

Should more children get free school meals?

24th September – 01st October 2021



90.13%

of Primary voters said Yes.



88.26%

of Secondary voters said Yes.



93.68%

of 16+ & College voters said Yes.

Free school meals are offered to children from low-income households and improves a child's health whilst helping to decrease the poverty trap. Due to the pandemic, many schools had closed leaving many school-aged children from a financially struggling background, without their daily free school meal. This week, VotesforSchools took a closer look at the campaign End Child Food Poverty #WriteNow. Throughout September, The Food Foundation are campaigning to ensure that no child goes hungry in the UK.

Marcus Rashford successfully campaigned to expand free school meals in the summer holidays during the pandemic. He is spearheading the #WriteNow campaign and is calling on the Government to do much more.

It's highly important the government see what young people think about issues that directly affect them. In this VoteTopic Lesson, VotesforSchools explored the different sides of free school meals and gave young people all over the UK the opportunity to have their voice heard on this issue. 37,979 voters took the opportunity to have their say!

Sample of 37,979 voters

Primary:	13,133 voters
Secondary:	23,168 voters
Secondary 16+ & College:	1,678 voters

Please Note: The sample size featured reflects the number of pupils and students that cast their vote on this topic during the week in which this vote was held. This sample size does therefore not reflect the number of pupils and students who discussed this VoteTopic but did not get a chance to participate in the voting.

VoteTopic Overview:

Primary, Secondary, 16+ & College voters all discussed the same Question “Should more children get free school meals?”.



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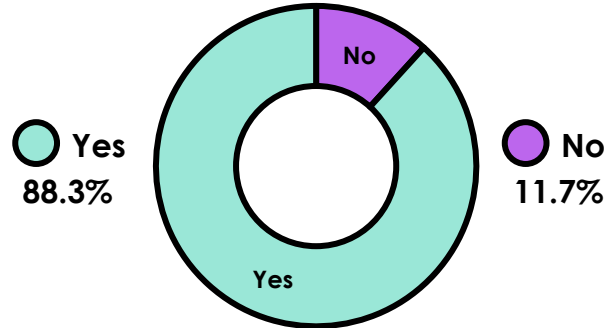
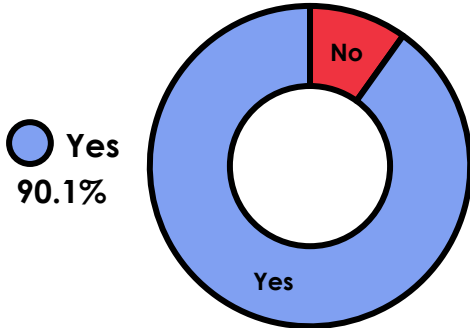
Grand Total

Primary:

Yes 90.13% (11,837)
No 9.87% (1,296)

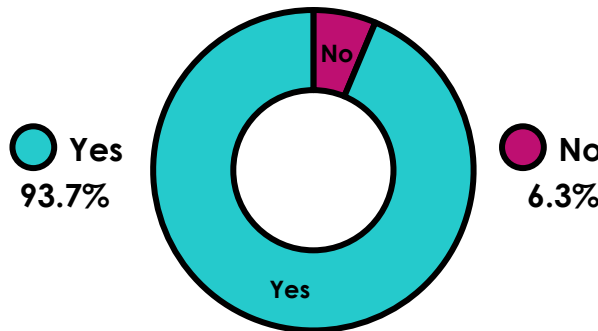
Secondary:

Yes 88.26% (20,448)
No 11.74% (2,720)



16+ & College:

Yes 93.68% (1,572)
No 6.32% (106)



Some of our voters who chose **No** pointed out the cost of free school meals and that instead of providing free school meals to more children, the government should increase wages. One Primary voter from Kent who voted **No** commented the following:

"The government should **pay more for wages** so that people can **afford** to feed their children."

