



21/06/23

Sue Webber MSP

Convenor, The Scottish Parliament Education, Children, and Young People Committee

Dear Ms Webber MSP

I'm writing to you in your capacity as Convenor of the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children, and Young People's Committee to suggest an addition to the committee's schedule of work for next year's parliamentary session. Magic Breakfast believe the committee, and the parliament, would benefit from taking evidence on the Scottish Government's commitments around breakfast provision in schools.

As you will know, Magic Breakfast is Scotland's largest third sector provider of school breakfast. We have over two decades worth of experience delivering breakfast and supporting and challenging schools to provide a hunger focused and barrier and stigma free provision in Scotland and England.

My colleagues Finlay Allmond and Tracy Freeman were glad to be able to share the impact of our work in Castleview Primary School in Edinburgh with yourself and your parliamentary colleague Jeremy Balfour MSP. As you heard at Castleview, our work with schools offers them a chance to deliver a nutritious breakfast every day.

Breakfast has the power to extend the potential of children and young people. Those in the Primary 3 age group can see their attainment boosted by an average of two months.ⁱ In our partner schools we hear from teachers that they can see the benefits of breakfast directly in attainment, attendance, and behaviour.

For the wider economy breakfast makes sense too. In a study conducted by Pro Bono Economics on behalf of Magic Breakfast, it was found that investment in breakfast offers a 50x return.ⁱⁱ This means that for every £1 invested in breakfast can create £50 back in terms of reduced public expenditure and increased tax revenues as a result of improved educational outcomes.

As a parliament, all members were elected on manifestos committing to some form of increased breakfast provision in schools. In a recent poll commissioned by Magic Breakfast, 80% of Scottish adults agree that the Scottish Government should act now on breakfast in schools.

The Scottish Government has taken an evolving view on the issue of school breakfasts. In her statement to

the Scottish Parliament on the 7th September 2021 announcing *A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22*, the Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP – former First Minister and member for Glasgow Southside – said that ‘we will reduce the cost of the school day’.ⁱⁱⁱ

This was cemented within *A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22* with the Scottish Government announcing, ‘In the next year, we will develop plans to deliver free breakfasts to all primary and special school children and start to pilot provision.’^{iv}

In October 2021 the then Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery – John Swinney MSP, member for Perthshire North – laid before Parliament the Scottish Government’s *Covid Recovery Strategy: for a fairer future*. In his speech he declared that the Scottish Government would be ‘reducing the costs of school with free breakfasts’.^v This was supported in the strategy which said that ‘In the next year, we will develop plans to deliver free breakfasts to all primary and special school children, and start to pilot provision.’^{vi} A direct replica of the wording from the Programme for Government.

Neither of these two Scottish Government commitments have been met.

In January 2022 the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and current Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice – Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, member for Dunfermline – told the Parliament as part of a response during a portfolio question from Collette Stevenson MSP, member for East Kilbride, that ‘[The Scottish Government] are committed to expanding free school meals and providing breakfasts to all primary school pupils during the course of the current session of Parliament.’^{vii} This marked the first official slippage from the ‘in the next year’ timeline of the Programme for Government.

The then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills again responded to a question in the Parliament on breakfast provision on May 4th 2022. Paul O’Kane MSP, member for West Scotland, asked the Scottish Government:

‘...what its response is to the recent report by the charity, Magic Breakfast, showing that four in 10 Scottish schools have no breakfast provision at all and that breakfast provision in Scotland reaches the fewest disadvantaged pupils per school of any United Kingdom nation.’^{viii}

The Cabinet Secretary responded saying that:

‘We are committed to the expansion of free school meals for all pupils in primary and special schools, as well as the introduction of free year-round breakfast and lunch provision to support eligible children and young people outside the school term.

Currently, breakfast club provision in Scotland is delivered through a mixed model of local authority, private and voluntary services, which might be delivered in schools or other community facilities. Services often combine food provision with early morning childcare.

