



2022 Welsh 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, 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 integrates 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.

Find out more about LACA and the benefits of membership at:

www.laca.co.uk



Introduction

The aim of this research is to understand the parental view on 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 19,477 respondents in Wales, completed interviews in Wales, providing an extremely robust overall sample size.

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, with this report covering school meal provision within the region of Wales specifically.

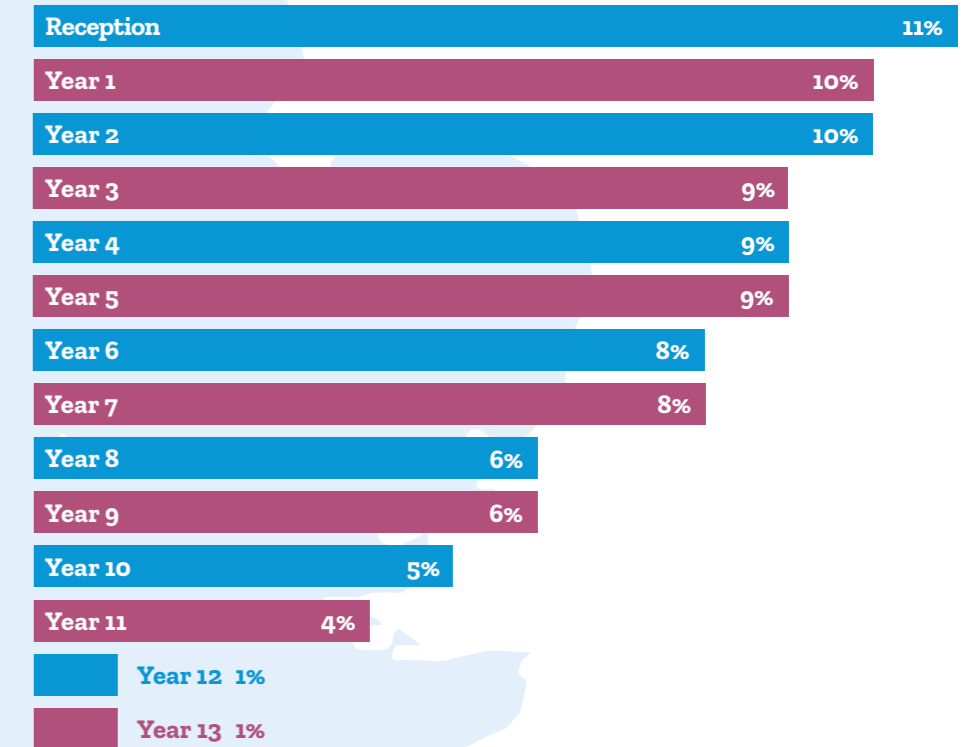
Dull

Nod yr ymchwil hwn yw deall barn rhieni ar y gwasanaeth a'r arlwy prydau ysgol sydd ar gael i'w plant. Gan adeiladu ar lwyddiant arolwg 2021, mae ParentPay, Cypad a LACA unwaith eto wedi cynnal un o'r astudiaethau mwyaf erioed gyda rhieni ar ddarpariaeth prydau ysgol yn y DU.

Denodd yr arolwg ymateb hynod gadarnhaol a chafwyd cyfanswm o 19,477 o ymatebwyr yng Nghymru, gan ddarparu maint sampl cyffredinol cadarn dros ben.

Mae'r astudiaeth hon yn ein helpu i ddeall beth mae angen i arlwywyr a thimau arwain ysgolion ei wneud i sicrhau bod eu cwsmeriaid a'u teuluoedd yn hapus gyda'r gwasanaeth a ddarperir, ac mae'r adroddiad hwn yn ymdrin yn benodol â darpariaeth prydau ysgol yn rhanbarth Cymru.

School age of children in Wales

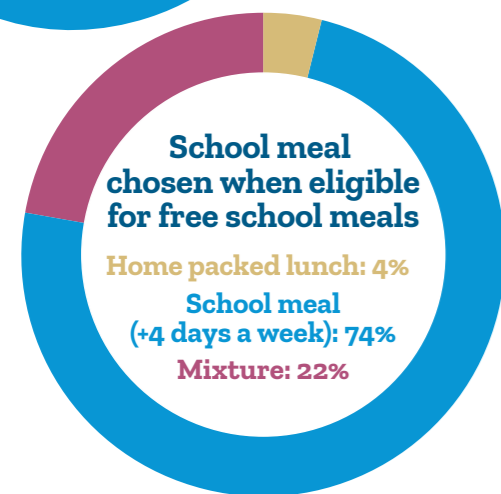
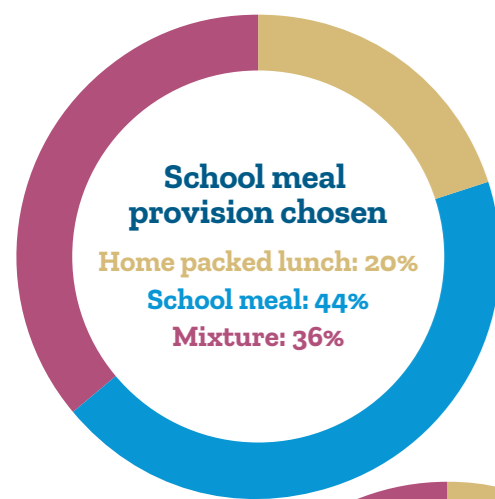


Meal provision

80% of pupils in Wales

are having a school meal at least once a week.