However, one College voter from West Yorkshire who voted **Yes**, pointed out the following:

"Whilst **increasing wages** for families would also be good to do, it **doesn't fix the issue** of food poverty for children. Providing free school meals for all children really would **solve this problem** directly."

And a Secondary voter also from West Yorkshire said:

"It is **important** that more children have **free school meals** because if you just **earn more money**, you **still may not be able to pay** for food at school or at home."



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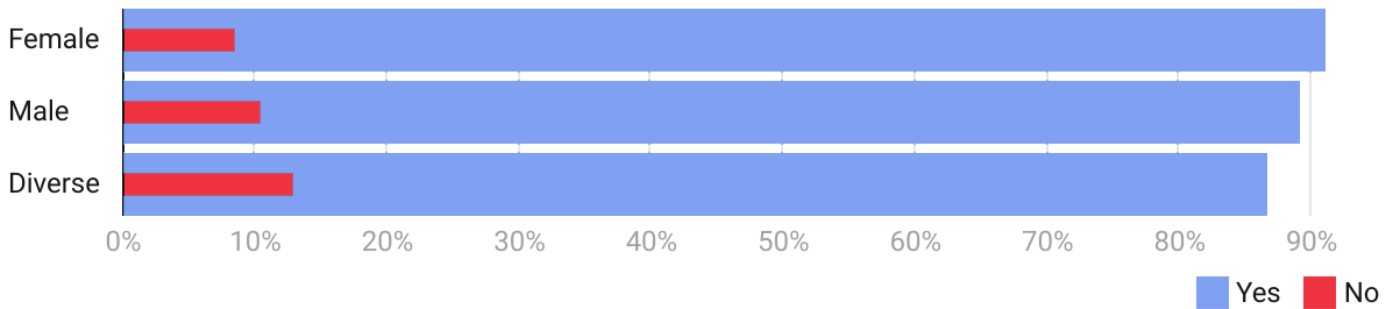


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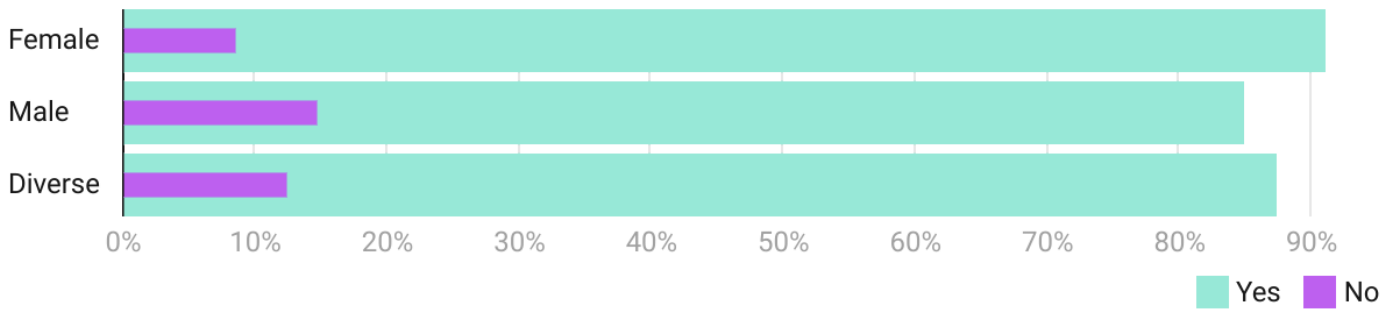


