

2024

Hitting the target, but missing the point

**The
New Britain
Project**

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The New Britain Project

The New Britain Project is an independent progressive think tank focused on bridging the gap between politics, policy and practice.

As a female-led organisation, we confront the lack of women in policymaking, bringing new perspectives to the table.

Our focus is on bringing frontline voices into policymaking, so that their insights can drive pragmatic solutions.

Guided by those with first-hand government experience, we effectively navigate the complexities of policy implementation.

Together, we aim to understand the root causes of past policy failures and provide practical measures to drive successful change in the months and years ahead

About the author

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The arguments and any errors that remain are the authors' and the authors' alone.

1

Executive Summary

The story of the Conservative government's £1.12 billion National Tutoring Programme (NTP) is a cautionary tale for Labour's breakfast club ambitions.

Both share worthy goals: Evidence-based interventions to help disadvantaged children. Both promise transformation.

Yet the NTP's journey from bold vision to disappointing reality offers crucial warnings for Labour's £365 million plan for universal breakfast clubs.

The numbers are sobering. The NTP fell short of its 6 million hours of tutoring target, despite strong evidence that tutoring works. More concerning was its failure to reach those most in need: less than half of pupils receiving support were from disadvantaged backgrounds. By 2024, only one in six school leaders planned to continue tutoring without government funding, suggesting a fundamental failure to embed lasting change.

As Bridget Phillipson sets out her vision for breakfast clubs to improve attendance, boost attainment and support working parents, the parallels are striking. The NTP began with laudable ambitions and strong evidence. Its unravelling offers four key lessons that Labour must heed if its breakfast club revolution is to succeed where the tutoring programme failed.

Key Lessons

Lesson 1: The importance of fidelity - a perennial challenge in educational initiatives

In many ways the NTP was exactly the right policy solution at exactly the right time, yet it failed spectacularly.

The programme focused on catching up 'lost learning' for the most disadvantaged pupils, and an ambition to create a legacy of tutoring in schools. However it ended up as an exercise in finding the shortest possible route to deliver 6 million hours of tutoring, sidelining its original mission in the process.

Recommendation: Update and enforce school food standards for breakfast

Labour's breakfast club promise risks repeating this pattern, with one crucial gap at its heart: what children will actually eat. While Bridget Phillipson has set out multiple aims from modern childcare to tackling absence, from raising attainment to giving children the best start to their day: the most basic question remains unanswered. What children will actually eat.

School food isn't just about nutrition, it should be enjoyable too. Children who look forward to breakfast are more likely to arrive early and engage with it.

This matters even more because school food standards haven't been updated since 2014, and no formal checks are in place to ensure schools even meet these outdated requirements.

The solution is straightforward: update the school food standards and implement a new national audit scheme. Without this, we risk another education scheme that looks impressive in headlines but falls short where it matters: in the daily experience of children themselves.

Lesson 2 - We need a more agile approach to evaluation

After delivering almost 6 million hours of tutoring, we are none the wiser about whether it actually made a difference.

What should have been a golden opportunity to learn valuable lessons and shape future support for disadvantaged pupils instead turned into a box-ticking exercise, where the focus was quantity over quality.

Recommendation: Implement agile, real-time evaluation

The NTP represented a perfect natural experiment, with most schools participating and rich data available. Yet instead of understanding the impact on disadvantaged pupils, the programme focused merely on counting hours delivered. Its evaluation framework was slow and bureaucratic. By the time issues were identified, it was too late to make meaningful changes. Schools, already overwhelmed with data demands, saw evaluation as yet another burden rather than a tool for improvement.

Breakfast clubs need a different approach. The Department for Education already captures daily attendance data automatically. Through adding specific breakfast club attendance codes and publishing these fortnightly alongside regular attendance figures, schools could spot and solve problems quickly as well as share best practice. This real-time monitoring, combined with longer-term impact studies, would enable both rapid improvements and establish a proper evidence base for what works.

Lesson 3 - Engaging with schools needs a particular skill set - good customer service and local intelligence is critical

The procurement process was the Achilles' heel of the National Tutoring Programme.

The initial approach on engaging with trusted organisations, gave way to the false economy of prioritising cost over quality.

