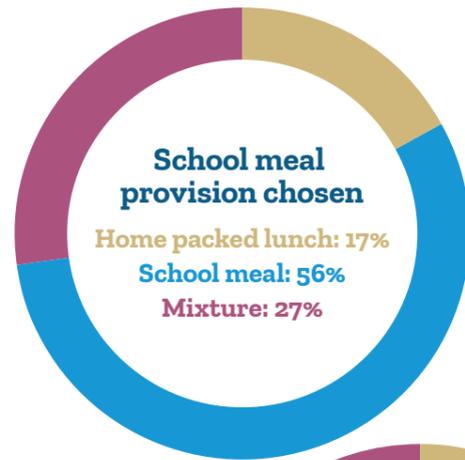
This study helps us to understand what caterers and school leadership teams need to do to ensure their customers and families are happy with the service provided. Comparing the results to the previous survey and other pieces of research will provide an ongoing understanding of the needs of parents/guardians, school leadership and catering teams.



Meal provision

83% of pupils

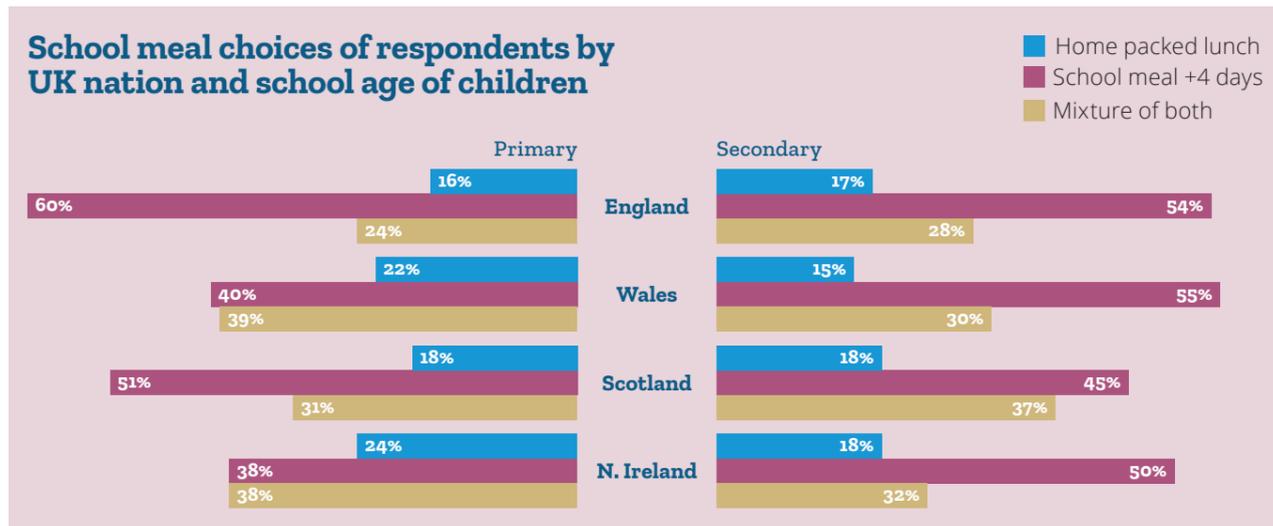
are having a school meal at least once a week. Overall, a half of children are having school meals everyday, with a third of those switching between school meals and packed lunches.



See page 7 for more information about free school meals.

The majority of parents

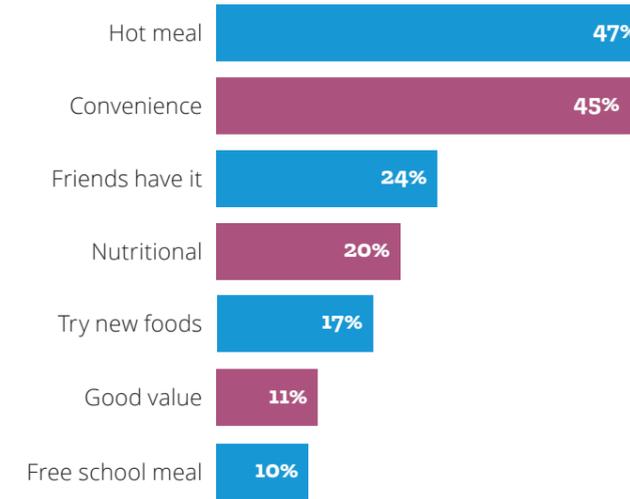
who are entitled to FSM and use them opt for school meals or a mixture. Still, **23% of free school meal parents are opting for a mixture** of packed lunches and school meals or packed lunch only.



