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A follow up national survey of breaktimes in primary and secondary schools.

Report to Nuffield Foundation.

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Summary Report

The research aimed to provide current, systematic and nationally representative information on break and lunch times in primary and secondary schools, and systematic information on changes over the last 10 years. The research also endeavoured to collect current information on the main features of breaktime, including timing and duration, supervision and facilities provided as well as views on its value, problems arising and behaviour, and information on extended school services. The project sought to provide information on pupil perspectives on breaktime, social behaviour in and out of school, and travel to and from school.

The research involved a large-scale postal survey developed after consultation with an advisory group, teachers and head-teachers and a survey of pupils views about breaktime, travel to and from school and social life outside of school. The school questionnaire was sent to 18% of all primary and secondary schools in England and Wales. Twenty percent of schools approached returned questionnaires and a further mail shot was required to improve the response rate. Overall, 1566 questionnaires were returned, an overall responses rate of 38% which is better than comparable recent postal surveys to schools. This constitutes a sample of 7% of all primary and 6% of all secondary schools in England and Wales. The pupil questionnaire was sent to Year 5, Year 8 and Year 10 pupils in 23 schools in England and Wales. Over 1300 questionnaires were returned from 19 schools.

The findings showed:

- Further reductions since 1995 in the length of lunchtimes and the virtual abolition of afternoon break at KS2 and secondary levels.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about breaktimes (particularly the lunchbreak) and most feel that these times should be lengthened (particularly at secondary level) or remain the same.
- Most schools agreed that behaviour outside school had declined since 2001, but primary schools felt that behaviour at breaktimes had improved.
- Primary schools valued breaktime as an opportunity for pupils to get physical exercise and to socialise. Secondary schools saw its value in more functional terms as providing time for eating and drinking and giving teachers a break.
- Pupils in primary and secondary schools valued breaktime as free time for them to do what they want and as an opportunity to socialise and get physical exercise.
- Schools and pupils were in agreement that the main problem at breaktime is poor behaviour but pupils also noted insufficient opportunity and space for fun activities, and time to eat.
- Staff supervision of breaktime was three times higher in primary than secondary schools. It was surprising that supervisory staff numbers had not increased and ratios to pupils not changed since 1995, despite recent expansion in the number of support staff in schools. Of concern is the finding that secondary schools were less likely than primary schools to offer formal training and support for supervisory staff, relying on relatively ad hoc informal arrangements instead.
- There were clear differences in the facilities available in primary and secondary schools. The majority of primary and secondary schools were neutral to positive about the suitability of school grounds for breaktime activities, though secondary pupils felt the school grounds were in need of repair. Over half of secondary schools had CCTV in the grounds and the school.
- Nearly all schools reported that they organise clubs/activities for pupils during breaktime and after school.
- Most schools allowed facilities to be used by the local community but very few primary and a minority of secondary schools report that these are used on a daily basis.

It is of great concern to find further cuts to breaktimes at a time when there is much government attention on providing opportunities for socialisation, play and for overcoming sedentary lifestyles. The data collected in this survey are of clear importance since they provide the only available systematic data on breaktimes and school playground facilities. Findings suggest that policymakers and schools should take pupils' views and enjoyment of breaktime seriously and thus should stem the trend for cuts to break and lunch times and make efforts to improve the breaktime experience, particularly in secondary schools. Such efforts may address and resolve problems of pupil behaviour. Despite taking up a fifth of the school day, there is still limited understanding about the importance of breaktime experiences for children's social, mental and educational adjustment. Until such research is conducted policy decisions about breaktime will be made with little understanding of their full impact on children's lives.

A follow up national survey of breaktimes in primary and secondary schools. *Final Report to Nuffield Foundation, November 2006*

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In recent years there have been major changes to children's social lives in and out of school. There has been a marked decline in their independence of movement, a widespread sense of danger from traffic and abduction, and a reduction in opportunities for informal peer contact and social interaction outside of school (Hillman, 1993). There have also been changes in schools and there are indications that opportunities for free social interaction with peers in school are also being reduced. However, there is little current systematic data available on the nature and length of breaktimes in primary and secondary schools.

From a national survey conducted in 1995 we know that almost every school has some form of compulsory recreational break - usually a morning break, a longer lunchbreak, and in some schools an afternoon break as well. We also know, however, that breaktimes are seen as a potentially problematic part of the school day and that this has begun to affect the position and length of breaktimes in the school day (Blatchford, 1998). We found in the 1995 survey that although the length of the school day had increased, there was an accompanying trend for time at breaktime to have reduced, particularly the lunchbreak, and for the afternoon break to have been abolished.