Overall, half of all children are having school meals every day, with a third of those switching between school meals and packed lunches.

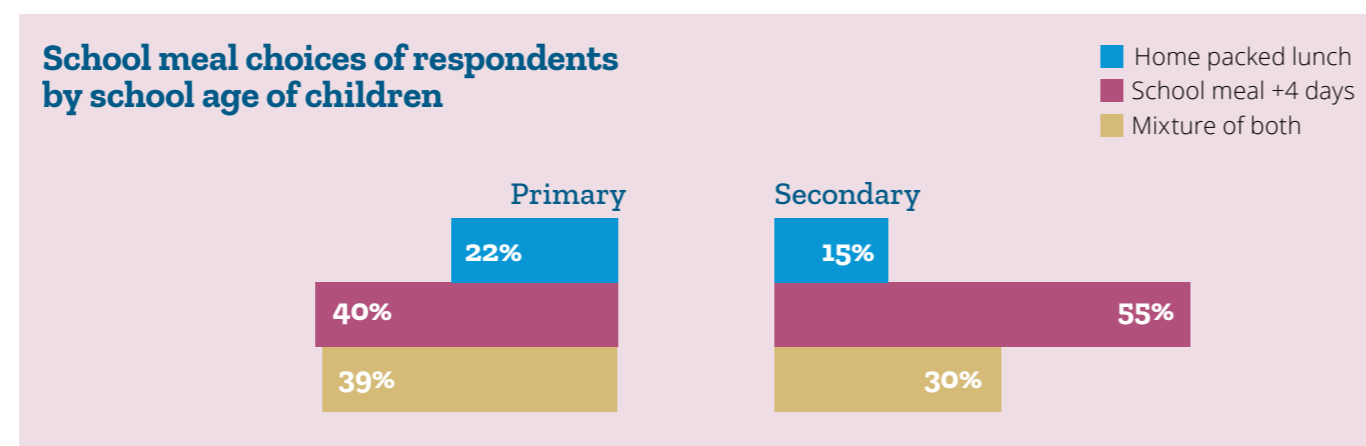


See page 7 for more information about free school meals.

The majority of parents

who are entitled to FSM opt for school meals or a mixture, with almost three-quarters taking advantage of school meals on most days.

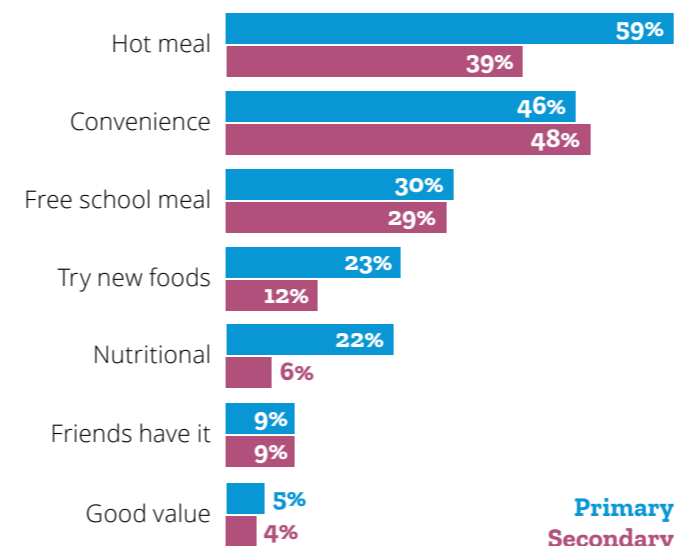
Still, **26% of free school meal parents** are opting for a mixture or packed lunches only.



Breakdown of school meal selection across school year

| | Recep. | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 | Year 13 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Home packed lunch | 21% | 23% | 20% | 22% | 21% | 22% | 24% | 15% | 16% | 13% | 13% | 19% | 8% | 16% |
| School meal (+4 pw) | 42% | 38% | 38% | 39% | 38% | 41% | 41% | 57% | 53% | 59% | 57% | 50% | 50% | 48% |
| A mixture of both | 38% | 39% | 41% | 39% | 41% | 37% | 35% | 28% | 30% | 28% | 30% | 31% | 42% | 36% |

Reasons for choosing school meals



Both primary and secondary school respondents say the top 2 reasons for choosing school meals are **to get a hot meal** and **the convenience it provides**, with parents of secondary-aged pupils placing more emphasis on convenience.

Price rating of hot school meals

| | Primary | Secondary |
|----------------------|---------|-----------|
| Too low | 1% | 0% |
| Priced appropriately | 69% | 59% |
| Too high | 30% | 40% |

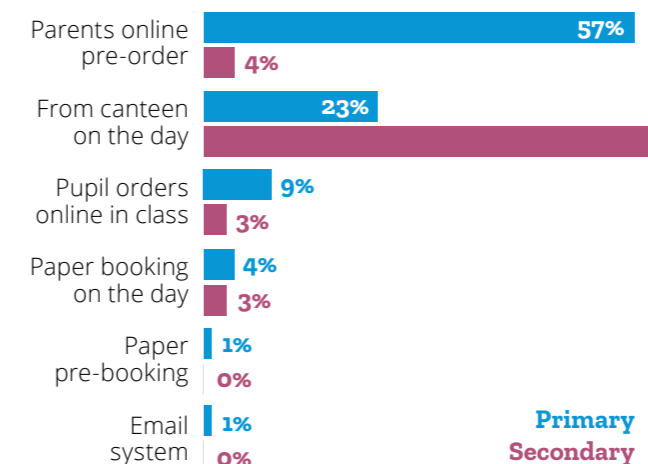
65% of parents

across the school years are happy with their current method of choosing school meals.