Regional breakdown of school meal selection across England

	North East	North West	Midlands	East Anglia	South West	South East	London
Home packed lunch	15%	15%	18%	19%	19%	19%	13%
School meal (+4 pw)	64%	64%	55%	50%	51%	51%	62%
A mixture of both	21%	21%	28%	31%	30%	30%	25%

Reasons for choosing school meals



Those who are mixing school meals and packed lunches

say the top-2 reasons for choosing school meals are to **get a hot meal and the convenience it provides.**

Price rating of hot school meals

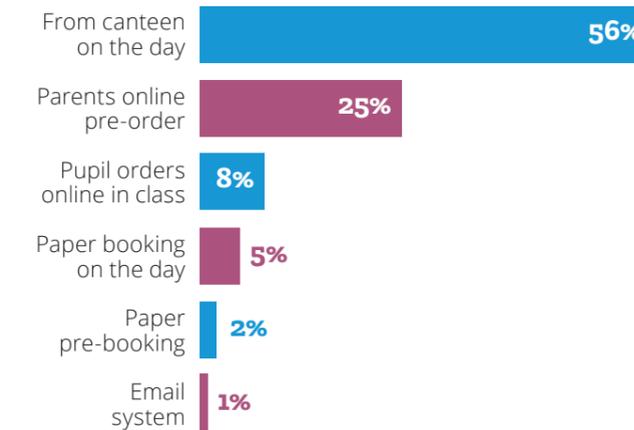
	Total	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
Total respondents	153,535	136,886	7,868	7,218	1,563
Too low	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Priced appropriately	69%	69%	64%	79%	67%
Too high	28%	28%	33%	17%	31%

Meal choice is predominantly done on the day, although a quarter of parents pre-order in advance.

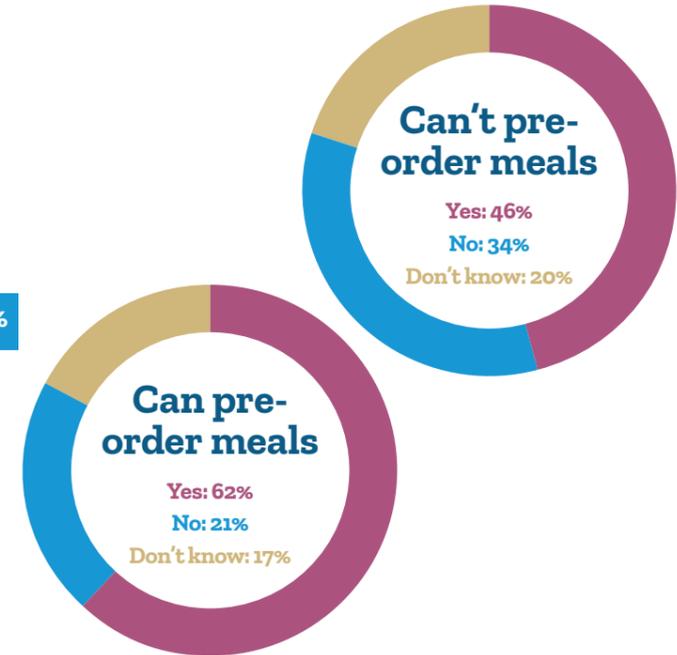
Of the 85,000 respondents

who would prefer a different method of choosing school meals to their existing method, **63% of them want to be able to pre-order meals in advance.**

Method of choosing school meals



Impact that the method of choice has on the pupil getting the meal they want or choose:



Digital meal pre-selection

further increases caterers' ability to deliver the chosen meal for each pupil and allows parents to confirm that the chosen meal was taken.