Gender

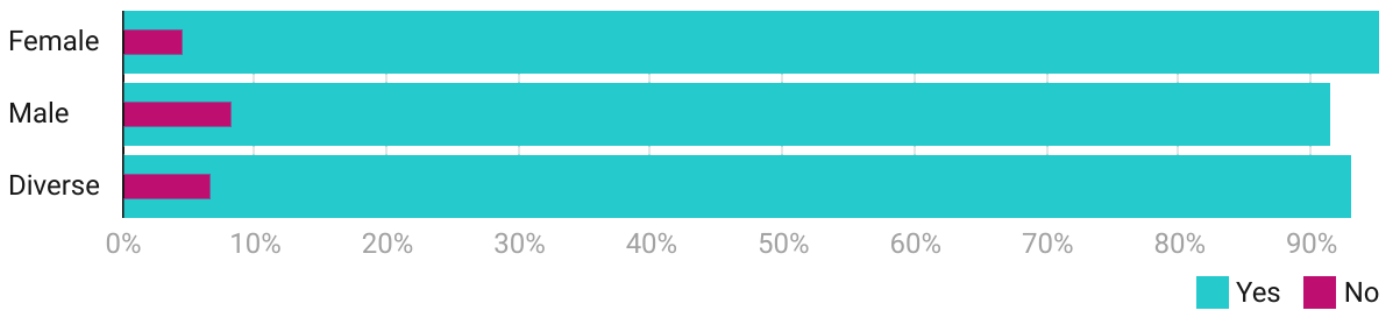
Primary



Secondary



16+ & College



Primary:

	Yes %	Count	No %	Count	Total Count
Female	91.22%	5776	8.78%	556	6332
Male	89.29%	5658	10.71%	679	6337
Diverse*	86.85%	403	13.15%	61	464

Secondary:

	Yes %	Count	No %	Count	Total Count
Female	91.28%	10149	8.72%	970	11119
Male	85.10%	8606	14.90%	1507	10113
Diverse*	87.45%	1693	12.55%	243	1936



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16+ & College:

	Yes %	Count	No %	Count	Total Count
Female	95.27%	846	4.73%	42	888
Male	91.59%	588	8.41%	54	642
Diverse*	93.24%	138	6.76%	10	148

*Votes collected as "Diverse" include students that identify as gender diverse, as well as students that wish not to disclose or were not able to specify their gender.

The following chart looks at the above **YES VOTES** and reflects how the results between the gender groups compares to the overall results of Primary, Secondary and 16+ & Colleges:

	Primary	Secondary	16+ & College
Female	↑ +1.09%	↑ +3.02%	↑ +1.59%
Male	↓ -0.85%	↓ -3.16%	↓ -2.09%
Diverse*	↓ -3.28%	↓ -0.81%	↓ -0.44%

Age

Total - Primary, Secondary & 16+ & College:

Year Group	Yes %	Count	No %	Count	Total Count
Reception	54.55%	6	45.45%	5	11
Year 1	85.78%	1194	14.22%	198	1392
Year 2	90.29%	1879	9.71%	202	2081
Year 3	92.76%	2269	7.24%	177	2446
Year 4	91.44%	2146	8.56%	201	2347
Year 5	90.00%	2260	10.00%	251	2511
Year 6	88.71%	2051	11.29%	261	2312
Year 7	87.44%	4622	12.56%	664	5286
Year 8	88.44%	4405	11.56%	576	4981
Year 9	88.96%	3998	11.04%	496	4494
Year 10	88.67%	3202	11.33%	409	3611
Year 11	88.88%	2285	11.12%	286	2571
Year 12	93.47%	787	6.53%	55	842
Year 13	95.29%	729	4.71%	36	765
Vertical Tutor Group	86.90%	2024	13.10%	305	2329