However, 26% of parents

surveyed would prefer to be able to pre-order meals online if given the choice.

Method of choosing school meals



Does the pupil get the meal they want or chose?



Digital meal pre-ordering

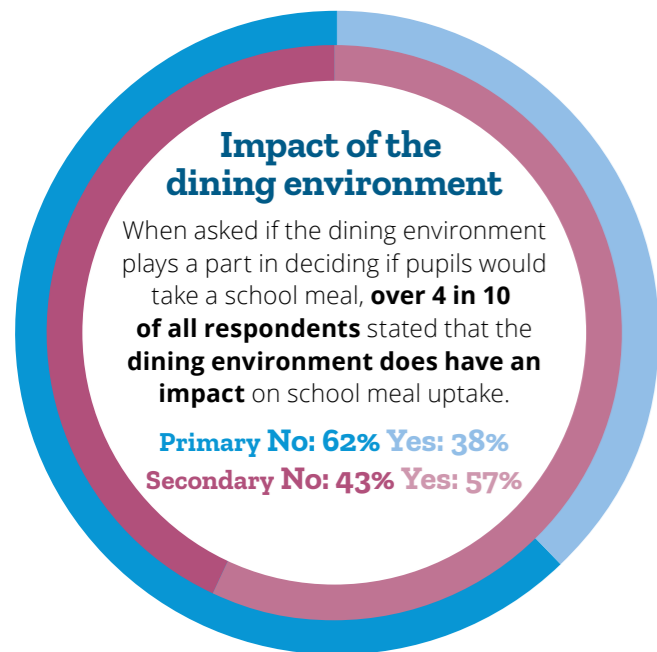
Digital meal pre-ordering further increases caterers' ability to deliver the chosen meal for each pupil and allows parents to confirm that the chosen meal was taken.

Promisingly, **the majority of parents in Wales** believe school meals are priced fairly.

However, 33% feel they're too high.



How to increase meal uptake



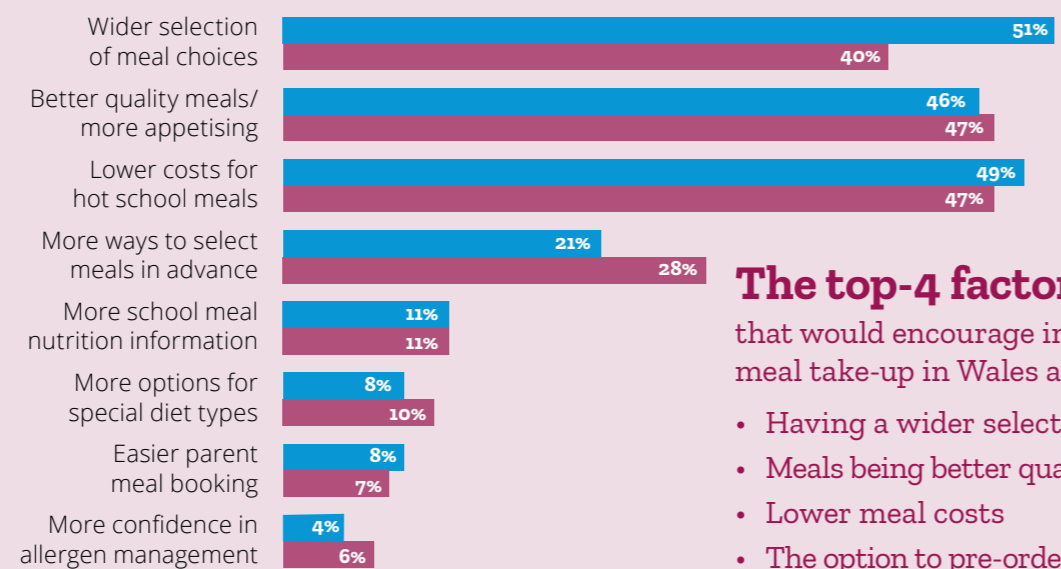
Themed meals

are of interest to three quarters of surveyed parents as being a factor in them choosing more school meal provision. Holiday celebration themes such as Eid, Chinese New Year, and Christmas were the most popular at **57% of respondents**.

Nearly **60% of parents surveyed** said their school offers a breakfast option – however, 20% of parents say their school doesn't provide breakfast.

Of this 20%, **the majority of respondents** said they would like the school to offer a breakfast option, providing schools with a basis for requesting their breakfast funding from their Welsh local authority (primary schools only, find out more [here](#)).

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



The top-4 factors

that would encourage increased school meal take-up in Wales are:

- Having a wider selection of meals
- Meals being better quality/more appetising
- Lower meal costs
- The option to pre-order meals in advance.

