



# 2022 Scotland School Meals Report

From ParentPay, Cypad and ASSIST FM



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# Who we are

## ParentPay

ParentPay Group is the UK's largest education technology business, and we're 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](http://www.parentpay.com)

## Cypad

Cypad is the technology behind the specialist meal & kitchen management solutions within the 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 local authority managing school meals in-house, a contract caterer with a school meal contract with 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](http://www.cypad.com)

## ASSIST FM

ASSIST FM is the voice of Scottish Local Authority FM services. Founded in 2011, their principal objective is to help promote and improve service delivery to public sector organisations throughout Scotland and to provide support to those involved in delivery of services. Their mission is to work on behalf of their members and partners to ensure that their services always highlight best value and information on practices, products and services.

[www.assistfm.com](http://www.assistfm.com)



# Introduction

Building on the success of the national survey, we've worked with ASSIST FM to create a Scotland specific view of parent opinions on school meals. The survey attracted extremely positive engagement with a total of 15,964 responses from parents in Scotland, providing a robust overall sample size across all school years.

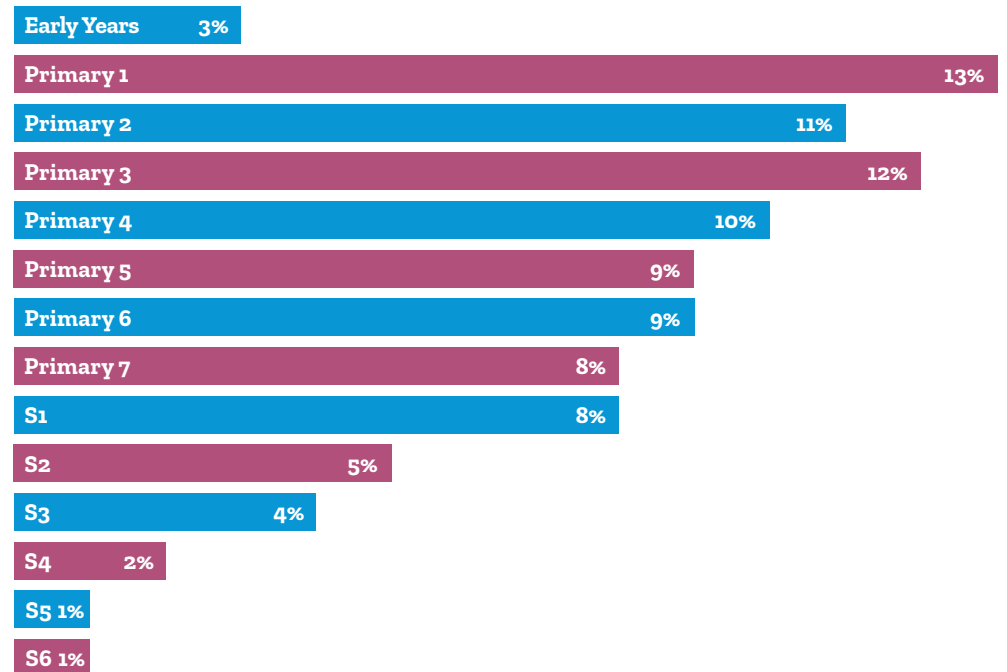
This study helps us to understand what caterers and school leadership teams in Scotland need to do to ensure their clients and families are happy with the service provided. The research will provide an ongoing understanding of the needs of parents/guardians, school leadership and catering teams.

**“** This study will help support local authorities across Scotland to deliver a customer focused service within both primary and secondary schools. It is important for catering teams to understand parental/guardian views and expectations as they endeavour to deliver Scottish Government commitment to rollout Universal Free School Meals increasing the current free provision of early years to Primary 5 to include Primary 6 and Primary 7.” - **ASSIST FM**

“ At ASSIST FM we worked with the Scottish Poverty and Inequality unit at Caledonian University obtaining secondary pupils experiences of school meals. The addition of parental/guardian views from this study provides solid information on where secondary school catering services should focus to ensure young people have a positive and enjoyable school meal experience.”

- ASSIST FM

## School year breakdown

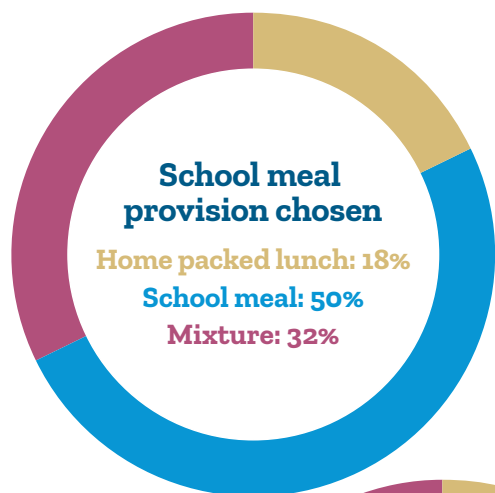


# Meal provision

## 82% of pupils

are having a school meal at least once a week.

