

# Hot School Meals Pilot Project

## Main Report July 2020

Prepared by  
Ian McShane & Rachael Joyce

J.201817



# Research Background & Objectives

- During the 2019/2020 school year a pilot project was carried out across the country, to gauge the efficacy of providing hot school meals in primary schools.
- This research was carried out to understand the experience of being involved in the pilot project, from the perspective of parents, teachers, principals and food suppliers.
- The Department of Social Protection used the findings of this research to help it make decisions about the future of the programme.



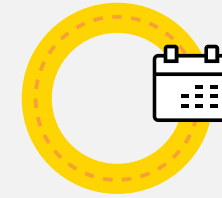


- An online survey was developed and distributed via email to parents, teachers and principals.
- Achieved sample sizes for each cohort are outlined below.

Survey Type	Estimated Universe	Achieved Sample	Response Rate
Parent	6000	1120	19%
Teacher	300	215	72%
Principal	37	33	89%



- Qualitative one-to-one depth interviews were conducted over the phone with 5 suppliers, of various sizes and based in different locations in Ireland.



- Fieldwork for the online survey ran from Friday 5th to Friday 26th June 2020.
- The supplier depths were conducted between Monday 22nd June – Friday 3rd July 2020.



## Key Highlights

# Key Highlights



Overall the hot meals are rated highly in terms of quality, choice, portion sizes, dietary requirements and nutritional value - the **vast majority** (of the combined total of parents, teachers/SNAs and principals) **rate** each of these aspects **positively**, with around **a third** giving a rating of **excellent**.



Over **two-thirds (68%)** of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals rate the **hot meals as better quality** than food that children ate previously, with **3 in 10 (30%)** saying they are **much** higher quality.



Over **a third** of parents say that the hot meals pilot project had a **very positive impact** on their **child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological wellbeing**. Around **2 in 5** strongly agree that their children found the hot meals to be **tasty/enjoyable, satisfying/filling** and **encouraged them to eat more healthily**, while **3 in 5** strongly agree that their children **enjoyed taking part**.



**Two-thirds (66%)** of teachers/SNAs say the pilot project had a **positive impact** on **children's diet**, while **over half** say it **positively impacted behaviour, attentiveness and psychological wellbeing**.



The **vast majority** of principals say that **interacting** and **coordinating** with **suppliers** was **very easy**. Other aspects of the projects' implementation were also considered easy by the majority.



Over **two-thirds (68%)** of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say that the pilot project **increased food waste**. **Almost half (47%)** of **teachers** say that the **increase was significant**.



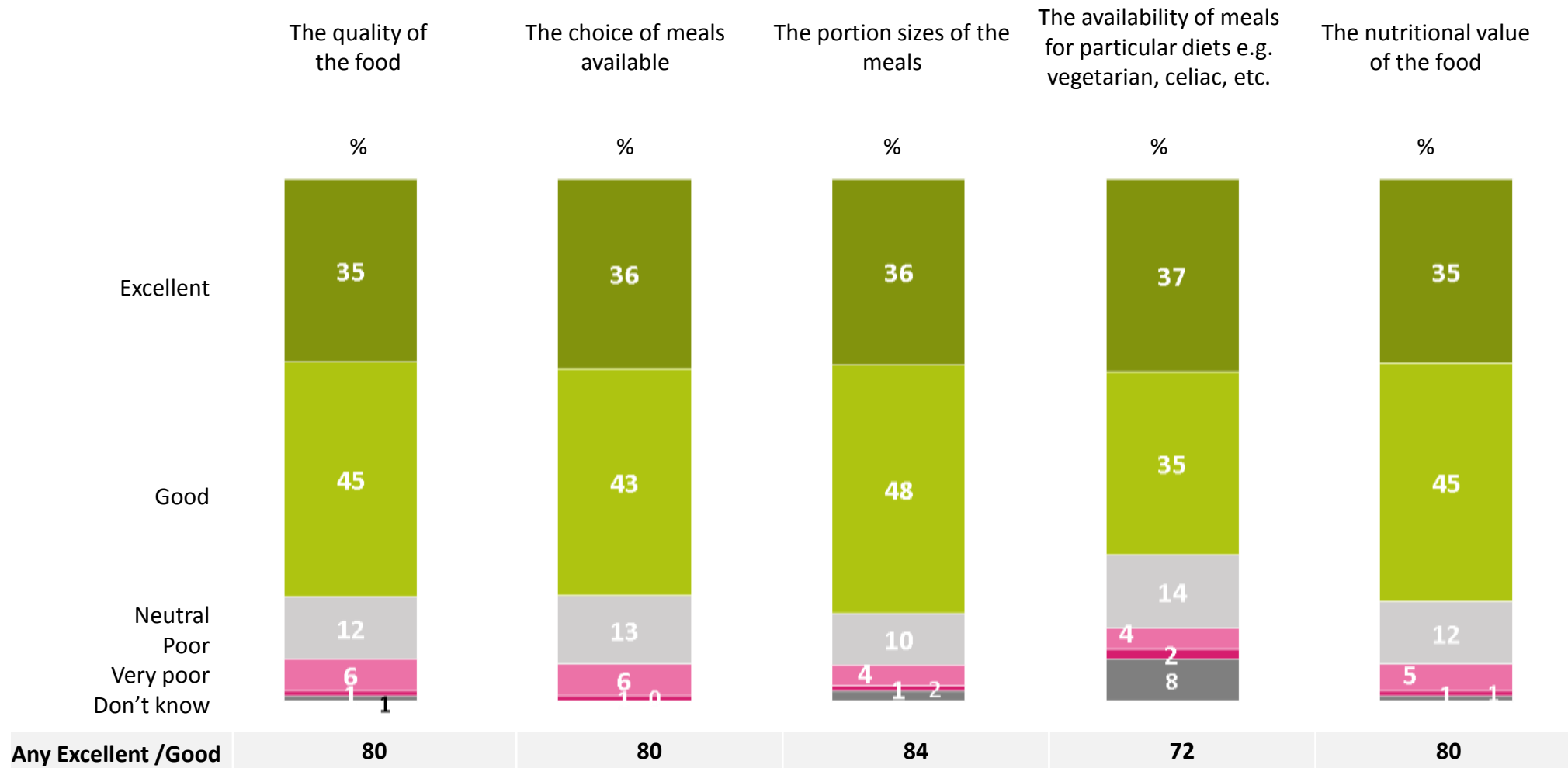
Over **3 in 5 (63%)** of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say it is important all children in the school receive a hot meal.



## Ratings of the Hot Meals

# Overall Ratings of the Hot Meals

Base: All Parents/Teachers/SNAs/Principals N - 1368



Overall the hot meals are rated highly in terms of quality, choice, portion sizes, dietary requirements and nutritional value - the vast majority (of the combined total of parents, teachers/SNAs and principals) rate each of these aspects positively, with around a third giving a rating of *excellent*.

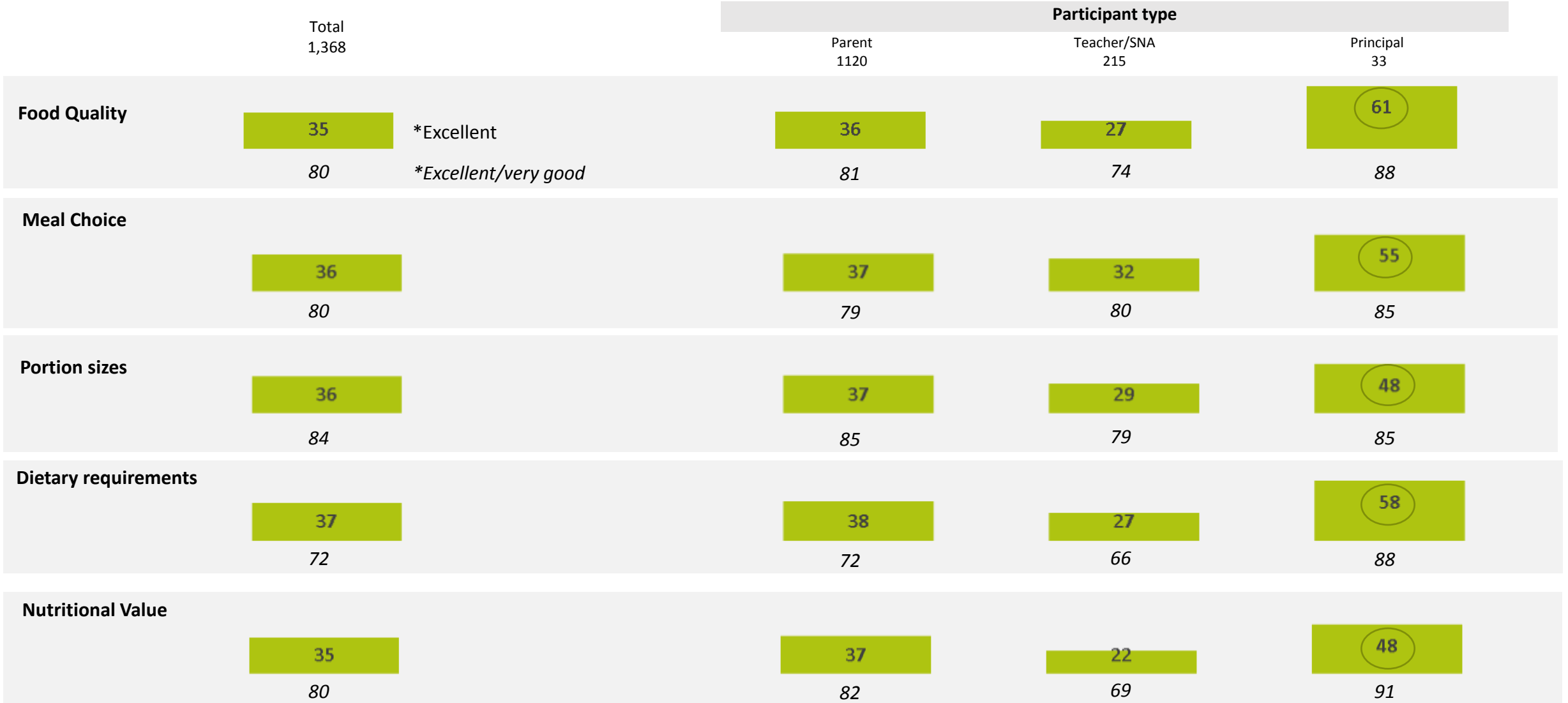


Q1. Thinking about the Hot School Meals Pilot Project how would you rate...