There were two main reasons for these changes, according to school staff. The first was to meet pressures to cover the school curriculum and the second was a response to the poor behaviour of some pupils (Blatchford and Sumpner, 1998). It is likely that these reasons will have intensified over the last ten years since the 1995 survey, resulting in further consequences for breaktimes in schools. In schools there has been a proliferation of curriculum reforms, including the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, a greater emphasis on coverage of core curriculum subjects, and increased emphasis on testing and league tables – part of a shift toward a performance based model of education (Osborn et al., 2000). There have also been further concerns over pupil behaviour at breaktime, including bullying. Such concerns are nothing new - they were documented in an early report (Blatchford, 1989), and the Elton committee of 'Enquiry into Discipline in Schools' (D.E.S., 1989) identified the lunchbreak as "the single biggest behaviour related problem that (staff) face." But these concerns have gathered in strength, and worries about lunchtimes have led to recent suggestions by Ministers that it should be shortened in order to keep pupils on site. A recent survey of secondary teachers found they are still concerned about bad behaviour in school and suggest further cuts to breaktime to reduce conflict (Galton et al., 2004). The situation is not exclusive to the UK; there is a strong anti recess view in the US, which has affected policy on the provision of recess (Patte, 2006; Pellegrini, 1995).

But there are reasons for viewing school breaktimes in a more positive light. There are widely publicised concerns about health and obesity among young people, along with fewer opportunities for them to take physical exercise. The Chief Medical Officer has advised "young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day". Breaktime, especially at primary level, is often a time for vigorous physical activity, and has an obvious function in relation to worries about sedentary life styles and childhood obesity. Indeed, a recent review suggests that breaktime at primary school can contribute up to 40% of boys' and 30% of girls' recommended amount of daily physical activity (Ridgers et al., 2006). Further, a recent study on 'reducing children's car use' (Mackett, 2004) concluded that play at breaktime is a main form of exercise for children. These researchers also indicated that reducing school breaks will reduce children's activity, and that the current shift from unstructured to structured out of school activities (e.g. Margo et al., 2006) encourages car use and thus less physical activity in children.

But school breaktime is not just about physical exercise and this is one reason why attempts in some states in the USA to replace it with PE lessons are worrying. It provides, for example, easily overlooked opportunities for outdoor play and recreation. The Mental Health Foundation have suggested that the lack of opportunities and time for children to engage in outside play is a major factor in the rise of mental ill health in young people ('Read the signs' - Department of Health, 2003). Concerns about opportunities and provision for outside play have led to a number of calls for reform and investment (e.g. 'Best Play' 2000). The Government has committed itself to 'do all it can to support play.'(p.44, 'Time for play' 2006), (see also 'Getting serious about play' 2004 and 'Youth Matters' green paper 2005). This is positive but it is notable within documents on play (e.g. 'Time for play' 2006) that there are few mentions of breaktime, play and socialising in schools. While there are other sites for recreation and socialising within communities, it is

important to remember that the one place where virtually all young people can have fun engaging in play, recreation and physical exercise on a regular basis is during school breaktimes.

School breaktimes can also have important developmental and educational implications (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). Breaktimes are perhaps first and foremost a social event (Blatchford, Baines & Pellegrini, 2003; Sutton-Smith, 1982) where important social and life skills may be developed. This social value is often overlooked but is a main reason for a positive view about breaktime (Blatchford, 1996, 1998). In recent years there have been a number of major changes to children's social lives out of school. There is evidence of a marked decline in their independence of movement and choice of activities, and a corresponding increase in journeys accompanied by adults, and being driven to school (Hillman, 1993). This has been accompanied by a widespread sense of risk from traffic and abduction, fuelled by cases widely reported in the media. More anecdotally, there seems to be a corresponding reduction in opportunities for informal peer contact and social interaction out of school and homes. These changes have coincided with the growth of home entertainments such as DVD, computers and console games. In this changing context, there have been concerns expressed about school breaktimes being one of the few remaining contexts for relatively safe pupil-pupil interaction, not dominated by adults, constrained within homes or schools, or mediated through electronic means (Blatchford, 1998).

This study

Despite this changing landscape, little is currently known about changes to breaktime in school. Since the 1995 survey, there are no national statistics on its duration and positioning in the school day, and supervision arrangements and management policies. There is now a broader policy context, affecting social lives in and out of school, which has implications for breaktimes in school. In response to this new context, this follow up study addressed several additional areas. Information was collected on extended school services, including community use and after school clubs, which informal information suggested had grown, perhaps at the expense of time spent at breaktime.

We also felt it was vital in the follow up survey to obtain pupils' own perspectives on breaktime, they are after all the experts and witnesses of what goes on. We therefore conducted an extra survey component that obtained pupils' perspectives on breaktime.

The research aims

The research aimed to:

- provide current, systematic and nationally representative information on a little understood and neglected part of the school day, and systematic information on changes over the last 10 years.
- collect current information on the main features of breaktime, including timing and duration, supervision and facilities provided and views on its value, problems arising and behaviour and information on extended school services.
- obtain information on pupil perspectives on breaktime, social behaviour in and out of school, and travel to and from school.

The project addressed the following areas:

1. Duration of breaktimes, 2. The perceived value and problems arising at breaktime, 3. Supervision at breaktime, 4. Changes to school grounds and school services and use by the community, 5. Breaktime management, 6. Pupil perspectives on breaktime and social life out of school.

This report relates to quantitative results on breaktime, after school clubs and school grounds only. Other results, for instance on pupils' social life outside of school and travel to and from school, will be covered in other reports.