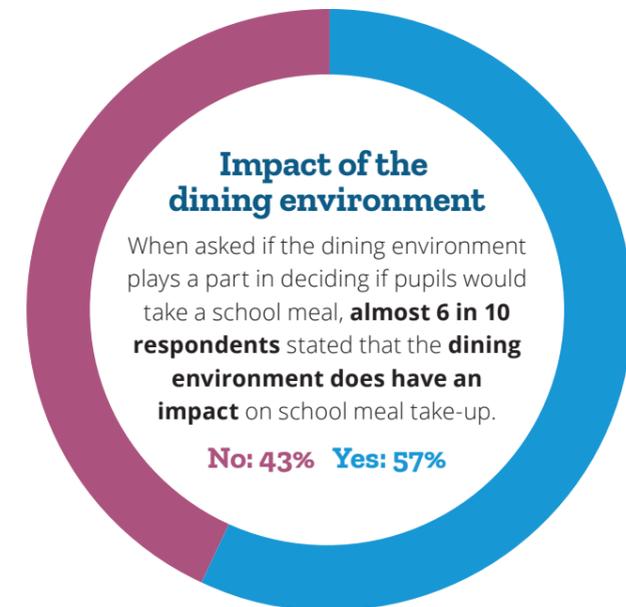
Promisingly, **69% of parents still feel that school meals are priced correctly**, while **28% think the price is too high**. There has been a drop of **11% of those feel that meals are priced correctly compared to the 2021 report.**

How to increase meal uptake

“ Having sufficient time in a designated area influences what my child wants to take. She has free school meals but sometimes not having the options available to her does make her request a packed lunch.” **Surveyed Parent**

“ Yes; children need to socialise in a dining hall.” **Surveyed Parent**

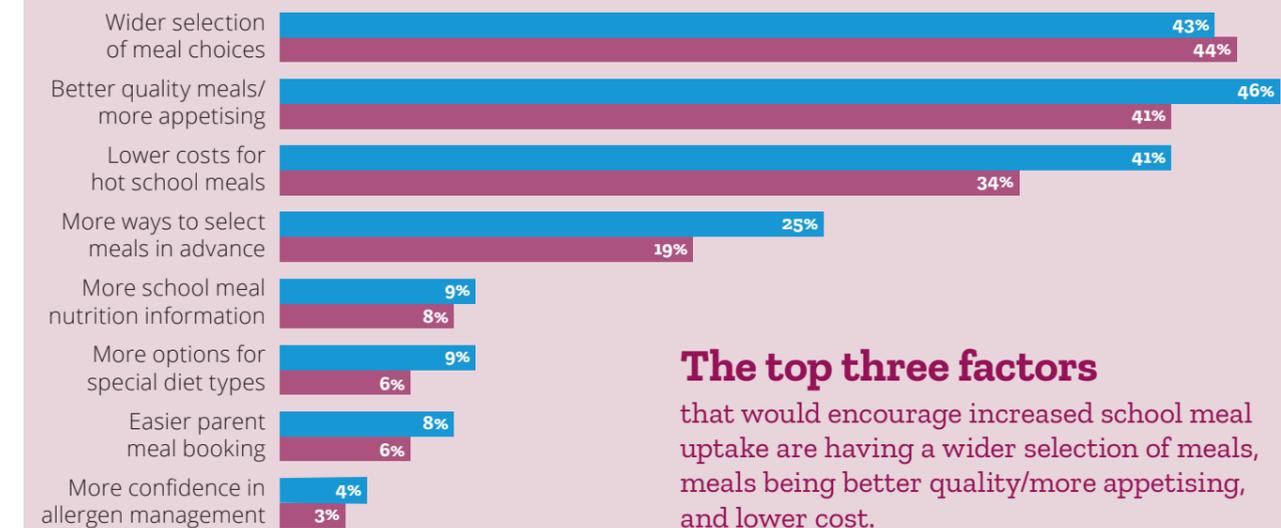
“ Eating in the canteen is a huge factor for my child as she is highly sensitive to noise and smells and is easily put off eating by this.” **Surveyed Parent**



Themed meals

are of interest to nearly 8 in 10 surveyed parents as being a factor for them choosing more school meal provision. Holiday celebration themes such as Eid, Chinese New Year, and Christmas were the most popular at 56% of respondents.

Which of these would increase the frequency of parents choosing school meal provision?



70% of parents surveyed

would be willing to pay for a breakfast option if it was provided by their schools, presenting an additional opportunity for caterers and schools, as well as the learning benefits a healthy breakfast gives to pupils.

2021 comparison:

A wide variety of quality meals remains the top factor for changing from packed lunches in 2021 and 2022, for both **primary school, at 50% of parents surveyed**, and

The top three factors

that would encourage increased school meal uptake are having a wider selection of meals, meals being better quality/more appetising, and lower cost.

secondary school, at 39%. Caterers and local authorities can use digital meal management solutions to offer a wider choice of meals while minimising waste and spend on excess stock.