# Overall Positive Ratings of the Hot Meals



Base: All Parents/Teachers/SNAs/Principals N - 1368



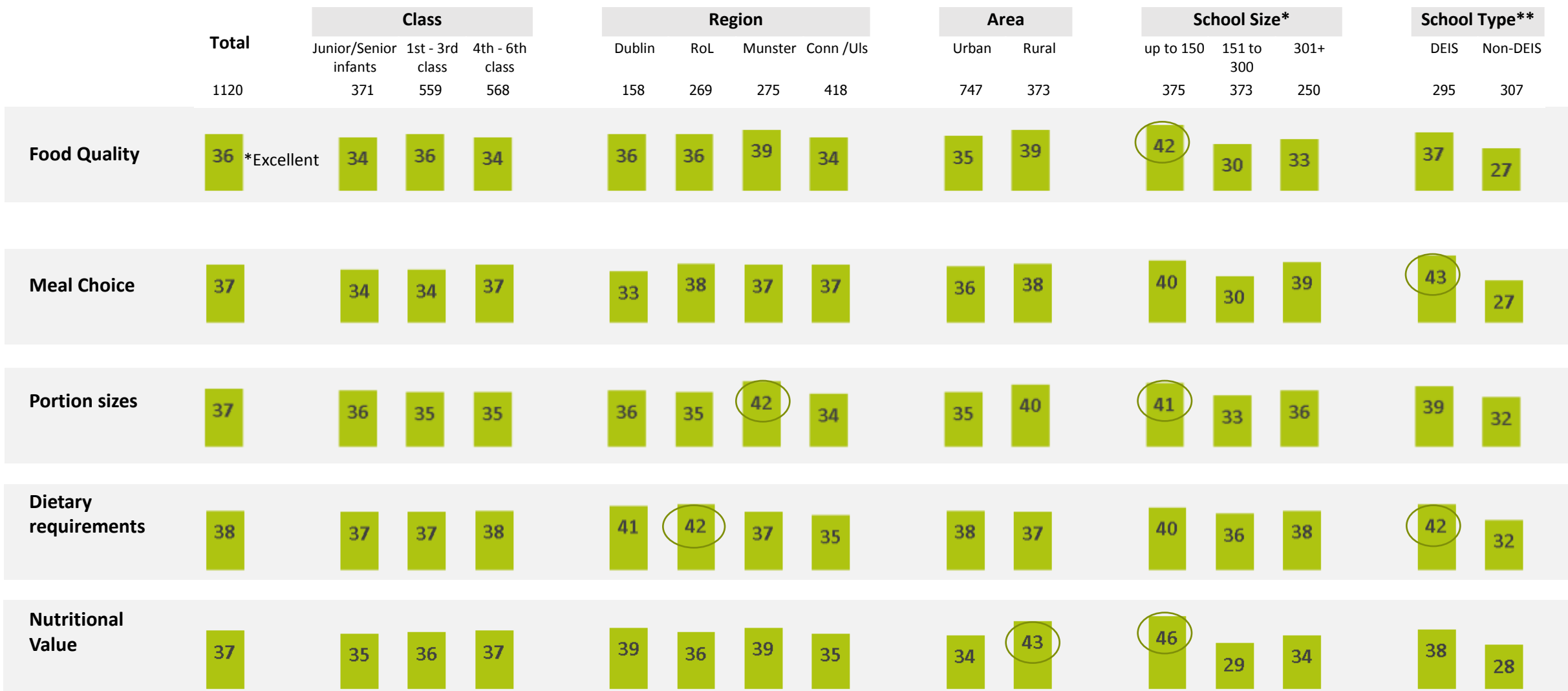
In terms of the individual parent, teacher and principal groupings, again we can see that the majority in each rate the hot meals positively. Principals are most likely to give excellent ratings.





# Parents' "Excellent" Ratings of the Hot Meals

Base: All Parents N - 1120



Amongst the parent group, those with children attending smaller, DEIS schools are more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent.

\*Approx. 122 parents did not know school size  
 \*\*Approx. 518 parents did not know school type

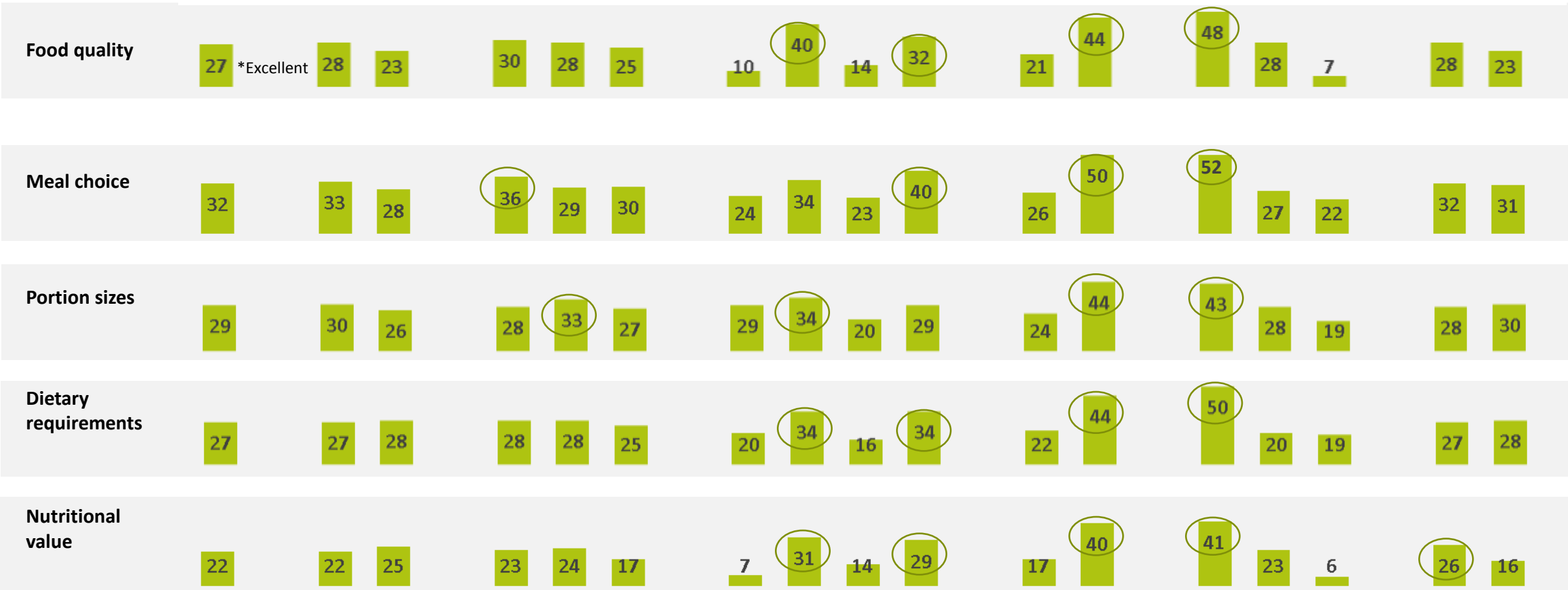


# Teachers’/SNAs’ “Excellent” Ratings of the Hot Meals

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



	Job title.		Class			Region				Area		No. of Pupils			School type		
	Total	Teacher	(SNA)	Junior /Senior	1st - 3rd	4th - 6th	Dublin	RoL	Munst er	Conn/ Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
	215	162	53	74	107	102	41	68	44	62	165	50	56	90	69	134	81



Amongst the Teacher/SNA groups, those in smaller, rural schools are more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent on all criteria.



# Principals' "Excellent" Ratings of the Hot Meals

Base: All Principals N - 33



	Total	Region		Area		School Size		School Type	
		Dublin/ ROL	Munster Conn/Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
	33	21	12	16	17	19	14	18	15
Food Quality	61 *Excellent	62	58	56	65	74	43	61	60
Meal Choice	55	52	58	63	47	63	43	56	53
Portion sizes	48	43	58	56	41	47	50	44	53
Dietary requirements	58	62	50	63	53	63	50	61	53
Nutritional Value	48	43	58	38	59	58	36	39	60

Amongst the principals' group, those in smaller schools are more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent in terms of quality, choice, dietary requirements and nutritional value.



# Suppliers' Perspective

- Overall, suppliers felt that the schools were very satisfied with the quality of the food provided.
  - ❖ Most actively sought feedback on the meals from schools to help them improve and refine their menus.
  - ❖ All suppliers felt that by the time the schools closed, they had strong menus, with plenty of choice available.
- Providing meals suitable for dietary requirements didn't pose any significant challenge to suppliers – in general there weren't many children with specific needs.
  - ❖ Some suppliers felt that in the beginning, their vegetarian/vegan options were a little weaker or less creative, however, these were improved upon throughout the year.
- Portion sizes tended to be the same for all classes and feedback from suppliers on this was mixed.
  - ❖ Some reported no issues, but a couple felt they were too large for the younger children, based on feedback from teachers and principals.
  - ❖ In schools where the food was prepared on the day, children had the option to bring their leftovers home – portion size may have been less of an issue for this reason.
  - ❖ Others received feedback on the size of the actual components of the meals, for example “too much rice and not enough sauce”.



*We used to send out little questionnaires for the kids so we could see what they liked or didn't like.*

*When we started with the vegan options I would have said they were poor. But we have someone working with us who's into that. We started really with just veg and sauces, but now we have meatless sausages, vegan fishfingers and meatballs. We have it much better now than we had at the start.*

*The portion sizes were the same across the board. But what most of them did, they ate what they could and the rest they brought home. That's the feedback I got from the school.*

*We started off with a single size portion, but very quickly realised from teachers and principals that the younger classes needed a smaller portion. We had begun to edge toward this change but then COVID-19 hit, but I think we will be doing different portion sizes from September.*



# Suppliers' Perspective

- The main challenge for suppliers in relation to the food standards was the “large” amount of veg required.
  - ❖ Suppliers felt that if children are confronted with too many vegetables early on, this can lead them to refuse the meal, meaning the food goes to waste, or disengage altogether.
  - ❖ The general consensus, therefore, was that some flexibility was required in the beginning to allow them gradually introduce more vegetables.
  - ❖ All felt they were near the mark by the time schools closed in March, however, they had to be creative (blending into curries, carrot and beetroot muffins, etc.).
- For one supplier, working with non-DEIS schools, or schools where meals were not ‘needed’, was challenging, as in their opinion, the standards and expectations of these parents were too high.