METHOD

1. School Breaktime Questionnaire survey

We conducted a large-scale postal survey, similar to that carried out in the 1995 survey. The 1995 questionnaire was designed on the basis of extensive piloting and previous work on breaktimes (see Blatchford, 1998) and on a national survey in the US (see Pellegrini, 1995), and work in Australia. The 2006 survey was developed after extensive consultation with members of an advisory group and head teachers. It was developed on the basis of two pilot stages involving visits to schools and discussions with head teachers and a pilot postal

survey of primary and secondary schools, in which questions were presented and feedback sought on the questions asked and the responses given.

Sample

On the basis of the previous 1995 survey, and also other more recent surveys, we estimated that to get responses from a 10% sample of schools, questionnaires would need to be sent to a random sample of 18% of all schools in both England and Wales (3,432 at primary level and 680 at secondary level). The head teachers of these schools were sent questionnaires and return envelopes but with the creation of a website (www.breaktime.org.uk) could also complete and return questionnaires electronically. Reminder questionnaires were sent out as necessary. Overall, 1566 questionnaires were returned - an overall responses rate of 38%. Responses were received from 40% of primary and 36% of secondary schools approached in England. Responses from Welsh schools was less good – 29% overall. The sample constitutes 7% of all primary schools and 6% of all secondary schools. The overall return rate does not match the 60% response rate in 1995, but it is better than comparable recent postal surveys to schools (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2006), and provides a sample that is similar in size to the 1995 sample. Further, statistical analyses show that the study sample did not differ from non-returners and the wider population of schools, in terms of region, school type and school background characteristics.

2. Pupil Breaktime Questionnaire Survey

The Student Breaktime Questionnaire was designed on the basis of previous research (e.g., Blatchford, 1996, 1998; Blatchford, Creaser and Mooney, 1990; Blatchford, Galton, Kutnick and Baines, 2005) and after pilot work. It was completed by students in a sub-sample of schools. To avoid placing added strains on pupils already involved in national testing, and also children younger than 7 years, we decided to survey pupils in Years 5, 8 and 10. Questionnaires were adjusted for the different year groups such that questionnaires took about 20 minutes to complete.

From the list of schools that had returned the breaktime questionnaire, we selected 11 secondary and 12 primaries ensuring representation of pupils' experiences from all areas of England and Wales. Subsequent analysis indicated that the selected schools did not vary significantly from all schools in England in terms of main background characteristics. Secondary schools were sent 1200 student questionnaires to be completed by students at Years 8 and 10 and Primary schools received 732 questionnaires to be completed by Year 5 students. Three secondary schools and a primary school did not return questionnaires. The total sample consisted of 1344 students with 808 questionnaires (431 at Y8, 377 at Y10) from secondary schools and 536 from primary schools.

RESULTS

In this report only findings relating to breaktime will be reported and discussed in full. Other findings are summarised or reported in the appendix.

The duration of breaktimes

The duration of all breaktimes added together (usually morning, lunchtime and afternoon) tended to decrease with age of pupil from 91 minutes at KS1, to 77 minutes at KS2 and 69 minutes at secondary school. Results indicated that the length of the lunchbreak was inversely related to age, so that youngest pupils aged 4-7 (KS1) had the longest break, the older primary aged pupils (7-11 years, KS2) had a shorter break, and the oldest pupils of secondary age (11-16 years, KS3 and 4) had the shortest break of all. The three breaktimes as a proportion of the school day took up 24% at KS1, 21% at KS2 and 18% at secondary. This is rather less than the figure of 25% reported by the government in 'Time for play' (2006) (p.11).

There have been interesting changes over the last 15 years. Results from the 1995 survey detected a reduction in some schools over the previous 5 years (i.e., from 1990 to 1995) in the length of the lunchbreak, and that the afternoon break was being abolished at KS2. Results from the 2006 survey show further changes since 1995 (see Table 1). There have been few changes in the overall length of the morning break between 1995 to 2006, with secondary breaktimes longer than those in primary school. But a clear finding is that the length of the lunchbreak has been further reduced at all age levels in school. The number of schools with long lunchbreaks over 65 minutes has substantially reduced at KS1 from 60% to 44%, at KS2 from 31% to 12%, and at KS3/4 from 23% to 5%. Conversely the number of shorter lunchtimes of 64 minutes or less has increased at KS1 from 40% to 56% at KS2 from 68% to 88%, and at KS3/4 from 76% to 95%. Over

half of all lunchtimes at secondary school are now 54 minutes or less, compared to 29% in 1995. Reductions in the length of lunchbreaks are not offset by increases in the length of the morning break.

There has also been a further decrease since 1995 in the number of schools at KS2 that have an afternoon break. Whereas a half of schools in 1995 had an afternoon break at KS2, this number has decreased to just a quarter (26%) of schools by 2006. We also found that the afternoon break effectively does not now exist in secondary schools. Only a minority of schools said they planned to make further changes to the duration of breaktime (only 5% of primary schools), but of those schools that did, a third planned to further shorten the lunchbreak (38% at KS1 and 32% at KS2).

There is therefore clear evidence that the length of the lunchbreak is being reduced at all age levels in school, that it is particularly short at secondary level, and that there has been further reduction in the number of schools that have an afternoon break.

