



Nottinghamshire
County Council

Overview and Scrutiny School Meals Survey

Parents' comments from survey of parents of primary school children (in InContact)

Price

1. I have one child in Primary School (aged 6) and another due to go into full time school in September. The school meals are excellent quality, however it's just too expensive. Meals are currently £1.90 a day, so this x 2 children would take a huge chunk out of our monthly income. My eldest son currently has two school meals a week. I would gladly take up school meals everyday, if they were cheaper - or better still free.
2. I do think that £9.50 is expensive especially as my little girl does not eat the puddings. A good idea would be to charge separately for dinners and puddings.
3. Food quality – good. Cost – poor
4. I think the school dinners represent good value - even if at £1.90, they are relatively expensive. If you want your children to have one cooked meal a day (which we do), then the alternatives are to prepare packed lunches and then cook at night, which won't work out any cheaper, or, with older children, allow them to go elsewhere. That means the chip shop, which is a bad idea!
5. I would say taking into account the price and quality the school dinners provided are satisfactory.
6. I feel the cost of the dinners is too much, especially when you have more than one child.
7. If I had more than one child at the school I would not get school dinners as would be too expensive.
8. If they were less expensive then I would pay to have a school dinner every day as she does enjoy them.

9. Too expensive - if I thought my daughter had a full hot meal then I wouldn't mind, however she always comes home hungry and I have to cook another hot meal at home.
10. My son started school in Jan 2008 and had a mixture of school dinners and packed lunches. The menu at his school was varied and he enjoyed having school dinners. My husband and I made the decision recently that my son would have packed lunches because of the cost. At £9.50 a week, which we were paying for a while, this became too much along with £10 a week for breakfast club (this is before he buys any breakfast!). My youngest son starts school in September 2009 and if they both have school dinner this would mean us paying £76 a month for dinners plus £80 a month for breakfast club. Packed lunches in future then!
11. Needs to be cheaper – what about a discount when having them all week?
12. We are both working parents and can afford the price of school meals. Plus I'd rather pay that bit more for fresh quality ingredients for a meal than a processed or fried meal.
13. Value for money - if my daughter received an adequate meal I would be happy to pay the £1.90 cost.

Menu/choice

14. My daughter is a vegetarian and on one occasion she was given the vegetarian option, but then the dinner lady proceeded to pour (non vegetarian) gravy over the top of it which meant that my daughter couldn't eat any of it so she went without a lunch which I had paid for. To my daughter and her friends, dinner ladies are often seen as quite foreboding, so as 10 and 11 year olds they will not challenge or disagree with the food that is put on their plate.
15. I gave up shelling out for meals that are really very expensive for the amount of food - £1.90 for my daughter to sometimes be given vegetarian food, or to have very little choice as most of it has gone is not acceptable! Often, by the time she had waited for her allotted time slot (different year groups have to eat at different times) and then queued up within that year group, there would be none, or very little left.
16. My daughter has school meals everyday and I always ask what she has had. It seems to me that the school are running out of meat options a lot and have a surplus of the vegetarian menu. Is this because this is the cheaper option? I am not impressed that my daughter seems to be on a permanent diet of

quorn nuggets and vegetable roll at a cost of £1.90 per day, and will probably be considering a pack lunch option after Easter.

17. My son is very lucky in that the school issues menus a week in advance for the children to choose what they would like. If there isn't anything on the menu which he likes he takes sandwiches to school. The meals on the menu sound delicious and are also nutritious. For example, on most Wednesdays they have roast dinner and all for £1.90.
18. As well as portions being too small the only children that get a choice are on first sitting. If you are on last sitting they often run out of food leaving sandwiches. My daughter often has half a meal as they have run out.
19. We tend to stick to the same days each week because the menu on the other days (Thursday and Friday) doesn't appeal to her. For example, she isn't a big lover of the fish that is on offer or the venison burgers.
20. Despite offering choice on the menu the choice often has gone for the later sittings or was never offered at all. Having a copy of the menu at home I can ask which she chose, but most of the time she just gets what she is given.
21. I think there should be more choice, local ingredients and fresh food. There also needs to be enough food so EVERYONE has a choice and enough food so EVERYONE has a full meal regardless of what sitting they are on.
22. Would it be an idea to provide an option at schools of having a healthy cold meal at a lower cost whereby children could choose say five different items.
23. Food often runs out with poor substitutes so that my son is often hungry when he gets home.
24. I think there has been a real effort to improve the quality and choice. My children are moderately fussy, but they usually find something on the menu that they enjoy. Often I wish I could join them - it sounds so good!