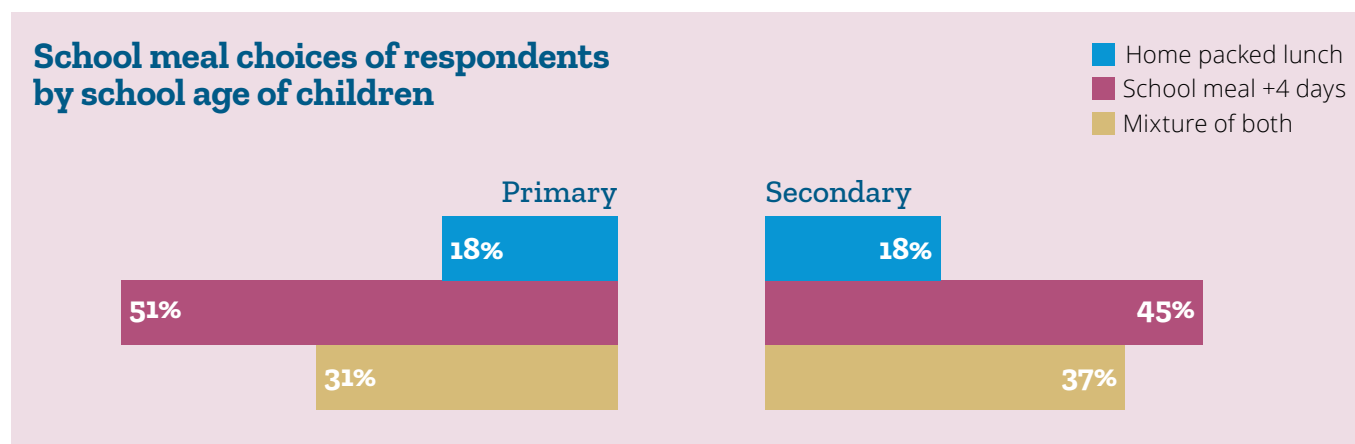
Overall, 50% of children are having school meals everyday, with a third of those switching between school meals and packed lunches.



See page 7 for more information about free school meals.

## The majority of parents

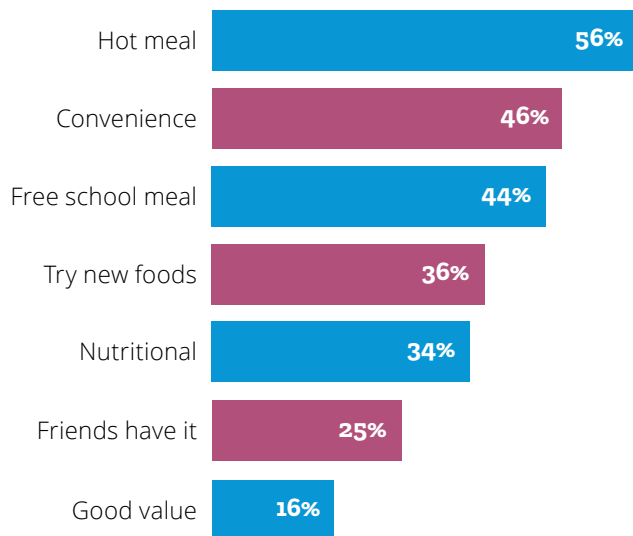
who are entitled to FSM and use them opt for school meals or a mixture. Still, **36% of free school meal parents are opting for a mixture** of packed lunches and school meals or packed lunch only.



## Breakdown of school meal selection across school year

	Early Years	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Home packed lunch	11%	10%	12%	12%	17%	20%	31%	35%	17%	17%	22%	19%	21%	23%
School meal (+4 pw)	64%	63%	61%	56%	52%	46%	32%	34%	49%	45%	42%	45%	38%	30%
A mixture of both	24%	27%	28%	32%	31%	34%	37%	32%	35%	38%	36%	36%	41%	47%

## Reasons for choosing school meals



## Those who are mixing school meals and packed lunches

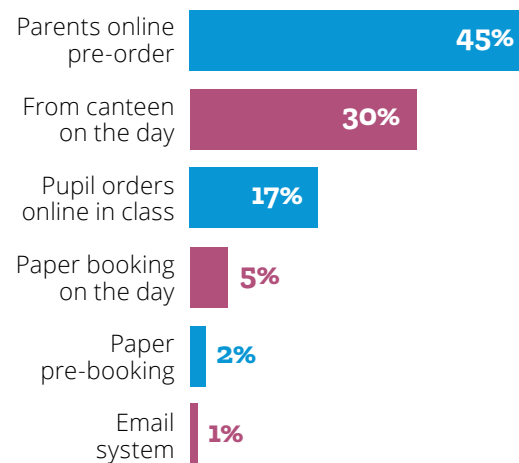
say the top-2 reasons for choosing school meals are to **get a hot meal and the convenience it provides.**

Meal choice is predominantly done on the day, although 45% of parents pre-order in advance

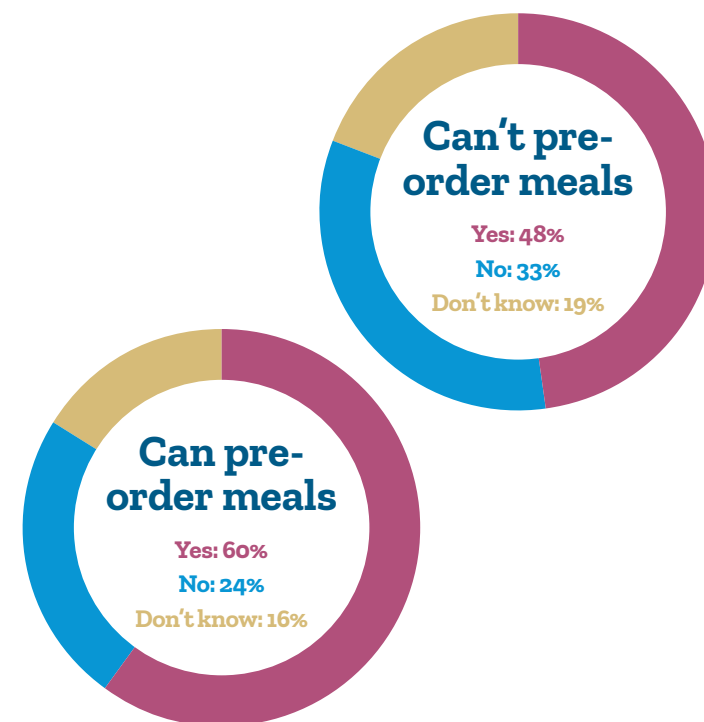
## Of the 2526 respondents

who would prefer a different method of choosing school meals to their existing method, **76% would like to switch to online ordering.**