Pupil views on breaktime and its duration

Findings from the pupil survey contrast with those from the school survey. It is clear from the pupil survey that they like both morning and lunchtime breaks, and this is consistent with earlier research (Blatchford, 1998). Views about morning break were overwhelmingly positive; 81% gave a positive response (i.e. 54% said they liked it and 27% thought it was great). Less than 6% of pupils reported that they disliked breaktime. Views on eating time at lunchbreak were also very positive (78% for like it and great) and views on the lunchtime break (i.e., when not eating) were even more positive (see Table 2; 87% said they liked it or it's great). Just 4% expressed a negative view. There are of course problems that can arise at breaktime, from a student's perspective, but the vast majority expressed a positive view, with only a small minority not liking breaktime.

Importantly, given the results on breaktime duration just described, there is no evidence at all that pupils' feel it should be cut back further, indeed they feel that it should be longer or remain the same length. In the case of lunchbreak, for example, over a half (54%) think it is not long enough, 44% think it is about right in length and only 2% think it is too long (see Table 3). This view is not just reflecting the fact that younger, primary aged pupils enjoy play activities, because the view becomes stronger as pupils go through secondary school. By the time they get to Y10, nearly two thirds of students (64%) say that the lunchtime break is not long enough (see Table 3), compared to 59% at Y8 and 43% at Y5. It is also not just reflecting the views of boys who might be expected to be more favourable than girls – there were actually few noticeable sex differences in views on breaktime or its length. Given that secondary lunchbreaks are shorter than those in primary schools, and they have become shorter over the past 10 years, we need to seriously consider whether they have in some schools become TOO short. There may be a point beyond which they become too short to allow even the basic activities of eating, let alone recreational time. (We will see below that secondary students feel that there is not enough time to eat at lunchtime).

Behaviour at breaktimes

One of the main problems at breaktime, identified by staff and pupils alike was the poor behaviour of certain individual pupils (70% of primary schools, 74% of secondary schools; see section on problems at breaktime below). This concern is something that has quite understandably impacted on school policies and management of breaktime. But in response to more specific questions about behaviour at breaktime it was interesting to note (see Table 4) that across all schools the majority thought behaviour at breaktime over the past five years had either improved (40%) or stayed the same (41%). However, there were significant differences between primary and secondary schools, with primary schools more likely to say that standards of behaviour had improved (43% vs 26%) and secondary schools twice as likely to say that behaviour had declined (34% vs 17%). Further, more secondary schools in 2006, compared to 1995, now think that behaviour has declined (34% vs 25%).

There was a clear contrast with views on behaviour out of school (see Table 5). Nearly half of schools overall (47%) thought behaviour out of school had declined, more than double the number who thought that behaviour at breaktime had declined (19%). This contrast in views about behaviour out and in school was particularly marked for primary schools. The majority felt that pupils seem less respectful (76% of respondents), less socially competent (62%), and more aggressive (53%). Primary schools were more likely to point to pupils watching and copying media characters and secondary schools to particular pupils whose behaviour has declined outside school.

It is difficult to account for this difference in school perceptions of behaviour at breaktime and out of school. Interestingly, it was also apparent in the 1995 survey, and the explanation advanced then (Blatchford and Sumpner, 1998) may still hold: it is possible that staff perceptions reflect their own position with regard to control over pupils. That is, a perception of behaviour improving at breaktime may reflect schools' responsibilities for it, and efforts to improve it, while it is easier to see that behaviour out of school has declined because it is not under their control and can be attributable to external factors (e.g. parenting). But there is also the possibility that teachers may be accurate in their judgement that behaviour out of school is declining while in school it is not. If this is true, it may mean that schools are faced with ever more troublesome pupils, and have to work that much harder at behaviour in school, with some success, according to their own analysis.

The results presented here are open to interpretation; more research is required on pupils' social lives and behaviour out of school, against which to test staff perceptions.

The main value and problems of breaktime

Value of breaktime

In terms of frequency of mention, the two main values of breaktime from the point of view of staff were for pupils to release energy and get physical exercise (81%), and for pupils to socialise and develop social skills / life skills (79%). Primary schools were more likely than secondary schools to mention the two main values of: releasing energy and physical activity (85% vs 58%), and socialising and developing social skills (83% vs 60%). They were also more likely to mention free undirected recreation (39% vs 15%). Secondary schools were more likely than primary schools to cite allowing pupils to eat and drink (68% vs 19%), giving teachers a break (22% vs 9%), and allowing pupils to engage in clubs and extra curricular activities (15% vs 3%). Primary schools therefore stress the opportunities breaktime provides for physical exercise and socializing, while secondary schools saw its value more in terms of providing time for eating and drinking and giving teachers a break.

We did not ask pupils about the value of breaktime as such, but in response to an allied question concerning what they liked about breaktime, the vast majority of all pupils (86%), and particularly girls, identified the opportunity it allowed them to be with friends, followed by providing free time for them to do what they want (55%). In addition, primary school pupils like physical activities: they enjoy games and physical exercise (particularly boys), and the problems they have with breaktime are also connected to this, i.e., that ball games get in the way and there is not enough space. Secondary pupils increasingly like breaktime because it affords free time, a chance to relax between lessons and a chance to eat and drink.

