



Hungry for Change

What Parents and Pupils
Want from Food Education

Research by Public First

 **PUBLIC FIRST**
A SHGH Company

Executive Summary

This report examines parental and pupil attitudes to food education in England's schools, building on Best Food Forward's Food Education Mapping Project (FEMP)¹ which found that food education is most effective when children are able to 'Learn it, See it, Live it'. Drawing on nationally representative polling of over 2,000 parents and 2,000 young people aged 11-18, this report reveals strong public support for food education as an essential life skill, alongside findings that current provision in schools is fragmented, inconsistent, and insufficient to equip young people to apply what they learn in real life.

Parents and pupils overwhelmingly agree that cooking healthy meals and making good food choices are core life skills, comparable in importance to time management and digital literacy. Parents see schools as playing a crucial role alongside families in developing these skills. Practical, hands-on learning is highly valued by both groups and is seen as one of the strongest aspects of existing food education provision.

However, the research identifies a significant gap between aspiration and reality. Fewer than half of young people report receiving dedicated curriculum time for food education, with access declining sharply with age and varying significantly by income, school type, and region. State-educated and lower-income pupils are markedly less likely to receive sustained food education than their more affluent or independently educated peers, reinforcing existing inequalities.

Beyond the classroom, food education is rarely embedded consistently across the wider school environment. While pupils commonly encounter posters or one-off themed events on the topic of food and nutrition, fewer experience sustained activities such as clubs, links to wider food initiatives and guest speakers integrated into school life. Many young people report that school food provision does not align with what they are taught about healthy eating, undermining the credibility and impact of classroom learning.

Critically, opportunities for young people to "live it" – to apply food knowledge and skills outside of school – are limited and unevenly distributed. Parents express low confidence in children's ability to cook from fresh ingredients, and young people from lower-income households are significantly less likely to feel confident preparing food independently. Young people with limited access to regular, participatory and shared food experiences at school are more likely to have weaker feelings of connection and belonging through food. Budget constraints, time pressures, and limited exposure to cooking at home all act as barriers, meaning that food education too often fails to translate into lifelong habits and skills.

These findings come at a pivotal moment, as government investment in school food provision expands through free breakfast clubs, wider eligibility for free school meals, and revised school food standards. Without high-quality food education embedded alongside these reforms, the long-term benefits of this investment will not be fully realised.

To address these challenges, Best Food Forward recommends a whole-school approach to food education that embeds learning across curriculum, culture, and practice. Best Food Forward calls on the government to:

1. **Make food a core subject for all** – extend and prioritise food education as a core subject across Key Stages 1-4, on par with subjects like PSHE, citizenship and PE, with its importance reflected in consistent curriculum time and ensuring wider opportunities to 'Learn it, See it, Live it' across the whole school.
2. **Appoint school food leads** – require MATs to appoint a specialist food education lead responsible and accountable for embedding a whole school approach to food learning, encompassing provisioning and ensuring food education allows children to 'Learn it, See it, Live it'. For local authority run schools, the local authority should appoint a food lead responsible for the maintained schools in their area.

For many children food learning is not just about ensuring healthy, nutritious food choices into adulthood, it provides an opportunity for high quality careers from food production to nutrition, from food safety to food service, from dietetics to food policy. But the removal of A levels in Food Technology and Food and Nutrition has limited these opportunities at a time when more and more young people are leaving school to no further education, employment or training. Best Food Forward calls on the government to:

Restore Food A-level – ensuring there are formal assessment pathways at A-level into careers in food preparation, production and nutrition, as an important part of the government's review into study options for food and nutrition at Level 3.

Introduction

In September 2025, The School of Artisan Food's Best Food Forward published the results of its Food Education Mapping Project (FEMP).

The project began in 2023 and sought to explore the current provision of food education in English secondary schools. Through qualitative interviews with Food and PSHE teachers, senior leaders and students, the project took a deep dive into the food learning landscape at 23 schools in England. It explored how schools are delivering food education, where and how young people are learning about food outside formal food study and what good practice looks like, alongside highlighting the fragmented nature of food education in schools.

The report found that food education was being delivered to varying degrees in schools under three intersecting themes of 'Learn it, See it, Live it'. With 'Learn it' referring to the formal curriculum, 'See it' referring to other opportunities for food learning across the school day (e.g. in assemblies and at mealtimes) and 'Live it' referring to the extent to which children are able to apply their learning outside of school. Teachers and school leaders were clear that when food education is done well - embedded across the whole school and with opportunities for putting learning into practice - it can be a powerful driver of wellbeing, inclusion and opportunity and can become a universal foundation for health, learning and life.

To build on the school-based findings of the FEMP report, Best Food Forward commissioned Public First to understand the views of parents and pupils on food education in schools and its place in supporting children to develop the skills they need throughout their lives. Through two nationally representative polls of young people and parents, this report explores their attitudes to the current state of food education in schools. We find parental support for schools

taking a leading role in children's learning in relation to food and nutrition, but a clear sense that an opportunity is being missed within the school system at present.

This investigation of the attitudes towards food education in England's schools comes at a time when the government is taking action to improve the provisioning of food in schools. The new government is expanding free school meals, rolling out universal breakfast clubs in primary schools and are in the process of revising school food standards, alongside policy commitments to improve the health of the nation's children through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and other public health interventions. The Curriculum and Assessment Review also commits to strengthening classroom-based food learning and Level 3 pathways.

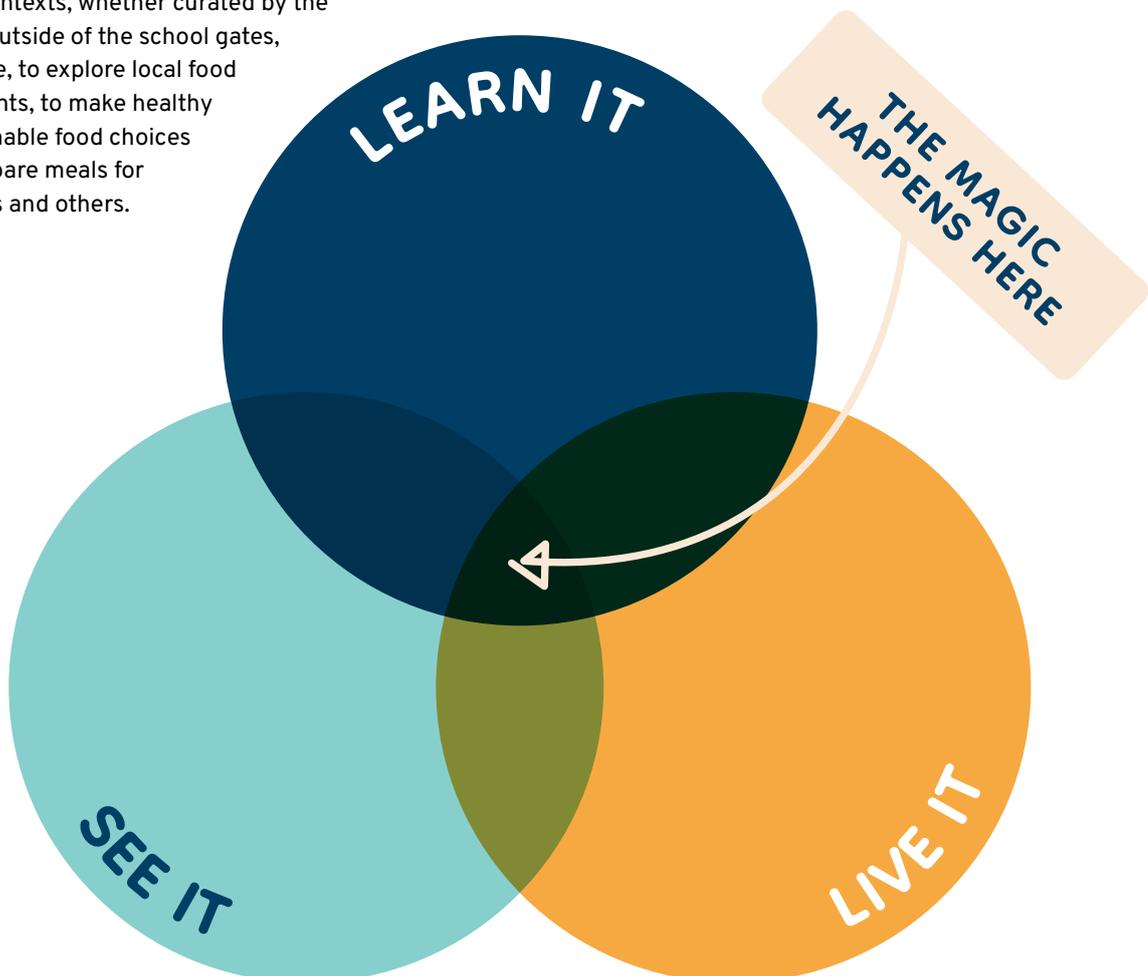
Now could not be a better time to listen to parents, pupils, teachers and school leaders and invest in good food education to unlock the lifelong benefits it can provide, to ensure the investment made in provisioning leads to healthy habits across a lifetime.