Ultimately this tarnished the reputation of the whole programme and led to providers being met with suspicion by schools.

Recommendation: Involve Local Government Public Health teams in breakfast club delivery

The NTP's centralised procurement approach created unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. When global outsourcing firm Randstad won the contract with a bid far below the government's maximum offer, it marked the beginning of the end.

Breakfast clubs present an opportunity to work differently, particularly by involving local authority public health teams. This could strengthen the connection between education and health outcomes while ensuring programmes meet local needs.

Labour's manifesto promise of unique pupil ID's also presents the possibility of finally joining up the dots between health and educational outcomes. It's the kind of smart, data-led policy that could transform how we support children; helping further track not just who shows up but whether it makes a difference.

Lesson 4: Engaging hearts and minds in the education sector is essential for achieving additionality

The National Tutoring Project failed to guard against the erosion of additionality.

Funding intended to provide extra support was instead redirected to cover existing gaps in resources.

Recommendation: Support schools in planning now and establish clear guidelines to safeguard additionality

To understand why the NTP failed, the issue of additionality must also be understood. The additional Conservative government funding was meant to provide extra support for pupils through tutoring, on top of what schools already offered. Instead, as budgets tightened, schools increasingly used the money to prop up existing provision, paying current teachers to provide tutoring rather than bringing in additional help. What should have been extra support became a way to keep basic services running.

Visit any primary school today and you'll hear the same story: budgets stretched to breaking point, especially around special educational needs support (SEND) and staffing shortages. What you won't hear much about is breakfast clubs. Yet, come September, when breakfast clubs are expected to roll out universally, there's a genuine risk that little will have been done to gauge demand or clarify expectations with parents. While schools will be required to offer breakfast clubs, it remains unclear what "universal" really means in practice.

The practical hurdles are mounting. Schools must commit to food and staffing costs without knowing likely uptake. Get those numbers wrong and they risk the same funding clawbacks that plagued the tutoring programme. Then there's

staffing: use existing teachers and watch other provision suffer, recruit new staff and face all the costs and complications that brings. Schools need answers now.

The solution lies not in Whitehall but in genuine partnership with schools. Link funding to local deprivation levels, require transparency about spending (as with pupil premium), and crucially, give school leaders a voice in shaping what works for their communities. After all, the best breakfast club policy is the one schools actually believe in.

2

Setting the table

The promise of Labour's Breakfast Club pledge

What is Labour's Breakfast Club Pledge?

Labour has pledged to roll out fully funded, free breakfast clubs in every primary school in England,¹ investing £365 million annually.²

This is a core part of their mission to "break down the barriers to opportunity," aiming to give all children a strong start to the school day, while helping parents with childcare options.

On the promised rollout of breakfast clubs, Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education has said: "They improve attendance, improve attainment, give the best start to every day for every child, giving parents work choices as well as children life chances"³

What are breakfast clubs and who already has them?

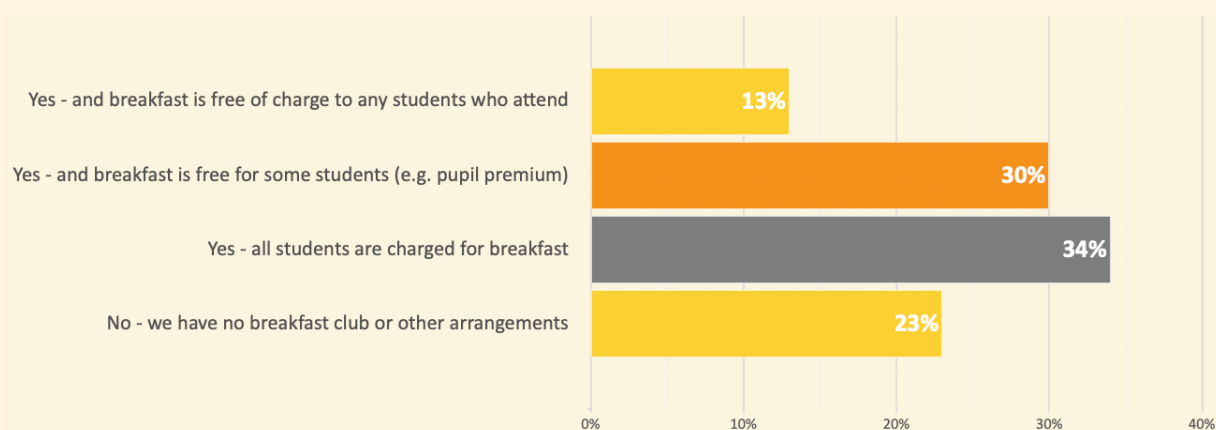
Breakfast clubs provide children with food and care before the school day starts.