“ My daughter loves to have school dinner in the cafeteria so she gets to sit with her friends from other classes.” **Surveyed Parent**

“ They get to eat in the cafeteria for school dinners. Have to stay in the classroom if they bring from home.” **Surveyed Parent**

“ Whether he would eat a school lunch would be about the quality and taste of the food.” **Surveyed Parent**

Free school meals



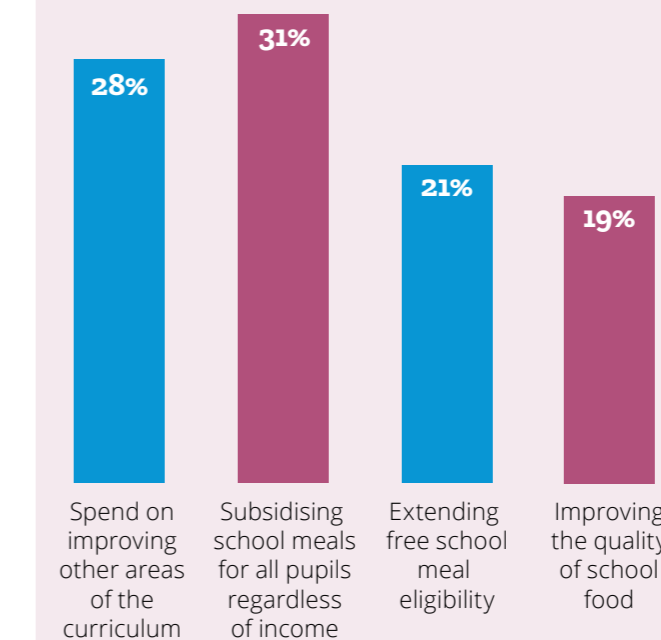
When asked to give more detail on why **11% of respondents don't make use of their FSM provision**, the reasons given include a limited range of meal options and kitchens changing the menu unexpectedly.

A number of parents also **choose to pay for meals** despite their FSM eligibility as they feel they can afford to pay.

Pleasingly, 60% of those eligible for free school meals

in Wales would still 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?

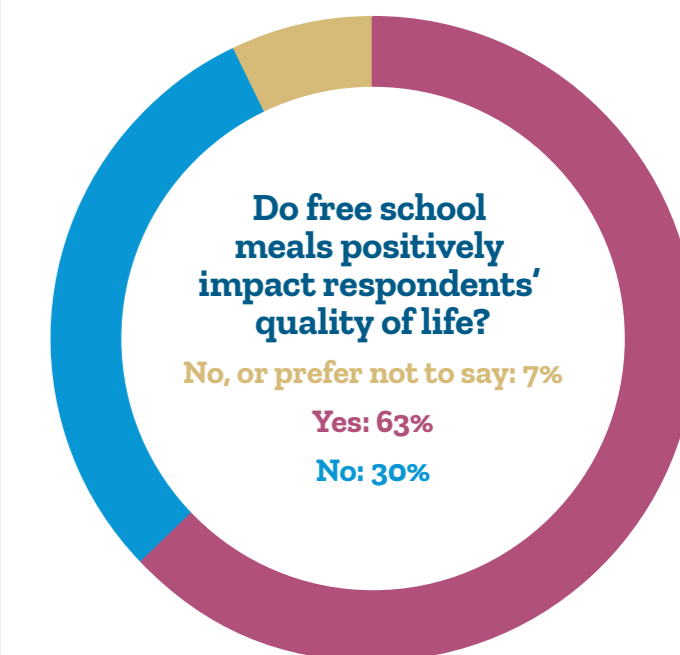


63% of parents

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

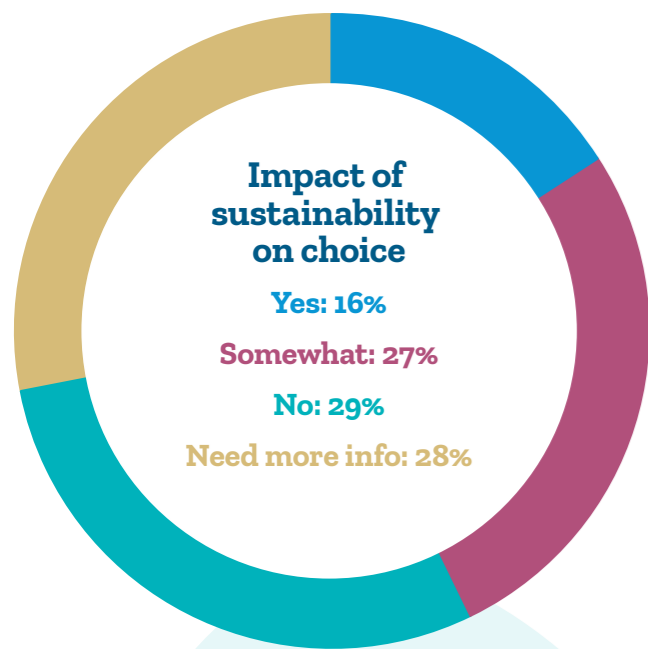
30% of respondents stated that free school meals don't improve their quality of life.

Many say that their free school meal allowance doesn't cover a full meal, so must top up anyway and that the quality and variety of meals haven't improved since catering options were limited during the pandemic.



