

The cost of hunger and the many benefits of breakfast.

It's easy to think of school breakfast as yet another cost that you have to cover. The cost of hunger, in contrast, is rarely considered. It doesn't appear on any budget sheet, but this doesn't make it any less real. Here we set out some of the hidden costs of hunger, in the light of all the evidence, so that a proper comparison can be made between the cost of tackling child hunger through breakfast provision, and the price of doing nothing.

The cost of hunger

Teaching time and quality

Just one child arriving in class hungry can impact the whole class. Two or more children and the effect compounds rapidly. Staff may lose teaching time dealing with the direct effects of hunger. Additionally, undetected hunger often leads to pervasive behavioural issues or children being unable to settle and concentrate, which can affect the whole class. That's quite a price to pay.

A recent randomised controlled trial compared similar schools with and without breakfast clubs (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016). It showed that children in primary schools with **breakfast clubs made on average 2 months additional progress within a year**, compared to children in schools with no breakfast provision. The most astonishing part is that the children who benefitted were not just those who ate breakfast at school! The most likely explanation for this is that in schools without breakfast, hungry and unsettled children affect the ability of the whole class to learn.

“We have realised the behaviour of certain children has dramatically improved. We now believe they were probably hungry.”

Headteacher, NSBP school



Consider the staff time and impact on teaching of:



comforting a hungry child, calming them when they are upset, irritable or complaining of tummy ache



dealing with behavioural issues such as anger or frustration, originating from feeling hungry



settling the rest of the class whilst dealing with the hungry child



re-engaging the class after time lost



sending the child out with a member of staff



finding food for pupils



reinforcing teaching points that the child has missed due to lack of concentration



spending additional time with a child to cover missed learning from the lesson, as a result of leaving the classroom to get something to eat



writing up incidents of hunger to child's profile notes



phoning home at the end of the day or speaking to parents about the incident

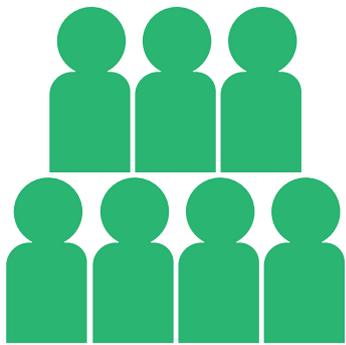
Adding up the cost

Suppose one class loses half an hour of staff time or lost lesson time every day due to a hungry child or the effect of a hungry child's behaviour on class, this adds up to nearly **three weeks of lost teaching** time a year, in one class!

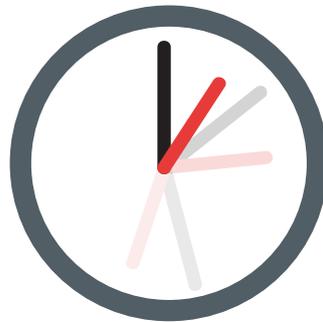
Bearing in mind that this is likely to affect critical morning lessons, what would the impact of that be in your school?

What about the cost to the teacher's well being? Lost teaching time puts extra pressure on the teacher, and dealing with poor behaviour stemming from hunger takes a toll on their job satisfaction. A calm, settled class improves outcomes for everyone.

In purely financial terms, that's a waste of salary too



An average school with 7 classes



585 hours lost teaching per year



At an average of £25 per hour that would equate to a loss of £14,625 per year

A school breakfast can also provide **nurture for vulnerable children**, and **levels the playing field between disadvantaged and other children** in their start to the school day. It is an EEF/DfE supported Pupil Premium spend, and clear research evidence can be cited to support its use in **overcoming barriers to education for disadvantaged** children of all abilities – and for all children!

Think about the savings to other staff time, such as Learning Mentors, Teaching Assistants and Office Staff. Not only from dealing with hunger, but also related issues such as following up late incidents.

The cost to the child

Hungry children lose valuable learning time because they are unable to concentrate until they access food.

- If they finally get food at breaktime, that means that they have been **unable to concentrate** and therefore have not achieved at their potential for the crucial first two hours of the day – or 10 hours a week – therefore, they are potentially underperforming for 390 hours or 78 school days a year.
- If they have to wait until lunchtime, they may lose the whole morning – up to 3.5 hours a day, 17.5 hours per week, 682.5 hours or 137 school days a year.

No Breakfast

unable to concentrate during the crucial first two hours of the day

potentially underperforming for 390 hours or 78 school days a year.

Additionally, many children who say they do eat breakfast, actually eat poor quality food – such as biscuits, crisps or chocolate. They have a ‘sugar high’ followed by a bout of poor concentration or irritability, and then they have a desire for more sugar. The EEF study suggested that some of the benefits of school breakfast could be not only due to children who previously had no breakfast at all, but also by replacing high sugar food items with a healthy breakfast at school.

How much more could these children achieve if they regained this learning time?

What impact would that have on school attainment figures, and the cascade of benefits that brings?

A good, nutritious breakfast will prevent mood swings and will improve their academic concentration and behaviour on a daily basis.



On balance...

Compare the cost of hunger with the cost of breakfast, and you'll see providing breakfast is not only a rights respecting, wellbeing promise to your most vulnerable children, but it also makes excellent financial sense.



For your investment in food and staffing, your school can have the following major impacts:

- more teacher hours spent teaching
- more learner hours spent learning
- improved classroom environment for all children (not just the hungry ones)
- improved punctuality and attendance
- reduction in hunger related behavioural incidents – good for children and staff
- a 'happier' more settled school right from the bell.