Every school is different, and because of that breakfast clubs often look a little different too.⁴

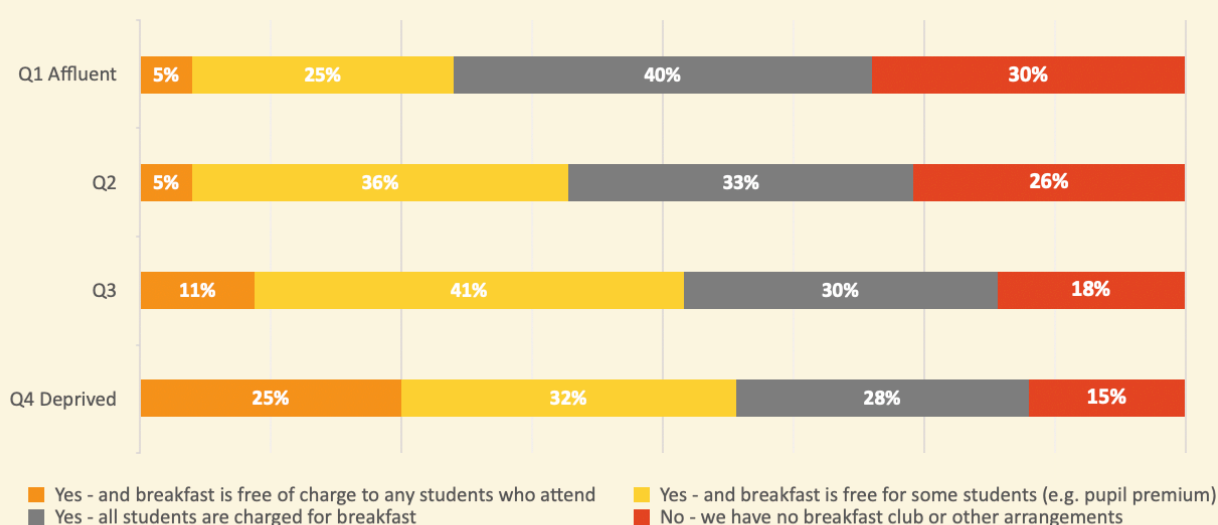
- **Traditional Breakfast Club:** Held in school halls or canteens, where children can eat, socialise, and take part in activities.
- **Classroom Breakfast:** Some schools let children eat breakfast in the classroom while they begin their day with activities like quiet reading as part of a 'soft start' to the school day.
- **Grab and Go:** Typically at secondary schools, breakfast is handed out at easily accessible points like the school gate as students arrive.

Currently, around 77% of primary schools offer breakfast clubs, but only 13% provide free breakfast for all pupils. Labour's plan aims to expand this, making free breakfast available to all primary school children.

Figure 1: Does your primary school offer breakfast?



Question answered by 2,168 primary school teachers on 01/10/2022 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics) via TeacherTapp



Question answered by 2,168 primary school teachers on 01/10/2022 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics) via TeacherTapp

In the most deprived schools, over half offer free breakfasts to at least some students, such as those receiving pupil premium support. In the most disadvantaged quarter of primary schools, a quarter provide free breakfast for all students.

The government currently subsidises breakfast clubs for 12% of state schools through the National School Breakfast Programme,⁵ with an additional 750 schools joining a pilot in 2025.⁶ However, most schools still rely on external funding from charities or their own budgets.

The National Tutoring Programme - a cautionary tale

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP), introduced under the previous government, was the most recent attempt at a large-scale intervention to close educational attainment gaps, particularly for disadvantaged students - echoing the aims of Labour’s breakfast club pledge. Launched in the wake of COVID-19, the NTP sought to tackle the stark learning losses by offering tutoring to those most in need.