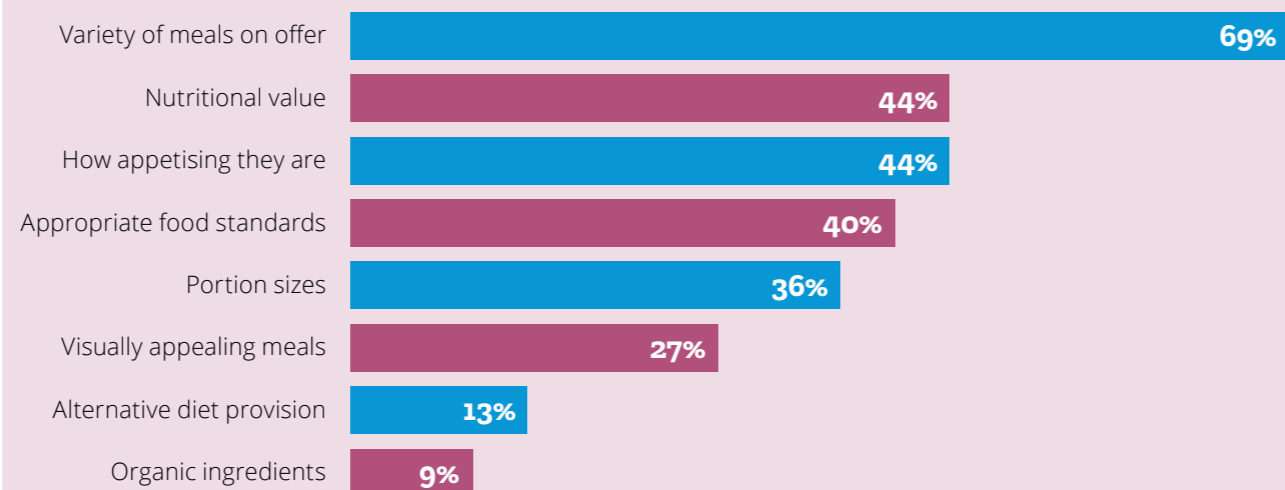
Quality and sustainability

16% of respondents surveyed claim that sustainability and ethical sourcing is definitely a factor when choosing school meal provision.



What quality means in a school meal

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



What quality means in a school meal

| | Primary | Secondary |
|--|---------|-----------|
| Total respondents: | 4767 | 1606 |
| A hot meal | 59% | 39% |
| Convenience | 46% | 48% |
| Their friends have it / want to be involved | 30% | 29% |
| Nutritionally balanced | 23% | 12% |
| Introduces your child to new foods | 22% | 6% |
| Good value for money | 9% | 9% |
| Because your child is entitled to a free school meal | 5% | 4% |

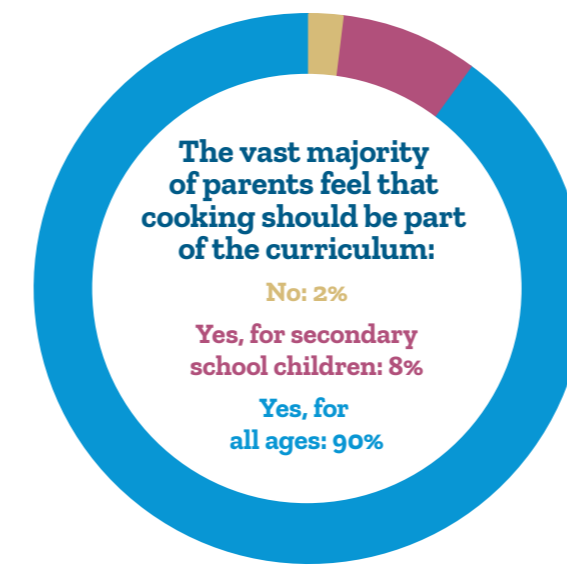
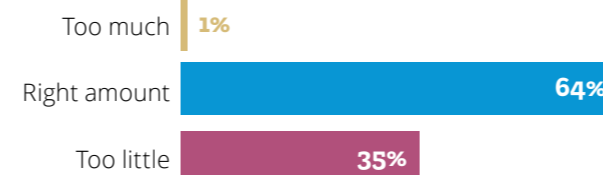
School meal information

Over 6 in 10

of all parents surveyed feel they get the right amount of information about school meals.

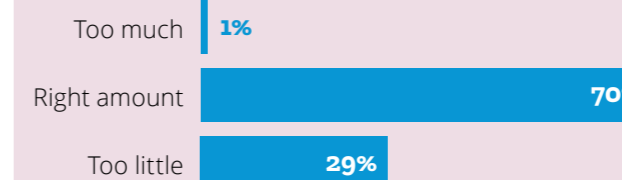
However, a significant proportion feel there should be more, with nearly 50% of secondary school parents feeling they receive too little information.