In general, pupils and primary school staff are in agreement about the main value of breaktime in terms of the opportunities it provides for exercise, socialising and having a break. This suggests that school staff do perceive that breaktime has a value, though there is a danger that these reasons may underestimate the importance of breaktime and its value to pupils. The reasons given by staff are relatively general and low level, and do not suggest a fundamental value. This was especially true of secondary schools who tended to see the value of breaktime more in functional terms. For their part, pupils may find it difficult to articulate the value of experiences so everyday as meeting and talking to their friends. Yet, as argued below and in more detail elsewhere (Blatchford, 1998), there is a case to be made from reviewing the sociological and psychological literature that breaktime experiences are very important to social development, and that this value is more pressing in the face of changes to social lives out of school. The results from this survey are troubling in showing little appreciation of this, and are descriptive of fundamental changes taking place which run counter to its message. We return to this theme below.

Problems at breaktime

Turning now to the problems at breaktime, as we have seen, primary and secondary schools identified the poor behaviour of some pupils as a main problem (44%). This was followed in frequency of mention by there not being enough things to do (35%), ball games getting in the way (27%), and fun activities being banned (22%). Less frequently cited were not having enough space (18%), not having enough time to eat (17%), and grounds needing repair (8%). Primary schools were also worried about problems arising from football, and secondary schools from problems connected to overcrowding, the quality of supervision and problems of the school grounds. Overall the problems identified were similar to those in 1995.

From the pupils' perspective, at primary level pupils were (in order of frequency of mention) concerned with some pupils behaving badly, ball games getting in the way, not having enough things to do, and not having enough space. At secondary level key problems were the lack of things to do, some pupils behaving

badly, that fun activities were not allowed, and ball games getting in the way. Not having enough time to eat lunch was also seen as a problem at secondary level, particularly at Y10. By Y10 pupils were also more likely to feel the school grounds were in need of repair. At primary level a third of respondents felt there were no problems at breaktime, but at secondary this reduced to about 20% of students.

There is therefore overlap in the perception of staff and pupils in problems that can arise at breaktime, e.g., pupil behaviour, overcrowding, and problems arising from ball games. But pupils - especially secondary pupils - have other concerns that could also be taken seriously. These include not having enough things to do, not having enough space, not having enough time to eat lunch and the need for repair to school grounds. Interestingly, the survey revealed that students at secondary more than at primary school feel that the activities they enjoy doing are not allowed. This is despite the fact that primary children more obviously engage in activities that might be visible to teachers, and therefore stopped, like games and physical activities.

Supervision at breaktime

The survey showed that the overall ratios of numbers of teachers and support staff to pupils were three times higher during lunchbreak in secondary schools (i.e., 99 vs 33) – showing that there were three times as many teaching and supervisory staff available in primary schools relative to the number of pupils (see Table 6). At primary level support staff were the main supervisors at lunchtime, outnumbering teachers by more than 6 to 1, while at secondary level about the same number of teachers and support staff were involved. Despite the recent huge expansion in the number of support staff in schools (Blatchford et al, 2006), it is interesting that the number of breaktime supervisors has not increased since the 1995 survey.

There is an historical context for the greater numbers of supervisors at primary level. During the industrial action in English schools during the 1980s, teachers withdrew in large numbers from supervision at lunchtime, and the gap was filled at primary level by the employment of large numbers of ancillary staff. This was evident in 1995 and a similar picture emerges from the 2006 survey. Primary schools are also more likely to insist that pupils stay out on the playground during breaktime and restrict their access to indoor spaces (see below). There is therefore only a need for supervisors to oversee them there. Yet, at secondary level there are more pupils, who are more dispersed, and there is less supervision provided. Presumably there are expectations that pupils will be more independent and require less attention, though comments from teaching staff on student behaviour at breaktime suggest this is only partially fulfilled in practice.

Interestingly, one point to arise from the pupil survey is that although pupils themselves see that there are some problems at breaktime, they do not generally feel that there is a need for more adults to supervise them at lunchtime. Indeed, most thought the number was about right (64%) and a quarter thought there were already too many adults supervising them! However, 1 in 4 pupils also said that the quality of supervision could be improved.

We asked in the survey about training and support for supervisory staff. Results indicated that there was a general reliance on relatively ad hoc, informal arrangements such as informal discussions with teaching staff. In only a minority of schools was training provided by the LA or outside group, or regular meetings held with senior staff. Primary schools were more likely than secondary schools to offer formal training and support. In contrast, secondary schools were likely to offer support through discussions as and when required. This difference between primary and secondary schools has opened up over the last ten years. Given that secondary schools in particular also felt that one of the problems of breaktime was the quality of supervision, it seems appropriate to ask why more resources in secondary schools are not put into more formal means of training and supporting support staff supervising at breaktime, or even regular meetings with school staff.

It needs to be acknowledged that there is a problem for schools stemming from the turnover of supervisory staff (Blatchford et al, 2006). There is also a danger of blaming supervisors, and questioning the quality of supervision provided, when the rates of pay and conditions of service of support staff are not necessarily sufficient to provide quality supervision. Given that breaktime still takes up a sizeable part of the school day, we argue that supervision needs to be seen as important and worthy of as much planning and forethought as that given to teaching within the classroom. Our call at the time of the 1995 survey for supervision at breaktime to be fundamentally reconsidered therefore still seems relevant today.

Organisation of breaktime

Schools differed in how strict they were about going out to the playground during breaktime. Most primary schools expected pupils to stay out of the school buildings during all breaks, while most secondary schools allowed access to some or all areas of the school.

