The PACKED LUNCH Project
PARENT SURVEY
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the parents who participated and gave their time and thoughts. We would also like to thank the schools, Local Authorities, organisations and parents who supported us in publicising our survey. This survey was funded by Leeds Metropolitan University.

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This report outlines the data collected from an online survey of parents, conducted as part of a research study: The Packed Lunch Project.

The Packed Lunch Project

The Packed Lunch Project revolves around parents’ preference for providing packed lunches for their children in primary schools. Our study aims to gain an insight into parents’ viewpoints in order to inform our knowledge and understanding of this key aspect of child nutrition. As part of this study we designed an online survey; the data collected is summarised in this report.

The Survey

The survey was conducted to explore parents’ motivations for sending their children to primary school with a packed lunch, as well as an exploration of what parents choose to include. Our survey was in four main parts: Packed Lunches; Your Child’s Most Recent Packed Lunch; Packed Lunches and You; and Packed Lunches and your Child’s School. We asked parents for their views on packed lunches, why they chose to send their children to school with a packed lunch or otherwise, what they chose to include in their child’s most recent packed lunch, and how they chose the foods they included. Other questions related to the Universal Infant Free School Meals initiative and packed lunch policies at schools.

The online survey was open during May and June 2014, and 1291 parents took part from across England.

For all data provided, the question is listed along with the percentage of responses, as well as the total number of respondents; this varied as the survey routed participants at points depending upon their response to certain key questions, and not all participants answered all questions asked.
The Packed Lunch Project  |  Parent Survey

Key points

- The survey was conducted during May and June 2014, and over 1000 parents with children attending primary schools in England participated.

- Parents were asked about packed lunches including details of the contents of their child’s most recent packed lunch, as well as how they chose what to put in them.

- Sandwhiches were the mainstay in the majority of lunchboxes (88%). The mean number of fillings in a sandwich was 2.2 and the most popular fillings (excluding margarine / butter) were ham (44%), cheese (26%) and cucumber (20%). The majority of parents (92%) included a piece of fruit in their child’s lunch box, with grapes (39%) and apples (34%) being the most popular. Nearly half of parents (47%) also reported including a vegetable / salad snack. Most parents (70%) included a yogurt / fromage frais item with the most popular choice being pouches of fromage frais or yogurt, e.g. Frubes and Tubes. Cheese snacks were also included in more than a third of lunches with Babybel (15%) and Cheestrings (12%) being the most popular. More than half of parents reported that their child’s packed lunch contained a savoury snack, with potato crisps (19%) and potato starch snacks e.g. Hula Hoops, (12%) accounting for most of these. Six out of 10 parents included a confectionery / sweet / biscuit; a chocolate covered biscuit bar e.g. KitKat was the most popular (14%), followed by cereal bars (11%) and cake (10%). The overwhelming majority of parents included a drink; the most common drink was tap water (38%), followed by diluted squash (27%).

- On average, parents estimated spending £1.42 on a packed lunch for their child.

- Of parents who sent their children to school with a packed lunch, most did so for 5 days a week, whilst almost a quarter did so for only 2, 3 or 4 days. Parents reported that a key factor for the variation was the school menu for that day.

- More than 70% of parents were aware of a policy around packed lunches at their child’s school. Of these, 77% were in favour of the policy. Of those parents who were not aware of, or did not have a policy around packed lunches at their child’s school, only 47% were in favour of packed lunch policies.

- 83% of parents knew about the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) initiative (which came into effect in September). For parents with children affected by the UIFSM, 47% said that they intended to take up the offer fully, whilst an additional 23% said they would for some days of the week.

- Parents felt that the most important reasons for sending their children to primary school with a packed lunch revolved around providing a healthy and high quality lunch, as well as ensuring that their child had enough to eat and knowing how much was actually eaten.

- In selecting what to put into packed lunches, parents considered the freshness and taste of the food and drink, as well as whether their child liked the items. Parents felt that they understood about healthy eating and a balanced diet, and reported being happy with the content of the packed lunch that they provided.

- It is important to note that the survey was conducted online and participants selected themselves to take part. Generalising to the wider population may be limited and should be carefully considered.
**Your child’s gender:**
Respondents: 1291 parents

**Your child’s year group:**
Respondents: 1291 parents

**During an average week, on how many days does your child take a packed lunch to school?**
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

**Why does your child have a packed lunch on some days and a school dinner on other days?** *(Please tick any that apply)*
Respondents: 299 parents providing a packed lunch on 1 – 4 days during an average week

* ‘other’ reasons included after school activities & cost
Packed Lunches – Key Factors

Why does your child take a packed lunch to school?