*It is difficult to meet the required amount of veg. For it to work with these children from disadvantaged areas, you've got to get them to buy into getting a hot meal first, and then slowly introduce it. Too much change can cause waste, so we've crept it up as we went along.*

*At the end of the day, in a lot of cases the kids who are availing of these meals need the food. So there is no point sending in food to a child who is hungry but won't eat it because they don't like it. I'll be honest with you, they are not mad about veg.*

*The directive of the programme is first and foremost to feed the kids. And in close second, to give them something highly nutritious. But if you have a kid and all they get is fast food, you can't move them to a healthy diet overnight.*

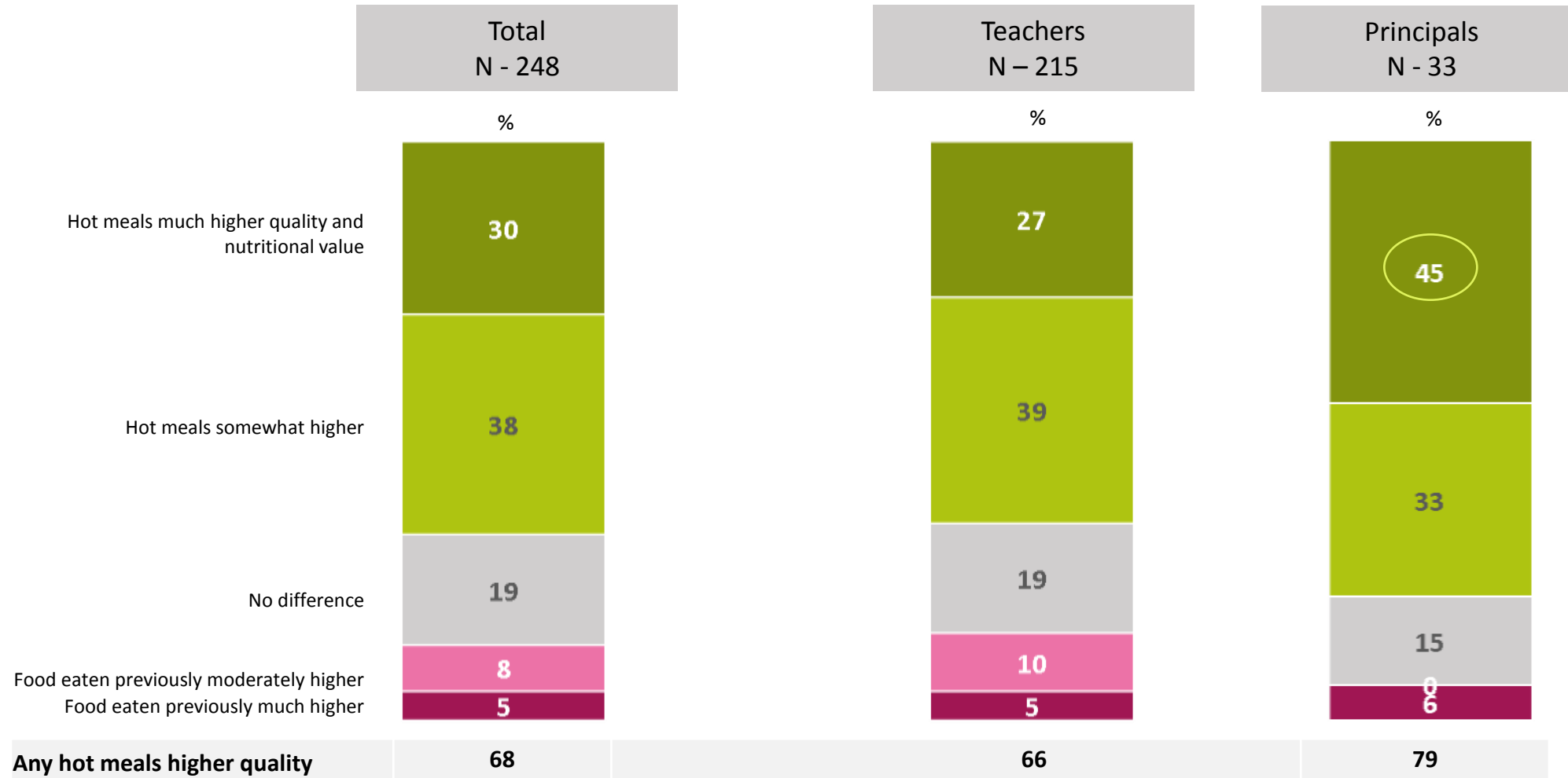
*I would have veg in everything unknown to them. Say the meatballs would have onion in them, for the curry I would blitz the veg into it. I made courgette muffins, beetroot and carrot muffins.*



# Comparison of Hot Meals with Food Eaten Previously



Base: All Teachers/SNAs/Principals N - 248



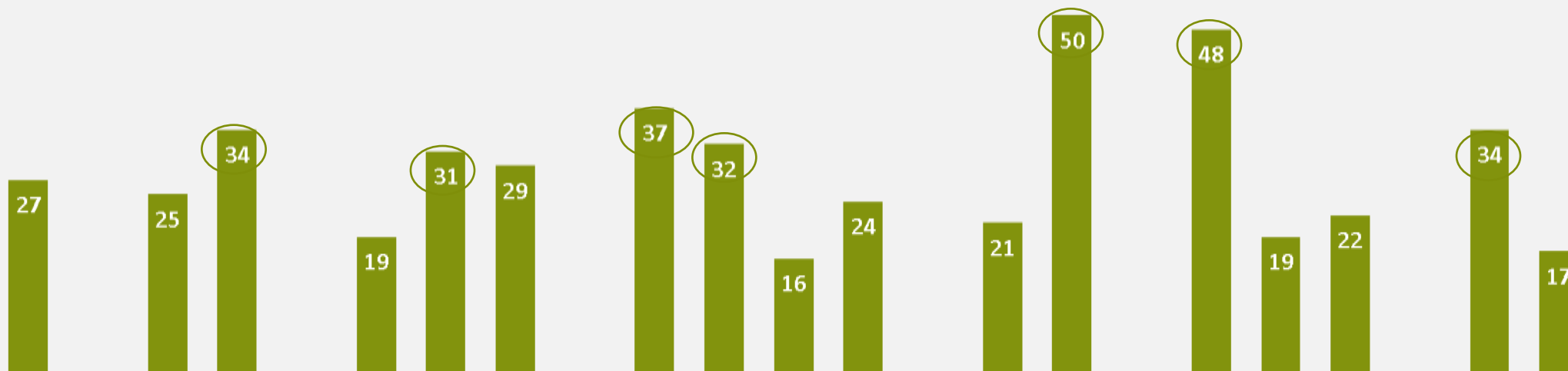
Around two-thirds (68%) of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals rate the hot meals as better quality than food that children ate previously, with 3 in 10 (30%) saying they are 'much higher' quality. When comparing teachers'/SNAs' and principals' ratings, the latter are more likely to rate the quality of the hot meals as being *much* higher.

# Teachers’/SNAs’ “Much Higher” Quality Ratings

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



Total	Job title.		Class			Region				Area		No. of Pupils			School type	
	Teacher	(SNA)	Junior /Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munst er	Conn/ Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
215	162	53	74	107	102	41	68	44	62	165	50	56	90	69	134	81



\*Hot meals much higher quality

**Around half of teachers in smaller, rural schools rate the hot meals as being ‘much higher’ quality than the food children ate previously.**

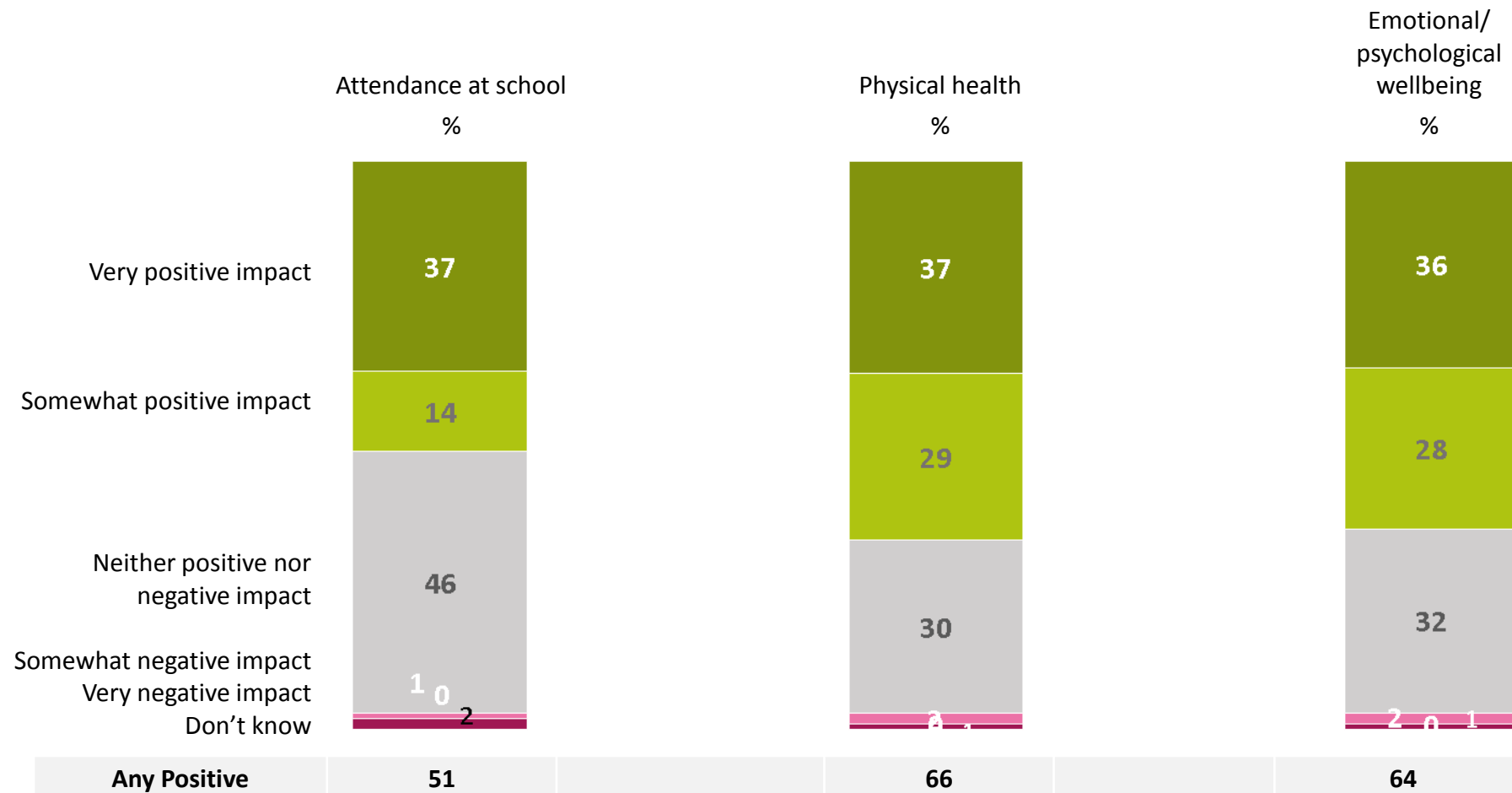


# Impact of the Project



# Parents' Project Impact Ratings

Base: All Parents - 1120



Over a third of parents say that the hot meals pilot project had a very positive impact on their child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological wellbeing. While the majority of parents say the pilot project had a positive impact in each of these three areas, a notable proportion say it had neither a positive nor negative impact, particularly in relation to school attendance.



