



CHILDREN'S FUTURES AND THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROVISION

July 2022

Before- and after-school activities offer pupils and their parents so much. However only some children and families get to reap the many educational and financial benefits. The rest are locked out because of costs or lack of provision.

This briefing, from Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and Magic Breakfast, outlines how extra-curricular clubs and activities support children to thrive, have fulfilled childhoods and better engage with learning at school. It also highlights the significant financial benefits for individual families when these are free to access, as well as the wider gains for the economy. Before- and after-school activities mean parents are better able to take up, and benefit from, full-time work without incurring the high cost of childcare. They are proven to reduce the educational attainment gap that disadvantaged pupils face,¹ as well as boosting the long-term economic opportunities of children and young people.

Our new analysis shows that the provision of universally-available, fully-funded before- and after-school provision, would make a low-income lone parent² moving from part-time to full-time work **£1,200 better off annually** because they do not have to pay prohibitive childcare costs. This would make a significant difference to families living in poverty through the removal of childcare costs alone.

The UK government needs to invest and enable all schools to play their part if it is serious about levelling up life chances. At present, per pupil spending remains below 2009 levels.³ Relying on already-stretched school budgets to provide these activities has resulted in patchy provision for children and families, with varying costs often excluding those most in need from accessing provision.⁴ Instead, CPAG and Magic Breakfast are calling on the UK government to prioritise central investment in before- and after-school clubs, with schools given adequate funding to pay staff or work with delivery partners, so children can thrive and struggling families have more opportunities to work. This will help reduce child poverty.

Clubs and activities support children to thrive

Pupils and families have told us how much they value being able to access before- and after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities. Breakfast clubs and opportunities for sports, music, arts and drama provide space and time for pupils to explore their wider interests outside of the core curriculum, and

¹ [The causal impact of school breakfast clubs on academic attainment](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2017

² Analysis is based on a lone parent with two primary school-aged children.

³ [School spending per pupil set to remain below 2009 levels](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021

⁴ [Hidden Hunger: The State of UK Breakfast Provision 2022](#), Magic Breakfast, 2022

develop a range of skills. This is beneficial for all children, but particularly those in low-income households who we know are less able to access opportunities elsewhere.^{5,6}

'The clubs help you find your passion for what you want.' (Year 5 pupil)

'I like that they have extra hours of school [for] things that people enjoy.' (Year 10 pupil)

Breakfast provision helps get children ready for the school day, and in the right frame of mind to learn. Magic Breakfast recommends a range of breakfast provision models including breakfast clubs, in-class provision, late provision and playground provision. Schools that operate breakfast provision have seen real benefits, with before-school clubs providing a calm, inclusive and stress-free start to the school day. Eighty-one per cent of teachers working with Magic Breakfast report that breakfast provision improves attainment, and nearly all Magic Breakfast schools report that children are more ready to learn after they've had breakfast.⁷

'We have a family of three children which have, through the pandemic, accessed breakfast club daily. The eldest is a young carer for their mum. This enabled her to come to school early and took away some of the responsibility for her younger siblings. The siblings can have breakfast together and relax and chat with breakfast club supervisors before the start of the school day.' (Teacher, Magic Breakfast partner school)

'What I like about breakfast clubs is that when I colour it kind of relaxed me and we do it first thing in the morning and when I start colouring it relaxes me!' (Year 5 pupil)

'A child was really struggling to settle down in the morning and was losing 45 minutes [of] education every day. We invited him and his sister to attend breakfast club free of charge, and now he is ready to learn every morning.' (Teacher, Magic Breakfast partner school)

Pupils and families have told us that where clubs and activities are available to all pupils free of charge, it extends this experience to all children and enhances children's enjoyment of school life.

'There's a bunch of clubs – drama, dance, chess, video games club... it's all for free. They want the best for us.' (Year 7 pupil)

'I'm really impressed that no children are excluded from clubs for financial reasons as clubs are free.' (Parent)

'There have been some free activity clubs after school this term which are GREAT and very popular with my children.' (Parent)

However, the reality is that current provision is inconsistent and often comes with a cost. Families are now facing soaring living costs and having to make increasingly difficult choices. Families have told us they want their children to access a wide range of academic, social, cultural and sporting opportunities. However, these opportunities are simply unaffordable for lower-income families, or require them to cut back elsewhere within already-stretched family budgets so that their children can take part.

