**BREAKFAST CLUBS AWARDS 2024**

Teachers have noticed a rise in the number of children missing school in the last year – for reasons other than sickness and holidays, according to research.

A study of 500 primary and secondary teachers found 70 per cent think absences have risen, due to more parents letting children stay at home (60 per cent), and an increase in poor mental health (59 per cent) and anxiety (46 per cent).

While 34 per cent think some fell so far behind during Covid that they no longer see the benefit of being in school, with 31 per cent concerned that cost-of-living pressures on parents mean they are struggling to buy uniform or equipment.

Others blame a lack of support for children with extra needs in school (31 per cent) and an increase in bullying (22 per cent).

As a result, 73 per cent of teachers fear those missing school are falling behind with their learning, while 53 per cent worry it also impacts the rest of the class.

A spokesperson for Kellogg’s, which carried out the research to launch its 2024 Breakfast Club Awards, said: “School is such a huge part of childhood, but a large number are missing it for a variety of reasons.

“As the research shows, this is becoming a wide-reaching problem and not only affects the child who is missing school, but also the rest of the class.

“Breakfast clubs can play a part in helping to get children back in school by providing a relaxed and social environment for them to enjoy before starting lessons.

“Having breakfast provided also takes a small bit off the pressure felt by parents who are struggling with the cost-of-living and allows them to ensure children are in school before they start work.”

Teachers estimate an average of 16 per cent of the children under their care have missed school for reasons other than short-term sickness or holiday during the current school year.

While an estimated six-and-a-half hours of their working week is currently spent dealing with absenteeism.

For 44 per cent, this makes their own job harder, and leaves 40 per cent spending more time simply trying to get pupils into school rather than actually teaching them.

But it’s not just the child’s learning that suffers when they miss school as two thirds of teachers feel it also impacts their social skills, while 63 per cent think it reduces their confidence.

Their mental wellbeing (62 per cent), behaviour when back in school (61 per cent) and their friendships (57 per cent) also suffer.

To encourage children to attend class, some have gone above and beyond by visiting the child’s home (21 per cent), offering extra tuition out of school hours (19 per cent) or even collecting the youngster from home themselves (17 per cent).

But of the 84 per cent who work in a school with a breakfast club, polled via OnePoll, nearly half (46 per cent) feel they have a positive impact on absenteeism.

Of these, 59 per cent feel access to a free breakfast helps pupils concentrate and less likely to fall behind, while 58 per cent think it’s easier for struggling parents to get children into school if food is provided.

Others believe it helps by allowing parents to ensure their child is in school before they start work (53 per cent), and by calming them down before lessons, leading to less discipline (41 per cent).

Maura Furber, Headteacher at St. Stephens Community Academy, said: ‘’Our school has been running a breakfast club for 10 years now and it’s been incredible to see the positive impact it has. “Not only does it set the children up for a day of learning, but it also has a consequent impact on the attendance of our pupils.

“Since introducing our club, we’ve seen big reductions in absenteeism.

“Children genuinely look forward to coming into school to have breakfast with their friends, it’s an opportunity to burn off some energy, play games and ease in before learning begins.

“This means it’s less of a challenge for parents to motivate their children in the mornings to get them into the classroom.

“I’ve seen it first hand, where we’ve really struggled to get children into school and seen it begin to impact their education until they’ve joined the breakfast club and turned a real corner.’’

A spokesperson for Kellogg’s, which is offering schools the chance to win £1,000 for its breakfast club, added: “We understand the important role breakfast clubs can play in a pupil’s life, as well as the impact it can take on tackling absenteeism.

“We hope that by continuing to support the scheme, we can help to get children back into school and thriving.”

**ENDS**

*\* All stats come from a survey carried out by OnePoll of 500 people. Done between 27th March to 9th April 2024.*