# Parents' "Very Positive" Impact Ratings

Base: All Parents - 1120



	Total	Class			Region				Area		School Size*			School Type**	
		Junior /Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munster	Conn /Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
	1120	371	559	568	158	269	275	418	747	373	375	373	250	295	307
School Attendance	37 *Very positive	36	35	37	34	32	39	39	35	39	39	34	34	39	22
Physical Health	37	33	36	38	36	34	36	39	35	40	43	31	33	39	23
Emotional/ Psychological Wellbeing	36	35	35	38	33	31	40	38	36	37	39	34	35	37	25

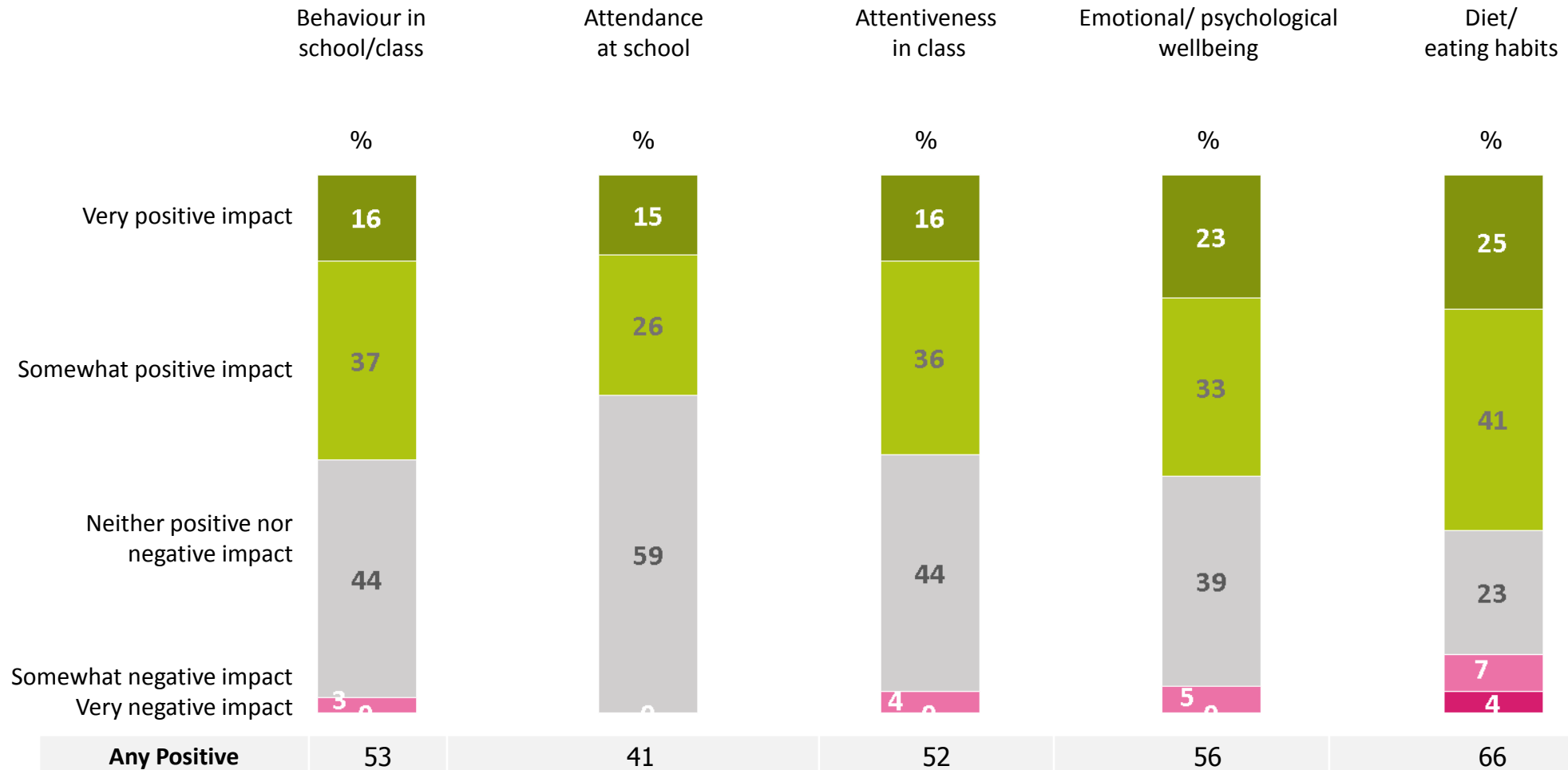
Those parents of children in non-DEIS schools are least likely to say that the hot meals pilot project had a very positive impact on their child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological wellbeing.

\*Approx. 122 parents did not know school size  
 \*\*Approx. 518 parents did not know school type



# Teachers’/SNAs’ Project Impact Ratings

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



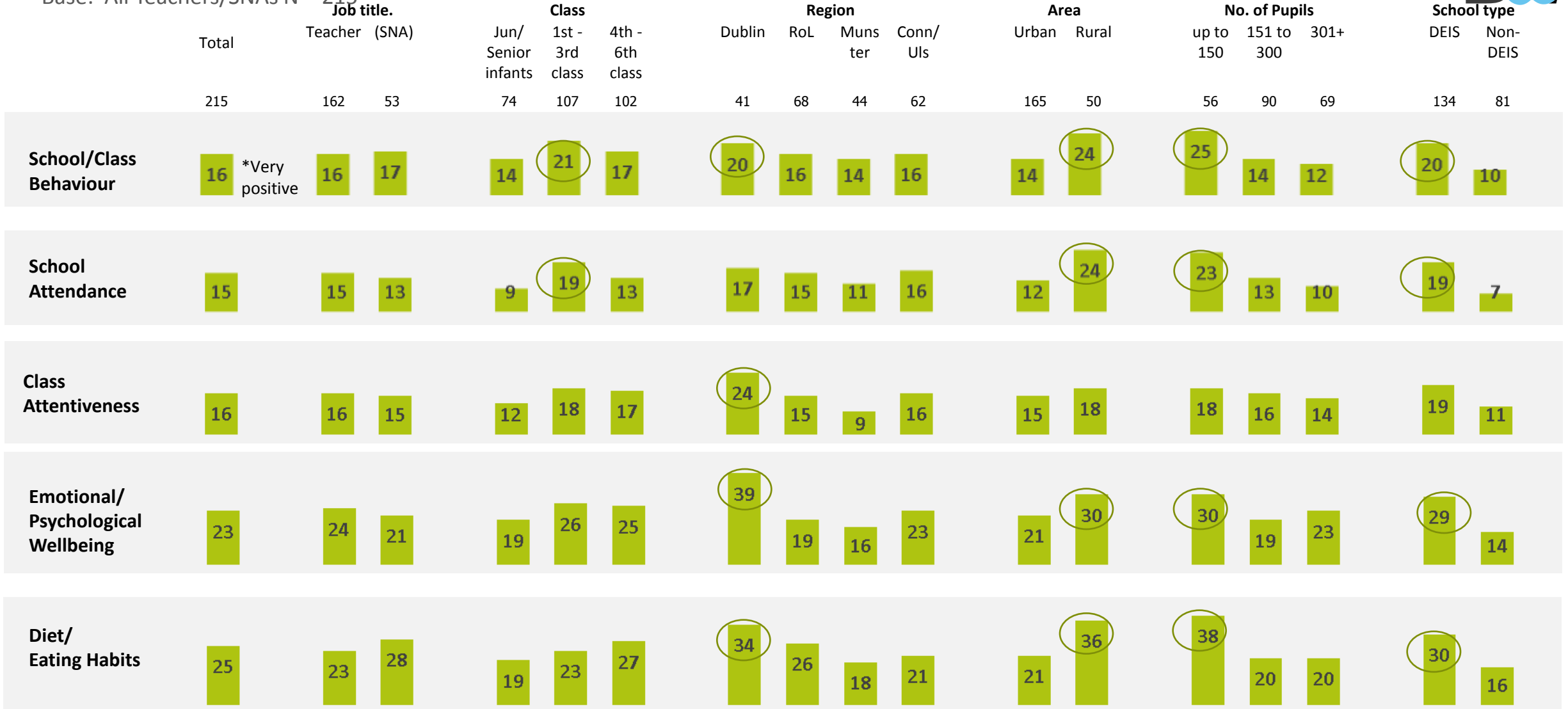
Amongst teachers/SNAs, the pilot project is perceived as having the greatest impact on children’s diet/eating habits – with two-thirds (66%) saying it had a positive impact in this area. Just over half say the pilot project positively impacted children’s behaviour, attentiveness and psychological wellbeing. The impact of the pilot project on children’s attendance is rated comparatively less positively, with the majority saying it had no impact in this area.



Q2. And what impact (if any) did the Hot School Meals Pilot Project have on your pupils’...

# Teachers'/SNAs' "Very Positive" Impact Ratings

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



Teachers/SNAs in smaller, DEIS, Dublin or rural based schools are more likely to say the pilot project had a very positive impact on the children.



