

# Speak Up

## Free school meal evaluation – survey with parents of reception children

### Background & methodology

Children starting primary school in Bolton in September 2008 were offered a free school meal. The take-up of this offer was 87%. In order to evaluate the trial, a questionnaire was sent to all parents of reception class children. Over 1000 people took part in the survey.

### Why have a school meal?

The top three reasons for parents choosing a school meal for their child were:

- I want them to have a hot meal (72%)
- I know they will get a healthy lunch (61%)
- It's easy – I don't have to make a packed lunch (29%)



Contact your school directly to take part, or for more information contact the school meals team on:

Telephone: 01204 236954  
Email: [schoolmeals@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:schoolmeals@bolton.gov.uk)  
www.bolton.gov.uk/schoolmeals

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**Bolton Council**

Only primary school reception year children are eligible for free meals.

It encourages my child to try different foods

They learn social skills while they eat

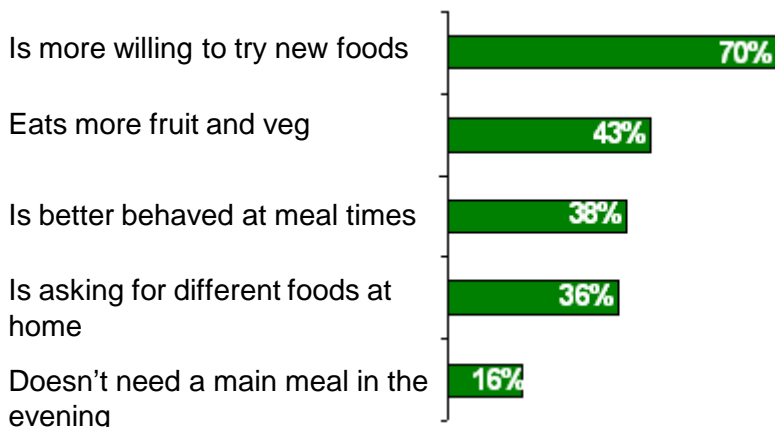
The food is freshly prepared whereas packed lunches are made hours (or even night) before

Full range of dietary essentials – cannot be matched by a packed lunch

Variety – kids don't want to eat sandwiches every day

### What has been the impact of the free school meal trial?

Having school meals has meant that **my child ...**



(Base 894)

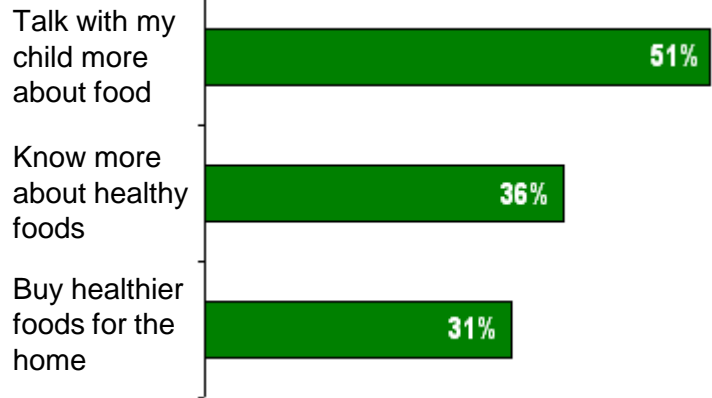
More than two-thirds of respondents said their child was more willing to try new foods as a result of the free school meal trial and just under a half agreed that having school meals has meant their child eats more fruit and vegetables at home

In disadvantaged areas of the Borough, the trial has had an even more positive effect with 56% saying their child now eats more fruit and veg and 50% feeling their child is now better behaved at meal times. This is helping narrow the gap between the most and least affluent - one of the council's key aims.

## Benefits to the whole family

Just over half of the parents who answered the questions said that they now talk more with their child about food and 31% of parents now buy healthier foods for the home. Again, in less affluent areas of the borough the effect has been even more positive, with almost half (49%) saying they now know more about healthier foods and 47% buying healthier foods for the home.

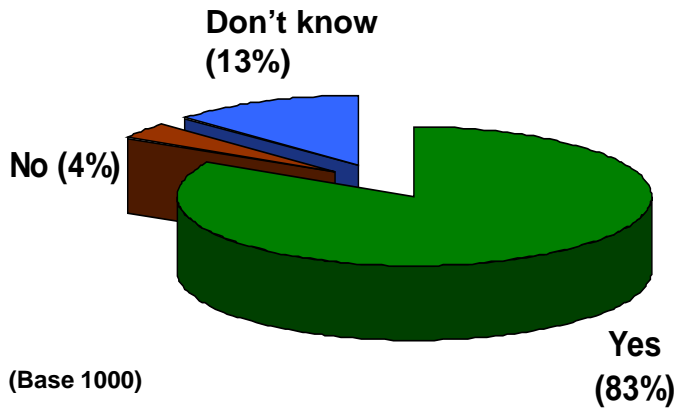
Having school meals has meant that I ....



(Base 889)

## It's healthy

Do you think the school meal is healthy? ...



(Base 1000)

More than four-fifths (83%) think that school meals are healthy. Of these, more than a third (36%) think that the alternative packed lunch they could give their child would probably be less healthy. Over two-thirds (71%) of the parents questioned were aware that their child attended a school which is part of the Healthy Schools Programme and 86% were aware that there is a government legislation regulating healthy school meals.

## Further comments

Is there anything else you would like to say about the effect of free school meals on your child, you or your family?

Excellent, can assess if your child will enjoy school dinners without the cost and then make a decision based on how well they have adapted to them

My child gets a hot meal and stays with her friends, it gives her courage / confidence and independence

Jasmine has enjoyed eating school dinners and her appetite and food choices have increased

Changing Alfie to school dinners instead of pack lunches is the best thing I did ... he's a fussy eater and I was worried he wouldn't enjoy them – but he looks forward to lunch time and will now try new foods at home – thanks!

Super idea ... encourages healthy eating, choice and friendships, manners and social skills