

A photograph of children in a school cafeteria eating their dinner. In the foreground, a young girl with blonde hair is focused on eating, holding a knife and fork. She is wearing a yellow shirt. In the background, other children are visible, including one in a pink shirt. The plates are red and contain a variety of food items like rice, vegetables, and bread. The overall atmosphere is bright and positive.

**SCHOOL DINNERS -
A SNAPSHOT SURVEY OF
CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN WALES**

**CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER
FOR WALES**

MARCH 2024

The logo for the Children's Commissioner for Wales, featuring four icons: a hand, a megaphone, a person, and a map of Wales.

**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

School Dinners - A snapshot survey of children and young people in Wales

Introduction

During March 2024 we asked children and young people for their views on school dinners through a survey.

The survey was part of an ongoing series of topical questions we ask children and young people monthly to hear their views on a variety of issues, called Monthly Matters. It was shared directly with all schools signed up to our children's rights schemes¹ for primary and secondary schools.

As part of the survey pack, children and young people were shown a video introducing the topic, and they were asked to consider some questions about their school dinners, like what they enjoyed about school dinners and how they would improve them. We suggested in our session outline that following this video, children and young people should have a few minutes to discuss their views with each other before answering the survey.

Schools had two options for completing the survey; children and young people could either do it independently, or a teacher could complete the survey on behalf of the group by answering a different set of questions to give an overview of the discussion.

490 children and young people aged between 7 and 18 answered the survey individually. A further 1250 children took part in groups, with teachers and youth workers submitting a summary of their views. We received responses from 19 local authorities.

Questions were developed internally, based on themes that had emerged from previous engagement exercises with children and young people and professionals.

¹The amount of schools currently signed up to our Ambassador schemes:

Primary – 633

Secondary - 83

Questions for children and young people

Closed response questions

Do you have school dinners?

Yes – 51%

Sometimes – 40%

No – 9%

In your school, is there a good choice of healthy food for dinner?

Sometimes – 48%

Yes – 43%

No – 9%

Are you full after having school dinner?

Sometimes – 41%

No – 40%

Yes – 19%

Can you have more food (seconds) if you asked for it?

No – 44%

Sometimes – 28%

Yes – 16%

Not relevant to me – 12%

At dinner time, can you always have vegetables if you want some?

Yes – 76%

No – 24%

At dinner time, can you always have fruit if you want some?

Yes – 78%

No – 22%

Free text questions

Under each free text question we've included the top three answers given by children.

Why do you choose to have a packed lunch every day?

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- not liking school dinners
- they are more filling than school dinners
- being a fussy eater
- preferring their parents' food

What do you think is the best thing about school dinners?

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- specific food items
- the taste and flavour of the food
- being able to choose what they want

What is the worst thing about school dinners?

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- specific food items
- small portions/wanting more food
- dislikes about the quality of food or the way it's cooked or presented

What one thing would you change to make school dinners better?

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- wanting more food

- wanting more choice
- changes related to specific food items

Is there anything else you want to tell us about school dinners?

The most common answers fell under the following themes:

- comments about specific food items
- positive comments about liking school dinners
- wanting more variety

Questions for teachers/youth workers

Closed response questions

How many children/young people have school dinners during the week?

Most of them – 66%

Some of them – 24%

All of them – 11%

None – 0%

How many think there is a good choice of healthy food for dinner?

Some of them – 53%

Most of them – 34%

None – 11%

All of them – 3%

How many feel full after having school dinner?

Some of them – 66%

None – 16%

Most of them – 16%

All of them – 3%

***Only if relevant* How many feel they can have more food (seconds) if they ask for it?**

None – 29%

Some of them – 29%

Most of them – 18%

Not relevant – 18%

All of them – 6%

How many feel they can always have vegetables for dinner if they want?

Some of them – 45%

All of them – 21%

Most of them – 18%

None – 16%

How many feel they can always have fruit at dinner time if they want?

Some of them – 42%

All of them – 26%

Most of them – 24%

None – 8%

Free text questions

When asked if they had anything further to add based on their discussions with the group, the most common comments from teachers fell under the following themes:

- wanting more variety
- wanting bigger portions
- children feeling that the price of food was high

Conclusion

It's clear that school dinners are a highly valued part of the school day, and we know that many children rely on this meal as their most important source of energy and nutrition. In the current societal context, it feels more important than ever that the main meal children are having in school gives

them the energy and the nutrients they need to grow, to play, and to learn. This sentiment was clear in a [recent report published by Public Health Wales, Opportunities for improving children's health in Wales: the potential of school food.](#)

We were pleased to be able to share children and young people's views through a range of news pieces, including from [BBC Wales](#) and [Newsround.](#)

In response to children's views, [Welsh Government said that they will soon be reviewing the guidance on school meals.](#) It should be a priority for the Welsh Government to take this forward and to make sure they keep listening to children and young people's views as part of their work. We've shared children's views with the Welsh Government and with councils across Wales.