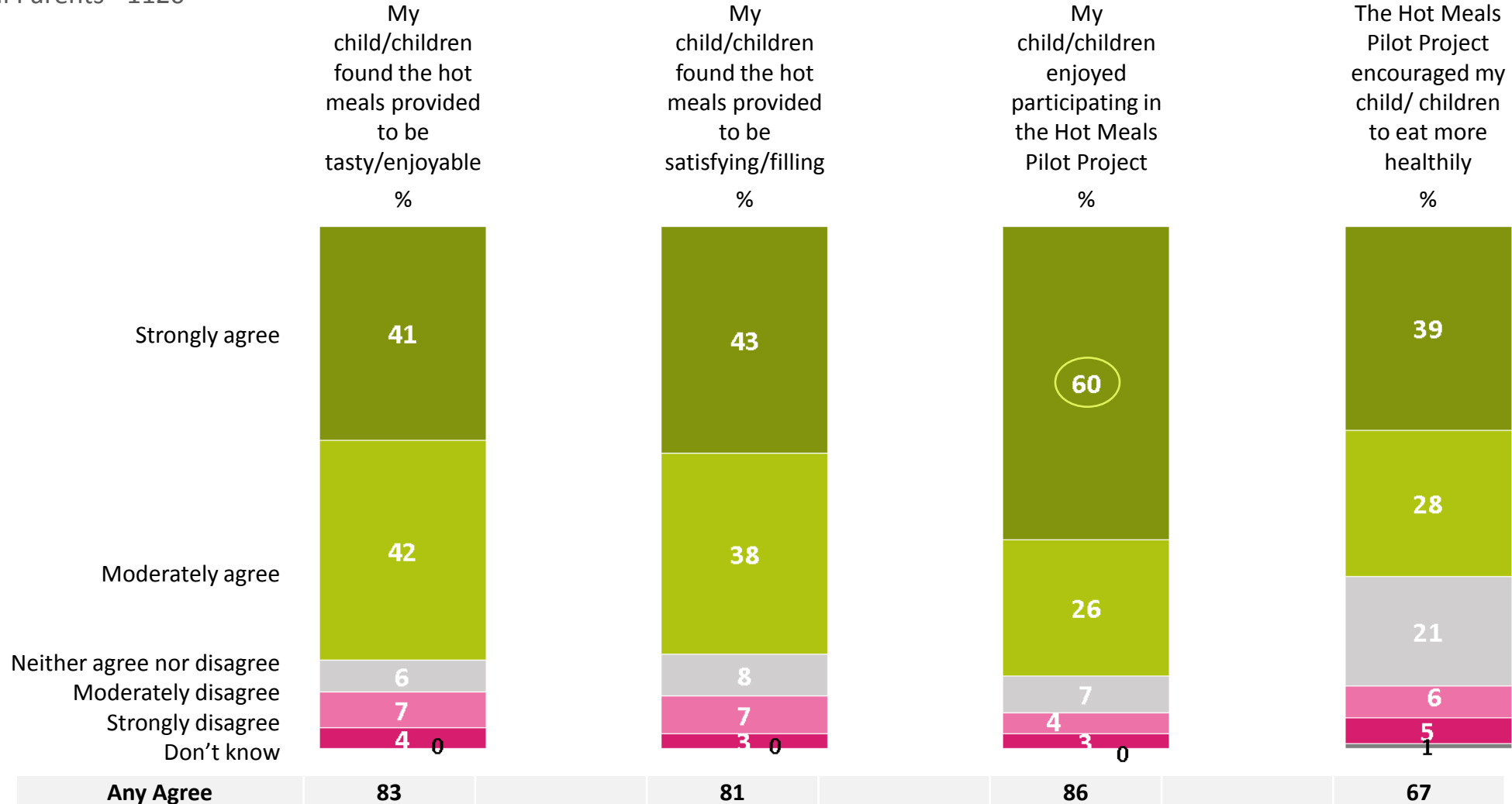


**Value of the Project**

# Parents' Child Engagement Ratings



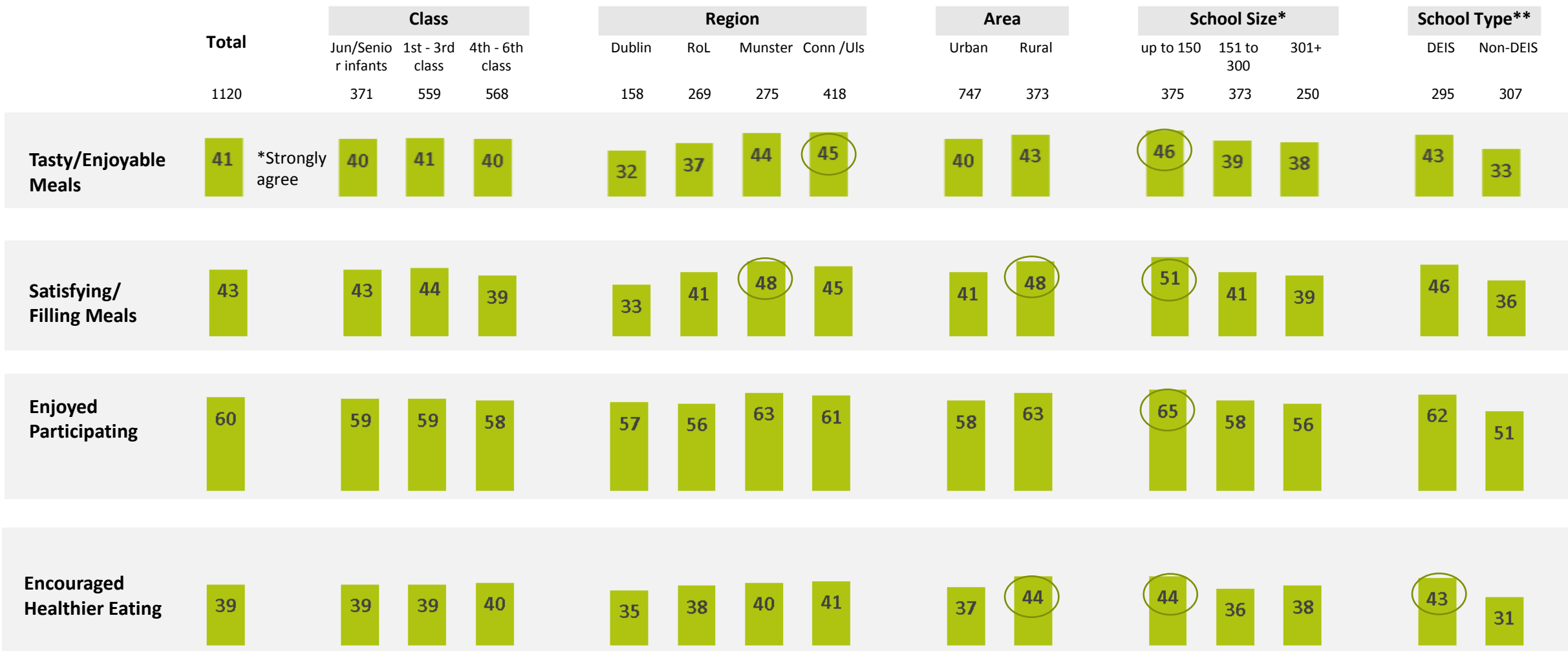
Base: All Parents - 1120



Parents' ratings of their children's engagement with the project are high – around 2 in 5 ***strongly agree*** that their children found the hot meals to be tasty/enjoyable, satisfying/filling and encouraged them to eat more healthily, while 3 in 5 ***strongly agree*** that their children enjoyed taking part.

# Parents' "Strongly Agree" Engagement Ratings

Base: All Parents - 1120

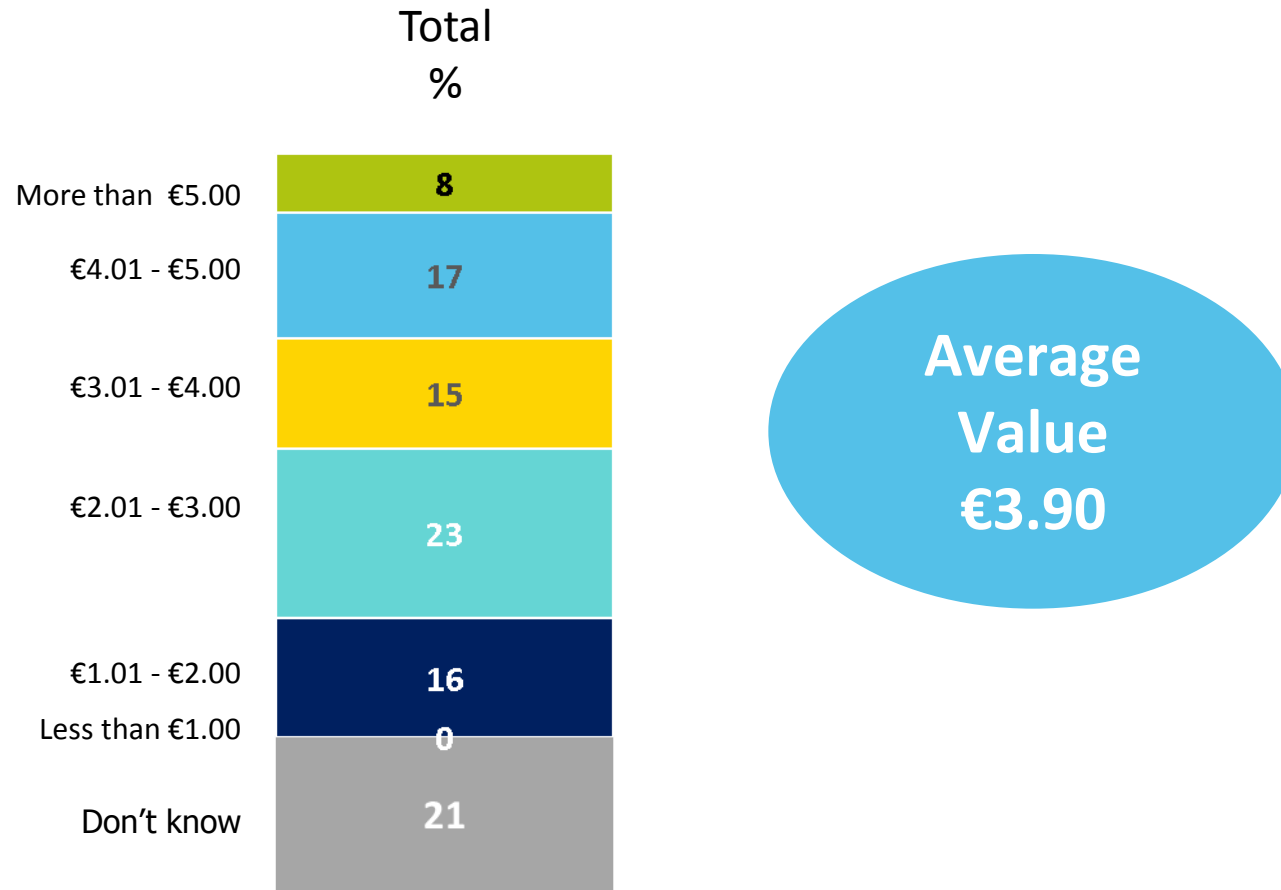


Parents of children in smaller schools are more likely to strongly agree with all statements relating to engagement with the project.

\*Approx. 122 parents did not know school size  
 \*\*Approx. 518 parents did not know school type

# Parents' Perceived Monetary Value of the Hot Meals

Base: All Parents – 1120



Parents' average perceived value of the hot meals is €3.90 – a notable proportion say they are unsure of what the hot meals are worth.



Q4. Thinking about the hot meals provided to your child, what monetary value (in Euro) would you place on ONE of these meals i.e. what is ONE of these meals worth to you?



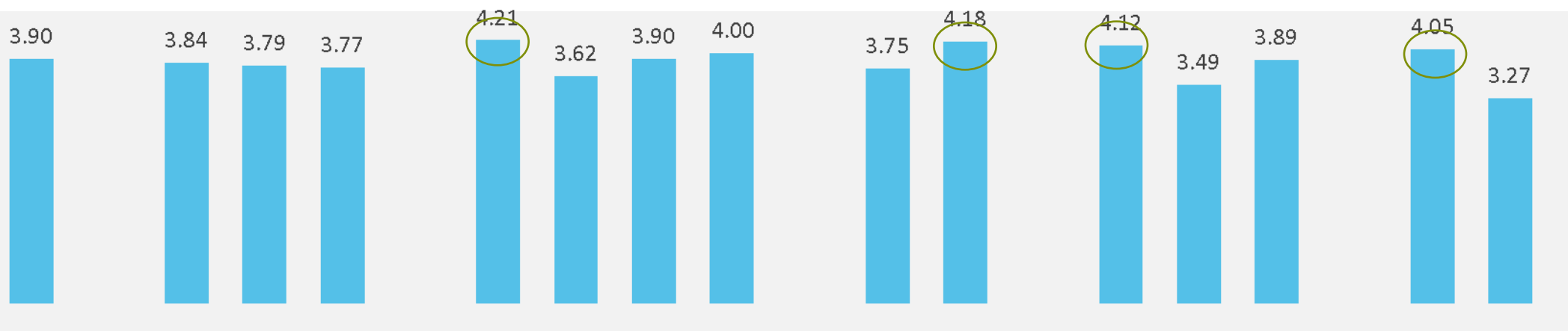
# Parents' Average Perceived Monetary Value

Base: All Parents - 1120



Total	Class			Region				Area		School Size*			School Type**	
	Junior /Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munster	Conn /Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
1120	371	559	568	158	269	275	418	747	373	375	373	250	295	307

Average €



Parents of children in smaller, DEIS schools based in Dublin and rural areas place the highest monetary value on the hot meals.

\*Approx. 122 parents did not know school size  
 \*\*Approx. 518 parents did not know school type



Q4. Thinking about the hot meals provided to your child, what monetary value (in Euro) would you place on ONE of these meals i.e. what is ONE of these meals worth to you? (Cents)



## Implementation & Administration of the Project

# Principals' Project Implementation Ratings



Base: All Principals N - 33



The vast majority of principals say that interacting and coordinating with suppliers was 'very easy'. Other aspects of the projects' implementation were also considered relatively easy by the majority – however, around a fifth say they found working around class routines, the overall administration and the project set-up to be difficult to some extent.



Q15. Thinking about the implementation and administration of the hot meals pilot project at your school, please rate how easy or difficult you found each of the following aspects of the project.

# Principals' "Very Easy" Implementation Ratings

Base: All Principals N - 33



Principals of non-DEIS schools are more likely to say that working around class routines, the overall administration and the project set-up were very easy.