What is Food Education?

This report takes as its starting point the definition of food education put forward in the Food Education Mapping Project 2025. The Food Education Mapping Project provides a tripartite definition of food education, summarised below:

- The **'Learn it'** component refers to 'the knowledge and skills taught as part of the formal curriculum, both in food lessons and the wider curriculum', such as in PSHE, Science and Design and Technology.
- The **'See it'** component refers to 'the wider opportunities for food learning that may exist throughout the school day, including food provision in the main canteen, as part of celebrations and events, or as part of extra-curricular opportunities, such as cooking and gardening clubs or competitions.'
- The **'Live it'** component refers to the ways in which students have the opportunities, competencies, agency and dispositions to apply their knowledge and skills to external contexts, whether curated by the school or outside of the school gates, for example, to explore local food environments, to make healthy and sustainable food choices and to prepare meals for themselves and others.

Food education is not provisioning of food in schools but sits closely alongside it. Provisioning forms part of the broader food environment within which children exist. This food environment could also be said to include the availability and variety of food in settings beyond schools (chiefly homes and social settings), as well as the way that broader society socialises them vis-a-vis food (such as through traditional and social media).



Methodology

Public First conducted quantitative research into the knowledge and attitudes of young people and parents towards food education, exploring how these key groups understand and access food education, and the role that food education plays in belonging and thriving.

The study surveyed 2,163 young people aged 11-18 in England.

The poll was conducted from 23-30 October 2025 and results were weighted to make them nationally representative by gender, region and education.

Public First is a member of the British Polling Council (BPC), and all quantitative work was carried out in line with the BPC's rules.



Attitudes to Food Education

Public First polled 2,126 parents of school age children in England, and 2,163 school age children (11–18-year-olds) to understand their views on the importance of learning about sourcing and preparing high quality, nutritious food and their views on the extent to which food education is being done well in schools currently.

Our polling finds parental support for schools taking a leading role in food education and an understanding of the importance of learning about food and nutrition for their children, but this comes alongside concern that it is not given enough attention within schools at present and our findings show that the opportunity for children to ‘Live it’ outside of the school environment is limited and divided.

We outline our poll findings under the three themes identified in the FEMP report: ‘Learn it, See it, Live it’.



The Importance of Food and Food Education



IMAGE SOURCE: SOLSTOCK / ISTOCK

Learn it

The FEMP report found that amongst students and staff in the 23 case study schools food education is widely recognised as important for building critical life skills and that the combination of theory and practice in food lessons creates an engaging and rewarding learning experience.

As shown in Figure 1, our poll finds broad consensus that cooking healthy meals and making good food choices are essential or important life skills, with near-unanimous agreement among parents (97%) and strong agreement among young people (91%).

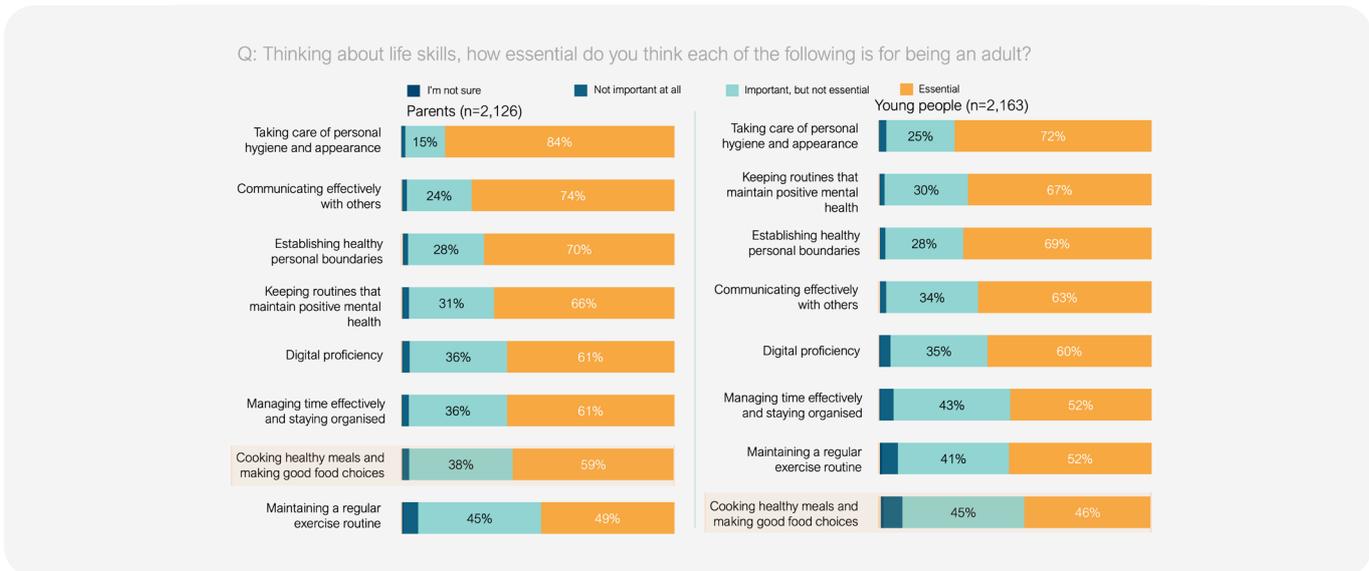


Figure 1: Level of importance placed on key developmental skills, as perceived by parents and young people

As illustrated in Figure 2, parents see schools as important institutions in delivering food education. 87% say schools and teachers should play a key or supporting role in this endeavour, second only to parents themselves (95%). Schools are rated as more important than government, the food industry, or community organisations, pointing to strong backing for a holistic approach that combines formal learning with every day, practical experience. This recognition of the significance schools play in food education is shared across the political spectrum, with high levels of agreement among Labour (90%), Conservative (87%), Liberal Democrat (87%), Green Party (86%), and Reform UK voters (83%), underlining that this is not a wedge issue but an area of near-unanimous acknowledgement.

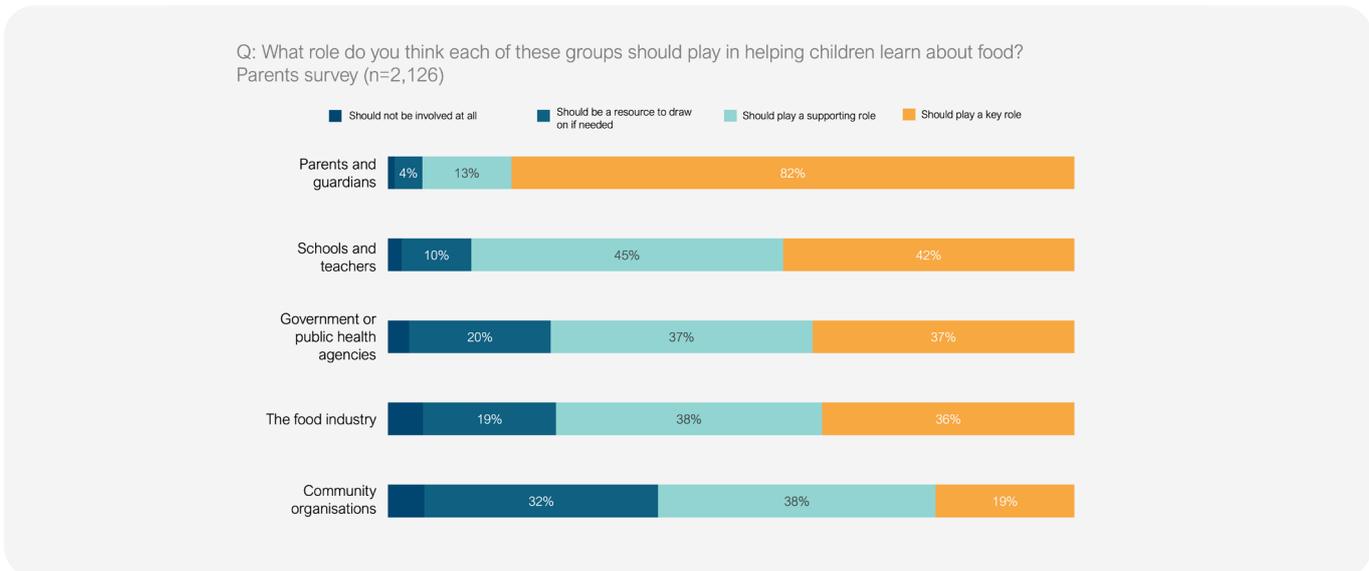


Figure 2: Desired roles of public and private actors in children's food education, as perceived by parents

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND FOOD EDUCATION

We found that both parents and young people value the opportunity that food education offers for practical learning. When asked what they thought was going well with food lessons or food learning at school, the most selected answer was opportunities for hands-on learning, which was selected by 40% of parents and 39% of young people (Figure 3). However, 55% of parents and 33% of young people believe that curriculum time devoted to food education is insufficient, which mirrors the findings of The Food Education Mapping Project (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Top benefit of food learning at school, as perceived by parents and young people



Figure 4: Top barrier to food learning at school, as perceived by parents and young people

See it

Young people clearly value and enjoy food learning when they are exposed to it.