We want to improve the picture and ensure that all children in primary and special education schools in Scotland have equal access to breakfast, if they need it. Preparatory work will begin this year to map the current extent of breakfast provision in Scotland. From that, we will plan our future breakfast offer, ensuring that that is informed by what parents, carers, children and young people need and is aligned with a future system of funded school-age childcare, where that is appropriate.’ix

This was the first suggestion from the Scottish Government that breakfast provision would support ‘eligible’ children rather than the initial universal commitment.

Since then, the Scottish Government commitment to breakfast provision has been conspicuously absent from key Scottish Government documents. *A stronger and more resilient Scotland: the Programme for Government 2022 to 2023* contained no references to breakfast provision. Similarly, *Scottish Budget: 2023-24* and *Investing in Scotland’s Future: Resource Spending Review* gave no significant insight into how the Scottish Government’s commitments would be funded.

In recent months, Scottish Ministers have replied to two written questions on breakfast provision. Both have been answered by the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise – Natalie Don MSP, member for Renfrewshire North.

Firstly, in response to question S6W-16692 from Claire Baker MSP, member for Mid Scotland and Fife the Minister mentioned that ‘We have begun work with local authorities and key stakeholders to better understand and map that provision. That process is ongoing and will feed into future plans as they develop.’x This suggests that the Scottish Government is still at the same stage it was when it published the 2021-22 Programme for Government.

Secondly, in response to question S6W-17840 from Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, member for Edinburgh Western, regarding staff time being spent on breakfast the Minister replied that ‘The Scottish Government is committed to developing plans to deliver free breakfasts to all primary and special school children.’xi This once again reiterates the universal nature of the commitment but once more shows the Scottish Government remains in a development phase.

I believe you will agree with me that the picture painted by the Scottish Government is one of confusion, obfuscation, and delay. Whilst our organisation is dedicated principally to the delivery of breakfast provision, we know similar issues can be found within the extension of free school meals and other key policy areas affecting children and young people.

When young Scots return to their classrooms in August it will be nigh on two years since the Scottish Government promised them their breakfast. This is a delay that is hard to stomach.

I’m asking the committee to consider taking evidence on the proven track record breakfast has in impacting positive change, the experience of delivering breakfast provision in schools, the Scottish Government’s lack of action, and the need for urgent change.

I hope the committee will consider this vital issue within its work programme.

For your information I am sending a copy of this letter to your Deputy Convenor Ben Macpherson MSP, member for Edinburgh Northern and Lothian, as well the other members of the committee and the clerk. I am also sending a copy of the letter to the members whose parliamentary statement I have referenced as well as the current Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills – Jenny Gilruth MSP, member for Mid Fife and Glenrothes.

Sincerely

Jacque Bance De Vasquez Director of
Policy and Engagement
Magic Breakfast

END NOTES

- i Franklin et al (February 2021), *The economic cost-effectiveness of the Magic Breakfast model of school breakfast provision*, available at [Download.ashx \(magicbreakfast.com\)](Download.ashx (magicbreakfast.com))
- ii Education Endowment Foundation (December 2019), *Magic Breakfast: Evaluation report and executive summary*, available at [Magic Breakfast report.pdf \(d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net\)](Magic Breakfast report.pdf (d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net))
- iii SP OR 7 September 2021, col 15
- iv The Scottish Government (September 2021), *A fairer, greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22*, available at [A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 \(www.gov.scot\)](A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 (www.gov.scot))
- v SP OR5 October 2021, col 34
- vi The Scottish Government (October 2021), *Covid Recovery Strategy: For a fairer future*, available at [Covid Recovery Strategy : For a fairer future \(www.gov.scot\)](Covid Recovery Strategy : For a fairer future (www.gov.scot))
- vii S6O-00677
- viii S6O-01046
- ix *ibid*
- x S6W-16692
- xi S6W-17840