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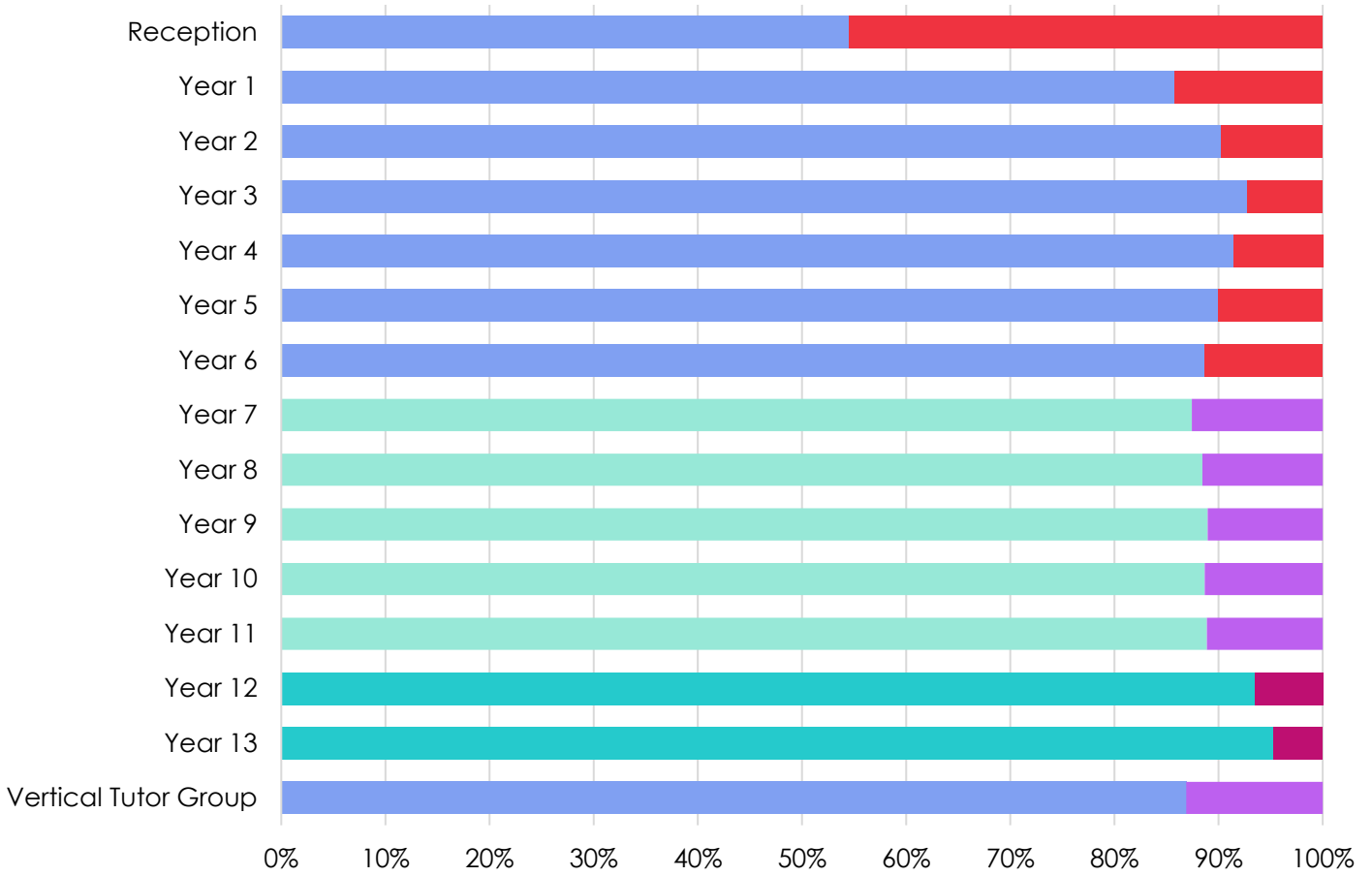


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Amongst voters, a common theme for voting **Yes** was children's wellbeing and how free school meals benefit this.

Two Primary voters from the West Midlands who voted **Yes** commented:

"All children have the **right to nutritious healthy food**. This is important because it **helps us to concentrate** in class and grow big and strong."

"If children don't have **enough food** they **won't be able to learn** and learning is important."

A Secondary voter from Nottinghamshire said:

"Children should all be allowed to eat. We **don't always know** if children are **fed properly** at home and school should be a **safe place** where they are fed."