# Suppliers' Perspective

- Overall, suppliers' experience of the pilot project was very positive – all those interviewed felt the programme is an extremely worthwhile one.
  - ❖ The level of sustained uptake of the hot meals came as a pleasant surprise to them.
  - ❖ Informal feedback they received from principals and teachers was highly positive.
- From their perspective, one of the key reasons for the pilot's success was the commitment and effort made by both themselves and the schools.
  - ❖ All suppliers spoke about the importance of strong communication and co-operation between themselves and the schools, particularly principals as they tended to be their main point of contact.
- In general, there were no significant issues with the day to day administration of the pilot project.
  - ❖ For most, there was an element of trial and error in the first few weeks, but once they were up and running, things tended to go smoothly.
  - ❖ Suppliers who had not previously been providing cold lunches had a particularly steep learning curve at the outset, however, the communication with schools helped to iron out any issues.



*Overall the project was incredibly positive. Hugely positive feedback from children and staff alike.*

*The will to make it work was fantastic from everyone.*

*If there was any requirement from them, or anything we wanted to change or thought might work for them, there was constant communication, there really was.*

*The principal of the school was really good, very helpful. If we had a problem at all he would sort it out.*

*It was easy once I got into the swing of it. In the beginning I wasn't sure what way to do it.*



# Suppliers' Perspective

- The main challenge suppliers encountered was in relation to getting the food to the schools hot.
  - ❖ For those suppliers who had just one school, based close-by, delivering the meals fresh, in insulated boxes worked well. However, this did require flexibility from the supplier to be able to deliver the food at a particular time (cold meals would usually all be delivered in the morning).
  - ❖ For suppliers with multiple schools in different locations, this was a significant challenge – it involved preparing the meals the day before, delivering them chilled in the morning and kitting out the schools with combination fridge/oven devices (which can be expensive).
- Overall suppliers reported having to think outside the box in order to overcome challenges such as these, and ultimately ensure the pilot was a success.
  - ❖ For example, the cost of biodegradable packaging was too high for one of the smaller suppliers, so they agreed with the principal that they would use plastic plates and cups, which could be washed and reused each day.



*The biggest challenge for us was getting the food out hot. But we are very lucky in that we are 6 or 7 minutes from the school, so once we got our timing correct it was ideal. So we did a special delivery to them everyday at around 12 pm.*

*We put equipment and staff into each school. There is a significant cost associated with that.*

*You could be delayed an hour and miss the lunch break, so for the schools further away you can't take the chance.*



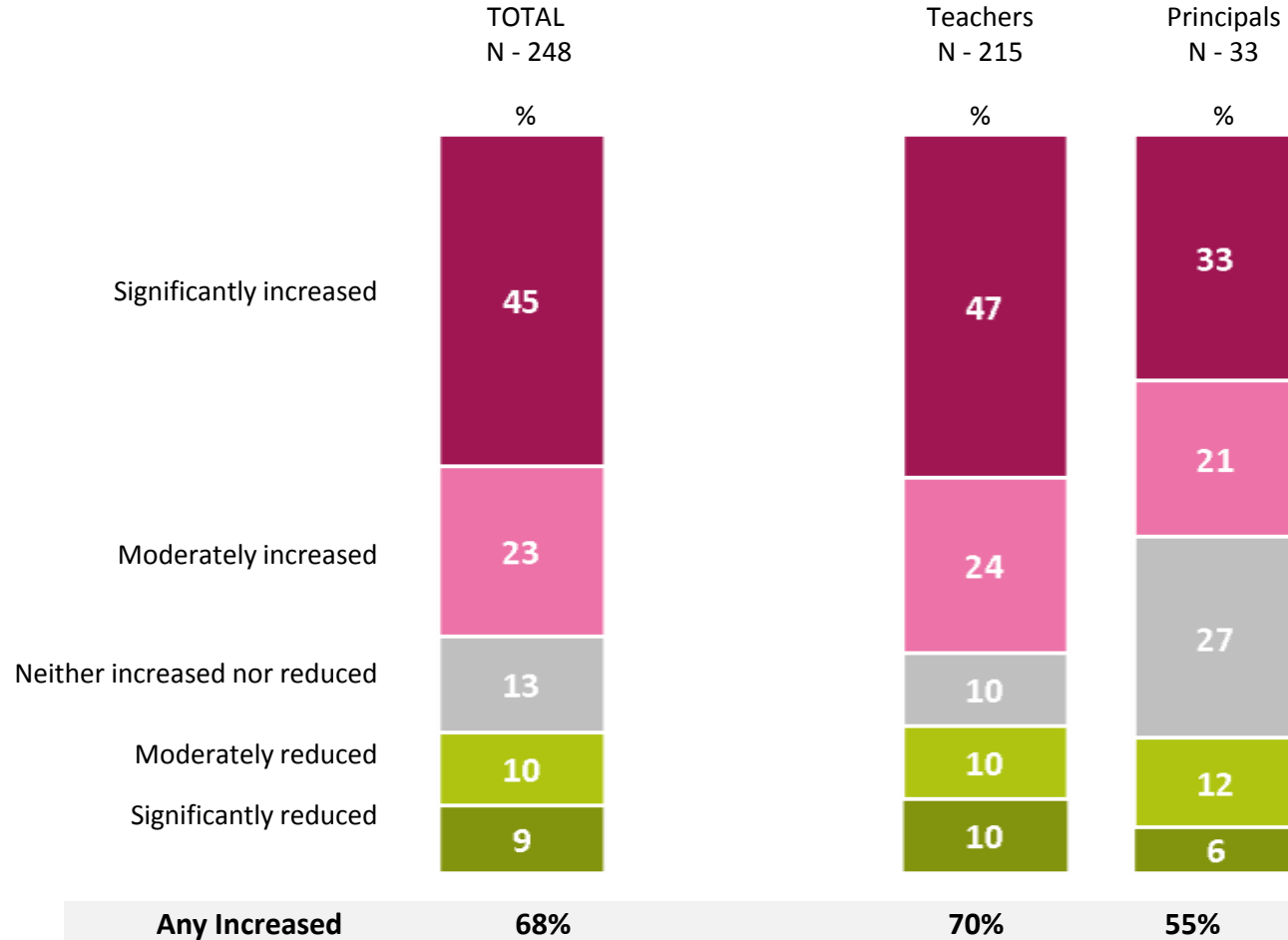


# Impact of the Project on Food Waste & Green Schools

# Impact of the Project on Food Waste



Base: All Teachers/SNAs/Principals N - 248



Over two-thirds (68%) of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say that the pilot project increased food waste. Almost half (47%) of teachers say that the increase was *significant*.



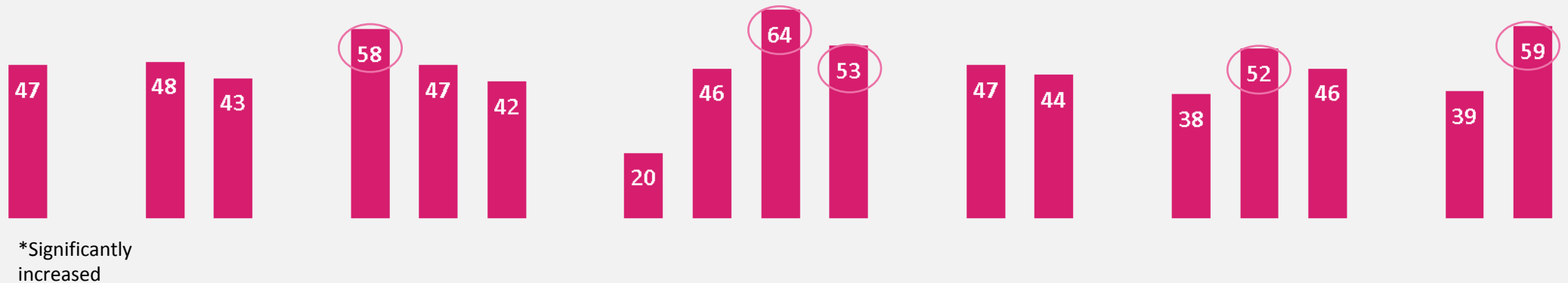


# Teachers’/SNAs’ “Significantly Increased” Ratings

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



Total	Job title.		Class			Region				Area		No. of Pupils			School type		
	Teacher	(SNA)	Junior /Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munst	Conn/er	Ul	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
215	162	53	74	107	102	41	68	44	62		165	50	56	90	69	134	81



Teachers of younger classes, those based in Munster and those in non-DEIS schools are more likely to say that the pilot project ‘significantly increased’ food waste.

## Suppliers' Perspective

- Interestingly, no suppliers reported there being significant food waste. While some were not involved directly in waste disposal, they felt principals would have communicated with them, had there been any issues with the amount of waste.
  - ❖ Some even felt it was less than there had been with the cold lunches.
- Getting feedback on menus and continuing to update and rotate meal options was seen to be core to keeping food waste at a minimum.
  - ❖ One school was using a self-serve system which they felt significantly reduced waste.
- As previously mentioned, in some schools where the food was prepared on the day, children had the option to bring their leftovers home – this may have reduced food waste.
- The use of biodegradable containers was mentioned by most suppliers.



*I was surprised by the lack of waste. It's about freshening things up, you get menu fatigue with children – they get bored.*

*I found the cold lunches, when they were getting the sandwiches, the waste was unreal. But the hot lunch was great, they really ate it. By the time we ended before COVID-19 we wouldn't even have a half mayonnaise bucket of waste.*