Sandwiches

25. He loves the food but every day asks to change to sandwiches. I have no wish to make him sandwiches but the pressure is constant. Those having sandwiches are allowed, I think, to eat virtually instantly at the dinner break time and sometimes outside. Whereas the dinners have a slower process to follow and of course the dinner kids see the other kids playing outside whilst they are still queuing up and to them, the meal almost becomes a punishment when their mates are all outside. I think the take up would improve dramatically if there was no advantage time-wise to having sandwiches.

26. My daughter has asked if she can have sandwiches some days. We have said no but I think that the influence of friends who have sandwiches and possibly not being able to sit with friends who have sandwiches, is influencing her rather than the quality of the food which she always likes.
27. Second child takes sandwiches because he is more choosy and at the moment he prefers a packed lunch. But also it becomes expensive if two are staying for school dinners five days a week.
28. My little boy started having school meals, but about a year ago he asked if he could switch to taking sandwiches. This had nothing to do with the price of the meal or the quality of the product (both of which we were happy with), but is to do with the fact that the school seat children who are having a provided lunch away from those taking a packed lunch. My son's friends all appear to take packed lunches and he wanted to be able to sit with them for the lunch break. It appears from speaking to friends and colleagues that this practice of segregating children according to their 'lunch type' is not uncommon, and may be an influential factor with regard to catered school lunch take up.
29. The class teacher said she doesn't go into the dinner hall just the sandwich hall as she could keep an eye on them in the sandwich hall but not the dinner hall. They have a salad bar at the school but are told at various times they cannot have anything from the salad bar as they are not vegetarians. They tend not to be able to choose what they want either when there is a choice of meal.

Convenience

30. From a convenience point of view, school dinners are so good. Me and my wife both work so buying school dinners avoids the hassle of packed lunches and cooking in the evening.

Parental control

31. As a parent it is always a worry knowing or not knowing what your child is eating when they are not with you.
32. My reason for her having school meals is nutritional, social skills, physical skills (using cutlery), trying new foods etc. My child isn't a fussy eater which convinced me more to let her stay for school dinners. This is a fear that some parents may have that their child will only eat certain types of food because they are a fussy eater. That's why they take a packed lunch as the parent knows what's going in it and can see what's been eaten. I too was worried about what my daughter was eating at school and would ask the teacher if

she was OK at dinner and if she ate it. The feedback was always positive. However my daughter would always - still does come out of school hungry. I was worried that she wasn't eating or eating enough. The fact that she was hungry I think was that she eats her dinner at 11.40am so by the time I collect her from school she is hungry. My point is I worried but persevered . I am a child care worker and know the benefits of healthy eating. Some parents may have easily given up and stopped their child from having a school lunch. I know parents that have commented that their child had come from school hungry and stopped school dinners. So maybe a more detailed report of what our children have eaten could be supplied? A tour of school meal times for parents or video footage during a parents welcome meeting, just to see what the children are being offered? Do they have a choice? More detailed information about the benefits of school dinners? Not just school meals are healthy etc but information on peer influence on trying different foods. Reassurance that the school will not let our child go hungry if they don't like the meal.