The practice in secondary schools of allowing students off site during the lunch break has become controversial given concerns about behaviour out of school and the quality of food eaten at lunchtime. We found that just under two thirds of pupils were allowed off the school premises at lunchtime, though over half of these required parental permission.

Suitability of school grounds at breaktime and facilities available

- A larger proportion of secondary school headteachers than primary headteachers felt that their school grounds were unsuitable for supervision at breaktime (35% vs 7%).
- Almost all primary schools (90%), but far fewer secondary schools (64%), thought that the school grounds were adequate or good for breaktime activities.
- Secondary schools were more likely to have sports areas (93% vs 70%) and multi-use games areas (79% vs 61%) than primary schools who in turn were more likely to have playground markings (96% vs 62%), portable equipment (94% vs 67%) and a quiet area (94% vs 77%).
- Nearly two thirds of primary schools had worked with an outside agency to improve the school grounds compared to less than half of secondary schools.
- Secondary schools were more likely to have CCTV in the grounds (64 vs 26%) and the school (59 vs 14%), while primary schools were more likely to have secure access into the school (66% vs 25%).

A consistent picture therefore emerges from this survey concerning facilities at breaktime. Primary schools are more likely to find the school grounds suitable for several key activities and are more likely to have facilities available and judge them to be of a higher quality than secondary schools. They are also more likely to have worked with outside agencies. This picture can be seen alongside the concerns of secondary pupils that there were not enough things to do, ball games got in the way, fun activities were banned, there was not enough space, and school grounds needed repair.

Questions could therefore be asked about whether more could be made of the outside grounds in secondary schools. At secondary level some pupils felt the school grounds were in need of repair. The descriptions of some pupils indicated that there should be little surprise if they preferred to stay in the canteen or leave the school premises altogether. Given concerns with the health and level of physical activity of young people, and also worries about a decline in outside play and activities in young people, more attention could be paid to improving the school grounds and facilities available for pupils. There may be understandable reasons why secondary school grounds are not considered to be particularly good for breaktime, for example, many do not have one single designated space but must allow students to cover a variety of areas all over the school. This will make supervision difficult in particular but may also affect the quality and management of breaktimes. However, improvement may also be affected by the different value attached to breaktime by secondary schools, with an emphasis on eating and drinking and release of energy, in comparison to that in primary schools on recreation and socialisation. It may be the case that the Government's investment in rebuilding and developing schools and grounds may improve these features in the future. Further efforts by organizations such as Learning Through Landscapes may also help secondary schools to improve their school grounds for recreation and socialization.

Organised activities and clubs

- The majority of primary (82%) and secondary schools (87%) said they organised activities for breaktime.
- The most popular breaktime activities were music (55%), team sports (45%) and computing/IT (38%).
- Nearly all schools organized activities for pupils before or after school (e.g., after school clubs).
- Nearly half of primary schools put on breakfast clubs. Most of these clubs were run by the school.
- Despite greater provision of clubs at secondary level, the pupil survey showed that there was a trend for adolescents (particularly girls) to reduce their attendance of clubs in Year 10. This may reflect reduced interest in organised activities, but also an increased commitment to forthcoming GCSEs.

Given the lack of comparable data, it is difficult to be sure whether organised activities at breaktime and after school have increased or not. It seems safe to say that after school clubs in primary school are a relatively new phenomenon. These structured and organized activities are functioning to unofficially extend

the school day. It may be the case that these clubs are perceived as providing (or increasing) the opportunities children have to play with and to socialise with others thus lessening the need for these opportunities, through breaktimes, during the formal school day. However, research is needed to confirm this view and to examine the implications of the expansion of after school activities relative to in-school learning and opportunities for pupils to socialise with others.

Organised activities during breaktime might well help schools to address problems that can arise, but these clubs may also function to reduce opportunities for the kinds of activities also valued by pupils and schools, namely, physical activities, play and socialising.

Community use of school grounds

- About half (52%) of primary and the majority (89%) of secondary schools allowed parts of the school to be used by the local community (i.e., for activities other than those associated with the school, or school fund raising).
- Only 8% or less of primary schools have any of their facilities used daily by the local community. A quarter of secondary schools allow community use of rooms and 10 - 15% allow the use of the playground and field on a daily basis.

These figures suggest the notion of extended schools and extending facilities into the local community is something that is going on but on rather a limited basis. Far greater use could be made of school grounds. However, reasons for limited use of schools and facilities may be as much to do with the local community and the location of the school as well as time taken to make changes and make the school grounds accessible and safe for use by the local community.