*How important (or not) are these reasons?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Quite Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can provide a healthy packed lunch</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can provide a high quality packed lunch</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can make sure my child has enough to eat</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child has a hot main meal in the evening</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can check how much my child has eaten for lunch</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can control what my child eats for lunch</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for money</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child prefers a packed lunch over school dinners</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child is very particular about the foods he/she will eat</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch time is short</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child wants a packed lunch because his/her friends have one</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child has special dietary requirements</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choosing which food & drink to put into your child’s packed lunch:

*How important (or not) are these reasons?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Quite Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The freshness of the food &amp; drink</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child likes the food &amp; drink</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of the ingredients in the food &amp; drink</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How healthy the food &amp; drinks are</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child is familiar with the food &amp; drink</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for money</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child asks for the food &amp; drink</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand of the food &amp; drink</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Packed lunches: parents’ perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception/Opinion</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand about healthy eating and a balanced diet for my child</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child understands about healthy eating and a balanced diet</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall I am happy with the contents of my child’s packed lunch</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think my child’s most recent packed lunch was healthy and balanced</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer the contents of my child’s packed lunch to be more varied</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer to include some healthier alternatives in my child’s packed lunch</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer my child to have a school dinner</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes a lot of time and effort to produce a packed lunch</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of the contents of my child’s packed lunch is wasted</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Packed Lunches – Contents

Did your child’s most recent packed lunch contain a sandwich?
Respondents: 1073 parents providing a packed lunch

- **Yes**: 88%
- **No**: 12%

What bread was used in the sandwich?
Respondents: 939 parents providing a sandwich in their child’s most recent packed lunch

- **Sliced bread**: 60%
- **Bread roll**: 18%
- **Wrap**: 12%
- **Pitta**: 3%
- **Other**: 7%

For white bread:
- **White**: 28%
- **50/50**: 27%
- **Brown**: 8%
- **Wholemeal**: 24%
- **Multigrain**: 5%
- **Granary**: 4%
- **High fibre white**: 2%
- **Other**: 2%
What was the filling in the sandwich?
(Please tick any that apply, e.g. if it was a cheese and tomato sandwich in buttered bread please tick cheese and tick tomato and tick margarine/butter)
Respondents: 935 parents providing a sandwich in their child’s most recent packed lunch

- Margarine/Butter: 60%
- Ham: 44%
- Cheese: 26%
- Cucumber: 20%
- Other: 14%
- Chicken: 12%
- Lettuce: 11%
- Tuna mayonnaise: 9%
- Tomato: 6%
- Cheese Spread: 5%
- Marmite: 5%
- Jam: 4%
- Egg: 4%
- Houmous: 3%
- No Filling: 1%

2.2 was the mean number of fillings in sandwiches

Did your child’s lunch contain any of the following?
(Please tick any that apply)
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

- Salad, e.g. pasta salad: 15%
- Dairylea Lunchables or equivalent: 7%
- Peperami: 7%
- Pie / pasty / sausage roll: 4%
- Pizza: 1%
- Leftovers: 3%
Did your child’s packed lunch contain any of the following fruit?  
(Please tick any that apply) 
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberries</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other fruit</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raisins</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangerine</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiwi</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘other fruit’ as provided by parents included blueberries (4%), melon (2%) & pineapple (2%)

92% of parents included fruit in their child’s most recent packed lunch

1.5 was the mean number of different fruit in a packed lunch

Was any of the fruit prepared? e.g. slices of fruit or a fruit bag
Respondents: 908 parents providing fruit in their child’s most recent packed lunch

- Prepared fruit - home 29%
- Prepared fruit - shop bought 6%
- Prepared fruit - home & shop bought 1%

All whole fruit 64%
Did your child's packed lunch contain any of the following vegetable / salad snacks? *(Please tick any that apply)*
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

- Cucumber sticks: 27%
- Carrot sticks: 21%
- Cherry tomatoes: 18%
- Pepper sticks: 5%
- Other: 3%
- Celery sticks: 3%

47% of parents said lunchboxes contained a vegetable / salad snack

Did your child's packed lunch contain any of the following yogurt / fromage frais items? *(Please tick any that apply)*
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

- Fromage frais pouches, e.g. Frubes, Choobs: 31%
- Yogurt pouches, e.g. Tubes: 18%
- Fromage frais pot, e.g. Petits Filous: 13%
- Flavoured yogurt pot: 7%
- Other yogurt / fromage frais: 5%
- Drinking yogurt, e.g. Yop: 4%
- Plain yogurt pot: 1%