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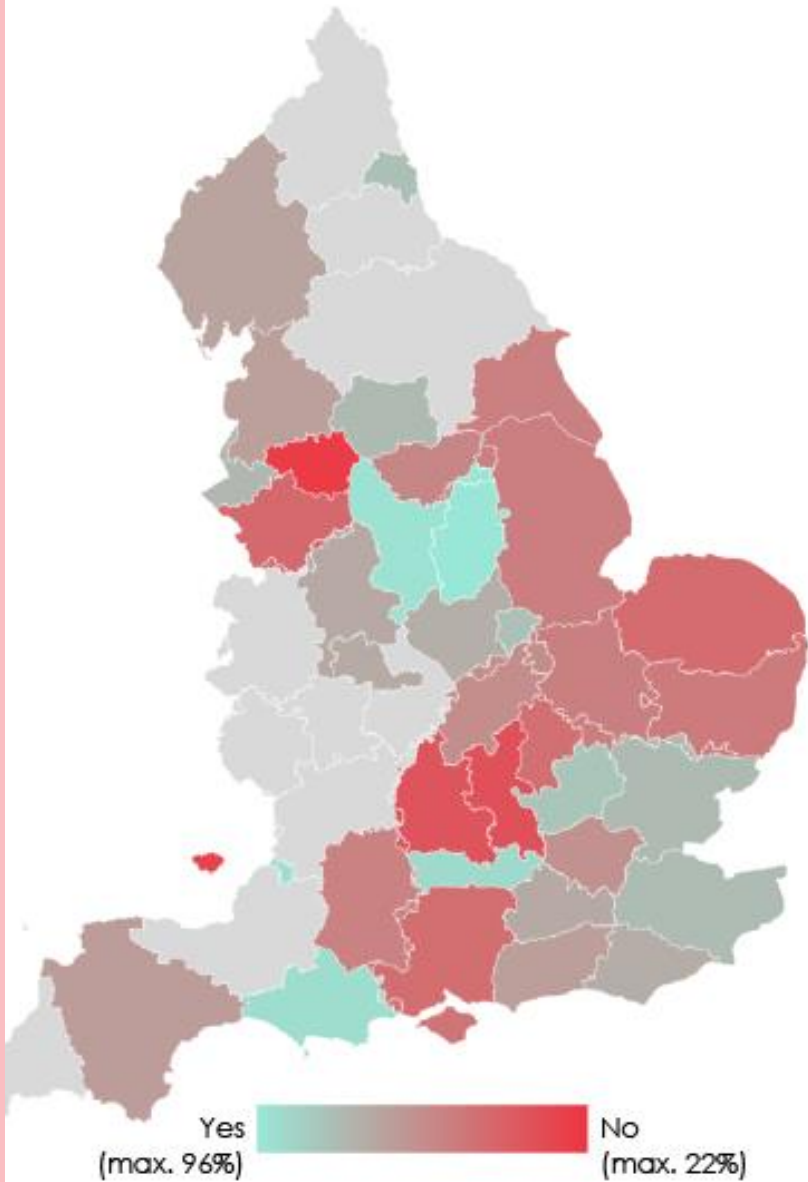
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Location

Total - Primary, Secondary & 16+ & College:

	Yes		No		Total Count
	%	Count	%	Count	
Worcestershire*	100.00%	1	0.00%		1
Durham*	100.00%	23	0.00%		23
Nottinghamshire	96.12%	322	3.88%	13	335
Derbyshire	95.58%	216	4.42%	10	226
Bristol	95.38%	186	4.62%	9	195
Dorset	95.12%	78	4.88%	4	82
Berkshire	94.79%	1218	5.21%	67	1285
Hertfordshire	92.75%	614	7.25%	48	662
Rutland	92.31%	24	7.69%	2	26
Tyne and Wear	92.25%	464	7.75%	39	503
Kent	91.88%	2557	8.12%	226	2783
West Yorkshire	91.77%	2541	8.23%	228	2769
Essex	91.76%	2595	8.24%	233	2828
Merseyside	91.45%	139	8.55%	13	152
Greater London	91.18%	703	8.82%	68	771
Leicestershire	90.57%	845	9.43%	88	933
East Sussex	90.41%	462	9.59%	49	511
West Midlands	90.18%	5630	9.82%	613	6243
Surrey	89.96%	2141	10.04%	239	2380
Staffordshire	89.96%	824	10.04%	92	916
Cumbria	89.47%	153	10.53%	18	171
Lancashire	89.13%	1254	10.87%	153	1407
West Sussex	88.97%	468	11.03%	58	526
Devon	88.82%	588	11.18%	74	662
Northamptonshire	87.25%	1109	12.75%	162	1271
South Yorkshire	86.62%	1457	13.38%	225	1682
London	86.25%	1543	13.75%	246	1789
Wiltshire	86.06%	395	13.94%	64	459
East Riding of Yorkshire	85.99%	313	14.01%	51	364
Cambridgeshire	85.94%	55	14.06%	9	64
Lincolnshire	85.84%	1552	14.16%	256	1808
Suffolk	85.38%	111	14.62%	19	130
Isle of Wight	84.81%	374	15.19%	67	441
Bedfordshire	84.29%	440	15.71%	82	522
Hampshire	84.07%	190	15.93%	36	226
Norfolk	83.89%	125	16.11%	24	149
Cheshire	83.65%	491	16.35%	96	587
Oxfordshire	81.65%	218	18.35%	49	267
Buckinghamshire	81.25%	65	18.75%	15	80
Cardiff	79.87%	119	20.13%	30	149
Greater Manchester	79.21%	80	20.79%	21	101
North Yorkshire	78.27%	1174	21.73%	326	1500



*Regions with fewer than 25 votes are not displayed on the map. These regions are marked with a * in the table.



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Voter Comments

"All children have the **right to nutritious healthy food**. This is important because it **helps us to concentrate** in class and grow big and strong."

Primary School, West Midlands

"I think yes because some children's families **cannot afford the school meals** and if everyone had a free school meal it would make it **easier for the families** who cannot afford the school meals."

Primary School, Hertfordshire

"I think that more children should get free school meals, because **eating healthily** helps you to **concentrate** more on your **learning**. If they have food, then they **won't go hungry**."

Primary School, Hertfordshire

"The **government** should do more to **help children**. Children are the **future of the country**."

Secondary School, Leicestershire

"We are the 5th **largest economy** in the world and yet we can't **afford** to provide school meals. Free meals should be available to **those who really need it**."

Secondary School, North Yorkshire

"Children should all be allowed to eat. We **don't always know** if children are **fed properly** at home and school should be a **safe place** where they are fed."

Secondary School, Nottinghamshire

"I think it's very important for the government to take note of, especially as **only 1.7 million children are on free school meals** yet **4.3 million live in poverty**. This means that millions of children are **going without food** or may become **malnourished** if their parents can't afford to feed them good quality food with lots of nutrients."

Secondary School, Dorset



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"Whilst **increasing wages** for families would also be good to do, it **doesn't fix the issue** of food poverty for children. Providing free school meals for all children really would **solve this problem** directly."

College, West Yorkshire

"Yes, **more children** should be **eligible**. It has been raised further by Marcus Rashford that lots of people **need extra help** especially with feeding their children due to **very low incomes**. There are people claiming working tax credits to help improve and top up their income, yet their **children are not eligible** for free school meals and so **money is very tight**."

College, Essex

"It is the **quality of the food** in schools and the **education** around **nutrition** that is more important."

Secondary School, Bristol

"**Lowering the price of food** in supermarkets and **school uniform** would be better."

Primary School, Surrey

"I personally believe that school meals should be **free for more children** but I do understand that it is **expensive** for the government so a possibly **better solution** would be to make the **meals a lot cheaper** for more children."

Secondary School, West Midlands

"The government should **pay more for wages** so that people can **afford** to feed their children."

Primary School, Kent

"Not all students should get free school meals **only those that qualify**, the money saved should then be used to provide more school meals **for people who need them**."

College, West Yorkshire



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