However, responses from secondary school students suggest that schools most commonly rely on highly visible, low-intensity approaches to promoting food and healthy eating (Figure 5). Over a third of pupils (35%) report seeing posters, displays, or noticeboards about food and nutrition, while around three in ten cite experiencing one-off activities such as themed food days, harvest festivals, or healthy eating weeks (29%), or celebrations of different cultures and food traditions (29%).

By comparison, more sustained and tangible actions are far less frequently reported. Fewer than one in five students say their school promotes food education through newsletters or social media (18%), invites guest speakers or nutrition experts (17%), or takes part in national or local food projects (15%).

Strikingly, nearly a quarter of young people (23%) say their school does not meaningfully promote food or healthy eating in these ways at all. This gap is socially patterned, with pupils from lower-income households and state comprehensive schools more likely to attend schools with no food or healthy eating promotion, compared with higher-income pupils and those in independent schools.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while students are receptive to and motivated by food learning, it is too often delivered through surface-level interventions rather than embedded as a visible, consistent, and meaningful part of the secondary school experience.

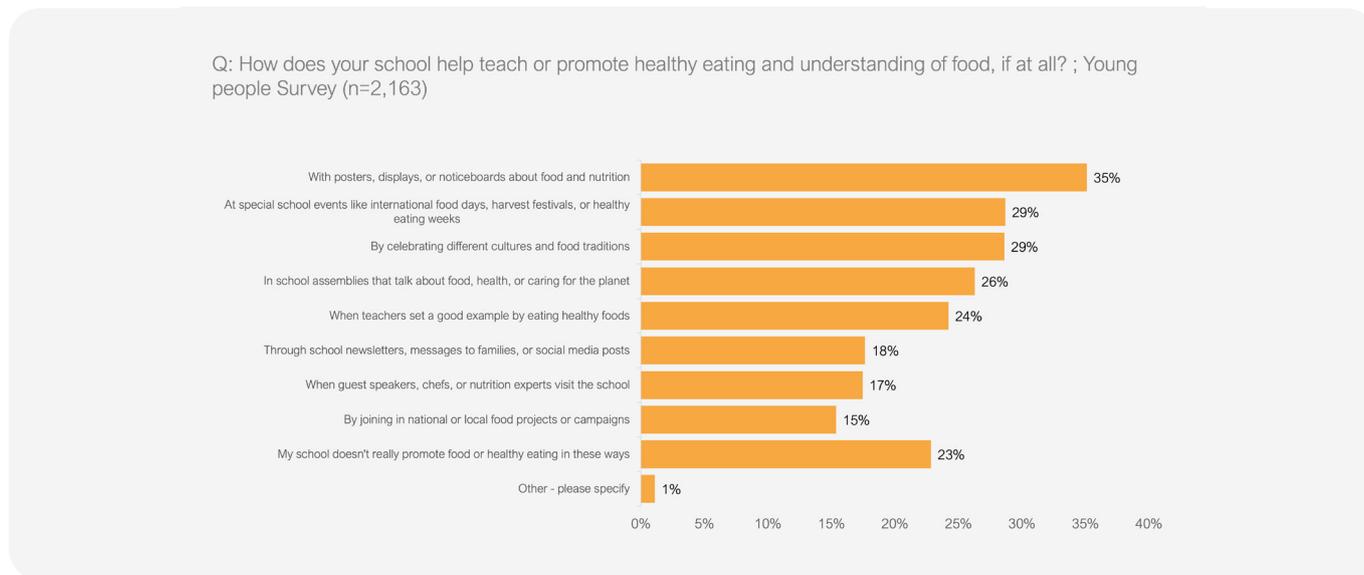


Figure 5: Reported promotion of food education in schools, by young people

Live it

Most parents think their children have a better understanding of food and ingredients than the average child, but few say that their children are good at cooking and preparing meals from fresh ingredients (Figure 6). This potentially reflects wider parental bias towards their own children compared to others.

Parents tend to think that few young people across the country have a good understanding of food.

Only a quarter of parents believe that children across the UK can confidently identify good-quality ingredients. Confidence is even lower when it comes to cooking skills: just 22% think children nationally can cook and prepare meals well, rising to 32% when parents assess their own child. Overall, this points to limited parental confidence in children developing food knowledge and practical skills through everyday exposure and practice at home.

This confidence also varies markedly across socio-economic groups. Household income, in particular, is associated with noticeable inequalities: only 20% of parents in households earning under £45,000 are confident in their children’s ability to cook and prepare meals from fresh ingredients, compared with 30% of those in households earning six-figures. Regional differences mirror this pattern, with confidence highest in London (30%), while areas such as Yorkshire and the Humber lag behind at 23%.

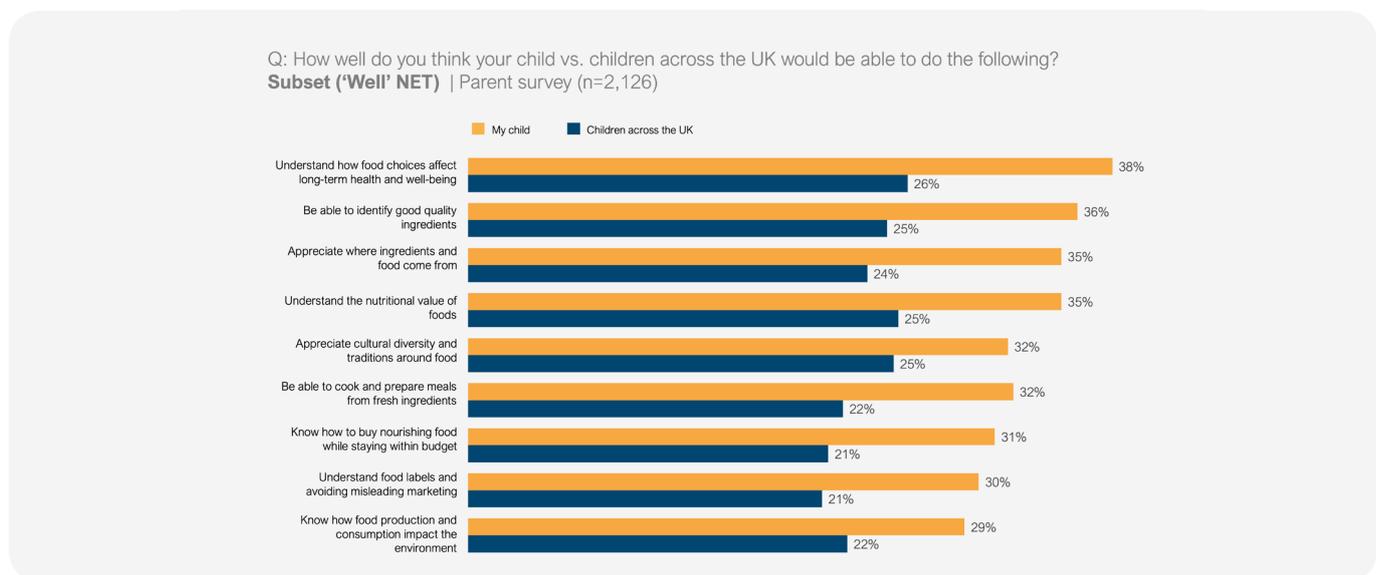


Figure 6: Competency of children to make good food choices, as perceived by parents

Our polling indicates that parents and young people perceive food preparation and mealtimes as contributing to a sense of connection and belonging. As highlighted in the Food Education Mapping Project Report 2025, opportunities to prepare and share food help strengthen relationships between students, staff and families, underscoring food’s wider social and community value. This role is particularly significant at a time when school-family relationships continue to experience strain, including in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.²

As shown in Figure 7, 91% of parents and 94% of young people said that eating meals together makes them feel ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ well connected with the people in their lives, in the top-three activities of those we listed. Cooking together was also selected as very important for this purpose by 78% of parents and 82% of young people.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND FOOD EDUCATION

Q: To what extent do each of the following help you feel a sense of connection or belonging with the people in your life?