CONCLUSION

Differences between primary and secondary schools

The results from the school and pupil surveys identified consistent differences between primary and secondary schools. To summarise: in comparison to primary schools secondary schools were more likely to:

- Have shorter breaks overall and shorter lunchbreaks.
- Say that standards of behaviour at breaktime had declined over the past five years (and more secondary schools in 2006 in comparison with 1995 now think behaviour has declined).
- See the value of breaktime more in functional terms - allowing time to eat and drink and giving staff a break - rather than as an opportunity for socialisation and exercise.
- Identify problems at breaktime arising from overcrowding, the quality of supervision and problems of the school grounds.
- Have fewer teaching and supervisory staff available, and have six times as few supervisory staff available at lunchbreak.
- Rely on an informal approach to supervisor training and support in contrast with primary schools which offer formal training and support, (e.g., training by LAs and other agencies and more frequent meetings with senior staff). This difference had grown since 1995.
- See school grounds as less suitable for supervision, breaktime activities and teaching and learning.
- Not have facilities available for use at breaktime and to judge facilities as of poor quality.
- Not have worked with outside agencies to improve the grounds or breaktime for pupils.
- Have CCTV in and out of school and be more concerned with security arrangements.
- Allow the local community to use school rooms and other facilities and more regularly.

We have also seen that secondary school pupils are more likely to say that there are not enough things to do, fun activities are banned, there is not enough time to eat and drink, not enough space and that the school grounds need repair.

All of this suggests that breaktime is seen as more of a problem in secondary schools but at the same time receives less attention and planning. Though problems are seen in terms of the behaviour of pupils, overcrowding, supervision and the school grounds, less effort is put into training and supporting staff, and providing facilities at breaktime. This suggests that secondary schools could do more to provide formal

training and preparation of supervisors (and perhaps teachers). They could also provide more and better quality facilities, and attend more to the quality of the school grounds. They might do this through greater links with outside agencies.

The fact that secondary schools have shorter breaktimes, especially the lunchbreak, suggests that rather than give thought to the pupils' experience and the school grounds, they have taken the simple expedient of solving a perceived problem area by cutting back on it. They have also attended more to security arrangements. It is true that they put on more specific activities and clubs during breaktime, but this would not seem to offset the other differences identified here. There is a clear contrast with the pupil experience: they like breaktime and do not want to see it cut back any more.

The role and function of Breaktime in Schools

This study has examined the nature of and changes to breaktime and school grounds in school. There clearly are difficulties that can arise at breaktime. One main problem recognized by both school staff and pupils is enduring worries about the bad behaviour of some pupils. It is therefore understandable if one solution involves limiting the contexts within which it occurs most frequently.

However, the overall impression arising out of the survey of pupils' views about breaktime was at odds with one which stresses the problems that arise and the view that breaktime should be kept tightly managed and as short as possible. The vast majority of students viewed breaktime positively and they value the social opportunities it allows, would prefer it to be longer and would like to see constraints on enjoyable activities, and the degree of supervision, to be eased.

It is clear from our results that the lunchbreak and the afternoon break are being cut back. This reduction of school breaktimes is happening despite recent debates and continuous media attention on physical health and obesity, reduced opportunities for play and increased concern about safety, school meal nutrition, mental health, and young persons' opportunities for socializing. It appears that breaktime is being taken for granted while at the same time it is increasingly being cut back. Yet the physical, health and social opportunities afforded by breaktimes are in virtually all schools in all communities, whether wealthy or deprived. There are good reasons for making more of these opportunities and thus extending breaktimes rather than cutting them back.

The reductions of breaktimes identified here suggest that pupils and particularly students at secondary school would be hard pressed to achieve appropriate levels of physical activity during breaktimes as well as to have something to eat and drink (see Ridgers et al, 2006). Results also suggest that while the government is encouraging schools to provide extended opportunities and facilities for socialising, play and exercise in and outside of school time (p.19, 'Time for play' 2006), these opportunities are being further eroded during school hours. It begs the question as to why schools are being encouraged to develop their school grounds, when these spaces are being used less for social and recreational purposes during breaktimes.

It is a salutary finding that, despite recent reforms, students say that the best thing about school is the chance to meet their friends – and it is breaktime that provides the main forum for their social life and well being at school. Of course this can have a negative side. Social relations can be fractious, and the misery caused by bullying and harassment has to be recognised and dealt with. But breaktime is also a time when friends, not always in the same class, can meet; a time when they can have fun and at primary level construct activities in a relatively safe environment; a time when important social networks are formed; a time when important social skills can be learned; a time when they can fall out, but can also develop strategies for avoiding conflict. It is a rare time when they can find freedom and a social life independent of the classroom, where the rules of conduct are more their own, and where activities stem from their own initiative. It is easy to assume that breaktime has little value for secondary pupils when all they seem to do is talk and hang around together. But this would be to underestimate the value of these informal contexts for social interaction.

Evidence of further cuts to breaktime and shortening of lunchtimes take on more significance in the light of findings on children's opportunities to meet with friends outside of school. In other results from the study we found that nearly a third of children did not get to see friends outside of school more than once per week. These figures are of concern especially since it is unclear to what extent these opportunities were under the control of adults – if so this would suggest even fewer opportunities for relatively free interactions with peers. When this is combined with recent research findings showing limited use of group work in classrooms (Baines et al., 2003), it appears that we are really starting to cut back on school aged children's direct opportunities for engaging socially with peers in collaborative (informal or formal) activities. Furthermore, in

expressing their right to choice of school, parents are sending their children to locations outside of their local communities with obvious knock on effects on children's social life outside school.