Amount of information

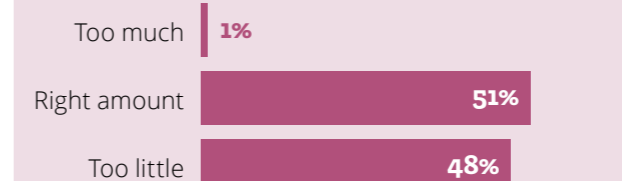


Primary/secondary split of school meal information received:

Primary – Total 13240

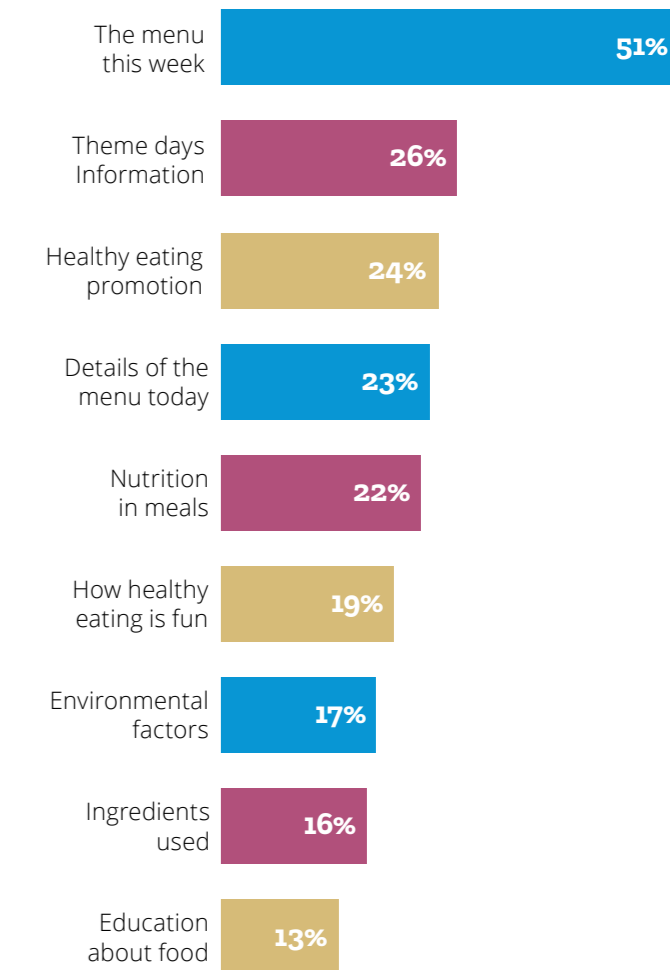


Secondary – Total 5861



When we explored the type of information respondents want, the responses are wide-ranging. Menu practicalities dominate with **51% 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 and how it's promoted, the nutritional content of the meals and information about upcoming theme days.

Types of information parents would like their schools to provide



Alternative diets and allergy management

Alternative diets and allergies are at consistent levels across primary and secondary.

“From when she started in Year 7, canteen staff were aware of her allergy and always checked with her about food.” **Surveyed Parent**

“Minimal choice of food, it’s absolutely awful. I have two children allergic to gluten and the schools do not take into consideration their catering needs.” **Surveyed Parent**

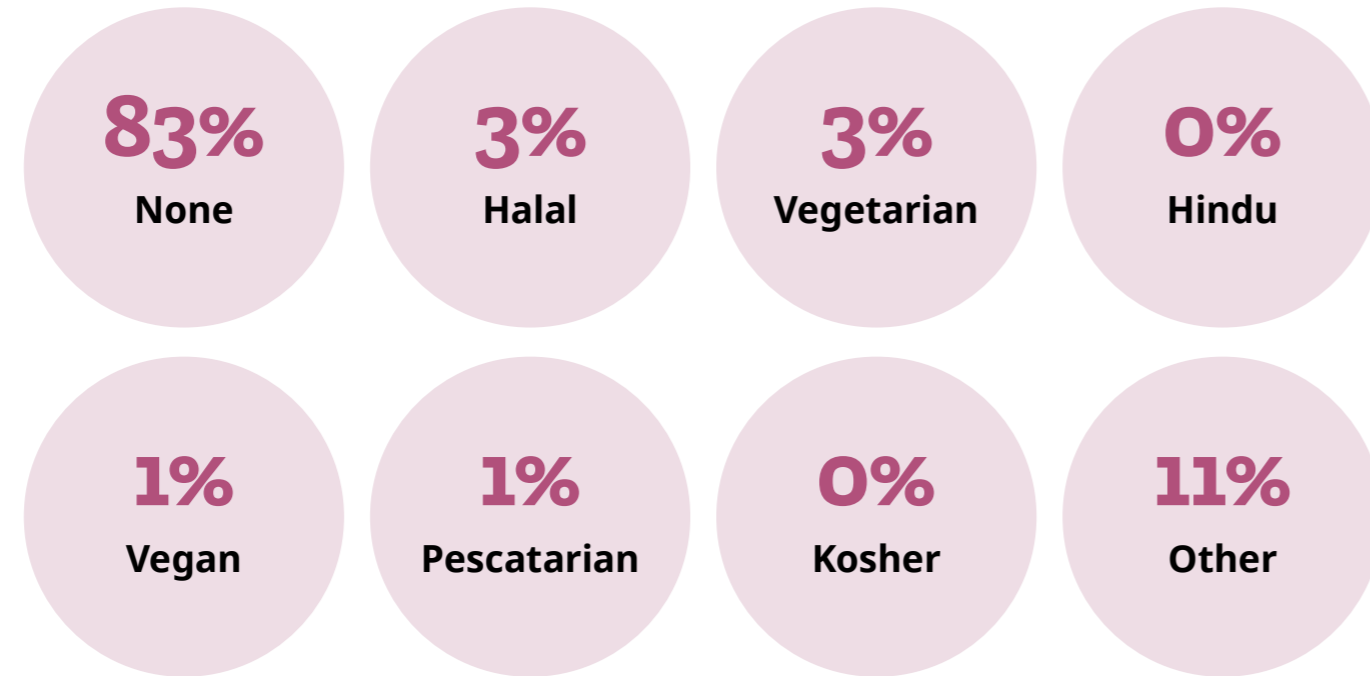
“My child has choice and they are very careful not to cross-contaminate.” **Surveyed Parent**