## Method of choosing school meals



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



## Price rating of hot school meals

	Primary	Secondary
Too low	1%	1%
Priced appropriately	83%	76%
Too high	16%	22%

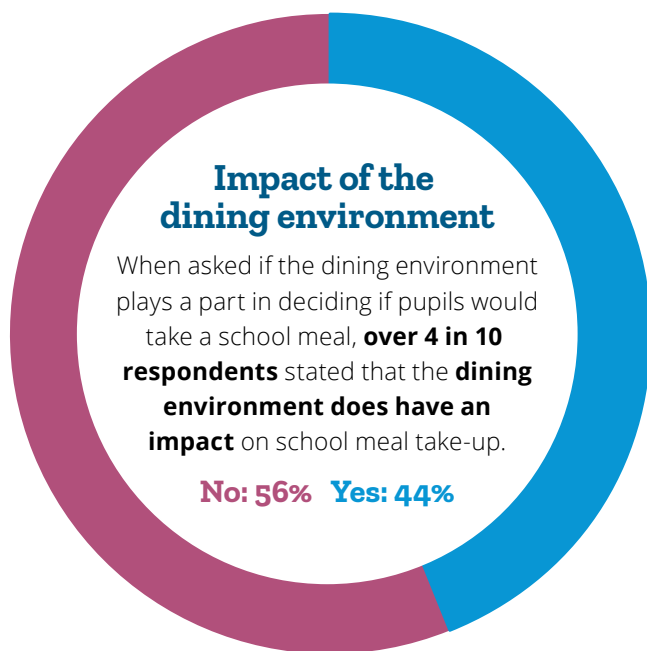


## Digital meal pre-ordering

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

Promisingly, **81% of parents still feel that school meals are priced correctly**, while **17% think the price is too high.**

# How to increase meal uptake



**" I feel the cafeteria is a good social environment and helps them all bond and mimic good behaviours." Surveyed Parent**

**" I think being seated in the cafeteria helps my son's routine and encourages him to maybe try other foods." Surveyed Parent**

**" Yes, we have had issues with our child wanting to eat a hot meal but there not being enough space to sit down and enjoy it." Surveyed Parent**

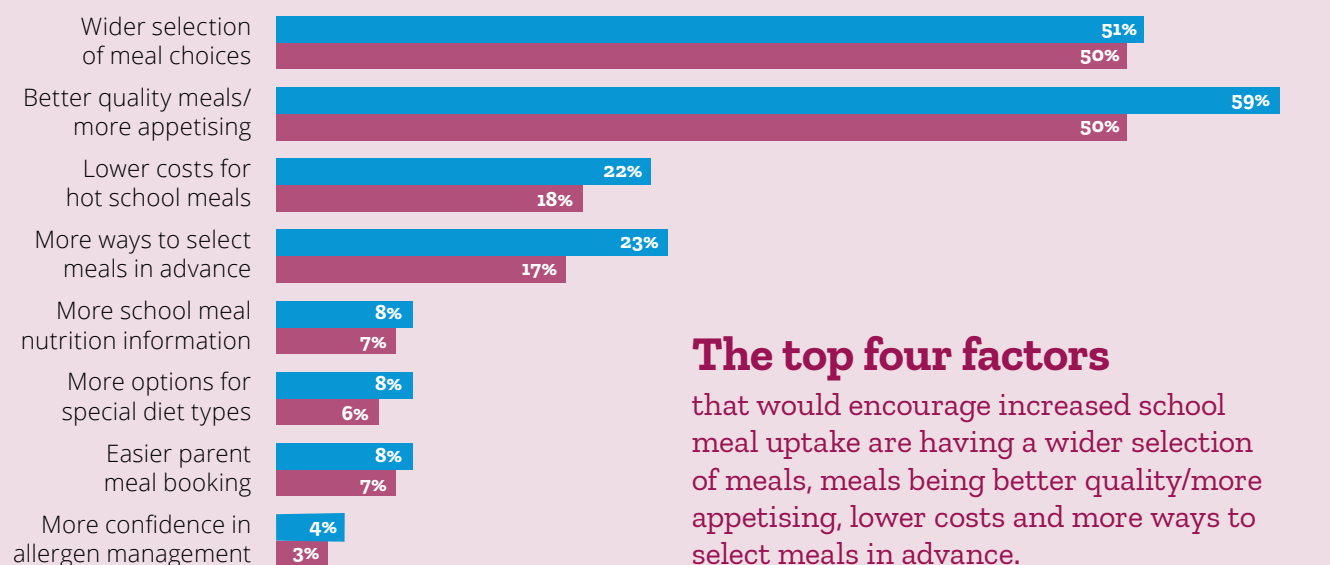
## Themed meals

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 58% of respondents.

## 63% 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.

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



## The top four factors

that would encourage increased school meal uptake are having a wider selection of meals, meals being better quality/more appetising, lower costs and more ways to select meals in advance.

## Primary and secondary comparison

When we look at the primary and secondary comparison, the top three factors remain the same but having a wider selection of school meals is less important for parents of secondary school pupils.