But despite its well-founded intentions, the NTP serves as a striking case study of a government attempting the right thing, backed by strong evidence, yet stumbling on delivery.–The missteps outlined in this report turned what should have been a promising programme into a toxic brand for schools and serves as a cautionary tale of how good policy can be derailed when practical execution falls short.

3

From Tutors to Toast

Key Lessons from the NTP's failure

Overview of the NTP

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) was launched in England in response to the educational disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷

It began in the academic year 2020/21 and over the four years of the scheme the Department for Education allocated a time limited £1.12 billion in funding for the National Tutoring Programme, a third of the total budget allocated to post pandemic education recovery more widely.⁸

Backed by strong evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation, which demonstrated that one-on-one tutoring could yield an average of five additional months of progress, the NTP was designed to close emerging educational gaps. While other proposals, like extending the school day, were sidelined due to insufficient evidence, the NTP was positioned as a robust solution.^{9 10}

Across the four years of the NTP, the government aimed to deliver six million 15-hour packages of tutoring,¹¹ a target they did not meet.^{12 13}

The NTP's delivery model in Figure 2 tells a story of growing complexity and declining quality. What began as a focused program with trusted education partners (EEF and Teach First) shifted dramatically when Randstad took over. Schools, frustrated with the bureaucracy, increasingly chose the 'school-led' route which was superficially more flexible but essentially diluted the original model. As government funding gradually reduced (from 75% to 50%), quality oversight fragmented across multiple contractors. By the final year, the program had effectively been abandoned to schools' existing budgets, precisely what it was meant to supplement, not become.

Figure 2: Delivery Models Timeline

2020/21 - Quality first - trusted education specialists lead delivery

The NTP was initially run through two strands: ^{14 15}

- *Tuition Partners*: allowing participating schools to obtain subsidised tutoring from a vetted list of external providers. This strand of the programme was led by the EEF. Schools received funding to cover 75% of the costs of tuition.
- *Academic Mentors*: involved hiring trained graduates to work in schools in the most disadvantaged areas, providing targeted catch-up support to students. This strand of the programme was overseen by Teach First. Schools received funding to cover 100% of the costs of academic mentors.

2021/22 - Shift to commercial provider, schools start going their own way

In the second year of the programme a third strand was added and overall oversight was contracted to the global outsourcing firm Randstad:^{16 17}

- *Tuition Partners*: This strand continued allowing participating schools to obtain subsidised tutoring from a vetted list of external providers now overseen by Randstad. Schools received funding to cover 70% of the costs of tuition.
- *Academic Mentors*: Schools could apply for an academic mentor or keep the one they already had. Schools received funding to cover 95% of the costs of academic mentors.
- *School-Led Tutoring*: Under this model schools were given a ring-fenced grant to fund locally sourced tutoring provision. They could use existing staff such as teachers and teaching assistants or external tutoring resources such as private tutors or returning teachers. 75% of the costs were subsidised. 81% of tuition courses started in 2021/22 were delivered through this route.

2022/23 - Multiple contractors, reduced funding

In the third year, the programme continued with the same three strands but new contracts were awarded. Tribal Group PLC oversaw quality assurance, ensuring tutoring standards. The Education Development Trust provided training for tutors and academic mentors. Cognition Education, a global consultancy, was responsible for recruiting and deploying academic mentors to schools most in need.¹⁸ Funding was reduced to 60% of the total cost to schools, but this was now given directly with schools able to decide which of the strands they wanted to spend it on.^{19 20}

2023/24 - Program effectively abandoned

The academic year 2023/24 was the final year of the programme and no further NTP funding has been awarded beyond it. The Department for Education said that 'schools will be encouraged to continue to prioritise tuition for those students who need it the most through existing budgets.'²¹

Figure 3: Key Stats

By the end of the second year 2021/22:

- 47% of pupils receiving tutoring were disadvantaged
- 87% of schools used some form of tutoring under the NTP

By the end of the third year 2022/23:

- 74% of schools used some form of tutoring under the NTP
- 46% of pupils receiving tutoring were disadvantaged
- Schools received funding to cover 60% of the cost of tuition