'Like with anything the cost of living has risen and I will need to find the money for my children by making cuts elsewhere.' (Parent)

⁵ *Extended School Day*, Child Poverty Action Group and Parentkind, 2021

⁶ *Parent Power 2018*, Sutton Trust, 2018

⁷ *Hidden Hunger: The State of UK Breakfast Provision 2022*, Magic Breakfast, 2022

'It's sad if you can't do it cos you don't have enough money.' (Year 5 pupil)

'If you don't have enough money then you can't join anything because you need to have money.' (Year 4 pupil)

'We make choices and cut out other things so she can do school activities.' (Parent)

Provision offers significant financial benefits for families

As well as benefitting children, free before- and after-school provision helps families financially. It means reduced childcare costs and more opportunities for parents to work more, or find new or more rewarding work. CPAG and Magic Breakfast analysis shows that free before- and after-school provision during term time, that enables parents to work or work more, could result in a low-income lone parent with two children being **£1,200 better off annually**, through the removal of childcare costs alone. As the UK has one of the most expensive childcare systems in the world,⁸ free before- and after-school provision would also help many other families struggling with these costs, not just those in receipt of benefits.

'The provision of the after school clubs and the wraparound have helped in reducing the financial burden on parents who have had to spend a fortune on childcare.' (School governor)

'Maybe do an extended childcare programme where families with working parents get childcare for free for two hours or something. Because that will make such a difference to us working parents.' (Parent)

The challenge of juggling childcare and jobs means some parents are unable to take on paid employment or can't work as many hours as they want to, making it harder for those families to increase their incomes and escape poverty. Childcare also constrains parents' job opportunities, forcing women in particular (women often take on the majority of caring responsibilities) to take jobs closer to home, even if they are low paid and poorly matched to their skills, just because they fit in with childcare requirements.⁹

'I have four children so [paying for] breakfast and after school clubs to enable me to work makes a massive dent in my finances.' (Parent)

'I am a single mum and student and have had to struggle looking for alternative ways for childcare because after school club cost is very high.' (Parent)

Breakfast provision also means one less meal for families to worry about.

'If parents are of low income, they often have to choose between buying food, budgeting for bills and uniform. Having access to breakfast in school has proved vital to bridging the barriers for our pupils.' (Teacher, Magic Breakfast partner school)

Our analysis shows that, at a time when many parents are struggling to get by, fully-funded before- and after-school clubs mean that no child misses out or goes hungry, and parents have more opportunities to significantly increase their household income through paid work.

⁸ *Is childcare affordable?*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020

⁹ *The 'gender commuting gap'*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018

Example family profile

Jill is a lone parent with two children who attend the local primary school. She is currently working 15 hours per week on the minimum wage to fit in work around school pick-up and drop-off (8:30am and 3:30pm respectively). Jill is currently in receipt of universal credit and is eligible to claim support for up to 85 per cent of her childcare costs.¹⁰ After she's covered her housing costs, Jill's weekly income is £297,* which means Jill and her children live below the poverty line (£300 for her family). Jill would like to work more but childcare costs are a significant barrier.

If Jill chooses to increase her work to 30 hours per week but has to pay for before- and after-school provision to make this possible, she would **lose over half of her increased net income** to meet these costs. In this instance, Jill's additional income would be £55 per week (after tax) but she would spend £30 on childcare.

However, if free before- and after-school activities were provided at the local school from 8am to 6pm, Jill could increase her work to 30 hours each week and benefit fully from the additional £55 per week. This would mean she could keep all £2,100 of the increase to her annual net income, **£1,200 more than if she had to pay for childcare.**

* Amended on July 12th 2022 with new AHC income figure

Before- and after-school activities support the wider economy

Before- and after-school clubs have other benefits as well. There is evidence showing that school nutrition and enrichment programmes can improve academic attainment.^{11,12} As well as being a good thing in its own right, higher attainment boosts the lifetime economic contribution of pupils benefiting from this before- and after-school support. Academic outcomes not only benefit the young person, but the wider economy too.

Previous analysis by Pro Bono Economics, in partnership with Magic Breakfast and Heinz, shows that school breakfast provision is cost-effective, with every £1 spent returning over £50 for the economy in the future.¹³ The calculations demonstrate that providing the Magic Breakfast model of school breakfast provision for one year to pupils completing Key Stage 1 (costing around £180 per pupil) could generate long-term benefits to the economy of around £9,200 per child. This is through assessing the academic impacts of providing a breakfast e.g., concentration and overall readiness to learn, and what this means for children's outcomes, e.g. earnings from employment. Approximately £4,000 benefits the public purse through increased tax revenue and reduced costs for public services.