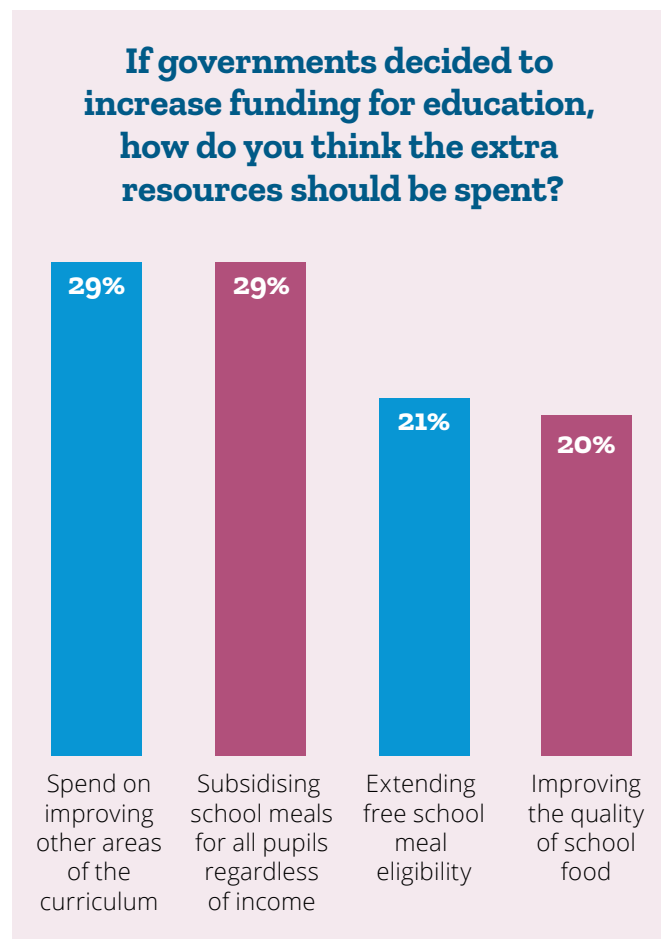
# Free school meals



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 the **portions are simply too small**, so they would rather provide packed lunches.

## 60% of those eligible for free school meals

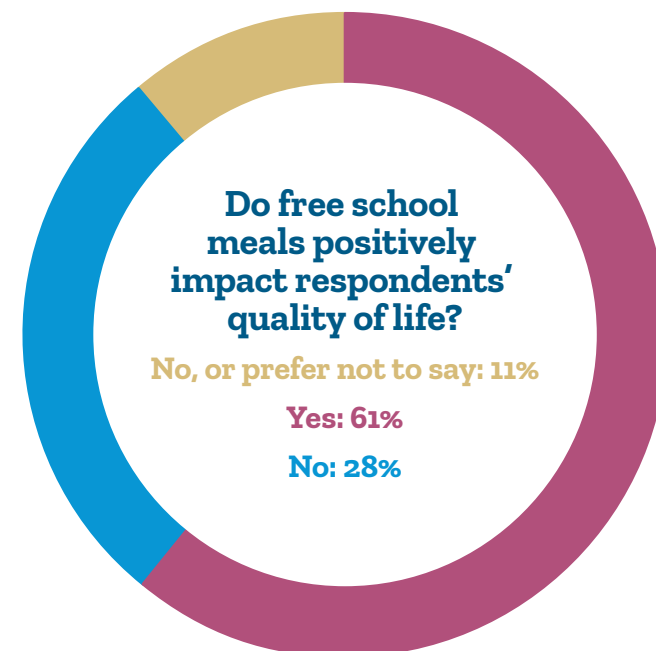
would use school meal provision even if they didn't qualify for free school meals.



## 61% of parents

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

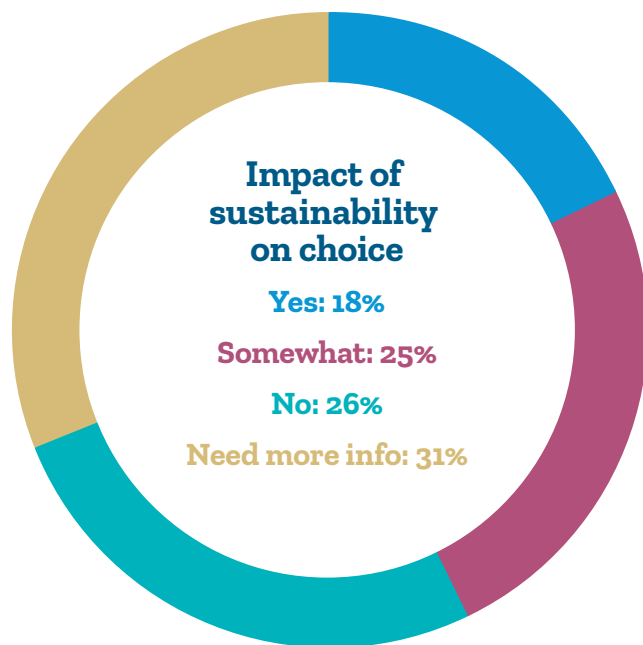
**28% of the respondents stated free school meals don't improve quality of life.** Many say that their child doesn't like the food on offer or that the meals aren't healthy. Some also say that the free school meal allowance doesn't cover enough food or that schools even run out of hot food.