“There is a general lack of choice for pupils with specific diets or intolerances – limits the number of times per week my son can/will eat at school.” **Surveyed Parent**

“The school are excellent and show awareness of the allergy.” **Surveyed Parent**

Nearly 1 in 5 have alternative dietary needs.

Halal and vegetarian are the highest (amongst the pre-defined needs).



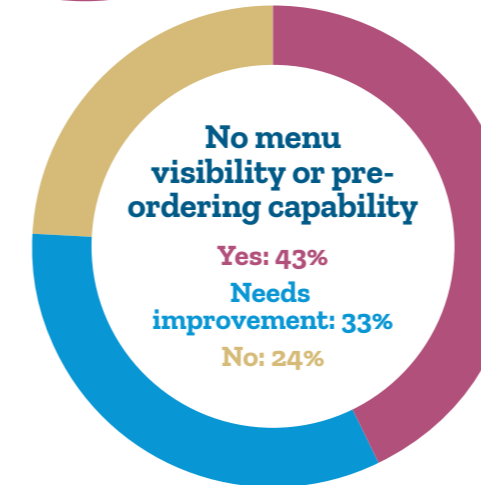
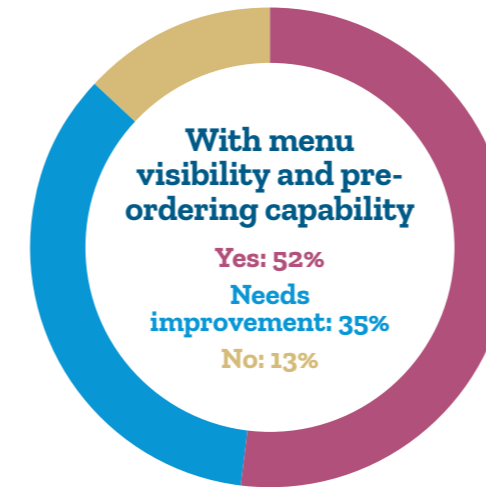
1 in 20 parents

surveyed have children with established food allergies that need catering for.

Milk allergies sit at 2%, with peanut, egg, or gluten allergies at 1% each.

No allergies sit at 83%, any established allergies 5% and other 10%.

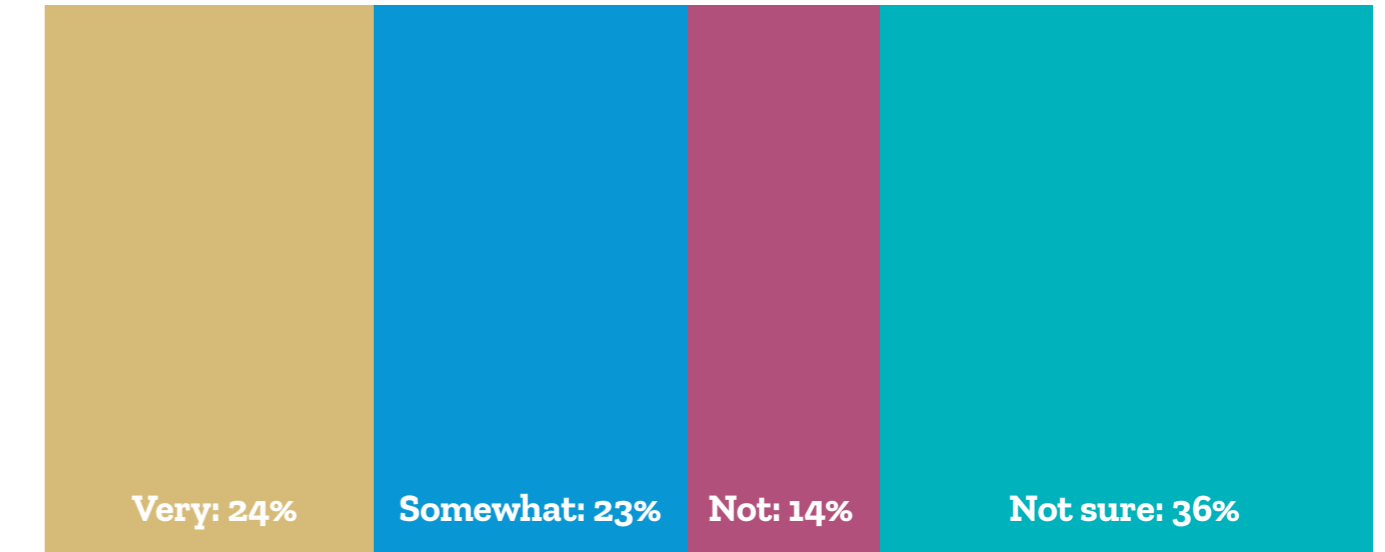
Are allergies and special diets managed appropriately?