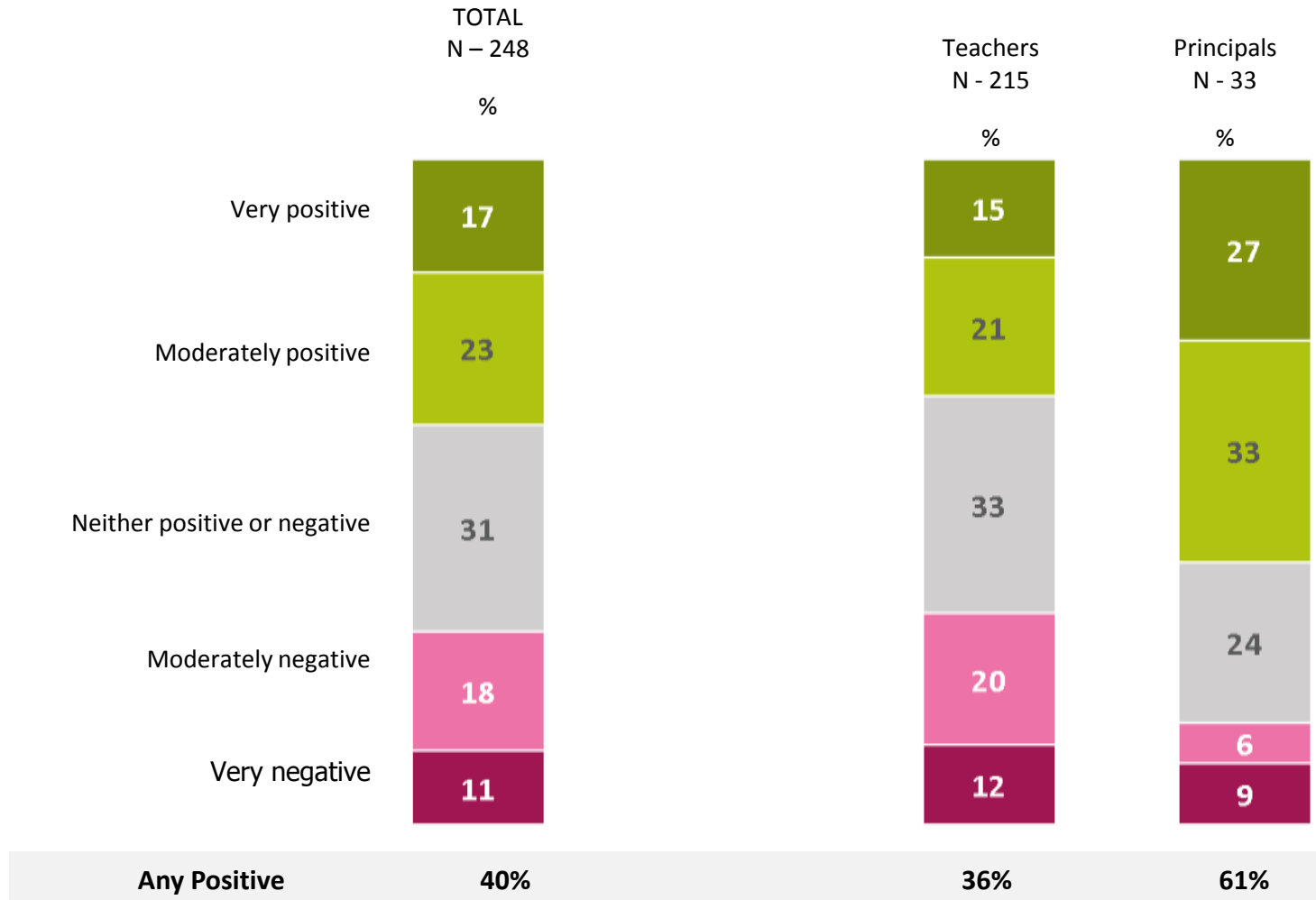
*When the kids were saying 'no cabbage' we knew then that was one of the ones not to send, we knew they wouldn't eat it and that would be waste then. The principal also said they could bring home the leftovers in a lunchbox.*



# Impact of the Project on the Green Schools Initiative



Base: All Teachers/SNAs/Principals N - 248



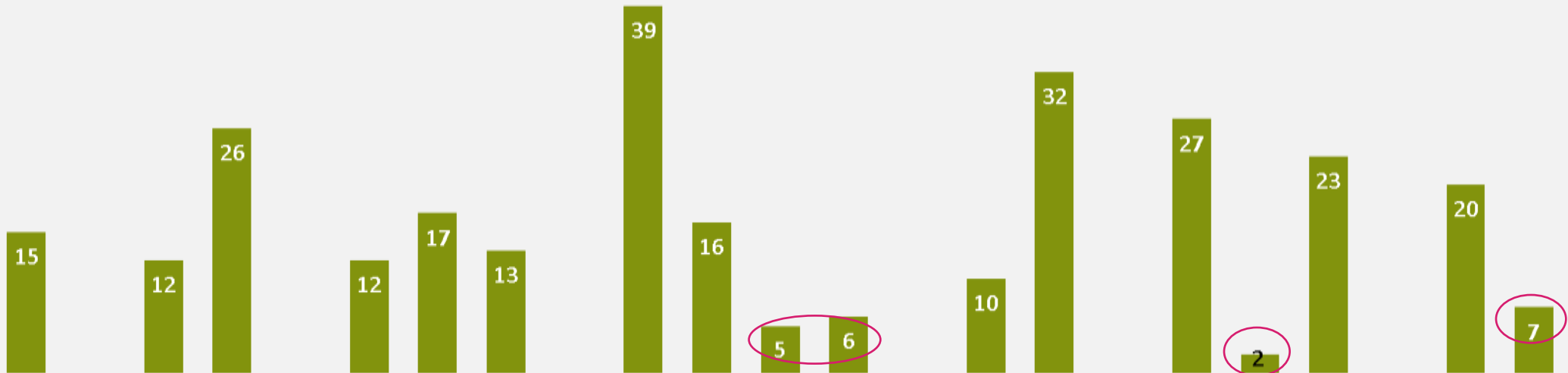
**While the majority of principals feel the pilot project had a positive impact on implementation of the Green Schools initiative, teachers are less conclusive – with roughly a third saying it had a positive, negative and no impact.**

# Teachers’/SNAs’ ‘Very Positive Impact’ Ratings

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



Total	Job title.		Class			Region				Area		No. of Pupils			School type	
	Teacher	SNAs	Junior /Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munst er	Conn/ Ul	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
215	162	53	74	107	102	41	68	44	62	165	50	56	90	69	134	81



\*Very positive impact

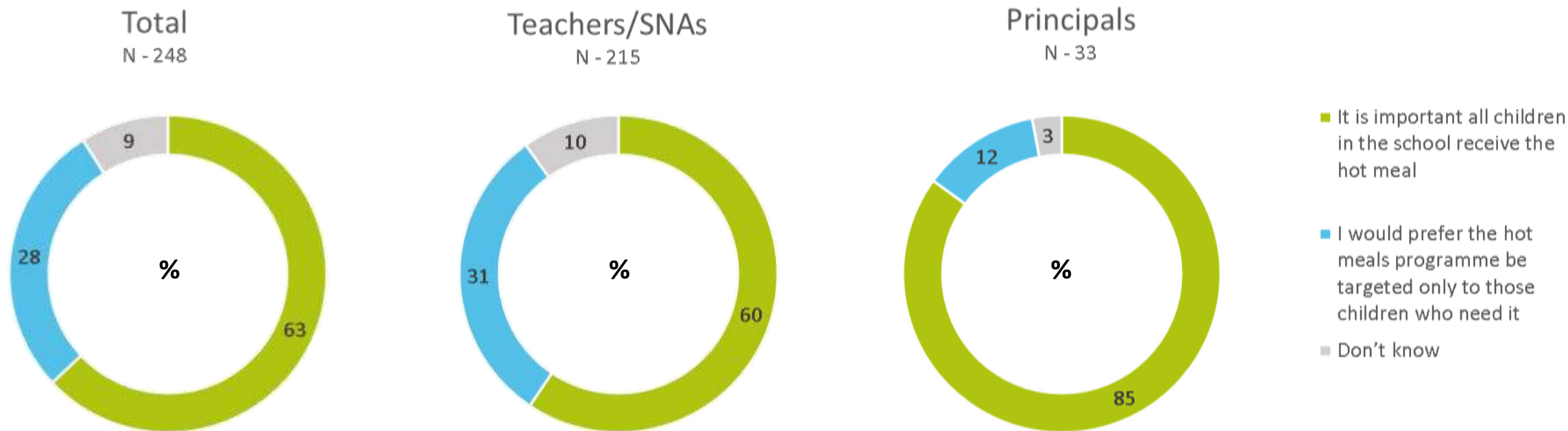
Teachers in schools outside of Dublin/Leinster, those in medium sized and non-DEIS schools were least likely to say the pilot project had a positive impact on implementation of the Green Schools initiative.



# Targeted vs. School-wide Availability of Hot Meals

# Targeted vs. School-wide Availability of Hot Meals

Base: All Teachers/SNAs/Principals N - 248



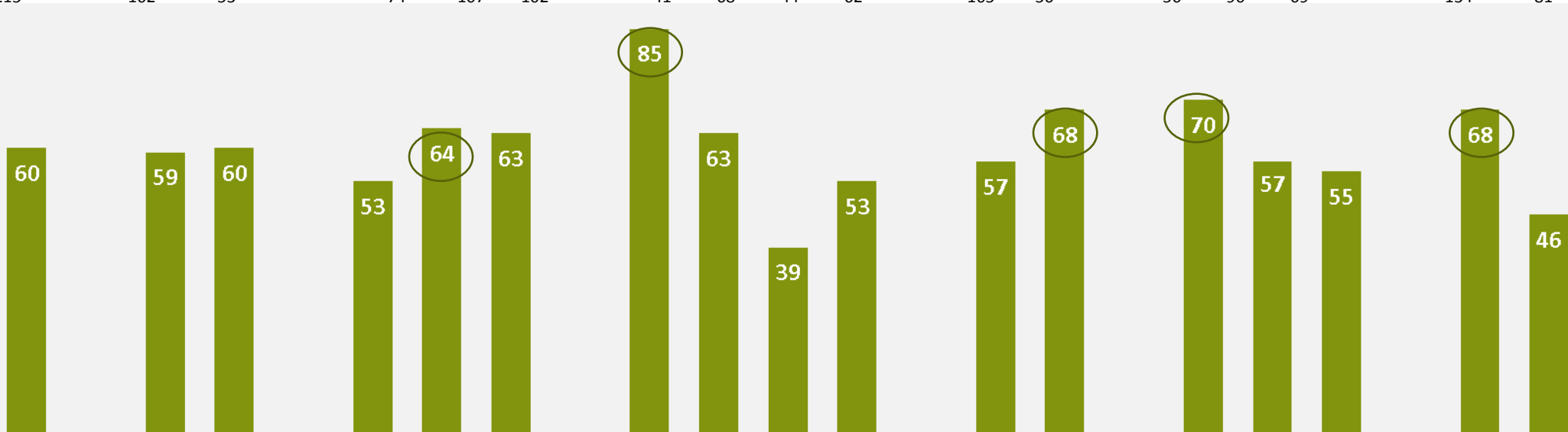
Over 3 in 5 (63%) of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say it is important all children in the school receive a hot meal. Principals are most likely to say this, while just over 3 in 10 teachers/SNAs (31%) would prefer the programme be targeted to those children who need it.

# Teachers' /SNAs' Importance of School-wide Availability Ratings

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



Total	Job title.		Class			Region				Area		No. of Pupils			School type	
	Teacher	(SNA)	Junior /Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munst er	Conn/ Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
215	162	53	74	107	102	41	68	44	62	165	50	56	90	69	134	81



\*Important all children receive hot meal

Teachers in smaller, DEIS schools based in Dublin and rural areas are more likely to say it is important all children in the school receive a hot meal.