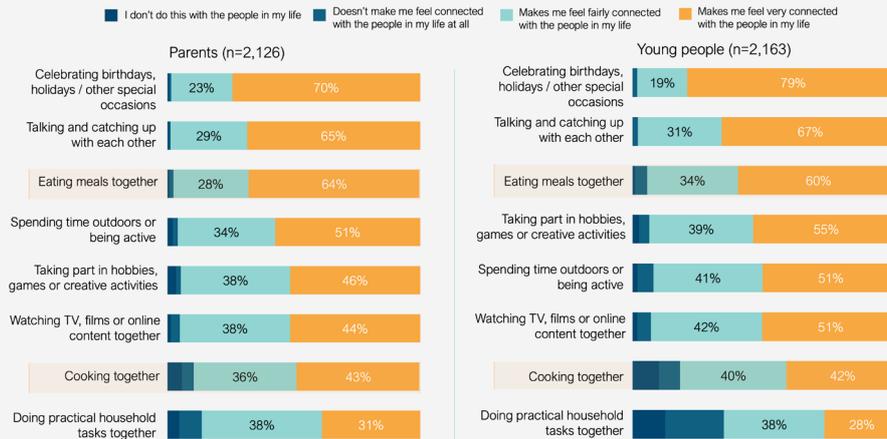


Figure 7: Impact of food-related activities on connection and belonging, as perceived by parents and young people

When zooming in, the polling shows geographical asymmetries – with parents from London most likely to say that eating meals together makes them feel very connected with the people in their lives, and the same was true of cooking together (Figure 8 & 9). The same pattern was also in evident among young people.

Q: To what extent does eating meals together help you feel a sense of connection or belonging with the people in your life? ('Very connected + fairly connected') | Parents (n=2,162), young people (n=2,163)

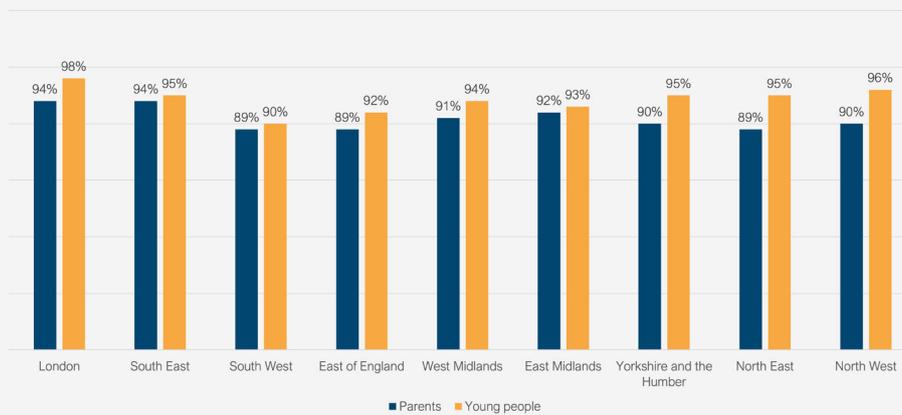


Figure 8: Impact of communal meals on connection and belonging, by region (as perceived by parents and young people)

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND FOOD EDUCATION

Q: To what extent does cooking and preparing food together help you feel a sense of connection or belonging with the people in your life? ('Very connected' + 'fairly connected') | Parents (n=2,162), young people (n=2,163)

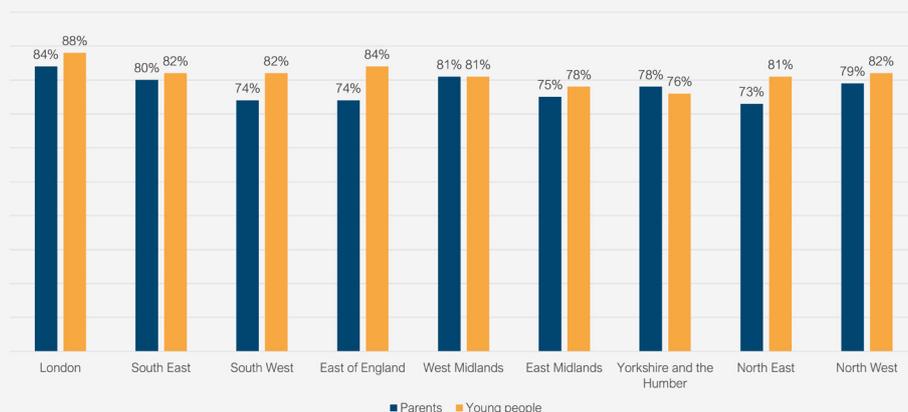


Figure 9: Impact of cooking or food preparation on connection and belonging, by region (as perceived by parents and young people)

We found that children who have greater input into food decisions in their household reap stronger social benefits (Figure 10), with children who are involved in deciding what food is bought, cooked and eaten at home much more likely to say that eating and cooking together makes them feel 'very' or 'fairly' well connected to people in their lives (66% and 48%), compared to those children who report an adult in the house making all decisions about food. For these children, their feelings of connectedness when eating and cooking together are significantly less (52% and 38% respectively).

As expected, children who have greater agency in food decisions reap stronger social benefits.

Q: Who usually decides what food is bought, cooked, or eaten at home? (Young people survey, n=2,163)

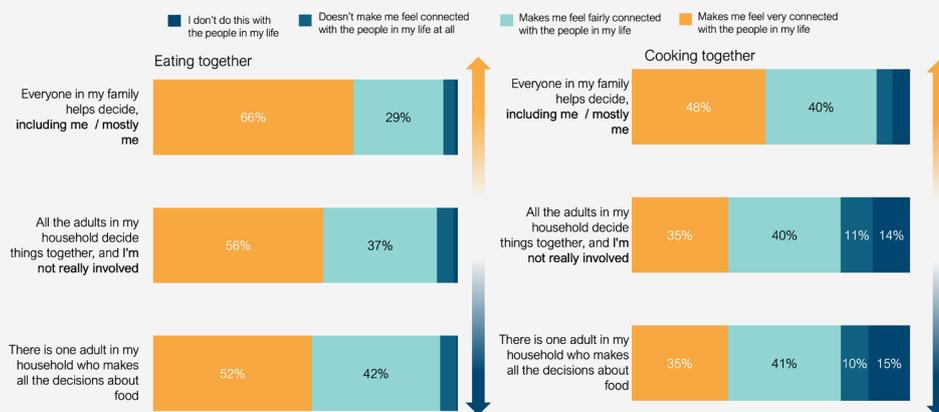


Figure 10: Interaction between agency in household food decisions and level of perceived connection and belonging through food, as perceived by young people

Young people who do not feel a sense of connection through eating and cooking are consistently less likely to report that food-related activities are available in their schools than those who do. The largest differences relate to hands-on cooking classes (50% vs 65%; -15pp) and learning about healthy eating and nutrition (49% vs 66%; -17pp). Substantial gaps are also seen in learning during school meals (18% vs 38%; -20pp), practical life skills such as meal planning and budgeting (26% vs 44%; -18pp), and learning about foods and traditions from different cultures (34% vs 52%; -18pp). Opportunities to involve families or the wider community (11% vs 29%; -18pp) and to grow food at school (14% vs 32%; -18pp) are particularly limited. Taken together, these findings indicate that more limited access to regular, participatory and shared food experiences at school is associated with weaker feelings of connection and belonging through food.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND FOOD EDUCATION

Q: At your school, do you learn any of the following things, or have you had the opportunity to take part in any of the following activities? Subset: Young people who feel connected through food vs. those who don't feel connected through food (n=2,163)