In the light of findings reported here, there may be concerns about children's opportunities for developing social skills. Research reports from the IPPR indicate that the behaviour of teenagers in the UK is worse than in other countries, and suggest that we should seek to increase time spent with parents and adults and time spent in adult structured and supervised clubs in and out of schools (Margo et al. 2006). These conclusions are part of a negative view of relatively independent peer interaction – that it can lead to negative, anti-social behaviour, and that it is best kept to a minimum and controlled. It is the same view as that voiced by schools with regard to problems arising at breaktime. But even if pupils do engage in anti-social behaviour we query the view that the solution is yet more adult structure and control. Just as important, we feel, is dealing with it in the context of everyday peer interaction itself (e.g. during school breaktimes). Whilst schools and teachers can be effective in teaching children about moral understanding, children also learn from their own experiences, mistakes and reflections. School breaktimes play an important role here. The difficulties that staff know arise at breaktime can be viewed positively in the sense that they can be the basis for discussion with pupils and greater involvement of pupils in school decisions and management (Blatchford, 1998), within a moral framework provided by the school. We argue that schools should take on board pupil perspectives and seek to find ways to reconcile the interests of school management and to minimise difficulties that can arise at breaktime with the important social, physical and mental benefits of breaktime.

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Appendix

Table 1: Duration of Morning, Lunch and Afternoon Breaks (% of schools)

		KS1		KS2		KS3/4	
		1995	2006	1995	2006	1995	2006
AM	No Break	3	0	4	0	3	0
	10 mins	3	1	4	2	2	1
	15 mins	78	83	79	84	44	40
	20 mins	17	15	14	14	48	53
	25 mins +	2	2	3	1	7	6
Lunchtime	Up to 45 mins	3	1	4	1	10	22
	45-54 mins	2	4	7	17	19	34
	55-64 mins	35	51	57	69	47	39
	65-74 mins	16	15	14	8	16	5
	75 mins +	44	29	17	4	7	0
PM	No break	30	30	58	74	87	96
	5 mins	0	1	0	0	0	1
	10 mins	17	21	13	11	4	2
	15 mins	50	46	27	14	4	1
	20 mins	2	3	1	1	1	0
	25 mins +	1	0	2	0	5	0

Table 2: Pupil views on lunchtime, when not eating

		How much do you like the lunchtime break? (when you are outside on the playground, not when you are eating)					Total
		Great	Like	Not sure	Don't like	Hate it	
Year 5	N	369	110	33	12	10	534
	% within Year	69%	21%	6%	2%	2%	100%
Year 8	N	200	177	35	11	6	429
	% within Year	47%	41%	8%	3%	1%	100%
Year 10	N	163	140	50	14	6	373
	% within Year	44%	38%	13%	4%	2%	100%
Total	N	732	427	118	37	22	1336
	% within Year	55%	32%	9%	3%	2%	100%

Table 3: Pupil views on the length of the lunchbreak

		How happy are you about the length of lunch time breaks?			Total
		Too long	About right	Not long enough	
Year 5	N	7	296	224	527
	% within Year	1%	56%	43%	100%
Year 8	N	3	171	249	423
	% within Year	1%	40%	59%	100%
Year 10	N	19	116	240	375
	% within Year	5%	31%	64%	100%
Total	N	29	583	713	1325
	% within Year	2%	44%	54%	100%

Table 4: School's experience of any changes to the behaviour of pupils at breaktime or lunchtime since 2000/1.

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	1995	2006	1995	2006	1995	2006
Improved	42	43	28	26	39	40
Not changed	37	41	47	40	39	41
Declined	21	17	25	34	22	19

$\chi^2 (2) 41.57, p<.001$

Table 5: Whether schools felt that behaviour out of school (when not supervised by an adult e.g. walking home from school or at weekends) had changed over the past five years

	Primary		Secondary		Total	
	1995	2006	1995	2006	1995	2006
Improved	6	6	9	8	6	7
Not changed	37	46	40	47	38	46
Declined	57	48	51	45	56	47

$\chi^2 (2)=1.8, p=.41 (2006)$

Table 6: Pupil/staff ratios for breaktime supervision duty

	Primary				Secondary			
	1995		2006		1995		2006	
	Mean	Ratio	Mean	Ratio	Mean	Ratio	Mean	Ratio
Morning break								
Teaching staff	2.1	122	1.9	116	8.7	104	7.0	111
Support staff	1.1	156	1.6	119	0.5	337	1.2	354
Pupils on duty	-	-	2.0	50	5.0	93	3.9	113
Total ratio		86		67		97		92
Lunch break								
Teaching staff	1.1	179	0.7	177	4.8	231	5.9	234
Support staff	5.9	38	6.2	35	4.8	186	5.4	216
Pupils on duty	-	-	3.0	46	4.1	98	4.5	132
Total ratio		33		33		91		99

Note: Ratio of staff on the playground to pupils on school roll was calculated by dividing the number of teachers and supervisors on breaktime supervision duty by the total pupils on roll. We used the number of pupils as reported by schools in 1995 and 2006, rather than PLASC data which did not include Welsh schools. This is a relatively general statistic in that it does not take account of situations in which not all pupils were on the playground at once, e.g. staggered breaks - so the figures may not reflect the actual ratios on the playground at any given moment. However, only a few schools stagger their lunch breaks and thus the figures for the lunch time break are likely to be reliable. In some cases 1995 figures vary from those published previously. This is because errors were found in the data which have now been corrected.