Free school meals



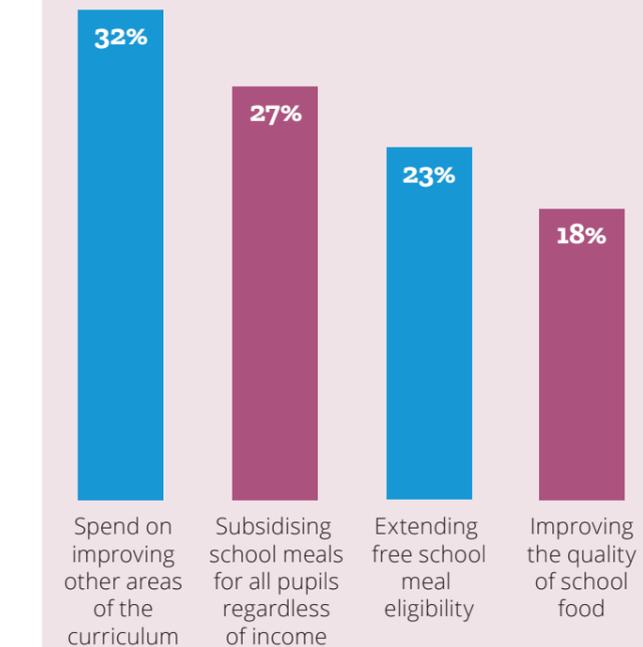
3% of respondents

When asked to give more detail on why they don't make use of their free school meal provision, a number stated that this is due to the **stigma attached** to free school meals, or that there is **little healthy choice** within the meals provided, so they would rather provide packed lunches.

64% of those eligible for free school meals

would use school meal provision even if they didn't qualify for free school meals.

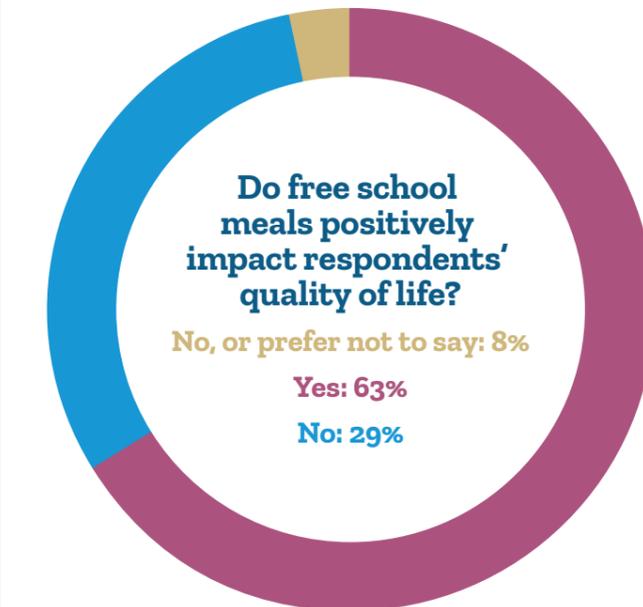
If governments decided to increase funding for education, how do you think the extra resources should be spent?



63% of parents

who qualify for free school meals feel that free school meals improve the quality of life for them and/or their children.

29% of the respondents stated free school meals don't improve quality of life. Many say that their free school meal allowance doesn't cover a full meal, so they must top up anyway. Some also say they are paying extra for top up meals or snacks due to a combination of limited variety of meals and portion sizes, leaving pupils hungry.



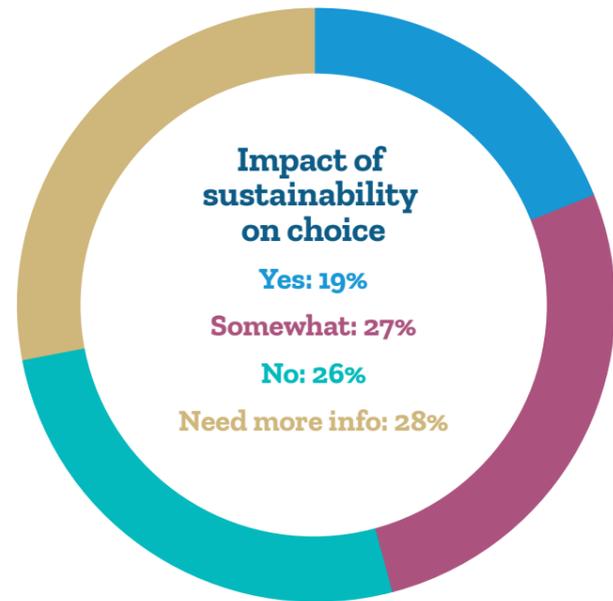
Quality and sustainability

Nearly 1 in 5 parents

surveyed claim that sustainability and ethical sourcing is definitely a factor when choosing school meal provision.