During fourth and final year 2023/24:

- 58% of schools used some form of tutoring under the NTP
- 48% of pupils receiving tutoring were disadvantaged
- Schools received funding to cover 50% of the cost of tuition

By the end of four years, pupils in England had begun a total of 5,637,893 courses, falling short of the original target of 6 million course starts set at the programme's inception.²²

The aim was for tutoring to become embedded in the school system without the need for ongoing government funding.²³ However, as of the 2024/25 academic year, only 1 in 6 school leaders have said they will continue offering tutoring now that the government subsidy has ended.²⁴

After almost a decade of a shrinking disadvantage gap pre-pandemic, at the end of the academic year 2023/24 the disadvantage gap between pupils at KS2 is now higher than it was pre pandemic. In reading, writing and maths (combined), 45% of disadvantaged pupils met the expected standard in 2024 compared to 67% of other pupils.²⁵

At KS4, whilst the disadvantage gap has been closing, progress halted in the years 2017/18 and 2018/19 and the disadvantage gap is now at its highest level since 2011 and has risen every year since 2020. This means that disadvantaged pupils were over 19 months behind their better off peers by the time they took GCSEs in 2023.²⁶

In many ways the NTP was exactly the right policy solution at exactly the right time - yet it failed spectacularly.

What began as a programme focused on catching up 'lost learning' for the most disadvantaged pupils, and an ambition to create a legacy of tutoring in schools, ended up as an exercise in finding the shortest possible route to deliver 6 million hours of tutoring, sidelining its original mission in the process.

The National Tutoring Programme began with a clear focus on addressing the "lost learning" of disadvantaged pupils, yet despite this there was no explicit target set in the first year, and selection of pupils was therefore left to the discretion of schools.²⁷ This oversight undermined the programme's intent to effectively reach those who needed it most. Political pressures likely influenced this flawed approach. Then Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged extra support for every pupil falling behind in English and maths, a promise unions quickly labelled as "unrealistic."²⁸

At the heart of the plan was an ambition to establish a lasting legacy of tutoring in schools, aimed at improving access to high-quality support, building capacity within the tutoring ecosystem, and showcasing the tangible impact on pupil attainment. However, as the programme evolved, the initial clarity of purpose began to wane.²⁹

In the second phase, a target was finally set, stipulating that 65% of pupils receiving tutoring through the Tuition Partners route should be in receipt of pupil premium funding. Yet, midway through that year, this target was quietly abandoned, with the global outsourcing firm Ranstead claiming it would "reduce complexities."³⁰

Lesson 1: The importance of fidelity - a perennial challenge in educational initiatives

Fidelity is crucial in educational initiatives, yet it remains a perennial challenge - especially when it comes to reaching the most disadvantaged students. These children are often the hardest to reach, making it vital to strike the right balance between flexibility for schools and their contexts whilst keeping a firm commitment to a programme's original intentions.

Lessons from the National Tutoring Programme show what happens when standards are watered down. The initial group size limit of 1:3 was loosened to 1:6, diluting the programme's focus on quality and shifting its commitment away from meaningful impact led by robust evidence. It's a reminder that setting firm red lines on quality is crucial for success.³¹

Bridget Phillipson, the current Secretary of State for Education, has rightly highlighted several important aims of the rollout of breakfast clubs. These include serving as a foundational step in a modern childcare system, tackling

persistent absence, improving student attainment, and ensuring that every child gets the best start to their day.^{32 33 34}

Breakfast clubs have some potential to deliver on all these fronts, but without clear direction from the government on the overarching objectives and minimum quality benchmarks, they risk becoming yet another well-meaning scheme that loses focus and impact.

One glaring omission is the lack of emphasis on nutrition. Offering children a good breakfast has both educational and health benefits. The growing crisis of childhood obesity,³⁵ alongside rising concerns over mental and physical health, places nutrition at the intersection of education and health policy.

Recommendation: Update and enforce school food standards for breakfast

School Food Standards must play a key role in ensuring that the breakfast club plan delivers on its potential. These standards, which set guidelines for the nutritional quality of school meals, were developed in 2014 and no longer reflect the latest evidence on healthy diets.³⁶ Updated food standards must also recognise that school food needs to be both healthy and appetising. When children enjoy their breakfast, they're more likely to benefit from it. In addition, currently, no formal checks ensure compliance with these standards, which means that access to nutritious food can vary dramatically depending on where a child goes to school.³⁷ This gap must be addressed.