# Quality and sustainability

## Nearly 1 in 5 parents

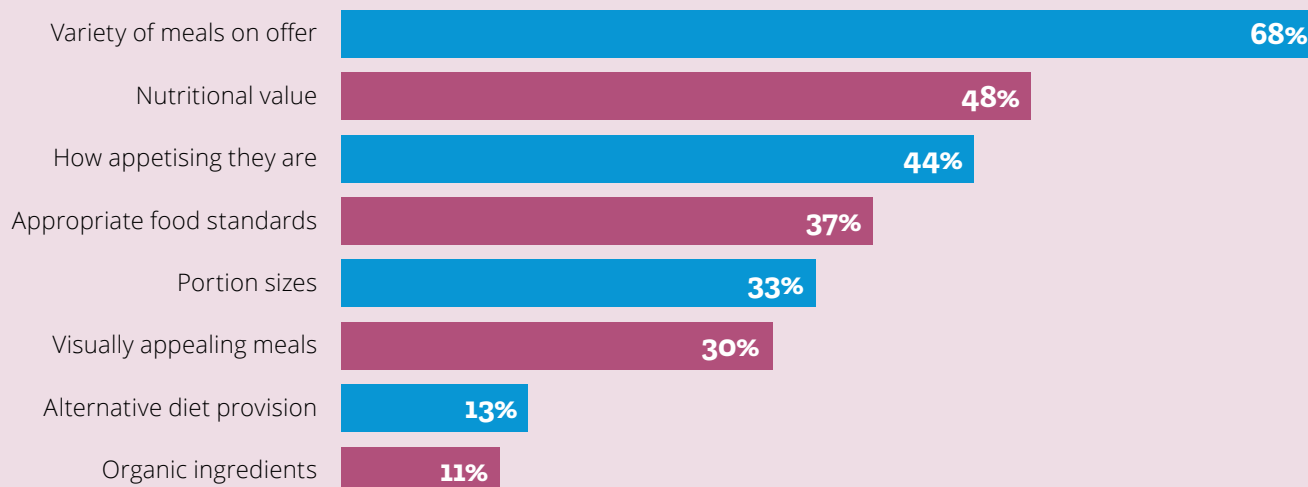
surveyed claim that sustainability and ethical sourcing is definitely a factor when choosing school meal provision.



"I think school meals should use Scottish ingredients to support local businesses, farmers etc." **Surveyed Parent**

## 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 school age of children

	Primary	Secondary
Yes	18%	17%
Somewhat	25%	27%
No	26%	27%
Need more info	30%	29%

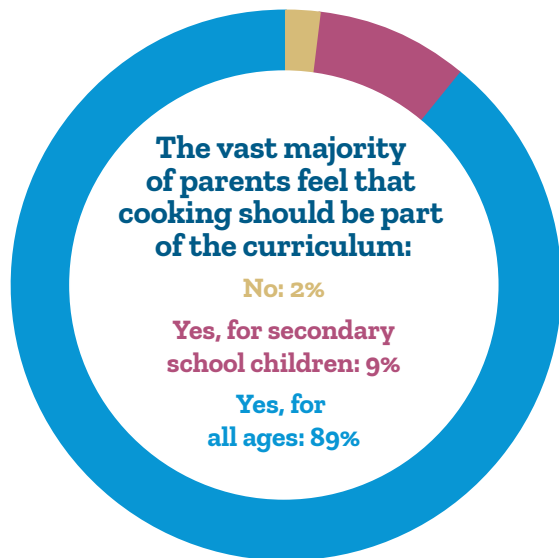
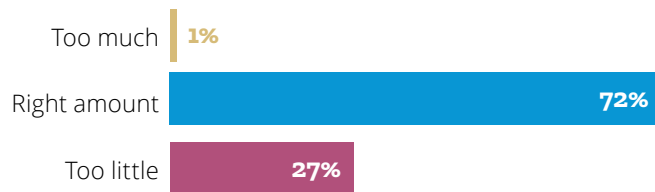


# School meal information

## Over 7 in 10

feel they get the right amount of information about school meals. However, just under 3 in 10 feel there should be more.

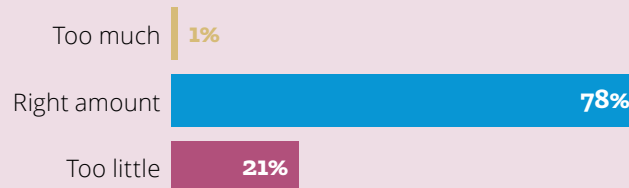
## Amount of information



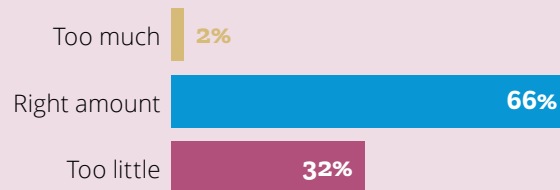
## 78% of respondents

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, 32% of those who can't pre-order say they receive too little information.