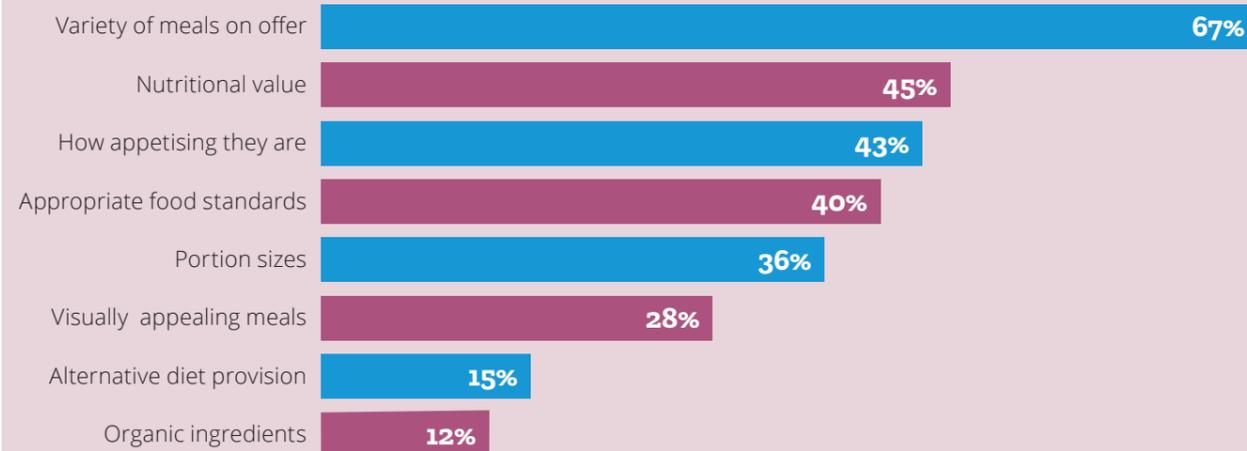
2021 comparison

30% of respondents in 2021 said sustainability was definitely a factor in choice, down to 19% in 2022.



What quality means in a school meal

When assessing the quality of school meals, **variety is a key factor for almost 7 in 10.** After that, a range of other factors comes into play such as **nutritional value, being appetising, adherence to food standards, and portion sizes** are also considerations.



Sustainability a factor in meal choices by regions of England

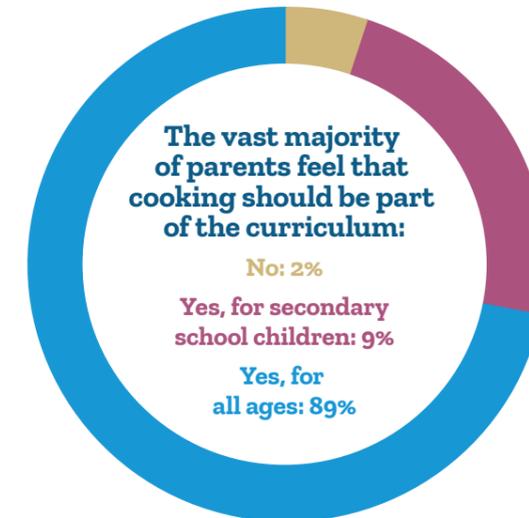
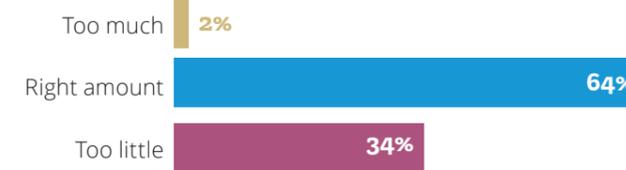
	North East	North West	Midlands	East Anglia	South West	South East	London
Yes	16%	19%	18%	17%	20%	19%	24%
Somewhat	25%	26%	28%	27%	29%	29%	29%
No	30%	27%	27%	29%	25%	26%	20%
Need more info	29%	28%	28%	27%	26%	27%	27%

School meal information

Two-thirds of respondents

feel they get the right amount of information about school meals. However, just over 1 in 3 feel there should be more.