HELP

SUPPORT

QUALITY

SOLUTION

DEADLINE

SERVICE

Recommended Project  
Changes/Improvements



# Overall Recommended Project Changes/Improvements

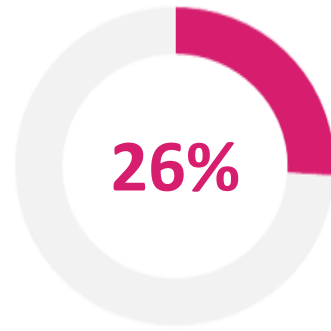


Base: All Parents/Teachers/SNAs/Principals - 1368

No changes/improvements required

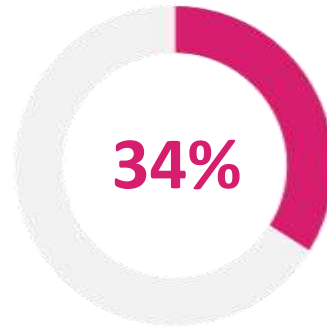


Meal preferences



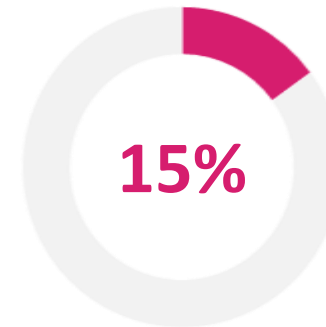
- 12%** didn't like specific food
- 6%** portion sizes too small
- 5%** keep sauce/part of meal separate
- 4%** food too spicy
- 3%** portion sizes too big
- 3%** plainer/simpler food

More meal options



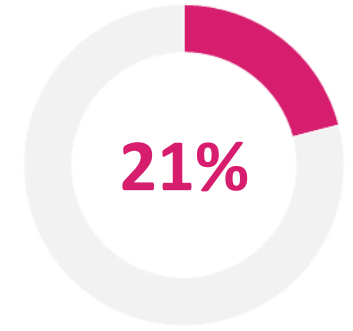
- 19%** more meal variation/options
- 9%** specific meal/food type/sauce requests
- 5%** cold meal options (warmer weather)
- 4%** more options for dietary requirements
- 3%** remove specific meal/food type/sauce

Better logistics/admin



- 8%** too much food waste
- 4%** more information/communication with parents
- 4%** more time/assistance when eating
- 3%** improve food ordering system

Higher food quality/nutrition

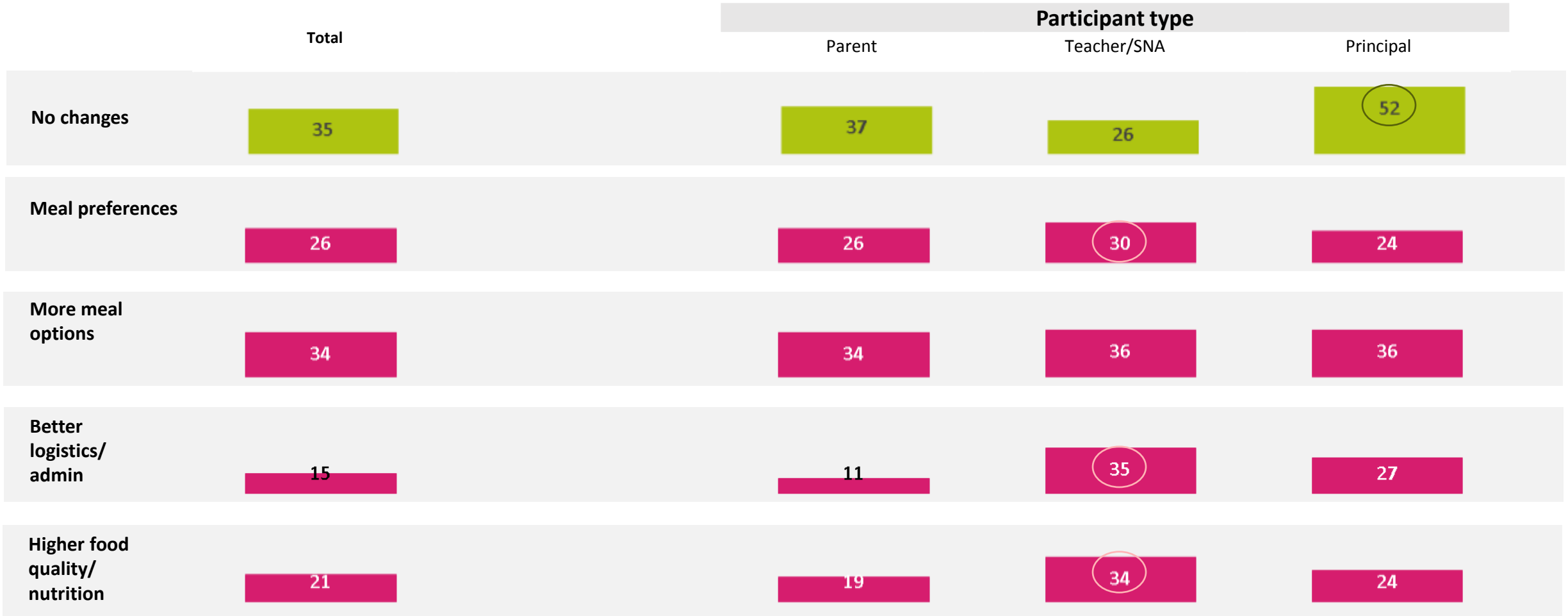


- 7%** issues with food packaging (spilling, too much plastic, etc.)
- 5%** more vegetables
- 5%** healthier options/ingredients
- 5%** better quality food
- 5%** food prep issues (soggy, not warm enough, etc.)

# Overall Recommended Project Changes/Improvements



Base: All Parents/Teachers/SNAs/Principals - 1368



# Parents' Recommended Project Changes/Improvements

Base: All Parents N - 1120



Total	Class			Region				Area		School Size*			School Type**	
	Junior/Senior infants	1st - 3rd class	4th - 6th class	Dublin	RoL	Munster	Conn /Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151 to 300	301+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
1120	371	559	568	158	269	275	418	747	373	375	373	250	295	307

## No changes



## Meal preferences



## More meal options



## Better logistics/admin



## Higher food quality/nutrition



\*Approx. 122 parents did not know school size  
 \*\*Approx. 518 parents did not know school type



# Teachers'/SNAs' Recommended Project Changes/Improvements

Base: All Teachers/SNAs N – 215



# Principals' Recommended Project Changes/Improvements

Base: All Principals N - 33



	Total	Region		Area		School Size		School Type	
		Dublin/ ROL	Munster Conn/Uls	Urban	Rural	up to 150	151+	DEIS	Non-DEIS
No changes	52	48	58	56	47	53	50	56	47
Meal preferences	24	33	8	6	41	32	14	17	33
More meal options	36	43	25	38	35	37	36	44	27
Better logistics/admin	27	24	33	44	12	5	57	39	13
Higher food quality/nutrition	24	24	25	31	18	11	43	28	20



# Suppliers' Perspective

- As mentioned previously, suppliers' experience of the pilot project was very positive overall – none felt there were any significant changes required.
  - ❖ All suppliers stressed the importance of the project's continuation/funding into the future.
- Some more minor suggestions which were made include:
  - ❖ An option of cold meals in summer/warm weather.
  - ❖ Should only be available to DEIS schools/schools that need it.
  - ❖ Consideration of sustainability in terms of cost to the supplier, particularly in terms of providing hot meals to smaller, rural schools.



*I thought the scheme was brilliant. I'm so glad they are going to continue it and not go back to the cold lunch.*

*If there was more funding, every school would take it up. The feedback we got from parents and teachers, they were absolutely ecstatic that they got it. They are definitely hoping it will continue.*

*I do think in the hot weather children won't want to eat hot meals. I think they need to be flexible and let schools change between hot and cold.*

*One school wasn't a DEIS school and truthfully they didn't need the programme and the expectation from parents was far too high. In one section of society it is hugely needed, and in another section it would be hugely criticised and it is too good for that.*





# Summary of Findings





## Ratings of the Hot Meals

- Overall the hot meals are rated highly in terms of quality, choice, portion sizes, dietary requirements and nutritional value - the vast majority (of the combined total of parents, teachers/SNAs and principals) rate each of these aspects positively, with around a third giving a rating of excellent.
- In terms of the individual parent, teacher and principal groupings, again we can see that the majority in each rate the hot meals positively. Principals are most likely to give excellent ratings.
- Amongst the parent group, those with children attending smaller, DEIS schools are more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent.
- Amongst the Teacher/SNA groups, those in smaller, rural schools are more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent on all criteria, while larger, urban schools are comparatively less likely to rate the hot meals as 'excellent'.
- Amongst the principals' group, those in smaller schools are more likely to rate the hot meals as excellent in terms of quality, choice, dietary requirements and nutritional value.
- Around two-thirds (68%) of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals rate the hot meals as better quality than food that children ate previously, with 3 in 10 (30%) saying they are 'much higher' quality. When comparing teachers'/SNAs' and principals' ratings, the latter are more likely to rate the quality of the hot meals as being much higher.
- Around half of teachers in smaller, rural schools rate the hot meals as being 'much higher' quality than the food children ate previously.





## Impact of the Project

- Over a third of parents say that the hot meals pilot project had a very positive impact on their child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological wellbeing. While the majority of parents say the pilot project had a positive impact in each of these three areas, a notable proportion say it had neither a positive nor negative impact, particularly in relation to school attendance.
- Those parents of children in non-DEIS schools are least likely to say that the hot meals pilot project had a very positive impact on their child's attendance at school, physical health and psychological wellbeing.
- Amongst teachers/SNAs, the pilot project is perceived as having the greatest impact on children's diet/eating habits – with two-thirds (66%) saying it had a positive impact in this area. Just over half say the pilot project positively impacted children's behaviour, attentiveness and psychological wellbeing. The impact of the pilot project on children's attendance is rated comparatively less positively, with the majority saying it had no impact in this area.
- Teachers/SNAs in smaller, DEIS, Dublin or rural based schools are more likely to say the pilot project had a very positive impact on the children.



## Value of the Project

- Parents' ratings of their children's engagement with the project are high – around 2 in 5 strongly agree that their children found the hot meals to be tasty/enjoyable, satisfying/filling and encouraged them to eat more healthily, while 3 in 5 strongly agree that their children enjoyed taking part.
- Parents of children in smaller schools are more likely to strongly agree with all statements relating to engagement with the project.
- Parents' average perceived value of the hot meals is €3.90 – a notable proportion say they are unsure of what the hot meals are worth.
- Parents of children in smaller, DEIS schools based in Dublin and rural areas place the highest monetary value on the hot meals.

## Implementation and Administration of the Project

- The vast majority of principals say that interacting and coordinating with suppliers was 'very easy'. Other aspects of the projects' implementation were also considered relatively easy by the majority – however, around a fifth say they found working around class routines, the overall administration and the project set-up to be difficult to some extent.
- Non-DEIS schools are more likely to say that working around class routines, the overall administration and the project set-up were very easy.



## Impact on Food Waste & Green Schools

- Over two-thirds (68%) of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say that the pilot project increased food waste. Almost half (47%) of teachers say that the increase was significant.
- Teachers of younger classes, those based in Munster and those in non-DEIS schools are more likely to say that the pilot project 'significantly increased' food waste.
- While the majority of principals feel the pilot project had a positive impact on implementation of the Green Schools initiative, teachers are less conclusive – with roughly a third saying it had a positive, negative and no impact.
- Teachers in schools outside of Dublin/Leinster, those in medium sized and non-DEIS schools were least likely to say the pilot project had a positive impact on implementation of the Green Schools initiative.



## Targeted vs. School-wide Availability of Hot Meals

- Over 3 in 5 (63%) of the combined total of teachers/SNAs and principals say it is important all children in the school receive a hot meal. Principals are most likely to say this, while just over 3 in 10 teachers/SNAs (31%) would prefer the programme be targeted to those children who need it.
- Teachers in smaller, DEIS schools based in Dublin and rural areas are more likely to say it is important all children in the school receive a hot meal.

# Thank you.



RESEARCH  
& INSIGHT

*Milltown House  
Mount Saint Annes  
Milltown, Dublin 6 - D06 Y822  
+353 1 205 7500 | [www.banda.ie](http://www.banda.ie)*

# Delve Deeper