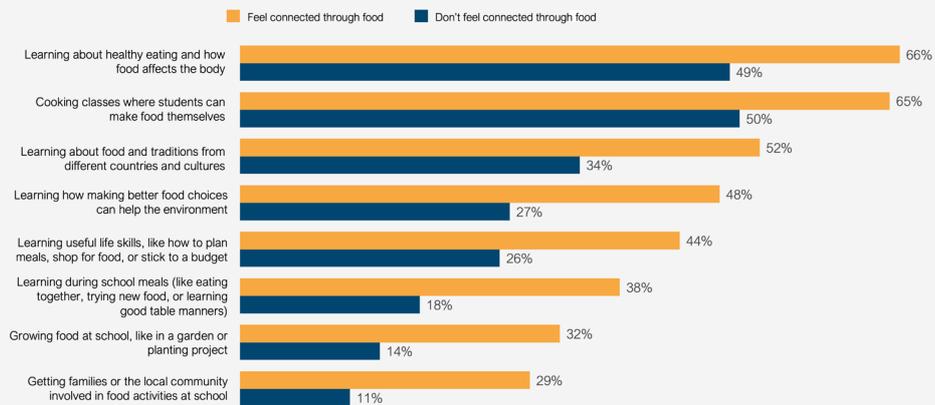


Figure 11: Reported opportunities available at school to learn about food, as perceived by young people (segmented by those feel connected through food vs. don't feel connected through food)



The ‘Learn it, See it, Live it’ Gap

Our polling found that parents and young people want schools to play a key role in food learning and understand its importance as a life skill that drives connection and belonging. When it comes to current provision of food learning in schools, parents and young people think more needs to be done to increase formal food teaching (‘learn it’), and opportunities to ‘see it’ and ‘live it’.

Only around half of young people report having dedicated time for food education at school (48%). This is accompanied by notable differences in access by income (Figure 12) and geography (Figure 13). Children from households earning under £45,000 are 7 percentage points below the national average (41%), while those from families earning £100,000 or more are 17 percentage points above it (65%). Regional variation is also evident: London records the highest share at 58%, while regions such as Yorkshire and the Humber are lower at 40%. This reveals inequity in access to food learning, with children from poorer households less likely to have dedicated time for food education, with likely negative impact on their knowledge of food, health and nutrition into later life.

Q: Do you get specific class time at school to learn about food? For example, lessons on how food affects the body and what different ingredients are. Young People Survey (n=2,163)

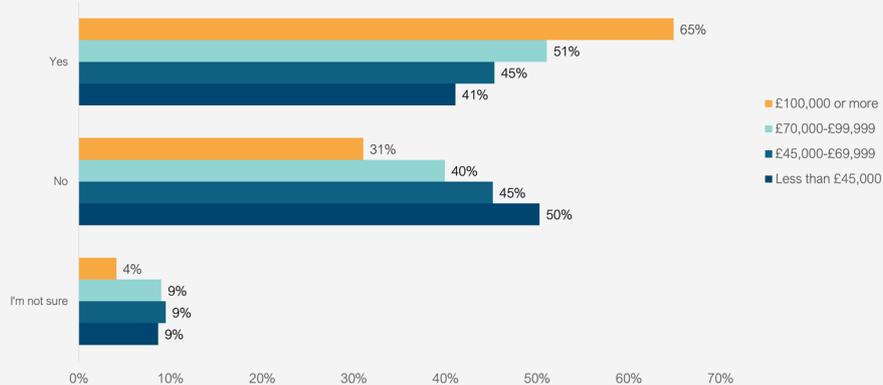


Figure 12: Reported class time dedicated to food learning at school, as reported by young people (broken down by household income)

Q: Do you get specific class time at school to learn about food? For example, lessons on how food affects the body and what different ingredients are. Young People Survey (n=2,163)

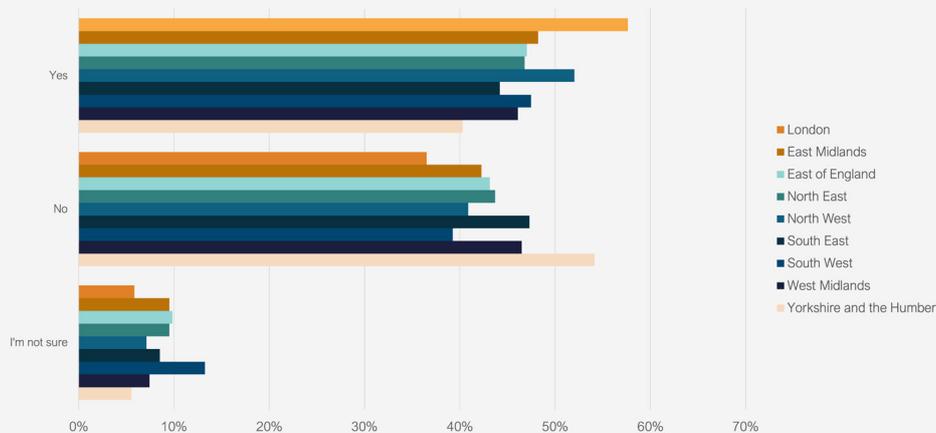


Figure 13: Reported class time dedicated to food learning at school, as reported by young people (broken down by regional income)



Learn it

When asked what makes it hard to learn about food, cooking or healthy eating at school, parents were particularly emphatic in their belief that there is limited time in the timetable for food education, with 55% selecting this option. Nearly as many (49%) said that food not being treated as a priority subject in the curriculum makes it hard to learn about food, cooking or healthy eating at school, followed closely by a lack of funding for ingredients and practical lessons. This echoes the findings amongst teachers and school staff in the FEMP report.

For young people, not enough time in the school day to learn about food was a barrier to learning (33%) but almost as many said that there weren't enough chances to do practical activities such as cooking, gardening or food trips (30%).

Despite these constraints, it is encouraging that nearly two-thirds of young people (63%) say that food education is taught very or fairly well in their school. While this is lower than ratings for more established subjects such as English and Maths, it suggests that where time and resources allow, schools and food educators are delivering food education well. This points to a strong base of existing practice that could be further amplified through greater curriculum prioritisation, time, and investment.

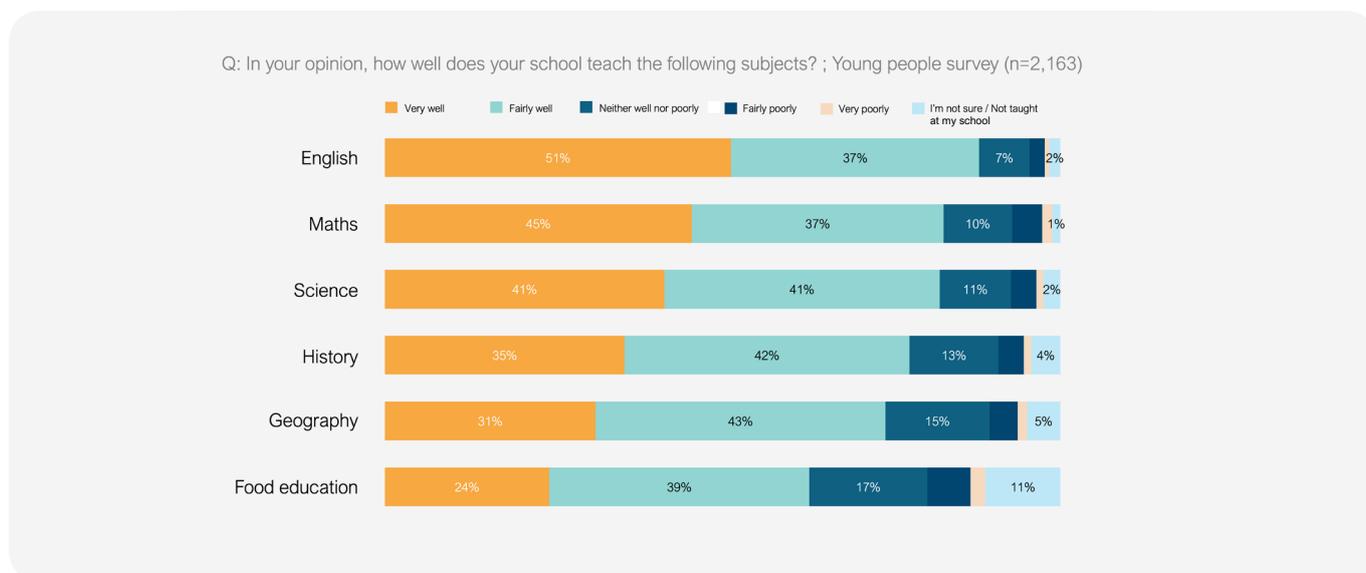


Figure 14: Reported quality of teaching, comparing traditional subjects to food education, as perceived by young people

Looking at how food education is timetabled across school years (Figure 14), only 48% of young people report receiving specific class time to learn about food, such as how food affects the body or the role of different ingredients. In line with statutory requirements to teach Cooking and Nutrition up to the end of Key Stage 3, this provision is more common among younger pupils (Figure 15): just over half of 11–12-year-olds (56%) report receiving dedicated class time, compared with 55% of those aged 13–14. However, provision drops sharply beyond this point, falling to 45% among 15–16-year-olds and to just 32% among 17–18-year-olds. This steep decline highlights a significant gap in food education after Key Stage 3, reinforcing the case for extending curriculum expectations beyond age 14 and strengthening provision through to age 16 and beyond.