33. When my son was having a provided lunch I had no way of knowing how much he was eating. The menus provided show the daily choice, but I had no way of knowing what he had opted to eat and how much he consumed!
34. I have heard about a possible 'parent pay' system which is internet based and which would allow parents to log on and view what their children have chosen. This would be great, not only in partially addressing the above issue, but also in cutting out cash/cheques etc.
35. My daughter has school dinners everyday, mainly because the majority of her friends do and I like her to have a hot meal in the middle of the school day.
36. The main reason for not having school dinners is that as we eat as a family in the evening.
37. I like the old-fashioned philosophy behind providing a balanced meal for children at school. Although some parents are quite capable of doing this many are not. If more children can be encouraged to have school dinners everyone would benefit (apart from the chip shop owners!). It depresses me when I see chip shops full of kids in school uniform. I know it is ambitious to suppose that many of those could be persuaded to have school dinners but it would be a shame to give up. Every effort should be made to market school dinners - we can't compete with McDonalds in that respect but some money spent on professional marketing might pay dividends.

38. They need more dinner supervisors to monitor what the young people are eating, to make sure they are eating.

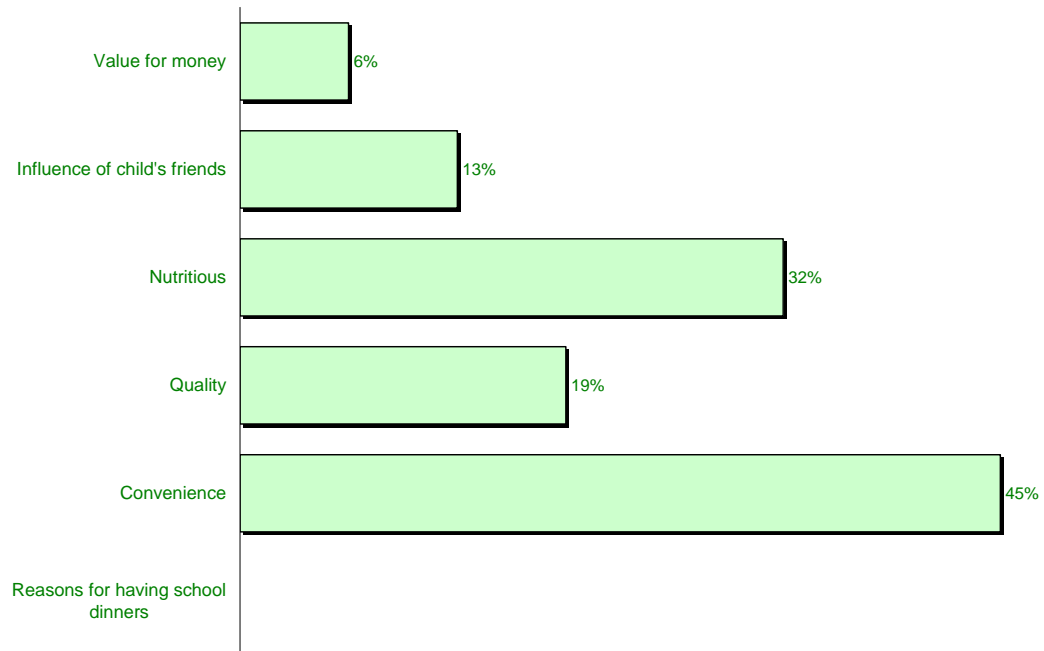
39. I hope the County Council will not give up on supplying school dinners. I think it is a service we can rightly be proud of.