By embedding revised nutritional standards and accountability into the fabric of the breakfast club rollout, Labour can leverage this programme to contribute to better health outcomes, and ensure that all children are ready to learn each day.

What needs to happen?

- The School Food Standards should be updated to reflect the latest evidence on healthy and sustainable diets.
- Roll out a national school food audit scheme following the successful pilots by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).³⁸

And after delivering those almost 6 million hours of tutoring, we are none the wiser about whether it actually made a difference.

What should have been a golden opportunity to learn valuable lessons and shape future support for disadvantaged pupils instead turned into a box-ticking exercise, where the focus was quantity over quality.

After delivering almost 6 million hours of tutoring, the National Tutoring Programme still lacks clarity about its true impact. This is particularly frustrating because, in many ways, it represented the perfect natural experiment; with nearly all schools engaged in some capacity, there was a unique opportunity to capture data on student outcomes at scale. Instead of using this participation to understand how tutoring affected disadvantaged pupils, the programme fixated on outputs, hours delivered, rather than meaningful outcomes. As a result, we missed a key opportunity to identify effective strategies for supporting students.

The same trap could easily befall the breakfast club initiative. A narrow emphasis on volume; breakfasts served or new clubs opened, it equally risks devolving into a mere exercise in meeting targets rather than making a genuine impact. And similarly to the NTP the focus on disadvantage becomes lost in the aggregate of data collection.

Lesson 2 - We need a more agile approach to evaluation

Evaluation in education is notoriously challenging. Current models tend to be slow and bureaucratic, often met with suspicion by schools already overwhelmed with data demands. Typically, the evaluation process takes a monolithic approach: vast amounts of time and effort are required to gather evidence before any outcomes are reflected upon. The result is often the realisation, a year or more down the line, that nothing has materially improved.

Instead, what is needed is a more agile evaluation system. Schools, multi academy trust central teams and local authorities should be able to access live data that enables them to make timely adjustments within days or weeks, rather than being tethered to protracted evaluations. This approach would mean we can quickly see what's working and ensure that it actually help the most vulnerable children, reflecting the realities on the ground and making real change.

Recommendation: Implement agile, real-time evaluation

The Department for Education is already capturing attendance data daily and automatically - a response to the attendance crisis that has engulfed schools in the wake of Covid. This existing framework can provide a valuable foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of breakfast clubs, particularly in measuring one of the key metrics for success: improved attendance for pupils. Additionally, this data would show differences between students who attend breakfast clubs and those who do not, allowing for an assessment of the impact on attainment, although this would by its very nature take longer to yield results.

Agility in evaluation also means finding a balance between accountability and adaptability. Data could be anonymised at the local authority or regional level to encourage sharing without schools feeling micromanaged in a way similar to how attendance is tracked by the Department for Education now.³⁹

This isn't an either or situation though. There will still be a need for rigorous longitudinal evaluation processes as the evidence on what type of breakfast club provision works best still has a limited base. A hybrid approach to evaluation, combining immediate feedback with rigorous long-term studies, would give policymakers the flexibility to fine-tune programs while building an evidence base. The universal rollout of breakfast clubs presents a challenge for assessment, as many schools already run similar schemes, limiting a clear-cut before-and-after comparison. Nonetheless, clever design, could still provide insights, but the key is to ensure that the effects and the approaches are both tested.

What needs to happen?

- The Department for Education could leverage existing live attendance data to track breakfast club participation by introducing a new attendance code, such as "attended school and breakfast club." This would enable real-time tracking of pupils who attend breakfast clubs, allowing comparisons with those who do not. Such an approach would provide an agile way to assess the impact of breakfast clubs on attendance and attainment.
- Publish this data at a national and local authority level fortnightly in line with pupil attendance in school data.⁴⁰

The procurement process was the Achilles' heel of the National Tutoring Programme.

The initial approach on engaging with trusted organisations, gave way to the false economy of prioritising cost over quality.