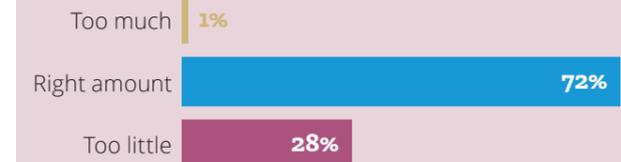
Amount of information



72% of respondents

who have the ability to see the menu ahead of time and pre-order their child's school meals say they get the right amount of information from their school. In comparison, nearly 50% of those who can't pre-order say they receive too little information.

With meal pre-ordering option

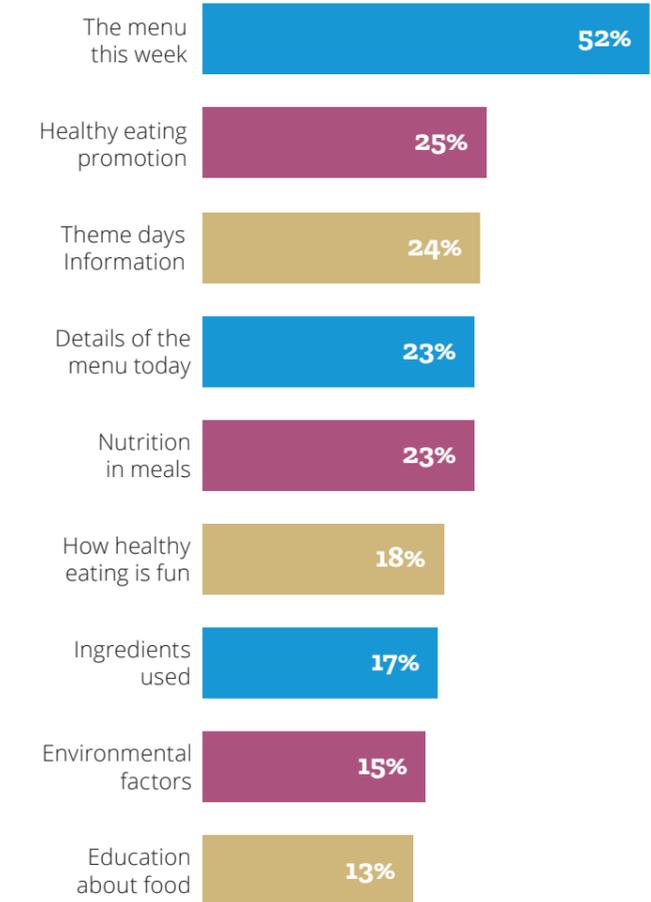


No meal pre-ordering option



When we explored the type of information they want, the responses are wide-ranging. Menu practicalities dominate, with **52% wanting to see the menu this week and 23% wanting to see the menu on the day.** This is followed by a focus on healthy eating, how it's promoted, or made fun.

Types of information parents would like their schools to provide



Alternative diets and allergy management

Breakdown of alternative diets across UK nations

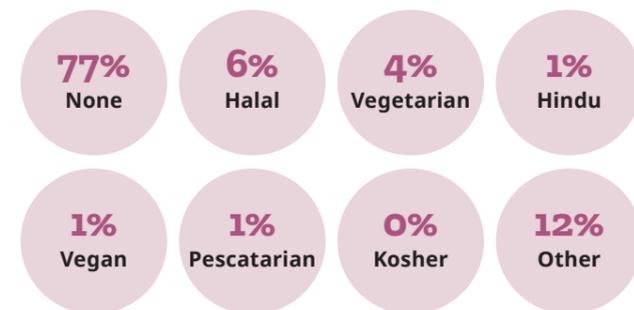
	Total	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
Total	306,354	267,047	19,477	15,964	3,866
Halal	6%	6%	3%	4%	0%
Vegetarian	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Hindu	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Vegan	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Pescatarian	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Kosher	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Breakdown of alternative diets across England regions

	Total	North East	North West	Midlands	East Anglia	South West	South East	London
Total	267,047	33,813	46,569	58,269	14,783	33,349	39,969	33,243
None	76%	83%	78%	79%	84%	82%	80%	62%
Halal	6%	4%	8%	6%	2%	3%	4%	14%
Vegetarian	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	6%
Hindu	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	4%
Vegan	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Pescatarian	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Kosher	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Other	12%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	14%