40. Do a questionnaire on what the children want. Not what the education department says they want.

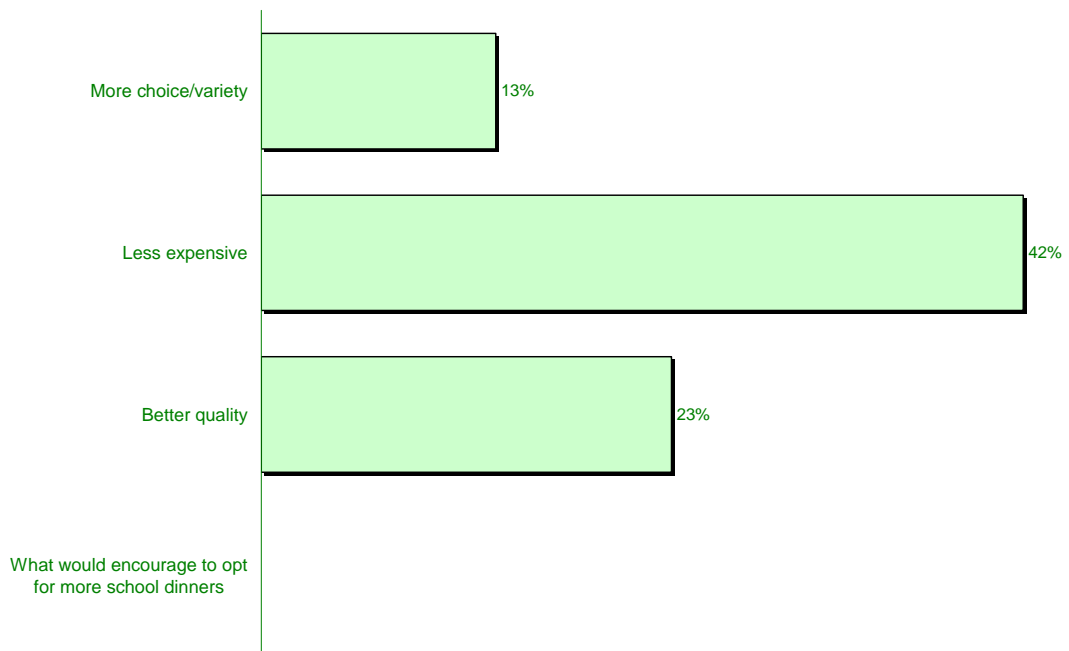
41. Thanks for the opportunity to comment on this. It's something I feel very strongly about.

Survey results

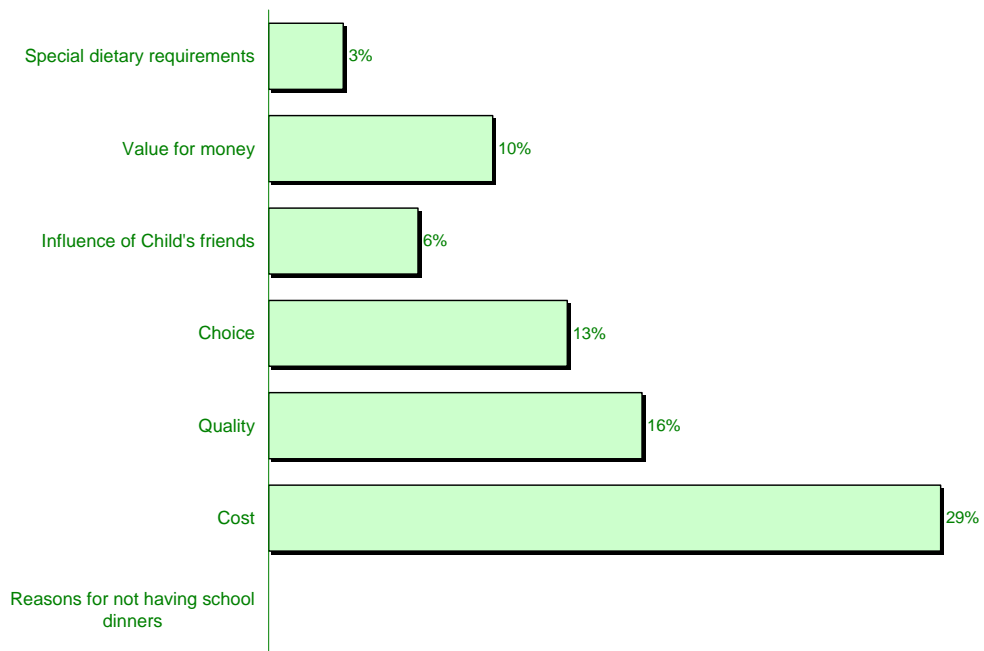
What are your reasons for having school dinners?



What would encourage you to opt for more school dinners?



What are your reasons for not having school dinners?



How do you rate the school dinners provided at your school?