70% of parents said their child's packed lunch contained a yogurt or fromage frais
Did your child’s packed lunch contain any of the following cheese snacks?  
(*Please tick any that apply*)
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

- Babybel: 15%
- Cheestrings: 12%
- Home prepared cheese, e.g. cubes: 7%
- Dairylea Dunkers or equivalent: 4%
- Other cheese snacks: 2%
- Cheese triangles, e.g Dairylea: 2%

*Cheese snacks were included in more than a third of packed lunches*

Did your child’s packed lunch contain any of the following savoury snacks?  
(*Please tick any that apply*)
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

- Potato crisps: 19%
- Potato starch snacks, e.g Hula Hoops, Quavers: 12%
- Savoury biscuits / Crackers, e.g. Mini Cheddars: 10%
- Corn based snacks, e.g. Wotsits: 7%
- Other savoury snacks: 5%
- Rice cakes / Oat cakes: 5%
- Nuts / Seeds: 3%

*53% of parents said they included a savoury snack in their child’s packed lunch*
Did your child's packed lunch contain any of the following confectionery / sweets? *(Please tick any that apply)*
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confectionery / Sweets</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate covered biscuit bar, e.g. Kitkat</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal bar, e.g. Chewee bar</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cake</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cake bar, e.g. Galaxy cake bar</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscuit, e.g. Rich Tea</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate biscuit, e.g. Jaffa Cake</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt coated raisins</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jelly pot</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wafer biscuit</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate bar, e.g. Milky Way</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60% of packed lunches included confectionery / sweets

Did your child's packed lunch contain any of the following drinks? *(Please tick any that apply)*
Respondents: 1074 parents providing a packed lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tap water</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diluted squash</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure fruit juice</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice drink</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoothie</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottled water</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavoured water</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavoured milk shake</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain milk</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

97% of parents included a drink
Packed LUNCHES – costs and child involvement

On average, how much would you estimate it costs you to provide one packed lunch for your child?
Respondents: 1043 parents providing a packed lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50p</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50p - 75p</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76p - £1</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1.01 - £1.25</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1.26 - £1.50</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1.51 - £1.75</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1.76 - £2.00</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£2.01 - £2.50</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£2.51 - £3.00</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£3.01 - £4.00</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£4.01 - £5.00</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than £5</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The estimated average cost for one packed lunch was £1.42

Does your child help to prepare his / her packed lunch?
Respondents: 1068 parents providing a packed lunch

- No: 24%
- Yes, occasionally: 48%
- Yes, often: 23%
- Yes, always: 5%

When shopping, does your child help choose the items for his / her packed lunch?
Respondents: 1070 parents providing a packed lunch

- No: 24%
- Yes, occasionally: 48%
- Yes, often: 23%
- Yes, always: 5%
School Policies around Packed Lunches

Does your child’s school have a 'packed lunch policy' that discourages or bans certain foods and drinks?

Respondents: 1291 parents

- Yes: 73%
- No: 8%
- I don’t know: 19%

Is the packed lunch policy implemented by the school?

Respondents: 935 parents who were aware of a packed lunch policy at their child’s school

- Yes: 57%
- No: 15%
- I don’t know: 8%
- Sometimes: 16%
- No: 3%

Parents aware of a packed lunch policy at their child’s school:
Are you in favour of the packed lunch policy?

Respondents: 935 parents who were aware of a packed lunch policy at their child’s school

- Yes: 77%
- No: 15%
- I don’t know: 8%

Remaining parents:
Are you in favour of a packed lunch policy?

Respondents: 350 parents who were not aware of or did not have a packed lunch policy at their child’s school

- Yes: 47%
- No: 32%
- I don’t know: 21%
At your child's school, can children bringing in a packed lunch eat with children having school dinners?
Respondents: 1283 parents

- Yes: 51%
- No: 29%
- I don't know: 20%

Do you think schools should be able to ban packed lunches so that all children must have a school meal?
Respondents: 1288 parents

- Yes: 6%
- No: 89%
- I don't know: 5%
Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

Did you know that from September 2014 all children in England in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 will be offered a free school lunch?
Respondents: 1285 parents

Parents with children affected by UIFSM:
Will you be taking up the offer of a free school lunch?
Respondents: 554 parents with children affected by UIFSM

Parents with children not affected by UIFSM:
If your child were offered a free school lunch, would you take up the offer?
Respondents: 731 parents with children not affected by UIFSM