# Child hunger in Scottish schools reaches alarming levels, risking futures



The spectre of child hunger looms over schools across Scotland, with alarming numbers revealing a troubling reality. A significant portion of the nation’s children—akin to the entire primary school demographic—faces the debilitating pangs of hunger daily. This issue persists unnoticed by many, but for those affected, it becomes an overwhelming experience, marked by the anxiety of attending school with a grumbling stomach and the fear of being judged by peers and teachers alike.

The statement reflects a broader concern about how hunger impacts children’s educational experiences and emotional well-being. Many teachers report spending over £200 each year of their own funds on food for students, a practice highlighted in a Kellogg's study. This survey also found that an astonishing 36% of teachers in the UK witness children arriving hungry every day. The escalating trend, with almost half of participating educators asserting that the situation has worsened, underscores the urgent need for actionable solutions.

Research elucidates the long-term repercussions of food insecurity in early childhood. A study published in the Proceedings of the Nutrition Society revealed that 83% of primary school teachers observe children arriving at school hungry, a crisis exacerbated by inadequate access to nutritious food. Furthermore, children who experience hunger in their formative years can face lasting disadvantages in vocabulary, speech, and numeracy skills. The Scottish Government’s 2022 School Healthy Living Survey reported an increase in the uptake of free school meals, now at 70%, yet this figure remains below pre-pandemic levels, signalling the persistent challenges associated with child hunger.

The response from educators is commendable but inadequate. Many teachers go above and beyond by creating informal breakfast schemes or bringing in snacks to reduce stigma for children who cannot afford meals. Often through personal sacrifice, these initiatives aim to foster a supportive environment, yet they underscore a systemic failure that should not fall on individual educators alone to resolve. The experience of hunger at school, whether it manifests as disruptive behaviour, lack of concentration, or chronic tardiness, detracts significantly from the learning process, leading to broader socio-economic ramifications.

Looking at the national landscape, the commitment of the Scottish Government to make Scotland "the best place in the world to grow up" necessitates not only promises but tangible action. To realise this vision, vulnerabilities linked to child poverty must be confronted head-on. The latest educational surveys show a commitment to extending free meals, yet voices from organisations such as Magic Breakfast highlight the sobering reality that 41% of Scottish schools lack breakfast provisions entirely. This gap leaves a significant portion of children without necessary nutritional support.

The narrative around child hunger often unfortunately drifts towards victim-blaming, placing undue responsibility on families instead of addressing the structural issues fueling poverty. This perspective is exacerbated by societal stigma, which discourages families from seeking the assistance they need. In conversations surrounding child poverty, it’s essential to remember that children do not choose their circumstances; rather, they are often innocent victims of an economic system that fails to protect its most vulnerable.

Until the issue of child hunger is thoroughly addressed, Scotland’s ambition to be the best place for children will remain unfulfilled. The findings from the various studies serve as a clarion call for united efforts among educators, policymakers, and communities. It is not merely about alleviating hunger; it is about ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive, to learn, and to grow without the shadow of hunger overshadowing their potential.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25188650.gone-school-hungry-really-like/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/scottish-children-too-hungry-learn-says-charity)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25188650.gone-school-hungry-really-like/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/en_GB/press-release/one-in-three-teachers.html), [[3]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/food-insecurity-in-children-and-young-people-in-scotland/51A055F6655E34CA4FDB352F2AFC4598)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.gov.scot/news/school-healthy-living-survey-school-meal-uptake-statistics-2024/), [[4]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-healthy-living-survey-school-meal-uptake-and-pe-provision-statistics-2023/pages/section-1-school-meal-uptake/), [[7]](https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/children-and-young-people/child-poverty/child-poverty-socioeconomic-disadvantage-scotland.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/scottish-children-too-hungry-learn-says-charity), [[2]](https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/en_GB/press-release/one-in-three-teachers.html), [[3]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/food-insecurity-in-children-and-young-people-in-scotland/51A055F6655E34CA4FDB352F2AFC4598)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25188650.gone-school-hungry-really-like/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-healthy-living-survey-school-meal-uptake-and-pe-provision-statistics-2023/pages/section-1-school-meal-uptake/), [[6]](https://www.gov.scot/news/school-healthy-living-survey-school-meal-uptake-statistics-2024/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25188650.gone-school-hungry-really-like/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/en_GB/press-release/one-in-three-teachers.html> - A 2016 Kellogg's survey revealed that 31% of teachers in England and Wales brought food into school for children who hadn't eaten breakfast. The study found that nearly 80% of teachers observed children arriving hungry at least once a week, with 36% witnessing this daily. The survey highlighted the negative impact of hunger on children's learning, noting that 82% of teachers reported that hungry children were unable to concentrate, and 50% found them more disruptive. The study emphasized the need for breakfast clubs to support children in need.
3. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/food-insecurity-in-children-and-young-people-in-scotland/51A055F6655E34CA4FDB352F2AFC4598> - A 2022 study published in the Proceedings of the Nutrition Society examined food insecurity among children and young people in Scotland. The research highlighted that 83% of primary school teachers reported children arriving at school hungry. The study also referenced data from the Scottish Government's 2022 School Healthy Living Survey, which indicated that 70% of pupils registered for free school meals took them, marking an increase from previous years. The findings underscored the persistent issue of child hunger in Scotland and the need for effective interventions.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-healthy-living-survey-school-meal-uptake-and-pe-provision-statistics-2023/pages/section-1-school-meal-uptake/> - The Scottish Government's 2023 School Healthy Living Survey reported an increase in the uptake of free school meals across all school sectors. The overall uptake rate for free school meals was 70% in 2023, up from 67% in 2022. Special schools saw the largest increase, with uptake rising from 74% to 84%. The survey also noted that the uptake rates remained below pre-pandemic levels, indicating ongoing challenges in addressing child hunger in Scotland.
5. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/scottish-children-too-hungry-learn-says-charity> - A 2022 article from Tes highlighted concerns about child hunger in Scotland. The piece discussed a survey by Magic Breakfast, which found that 41% of Scottish schools had no breakfast provision, and a quarter of those that did charged for it. The article emphasized the need for increased funding and support to ensure all children have access to a nutritious breakfast, noting that the Scottish government had committed to extending free school lunches and breakfasts to all primary and special school pupils.
6. <https://www.gov.scot/news/school-healthy-living-survey-school-meal-uptake-statistics-2024/> - The Scottish Government's 2024 School Healthy Living Survey reported a second consecutive increase in the uptake rate for school meals. The proportion of pupils taking a school meal, free or paid for, increased from 53% in 2023 to 55% in 2024. For free school meals alone, the uptake rate increased from 70% in 2023 to 71% in 2024. However, the uptake rates remained below pre-COVID-19 levels, indicating ongoing challenges in addressing child hunger in Scotland.
7. <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/children-and-young-people/child-poverty/child-poverty-socioeconomic-disadvantage-scotland.html> - The NASUWT Scotland highlighted the impact of child poverty on education in Scotland. The union reported that 24% of children were living in relative poverty after housing costs in 2020-23. The article emphasized that hunger has a serious impact on learning and concentration, making pupils tired and unwell, and leaving them feeling embarrassed and left out. The union called for universal free school meals to address these issues and improve educational outcomes for all children.