Conclusion

Stacked up, the arguments in favour of government investment in before- and after-school activities and clubs are compelling, particularly given the government's objectives to level up education, close the educational attainment gap and support families to work. These activities provide clear opportunities for pupils to flourish beyond the core school curriculum. They enhance childhood experiences and pave the way for brighter futures. What is more, this type of provision has the potential to significantly support and increase household incomes, at a time where many families are facing severe hardship. Families can save on childcare costs and be supported to work more if they wish, with some **lower-income**

¹⁰ For families in receipt of universal credit with two or more children, the maximum amount of childcare costs that can be claimed back is £1108

¹¹ [Magic Breakfast: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary](#), Education Endowment Foundation, 2019

¹² [Extending school time evaluation](#), Education Endowment Foundation, 2021

¹³ [The Magic Breakfast model of school breakfast provision](#), Pro Bono Economic, 2021

families standing to gain £1,200 a year with this provision in place through the removal of childcare costs alone. And there are gains for the wider economy, with clubs contributing to better outcomes for children, making them an investment in the future.

Recommendation

CPAG and Magic Breakfast are calling on the UK government to prioritise central investment in before- and after-school clubs, making them fully funded and universally available, so all children in England can thrive and struggling families have more opportunities to work. This will help reduce child poverty. CPAG has previously estimated it would cost the government £2.6 billion a year to fund every primary school in England to deliver core before- and after-school activities.¹⁴ For secondary schools, an additional £525 million would be required.

As a starting point, the government must prioritise comprehensive breakfast provision – nearly one in five schools in England have no before-school provision, and of those that do, over half report there are barriers to pupils attending these clubs.¹⁵

As an urgent first step, we recommend an injection of £75m of new funding. This would enable up to 7,000 more schools to offer breakfast provision, or 75 per cent of schools with high levels of disadvantage currently unable to access funding. However, to fully support all children, food costs, expert support and advice, and contributions to school staffing should be covered through a long-term centrally-funded settlement accessible to every school that needs it.

Methodology and supporting notes

- Jill's universal credit entitlement is made up of the single person (25 and over) standard allowance, the child element for both her children, and the housing element (local housing allowance), which is equal to her rent.
- The cost of after-school childcare is calculated by using the weekly price of an after-school club for children aged 5-11 of £66.52.¹⁶ The cost of before-school childcare is then assumed to be half of this (under the assumption that 1 hour would be needed before school and 2 hours after school). This would be £33.26.
- This means the total cost of childcare is £99.78 per child per week. However, as Jill is on universal credit she only has to pay 15 per cent of this amount. This works out as £14.97 per child (£30 for two children).
- The annual figures for Jill's childcare costs are calculated by multiplying the weekly figure by 39 (the number of weeks of term time in a school year).
- The Magic Breakfast model is to work with eligible schools and provide both food aid and specialist support through dedicated support and challenge to staff. For a school in England to be eligible, at least 35 per cent of pupils should be recorded as eligible for pupil premium. A primary school in Scotland qualifies for Magic Breakfast support when at least 55 per cent of pupils are in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 to 4 and/or at least 35 per cent are eligible for free school meals. A secondary school qualifies for support when at least 40 per cent of pupils are in SIMD Deciles 1 to 4.
- In this briefing we focus on the benefits of term time before- and after-school provision. However, we recognise that families face increased childcare costs over the holidays and that access to free holiday provision is also needed to support struggling families.

¹⁴ [Extended school provision](#), Child Poverty Action Group, 2021

¹⁵ [Hidden Hunger: The State of UK Breakfast Provision 2022](#), Magic Breakfast, 2022

¹⁶ [Coram Childcare Survey 2022](#), L Coleman and others, Coram Family and Childcare, 2022

About us

About Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need. We also carry out high profile legal work to establish and protect families' rights. Child Poverty Action Group is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number 294841) and in Scotland (registration number SC039339).

About Magic Breakfast

Magic Breakfast is a registered charity providing healthy breakfasts to children in the UK who arrive at school too hungry to learn, and expert support to their schools. The charity currently works with over 1,000 schools in disadvantaged areas across England and Scotland, to offer free breakfast to over 200,000 children. We ensure children and young people start the school day with the energy and nutrition they need to make the most of their morning lessons.

About UK Cost of the School Day

The Cost of the School Day project was started by CPAG in Scotland in 2014 with the aim of reducing the financial barriers that prevent pupils from fully participating in the school day. The Cost of the School Day approach involves working with whole-school communities (pupils, parents, teachers and school staff) to identify and reduce cost barriers faced by pupils from low-income backgrounds. Following the success of this project in Glasgow and Dundee, CPAG has partnered with Children North East and expanded the project to local authorities in England, Wales and new parts of Scotland. This project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Pears Foundation, Orbit Housing Association, Coventry City Council and the Royal Borough of Greenwich who we thank for their ongoing support. cpag.org.uk/CoSD