THE 'LEARN IT, SEE IT, LIVE IT' GAP

Q: Do you get specific class time at school to learn about food? For example, lessons on how food affects the body and what different ingredients are | Young people survey, age breakdown (n=2,163)

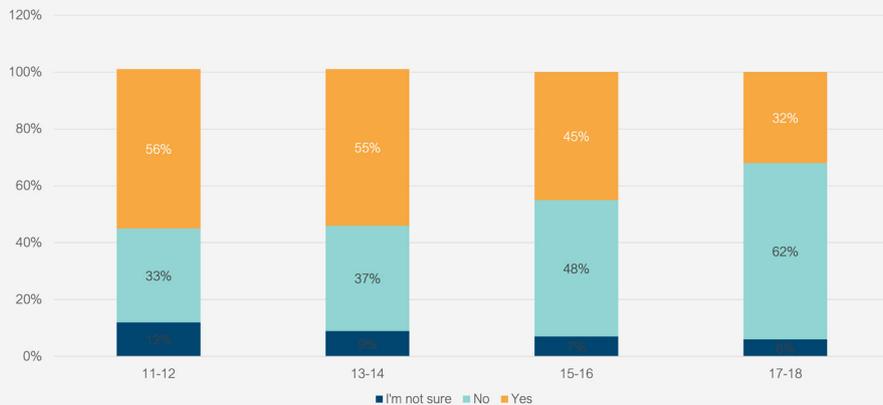


Figure 15: Reported class time dedicated to food learning, segmented by age, as perceived by young people

Our poll also suggests a significant asymmetry in class time given to food learning between different types of schools (Figure 16). 70% of independent school pupils said that they had dedicated class time to learn about food, but this figure was only around the 45% mark for state school pupils. This suggests schools with greater resources and facilities are able to provide higher quality food education and opportunities for food learning.

Q: Do you get specific class time at school to learn about food? For example, lessons on how food affects the body and what different ingredients are | Young people survey, school type breakdown (n=2,163)

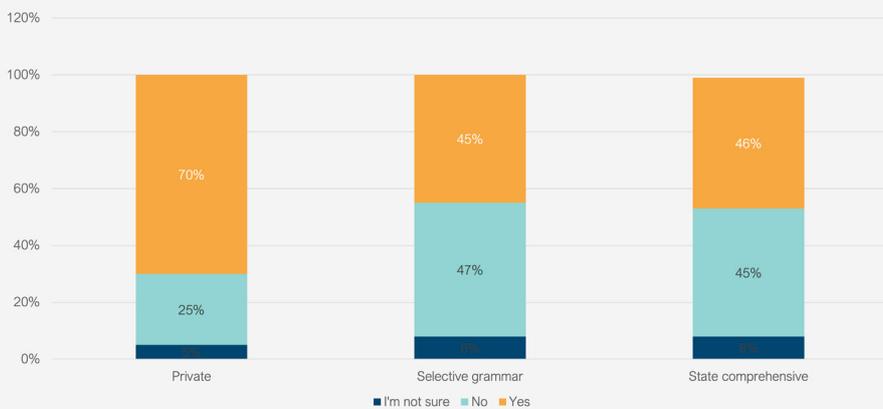
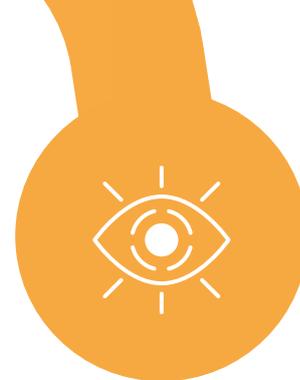


Figure 16: Reported class time dedicated to food learning, segmented by age, as perceived by young people



See it

As well as a gap between what parents and young people want to see in relation to formal food learning, our poll found a significant gap between what is taught in schools and what pupils experience in the wider school environment (Figure 17).

This echoes the findings of the FEMP report which found that food is rarely embedded in whole-school policy or planning even though school staff value its importance and that food environments within schools have great potential to reinforce and extend food learning but the opportunity to do so is often not being maximised.

Overall, under half of young people with a school canteen agree with the statement ‘the food we can buy or eat at school matches what we’re taught about eating well and staying healthy’, and an even smaller proportion agree with the statement ‘the snacks we can buy or eat at school matches what we’re taught about eating well and staying healthy’.

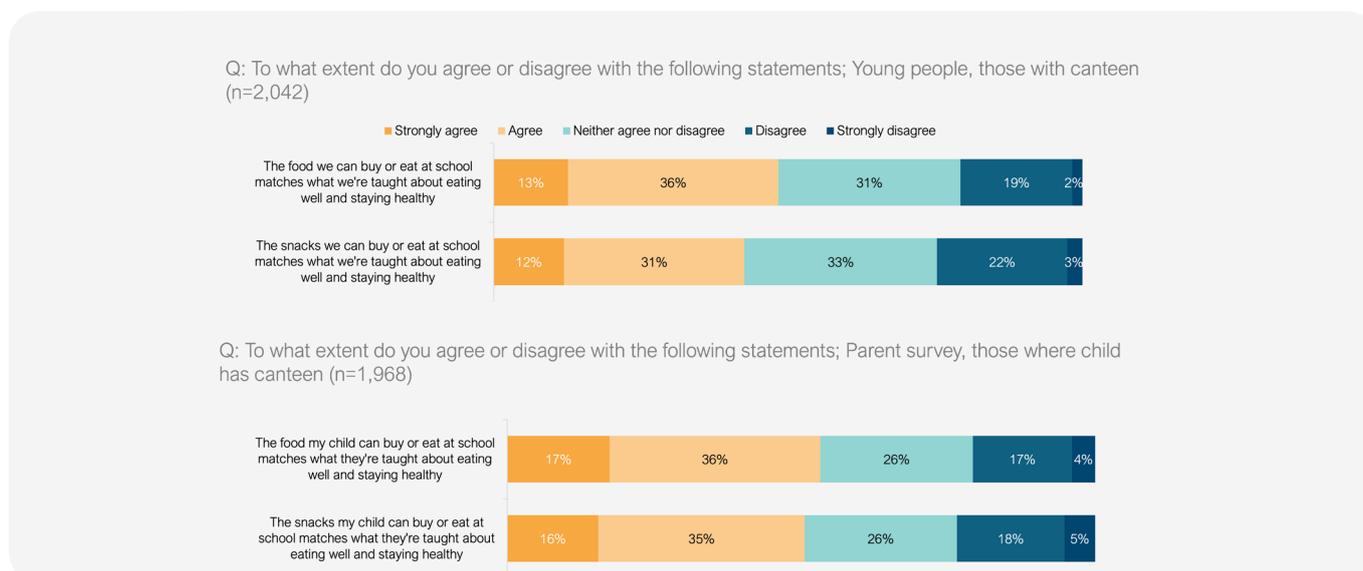


Figure 17: Reported compatibility between content of food learning at school and quality of food available in school canteens (as perceived by young people and parents)

Teachers and students in the 23 case study schools in the FEMP study likewise reported that often school food offers can contradict curriculum teaching which in turn undermines food learning and results in missed opportunities to reinforce healthy choices and agency.

Our polling found that despite schools being seen as having an important role in children’s learning about food, they are currently only a small factor influencing food and cooking choices, with limited connections between teaching and provisioning possibly undermining credibility. This marks a missed opportunity to ensure that expanding and improving provisioning of food in schools comes alongside lifelong healthy habits.

In terms of how parents and young people perceive sources of influence or information on their ideas about cooking and food, schools are currently behind other sources of information despite parents seeing schools as having an important role in delivering food education (Figure 18). Family recipes, cookbooks, supermarket materials and conversations with friends and/or relatives are all more likely to be consulted at least weekly by parents than recipes learned by them or their children at school, indicating a clear gap between what is taught in the classroom and how it translates into inspiration for cooking at home.