## With meal pre-ordering option

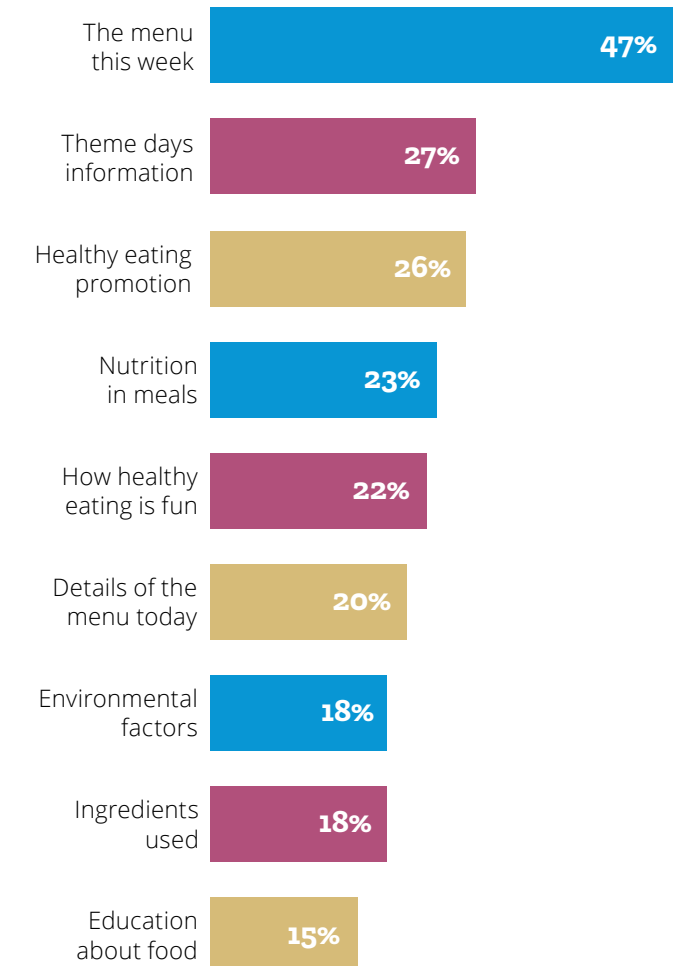


## No meal pre-ordering option



When we explored the type of information parents want, the responses are wide-ranging. Menu practicalities dominate with **47% wanting to see the menu this week and 20% wanting to see the menu on the day.** 23% of parents want information on the nutritional values in school meals.

## Types of information parents would like their schools to provide



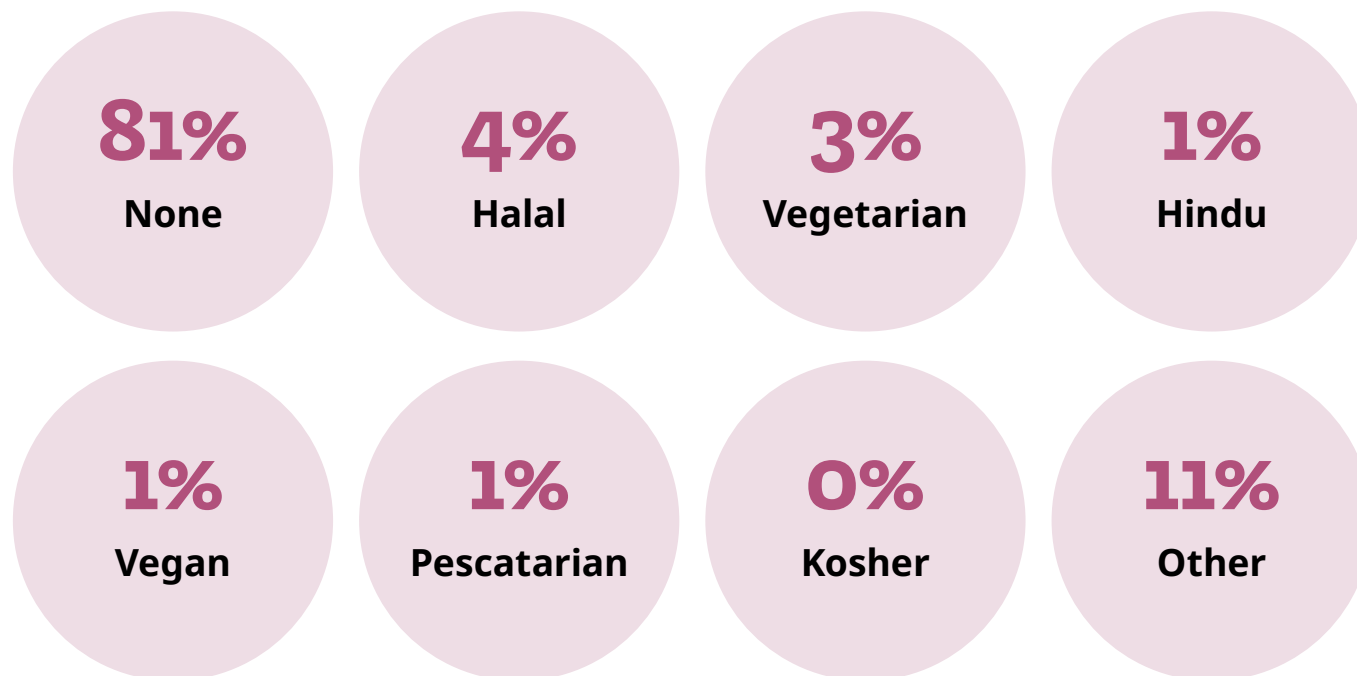
# Alternative diets and allergy management

// School catering teams endeavour to deliver a fully inclusive meal experience at all times and cater for any young person with medical, cultural or lifestyle diet requirements ensuring that they are able to enjoy a suitable nutritionally sound school meals."