Nearly 1 in 4 have alternative dietary needs

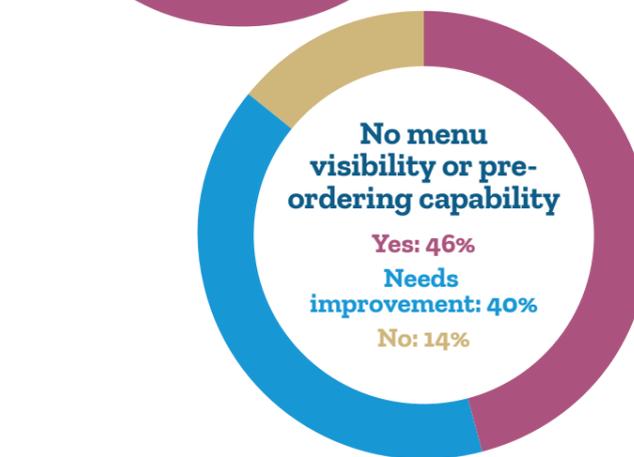
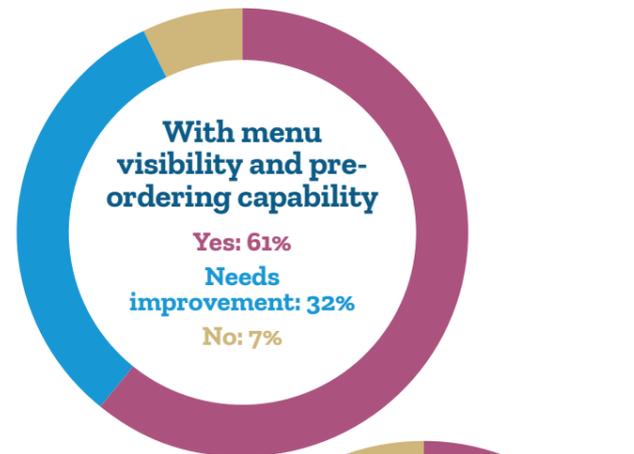
Halal is the highest (amongst the pre-defined needs), accounting for 1 in 20 school children.



12% of pupils had alternative dietary requirements in 2021.

1 in 20 parents surveyed have children with established food allergies that need catering for. Milk and peanut allergies sit at 2% each, with egg and cereals with gluten at 1%.

Impact of pre-ordering functionality on trusted allergy management:



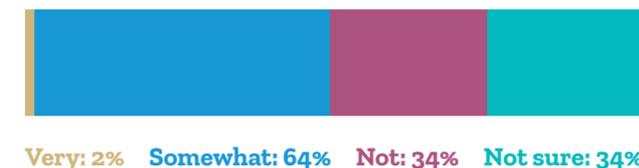
Pre-booking options give visibility over diet types and appropriate meals, increasing parents' confidence to select a school meal.

“ They are brilliant with allergies and never had any issues. My son never misses out.”
 Surveyed Parent

“ Slow response from the council meant we didn't get an allergy menu and there were miscommunications between them and the school. A faster response and better communication from the council to parents and the school would help improve this.”
 Surveyed Parent

“ All done online and can speak to the teacher about allergies directly.”
 Surveyed Parent

How sensitively are allergies managed by schools?



Positively, the majority of parents with children who have allergies say that their child hasn't experienced bullying because of this. However, 1 in 10 respondents say their child has experienced negativity as a result of their allergy, either currently or in the past.



The majority of parents feel that their schools manage allergies well, with **nearly 50% having complete confidence** in them and **37% agreeing**, but suggesting improvement is needed.

Of the same group of parents, just over half feel that allergy management is handled with some sensitivity, but only one quarter feel it's managed 'very' sensitively. **highlighting some room for improvement in this area.**