THE 'LEARN IT, SEE IT, LIVE IT' GAP

This is particularly acute among those experiencing inconsistent food education provision. Young people who are confident in the breadth and quality of their food education are 20 percentage points more likely to draw on school-based sources when deciding what to cook at home (33% compared with 13%). A similar pattern is evident among parents: those confident in their children's food education are 17 percentage points more likely to say school learning influences home cooking than those who are not confident (39% vs. 22%).

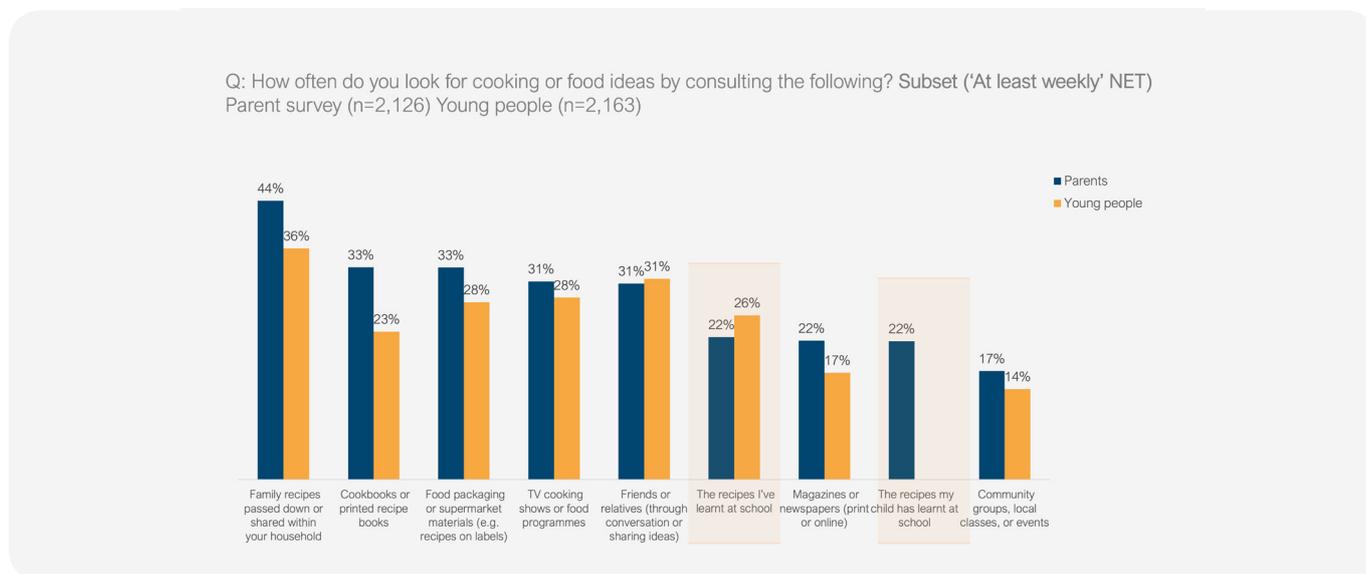


Figure 18: Sources of food learning, as reported by parents and young people

Overall, we found that young people are struggling to see the lessons they are learning about food in the classroom reflected in the exposure that they get to food, ingredients and cooking in the wider school environment. This represents a missed opportunity for coherence between the curriculum and the wider food environment around young people, evidencing the need for a whole-school approach to food education and provisioning in the round.



Live it

A substantial proportion of the parents and young people who responded believe that cooking healthy meals and making good food choices are essential life skills. 59% of parents deemed cooking healthy meals and making good food choices essential life skills.

However, we found on a practical level, factors like budget, time, and convenience tend to trump values-based concerns such as health and sustainability for parents (Figure 19). These patterns vary markedly by income (Figure 20). Parents in households earning under £45,000 (65%) are more than 23 percentage points less likely than those in six-figure households to factor health goals into household food decisions. The gap is even wider when it comes to sourcing local or organic food, with 44% of families earning under £45,000 considering this, compared with 77% of those in households earning £100,000 or more, a difference of 33 percentage points.

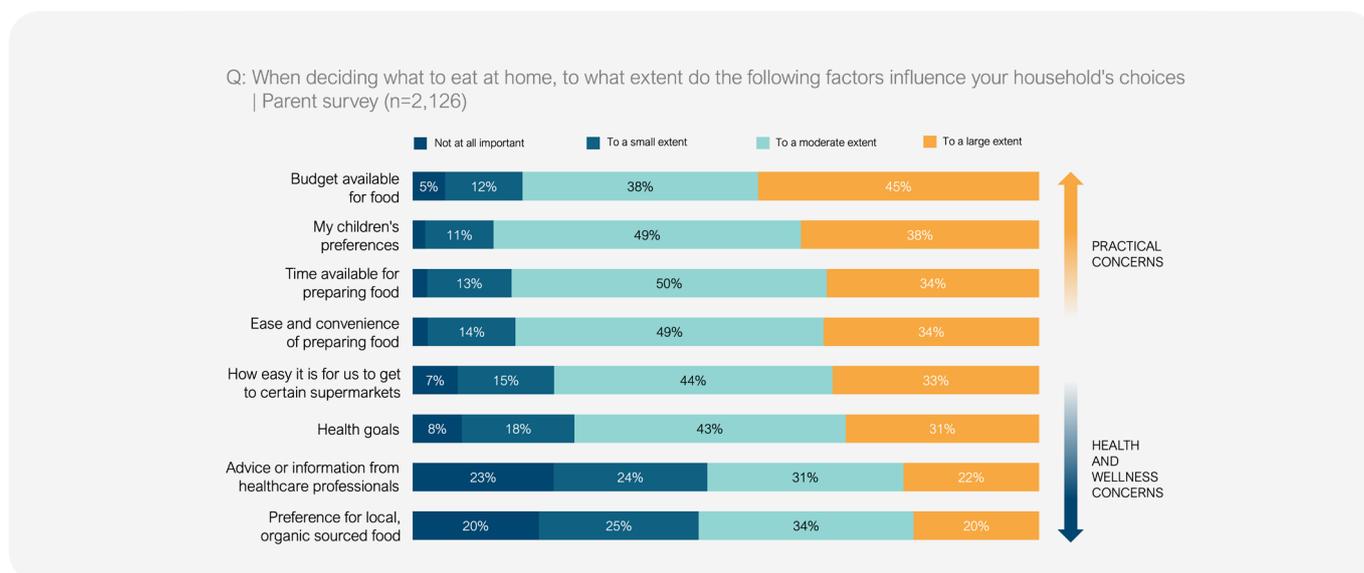


Figure 19: Factors influencing food choices at home, as perceived by parents

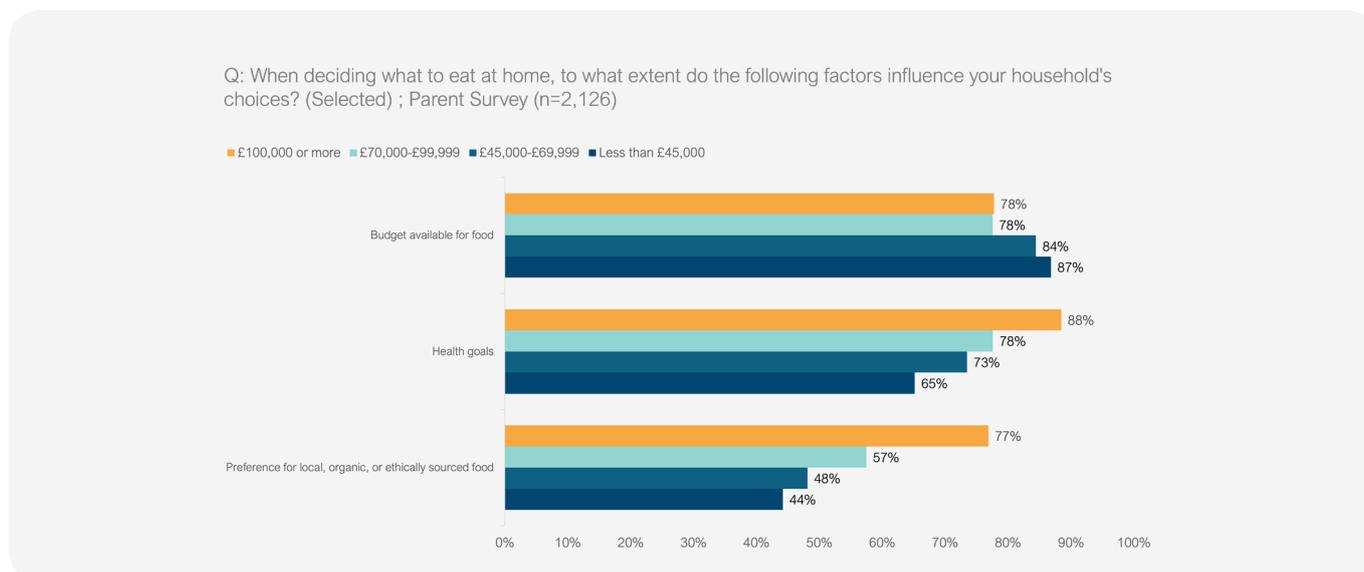


Figure 20: Factors influencing food choices at home, broken down by household income, as reported by parents

THE 'LEARN IT, SEE IT, LIVE IT' GAP

This mirrors the findings of the FEMP report which found putting food education into practice in the real world offers children a chance to apply their learning, inspiring them and extending their understanding, but that access to such opportunities is infrequent and unequal.