- ASSIST FM

## Nearly 1 in 5 have alternative dietary needs.

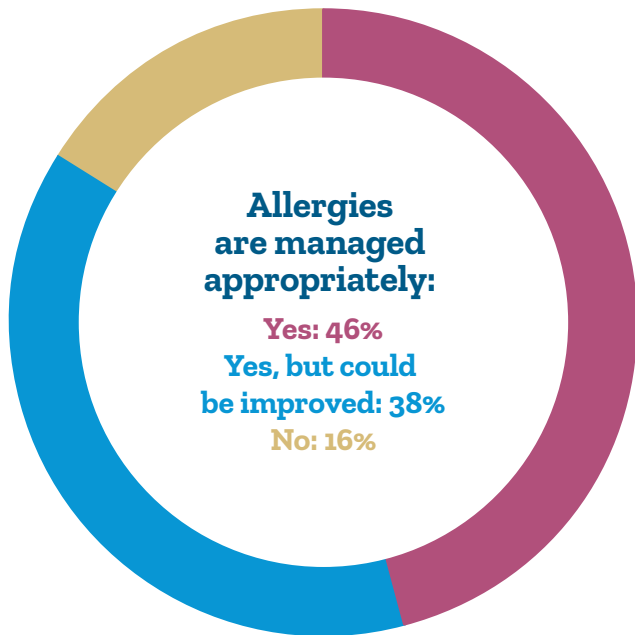
Halal is the highest (amongst the pre-defined needs), accounting for nearly 1 in 20 school children.



## 1 in 20 parents

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

Milk and peanut allergies sit at 2% each with eggs and cereals with gluten at 1%.



**"** They have always asked about my sons allergies and have always made sure that he isn't exposed to peanuts." **Surveyed Parent**

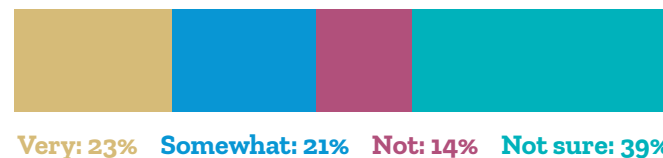
**"** Our daughter is lactose free. This is managed ok but when I select her meals there is no dietary info so I don't actually know the meal is lactose free." **Surveyed Parent**

**"** School were unaware of procedures for arranging alternative meal options and passed to external body who were extremely unhelpful." **Surveyed Parent**

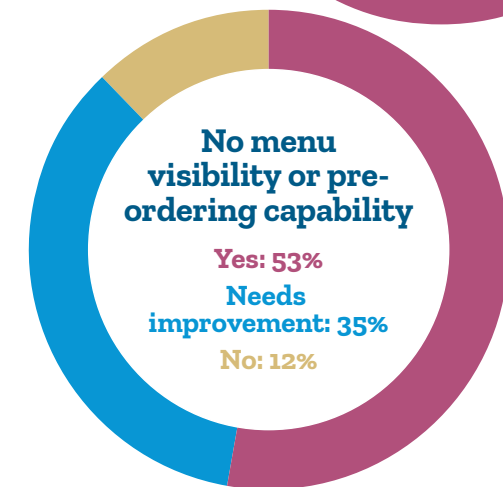
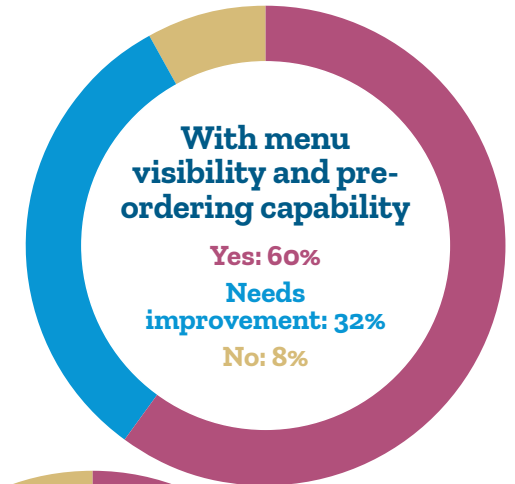
The majority of parents feel that their schools manage allergies well, with **nearly 50% having complete confidence** in them and **37% agreeing**, but suggesting improvement is needed

Of the same group of parents, nearly 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.**

### How sensitively are allergies managed by schools?



### How access to pre-ordering functionality impacts parent opinions on whether allergies are managed appropriately:



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.