And ultimately this tarnished the reputation of the whole programme and led to providers being met with suspicion by schools.

Due to the time constraints during the midst of the Covid pandemic, initially the Department for Education did not carry out a competitive tender and instead worked with organisations it already had a close relationship with such as The Education Endowment Foundation (The EEF) and Teach First to centrally oversee the programme.⁴¹

To put the NTP on a better contractual footing a full competitive tendering process was carried out, of which Randstad, a global outsourcing firm, was awarded a £25 million contract to run the scheme.⁴² Tender documents show that this winning bid was far below the £62 million maximum offered by the government, reflecting a focus on cost reduction rather than securing the best provider for the job.⁴³

At the same time, a third strand for tutoring delivery was introduced as a way to offer more flexibility for schools to identify their own tutors as it became clear the current model would not reach the required target. The school-led tutoring route enabled schools to either recruit tutors from their own staff or alternatively source local former or supply teachers to provide the tuition.⁴⁴ By the end of the second year, school-led tutoring became the most popular route with over 80% of schools choosing this model. This model, though more adaptable for schools, came at the cost of consistency and quality across the programme.

The third year of the National Tutoring Programme began with another change in delivery mode, with Tribal brought in to quality assure after criticisms of Randstad's delivery which was described as "shambolic"⁴⁵ by tutoring groups and the funding mechanisms from government as "spaghetti junction" by MPs.⁴⁶ But by then, the damage had been done, and the NTP's reputation suffered as a result.

Lesson 3 - Engaging with schools needs a particular skill set - good customer service and local intelligence is critical

Schools are, by their nature, challenging to engage with. Staff are often stretched thin, managing operational demands that leave little time to liaise with external organisations. Recognising the diversity between large urban schools with significant administrative resources and small rural schools, where head teachers may teach for part of the day, is also crucial to building strong partnerships and providing meaningful support.

A recurring complaint from schools during the NTP was the inefficiency and complexity of working with Randstad's booking system. The online hub was cumbersome and time-consuming, leading many schools to favour the more straightforward school-led model. Even the accredited Tuition Partners found themselves delivering much of their work through the school-led route as schools became increasingly frustrated with the administrative burden.⁴⁷

Striking the right balance between giving schools flexibility and designing a procurement process that ensures high-quality providers is a difficult challenge to navigate. At first glance, local authorities would seem a natural partner for this, able to leverage local knowledge and support delivery across their areas. But this isn't the 1990s, when Michael Barber's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies relied on a strong network of local authority leads. Over the past three decades, local authorities have been hollowed out, losing both funding and power as control over schools shifted towards Multi Academy Trusts.

Recommendation: Involve Local Government Public Health teams in breakfast club delivery

A more innovative approach, especially given Labour's commitment to a mission-led, joined-up government, would be to involve the public health teams of local authorities in commissioning and delivering breakfast clubs. These teams bring valuable expertise about nutrition and wellbeing that could complement schools' educational knowledge. By creating this link between health and education professionals, breakfast clubs could do more than just boost attendance and attainment, they could help support children's wider wellbeing and establish healthy eating habits that benefit learning.

Labour's breakfast club programme stands to benefit significantly from utilising the unique pupil IDs outlined in the party's manifesto to track participation and outcomes.⁴⁸ By integrating health data such as childhood obesity rates, physical well-being, and mental health with educational metrics like attendance and attainment, the programme could create a comprehensive evidence base to evaluate its effectiveness. This data-driven approach would offer invaluable insights into how breakfast clubs are improving student well-being and academic performance, shaping future policy to support children's needs even more effectively.

What needs to happen?

- In the summer of 2025 launch a local authority public health team-led pilot to test the integration of public health and education in commissioning and delivering breakfast clubs.
- Implement the unique pupil ID outlined in the Labour party manifesto.

The National Tutoring Project failed to guard against the erosion of additionality.

Funding intended to provide extra support was instead redirected to cover existing gaps in resources.

One of the major pitfalls of the National Tutoring Programme was the erosion of additionality: what should have been new funding to help disadvantaged pupils ultimately ended up plugging gaps elsewhere in the system. Schools, already struggling with stretched budgets, used much of the extra funding to cover pre-existing needs, weakening the programme's overall impact.