When asked about putting what they have learned about food at school into practice at home, most young people report being involved in food preparation to some extent. Around two-thirds (68%) say they cook or help prepare meals at least occasionally, including 15% who do so daily and 42% weekly. However, a lack of interest remains a barrier for a minority, 21% say they are not really interested in preparing food at home, with boys more likely than girls to report this (24% compared with 18%). The overall pattern suggests there is a strong base of existing engagement that schools and families could build on to better support the application of food learning at home.

Q: Thinking about the meals that are prepared at home, how often do each of the following usually happen?
 Parent survey (n=2,126)
 Q: How often do you cook or help prepare meals at home? Young people (n=2,163)

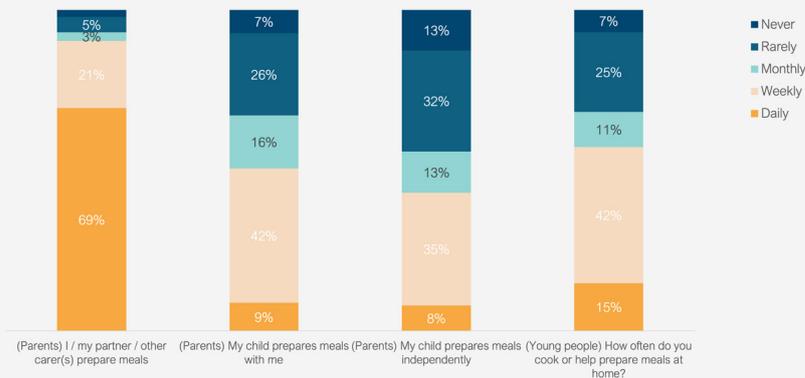


Figure 21: Levels of confidence in independent food preparation, as reported by parents and young people

As outlined above, parents and children agree that cooking and making good food choices is an essential life skill, but our polling suggests significant divergence in young people’s confidence in preparing food on their own (Figure 21).

We found that some young people are more likely to feel confident preparing food on their own than others, but that this varied for differing demographics (Figure 22). For example, young people from independent schools are twenty percentage points more likely to say they are confident in preparing food on their own than their state comprehensive counterparts (87% vs 67%), with a similar pattern in evidence for young people from higher-income families (notwithstanding the overlap between independent school attendance and high-income families).

Q: How confident do you feel about preparing food on your own?
 | Young people survey (n=2,163)

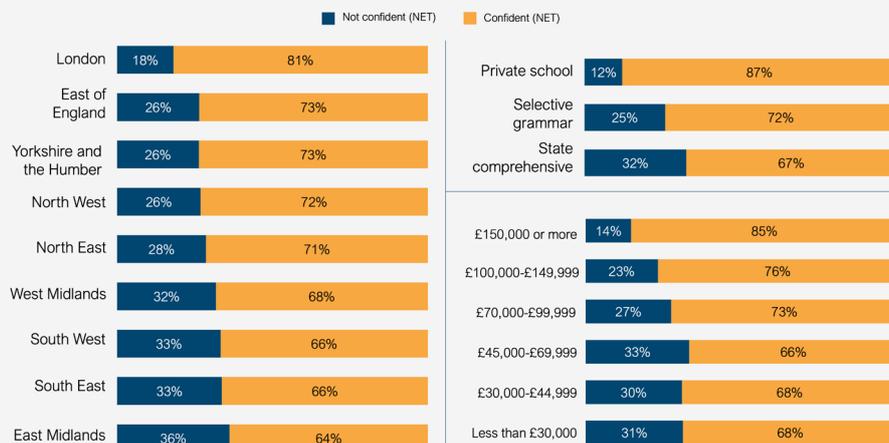


Figure 22: Levels of confidence in independent food preparation, as reported by young people, broken down by region, school type and household income

Conclusion and Recommendations

In its first eighteen months in government, Labour has announced significant investment in high-quality food in schools, recognising the importance of providing children with healthy, nutritious meals to improve learning and development. These commitments have included rolling out free breakfast clubs to all primary school children, extending free school meals to all children in receipt of Universal Credit, and starting to revise school food standards to improve the nutritional value of school meals. This investment represents a commitment not only to the long-term development and life chances of children, but also an awareness of the importance of a nutritious diet to improve children's health in the here and now.

These investments are costly. Without good food education embedded alongside them to ensure children understand the components of a healthy, nutritious diet, the potential lifelong benefits are unlikely to be maximised. These interventions should therefore be accompanied by improvements in food education, with food learning embedded into school life within and alongside the curriculum.

Ensuring that children understand how to source and prepare high-quality, nutritious food and appreciate its importance provides them with a key tool to lead healthy lifestyles into adulthood. In other words, combining improved food provisioning with improved food education will unlock the lifelong benefits of the investment into school food, guaranteeing a bigger return over children's lifetimes.

There is a wealth of evidence showing strong correlation between income deprivation and poor diet, leading to higher rates of obesity and other diet-related conditions amongst children and adults with lower incomes, and lower healthy life expectancy for those living in deprived areas.³ This report shows significant income and geographical inequalities in the levels of food learning, knowledge and confidence in food preparation and nutrition and the extent to which food enriches children's lives. This inequality in access to good quality food learning risks reinforcing these well evidenced health inequalities. Better provision of food learning through a whole school 'Learn it, See it, Live it' approach would begin to address these inequalities in access to food knowledge, alongside ensuring more equitable access to good quality food itself through expanded provisioning.

This report, together with the FEMP report, shows clear support across schools, pupils and parents for improved food learning in schools. Particularly the expansion of a more holistic approach which allows children to really 'Learn it, See it, Live it' while in school and throughout their lives.

To deliver this in schools across the country, Best Food Forward calls on the government to:

1. **Make food a core subject for all** - extend and prioritise food education as a core subject across Key Stages 1-4, on par with subjects like PSHE, citizenship and PE, with its importance reflected in consistent curriculum time and ensuring wider opportunities to 'Learn it, See it, Live it' across the whole school
2. **Appoint school food leads** - require MATs to appoint a specialist food education lead responsible and accountable for embedding a whole school approach to food learning, encompassing provisioning and ensuring food education allows children to 'Learn it, See it, Live it'. For local authority run schools, the local authority should appoint a food lead responsible for the maintained schools in their area.

For many children food learning is not just about ensuring healthy, nutritious food choices into adulthood, it provides an opportunity for high quality careers from food production to nutrition, from food safety to food service, from dietetics to food policy. But the removal of A levels in Food Technology and Food and Nutrition has limited these opportunities at a time when more and more young people are leaving school to no further education, employment or training. Best Food Forward calls on the government to:

Restore Food A-level - ensuring there are formal assessment pathways at A-level into careers in food preparation, production and nutrition, as an important part of the government's review into study options for food and nutrition at Level 3.

REFERENCES

1 Best Food Forward, Food Education Mapping Project 2025

2 *ibid.*

3 Diet-related health inequalities, The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, December 2022; Inequalities in life expectancy, House of Commons Library, August 2025



Hungry for Change

What Parents and Pupils
Want from Food Education

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible with the generous support of Fondazione Artemisa.

With thanks to:

The School of Artisan Food

Jenny Paxman
Alison Swan Parente

Best Food Forward

Lauren Rathbone

Bremner & Co

Myles Bremner

Public First

Olivia Walsham
Kingsley Woldegiorgis

Research by Public First

 **PUBLIC FIRST**
A SHGH Company