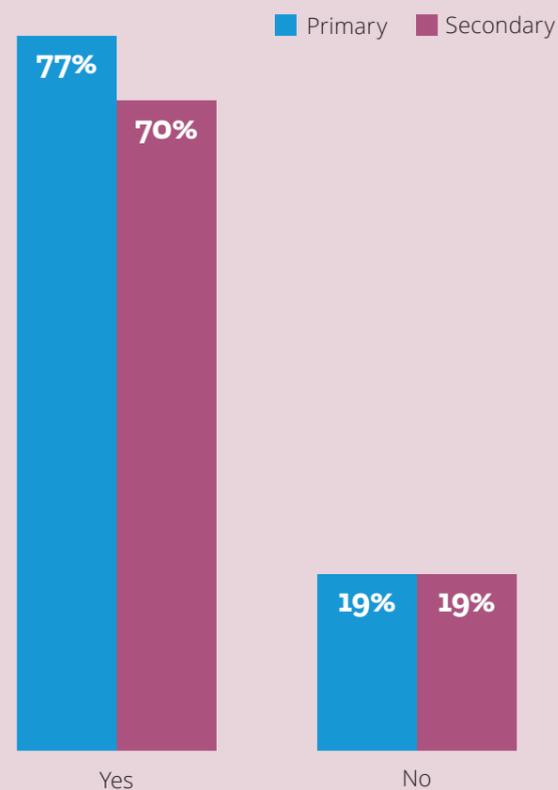
Bullying due to allergies

Currently: 3% **No: 87%**
In the past: 7% **Prefer not to say: 3%**

Technology

Ability to pre-select meals

The majority of parents across primary and secondary schools would like to be able to use a system that allows them to **pre-select meals ahead of time, view the menu and nutritional content, and see a picture of the food.**

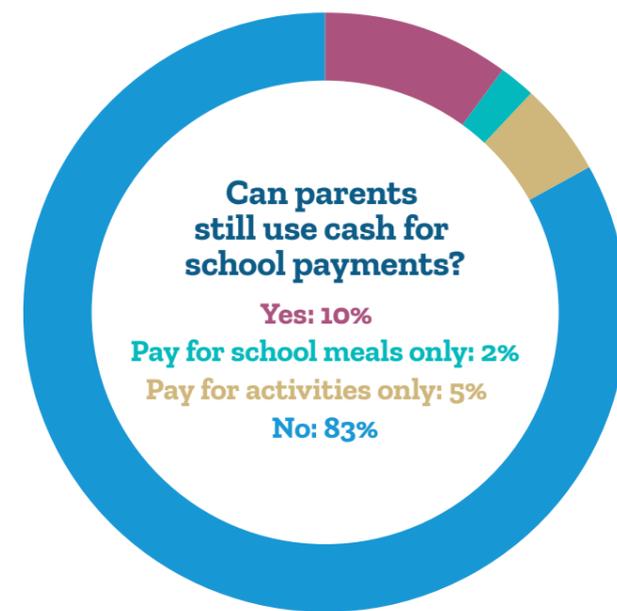


8 in 10 parents

say cash payments are a thing of the past.

1 in 10 can use cash

to pay for all school related spend. However, just **0.02% of parents who can use cash to pay want to continue doing so.** The vast majority use online payment methods when given the choice between cash and online.



66% of primary school parents

would like the ability to see what school meals their child has eaten in the recent past, with **only 12% already having this available to them.**

“ There aren’t many schools that are cash-only anymore. We saw in 2020 that 2% of surveyed schools still only accept cash payments, and that number has decreased to 1.6% in 2021.”

Source: ParentPay Whitepaper, 2021.

Summary

- The majority of parents continue to feel that school meals are priced correctly. Even with the ever-increasing cost of living, school caterers are focused on and managing to produce good value for money meals.
- While caterers continue to work tirelessly at improving school meal provision, some topics raised by parents show there is more work to be done in terms of communicating on key issues that include:
 - allergen management
 - variety of meals on offer
 - healthy and nutritious menu choices
- Considering the sustainability and ethical sourcing of ingredients is still definitely or somewhat a factor when choosing school meal provision for over 50% of parents.
- Parents want to be involved in what their children are eating – with interest shown in having easier ways to view the menu, information on what their child has eaten, and better visibility of nutritional information.

Recommendations

- Engage with parents and pupils to provide relevant tools and information that reassure parents - including special diets and allergens.
- Ensure the availability of good quality, School Food Standard-compliant meals, priced within the value of the Free School Meal Allowance.
- Food costs and wastage can be reduced using a digital meal management system.
- Meal pre-ordering solutions greatly improve the chances of pupils receiving their first choice meal.
- Making time for lunch using designated spaces for meals is considered important by parents – aim to move meals out of the classroom post-Covid to help increase meal uptake.
- Develop regular communications with parents to help promote healthy eating and the availability of nutritious meals within the school meal service.