### Bullying due to allergies



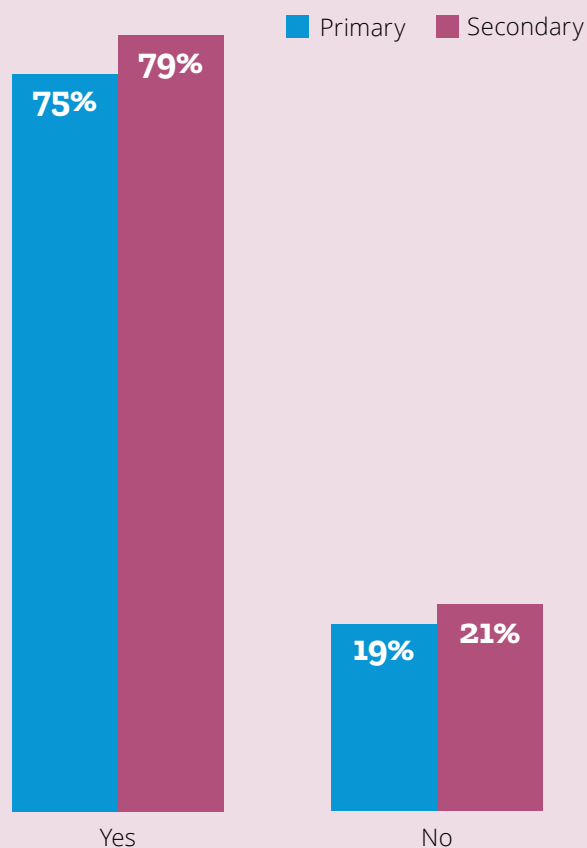
### Pre-booking options

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

# 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.**

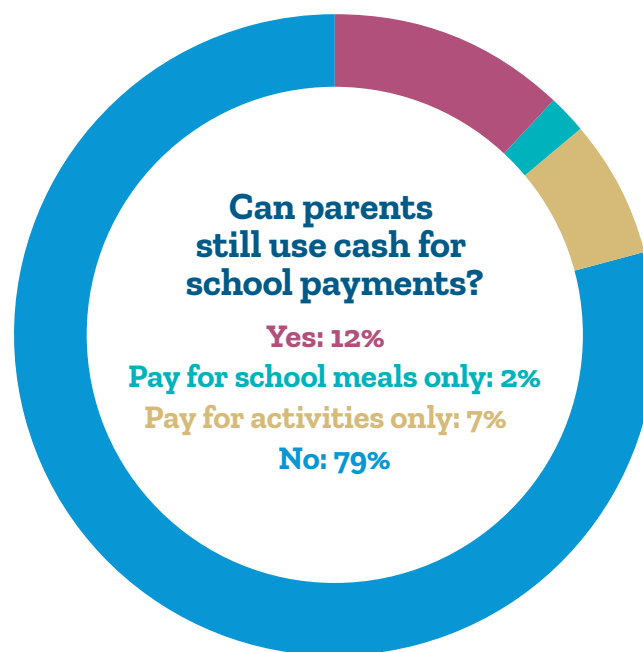


## 8 in 10 parents

say cash payments are a thing of the past.

## 1 in 10 can use cash

to pay for all school related spend. However, **60% of those parents who can still make cash payments would prefer to make these payments online.**



## 60% of primary school parents

would like the ability to see what school meals their child has eaten in the recent past, with only **16% already having this available to them.**

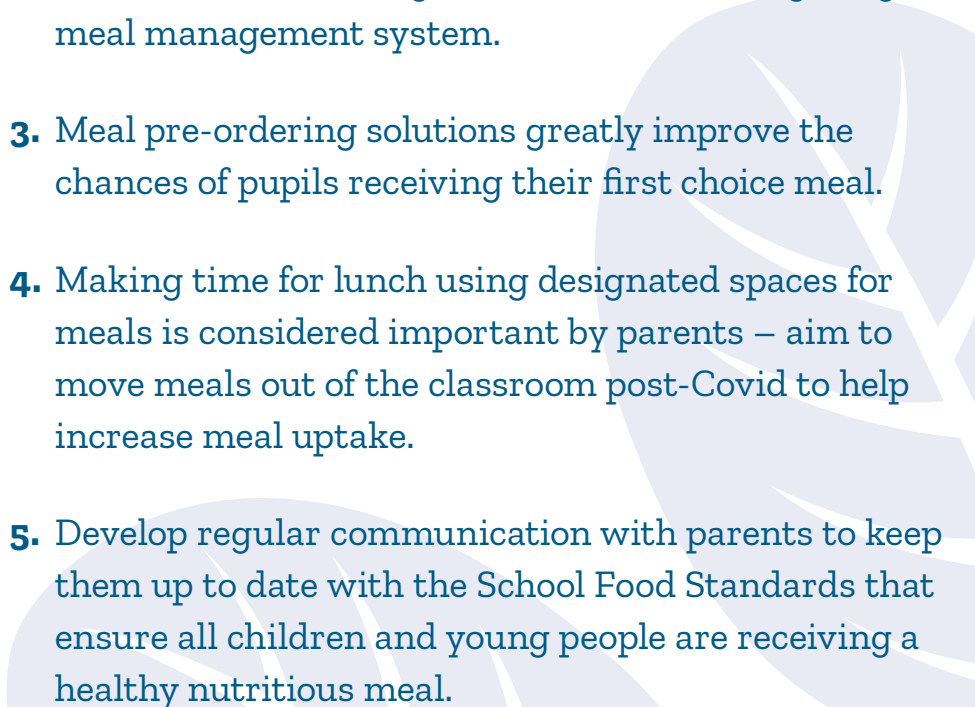
**“** There aren't many schools that are cash-only anymore. We saw in 2020 that 2% of surveyed schools still only accept cash payments, and that number has decreased to 1.6% in 2021.’

Source: ParentPay Whitepaper, 2021.

# Summary

1. 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.
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 on key issues that include:
  - allergen management
  - variety of meals on offer
  - healthy and nutritious menu choices
3. Considering the sustainability and ethical sourcing of ingredients is definitely or somewhat a factor when choosing school meal provision for over a third of parents.
4. 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

1. Engage with parents and pupils to provide relevant tools and information that reassure parents - including special diets and allergens.
  2. 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.
  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 communication with parents to keep them up to date with the School Food Standards that ensure all children and young people are receiving a healthy nutritious meal.
- 

## ASSIST FM welcomes the feedback from this report and as a result will focus on 5 key actions.

- 1. Local sourcing** – ASSIST FM will work to increase dialogue with suppliers and communicate awareness of local sourcing to enhance sustainability and environmental agenda. Working with our suppliers we will continue to increase the amount of local provenance on our menus.
- 2. Special diets** – ASSIST FM will work across the country to share best practise in end-to-end process of special diets and continue to keep members up to date with changing legislation.
- 3. School environment** – Focus on creative solutions to improve the pupil experience in our service delivery of meals in each school environment.
- 4. Quality** – Invest in our people and provide training and development to continually seek feedback and promote a quality first ethos in our meal offering.
- 5. Choice** – Improve communication channels to allow all parents and pupils greater awareness of food choices.

## Our national report – in collaboration with LACA

Are you interested in seeing how the results for Scotland 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 Scotland compares, simply scan the QR code.