This was especially evident in the school-led tutoring route, where schools often turned to their own staff or local supply teachers to provide tutoring, inadvertently pulling resources away from other critical areas. In doing so, the intended boost to disadvantaged students was diluted.⁴⁹

In the context of breakfast clubs, a similar risk is emerging. If additional funding is provided without clear guidelines on its usage, there's a substantial danger that these resources will be redirected to cover existing budget shortfalls rather than fulfilling the programme's true aim: enhancing children's well-being and educational outcomes.

Lesson 4: Engaging hearts and minds in the education sector is essential for achieving additionality

To ensure that breakfast clubs effectively improve what's already there, it is vital to engage schools and communities meaningfully, fostering a sense of ownership and trust in the initiative. When schools can see the value of a programme, they'll use the extra funding to make a real difference to their pupils.

Schools are facing considerable funding pressures, particularly in supporting SEND needs, and breakfast clubs are not currently a primary concern in their planning for next year.⁵⁰ Yet, come September, when breakfast clubs are expected to roll out universally, there's a genuine risk that little will have been done to gauge demand or clarify expectations with parents. While schools will be required to offer breakfast clubs, it remains unclear what "universal" really means in practice.⁵¹ Defining "universality" will be essential here. Will every child be eligible? Can any child attend as they wish? Schools need guidance on managing parental expectations and assessing local demand to avoid a mismatch between resources and uptake. We know from school lunches that pupil numbers usually find their rhythm. But a messy start to breakfast clubs could damage confidence among schools and parents, exactly what happened with the tutoring programme.

Funding uncertainties add to the challenge. Schools, once committed to food and staffing costs, could face clawbacks if attendance is lower than anticipated, a scenario that occurred during the NTP and if were to occur in breakfast clubs would destabilise already tight budgets.⁵² Staffing itself is another significant hurdle, if schools must use existing staff, other areas may suffer. If they need to

recruit, guidance must be in place soon, ideally before the summer term, so they are able to make realistic hires. Relying solely on lessons from the summer term of 2025 pilot risks being too little, too late.

Recommendation: Support schools in planning now and establish clear guidelines to safeguard additionality

For breakfast clubs to succeed, schools must see them as a valuable enhancement, not just another obligation. The government needs to involve schools in planning that now and provide clear guidance to ensure breakfast clubs genuinely add value, directing resources where they'll make the most real difference on students' well-being and educational outcomes.

To avoid the erosion of additionality seen in the NTP, Labour must establish clear, enforceable guidelines on how funding for breakfast clubs is to be used. Schools should be required to demonstrate that the funds are used exclusively for the enhancement of children's well-being and educational outcomes, rather than being redirected to cover existing budget shortfalls. These guidelines must be tightly monitored to ensure that the programme delivers on its intended impact.

Additionally, Labour must create a framework for funding that scales with need, linked to deprivation and nutritional indicators. Tying funding to need not only directs resources where they are most needed, but also aligns with the Child Poverty Strategy's goal of tackling inequality. Schools should be required to show that funds are used solely for their intended purposes, as they do with pupil premium spending.

The Labour government must focus on building genuine engagement with schools and local communities. Schools that feel involved in the design and implementation of breakfast clubs are more likely to embrace the initiative as an integral part of their school culture, ensuring it adds real value to their existing programmes. This sense of ownership will translate into a more committed effort to utilise additional resources effectively, thereby amplifying the programme's impact on pupils.

By developing this deep level of engagement, Labour can ensure that breakfast clubs are not just implemented, but embraced, allowing them to fulfil their potential in supporting children's health and educational achievement.

What needs to happen?

- Support schools by releasing guidance in how they can begin testing appetite for breakfast clubs locally
- Define the concept of “universality” in breakfast club provision
- Create clear guidelines that require schools to use breakfast club funding exclusively for new or enhanced services in this area.
- Schools must show how they are using the breakfast club funding in a similar way to how they demonstrate to the Department for Education they are using their pupil premium effectively. ⁵³
- Share lessons from the summer 2025 school-led pilot to show how collaborative design, involving school staff, parents, and communities, can tailor breakfast clubs to each school’s needs, fostering long-term engagement with the programme from the sector.

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