Pre-booking options

give visibility over diet types and appropriate meals, increasing parents’ confidence to select a school meal.

How sensitively are allergies managed by schools?



Nearly 50% of parents and carers responsible for a child with an allergy feel that their schools manage allergies sensitively, with 24% saying the school manage them ‘very sensitively.’

Of the same group of parents, 37% feel that allergy management is handled with some sensitivity or not sensitively at all – highlighting some room for improvement in this area.

Positively, the vast 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.

Bullying due to allergies

Currently: 4%

No: 86%

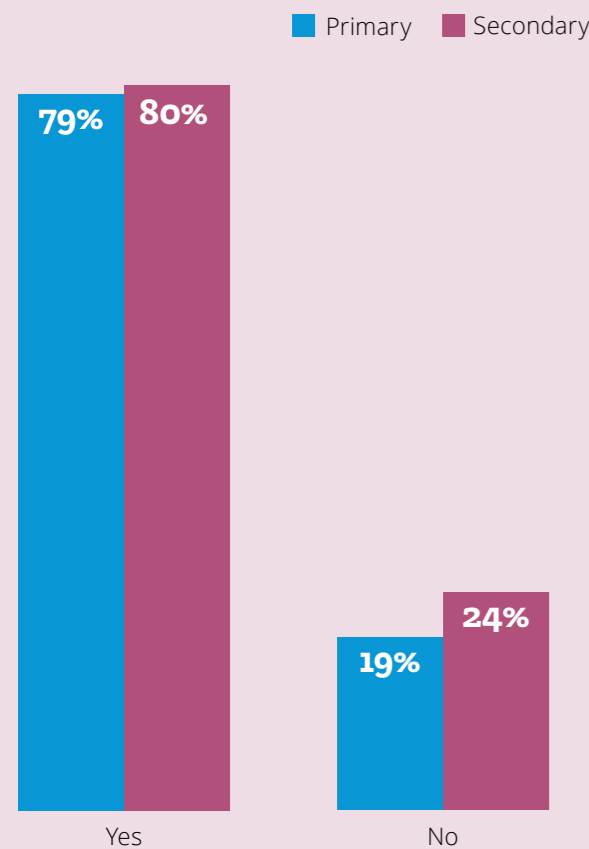
In the past: 7%

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.

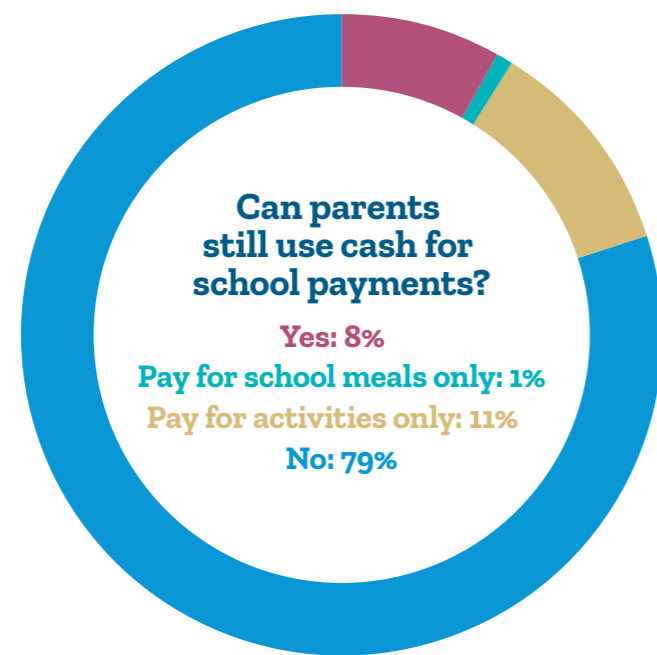


8 in 10 parents

in Wales say cash payments are a thing of the past.

8% of respondents

have the option to use cash to pay for all school-related spend. However, over 60% of these specific respondents prefer to make these payments online.



64% of primary school parents

would like the ability to see what their child has eaten in the recent past, with only **16% already having the ability to do so.**

“ 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

1. The majority of parents continue to feel that school meals are priced correctly, despite an increase in the cost of living, meaning school caterers are still managing to produce good value-for-money meals.
2. 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 information on key issues that include:
 - allergen management
 - variety of meals on offer
 - healthy and nutritious menu choices
3. For over 50% of parents, it’s still an important factor for them to consider the sustainability and ethical sourcing of ingredients when choosing school meal provision.
4. Parents want to be involved in what their children are eating. They have shown interest in having ways of viewing the menu ahead of time and online, information on what their child has eaten, and better visibility of nutritional information.

Recommendations

1. Engage with parents and pupils to provide relevant tools and information that reassures parents, including special diets and allergens.
2. 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.
3. Meal pre-ordering solutions greatly improve the chances of pupils receiving their first choice meal, increasing pupil and parent satisfaction and reducing food wastage.
4. 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.
5. Develop regular communications with parents to help promote healthy eating and the availability of nutritious meals within the school meal service.

Our national report – in collaboration with LACA

Are you interested in seeing how the results for Wales compare to the other countries in the UK? Our national report, made up of 306,354 parent responses, compares opinions on meal quality, allergy and diet management, free school meals and more, across the four countries.

You can download your free digital copy to see how Wales compares.