

Ending child poverty must be Britain's top education policy

Child poverty is the main factor behind Britain having one of the highest educational failure rates in the developed world. Research suggesting this link is behind CPAG's new campaign, *2 skint 4 school*, highlighting the appalling effect that child poverty has on educational outcomes. Not only are individual lives damaged, but the UK's economic security is threatened by a skills shortage. As a new *2 skint 4 school* campaign website was launched, a cross-party group of MPs tabled a parliamentary motion welcoming the campaign.

The motion supports the principle of the campaign that every child deserves a

fair chance to learn, and calls on the Government to give greater recognition to the importance of ending child poverty to improve education outcomes and achievement in school.

The Prime Minister announced this month that schools failing to meet the 30 per cent threshold for pupils gaining at least five A-C grade GCSEs will be merged or closed. However, child poverty figures announced earlier this month showed no further progress towards the 2010 target to halve child poverty. Failure to achieve this target will also hold back progress in schools in disadvantaged areas.

The lead sponsor of the motion, senior Liberal Democrat Phil Willis, is a former headmaster with personal experience of the impact poverty has on outcomes for the poorest pupils. He said: 'Teachers are doing a great job, but it's impossible for them to compensate for all the inequalities children bring with them through the school gates. Ending child poverty would mean major progress on ending educational failure and would be a major step towards giving every child a fair chance to learn.'

Co-sponsors to the motion are Conservative Work and Pensions Committee member John Penrose, and Labour MP Dawn Butler. While the parties have policy differences, the cross-party support for the motion shows growing resolve within all the main parties to make progress on child poverty.

Kate Green, Chief Executive of Child

Poverty Action Group, said: 'Ending child poverty must be Britain's top education policy. We know that being poor is the main indicator that a child will not realise their potential at school. Teachers cannot address all their problems alone – it is the lack of money and its consequences that really harms the chances of children from poor families.'

The new campaign website has been launched at www.cpag.org.uk/2skint4school. The site has background information about the campaign and will host a survey for you to feed your views and experience into CPAG's research. There will be an additional special survey for teachers. The research currently being undertaken will result in a major CPAG publication later this year.

We need your support for the campaign: Through the website you can email your MP to ask them to sign EDM 1799 welcoming 2 Skint 4 School and calling for greater recognition of the importance of ending child poverty to better education outcomes for Britain.



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- **Poverty figures rise – see what CPAG has to say**
- **Keep the Promise event on 4 October**
- **New child poverty inquiry is set up by the Scottish Parliament**



In the House

MP of the Year nominee: Roger Berry, for his early day motion on the employment and support allowance.

The **employment and support allowance** regulations are attracting strong concern from parliamentarians that promises over the rate at which it would be paid have not been kept. The regulations have been prayed against by both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, meaning that the Government is now required to allow a debate, either in Committee or on the floor of the House, before the regulations can be implemented.

Labour backbenchers are also expressing concern about the regulations. Chair of the All Party Disability Group, **Roger Berry MP**, has tabled EDM 1595 which raises concerns that the regulations and new benefit amounts could worsen both disability poverty and child poverty. It has been signed by 45 Labour MPs so far.

The **Children, Schools and Families Select Committee** held a one-off session with ministers from DCSF, DWP and the Treasury to discover how their departments are collaborating on their joint responsibilities in relation to child poverty and what progress is being made in reducing child poverty.

In Work and Pensions questions, **Karen Buck MP** pressed ministers on childcare with her typical enthusiasm on

children's issues, seeing her push concerns about funding for childcare for older children to the point where the speaker intervened to cut her short. **Alistair Burt MP** and **David Gauke MP** both secured questions on the order paper on child poverty, which help keep interest up ahead of the new figures being announced.

The Government has published its response to the **Work and Pensions Select Committee** report on child poverty. Committee chair, Terry Rooney MP, has described it as 'disappointing'. A debate on the Government response was due as we went to press.

Lib Dem **Danny Alexander MP** has moved aside from his Work and Pensions role to concentrate on the party's manifesto. CPAG welcomes the new Lib Dem Shadow Secretary **Jenny Willott MP** to the role. As a highly respected member of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, she will no doubt hit the ground running.

Jenny will have the chance to lead on a bill for the first time with another **Welfare Reform Bill**, which was announced by the **Prime Minister** as part of the draft legislative programme for the next parliamentary session. It will be preceded by a Green Paper and **Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell** has stated that its core aim will be poverty reduction.

Child poverty rises again

The new annual figures for child poverty have shown a rise for the second year running. The rise is small, but shows that progress has stalled for the years that the Government did not make any new progress on investment in the poorest families' incomes.

The Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes, said: 'We know that meeting our 2010 and 2020 targets will not be easy, but we will not abandon any of our children to a future of poverty and disadvantage and we remain 100 per cent committed to these goals.' She likened the challenge to running up a down escalator because the poverty lines changes with the rising cost of living.

Child Poverty Action Group welcomed the Government's reaffirmation of their commitment to the targets, despite the setback. However, the Group warned that the disappointing figures showed how important it is to maintain momentum. Chief Executive Kate Green said: 'Ministers cannot take a holiday from their promise to end child poverty, or this is what happens. Every year progress must be planned, invested in and achieved.'

The child poverty rate is expected to fall again when figures are announced in the next two years, following around £2

billion of new investment in the last two budgets. However, the Government's own projections suggest that this will still leave around half a million more children in poverty than the target of 1.7 million for 2010. This means further investment will be required in the next Budget. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that at least £2.8 billion of new annual investment is needed to meet the target is met.

Kate Green said: 'We all know that the 2010 target can be met. We all know that even in tight Budget years, funding for the most important needs can be found. Failure in 2010 would not be due to a lack of national wealth, but a lack of moral leadership.'

'This year's Pre-Budget will be a time for political courage from the Chancellor for poor children. As a member of the Campaign to End Child Poverty, we are calling for the £3 billion investment to be found that would help ensure the 2010 target to halve child poverty is met.'

'Why should Britain's children suffer more than children in other wealthy countries? We can end our child poverty shame and we must.'



The Rt Hon Bev Hughes, Minister of State for Children

'Keeping Mum' – mothers and children's poverty

CPAG is working with The Fawcett Society and other organisations on a new campaign, Keeping Mum, highlighting links between mothers' and children's poverty.

Understanding the links between female and child poverty is of great importance to the 2010 and 2020 targets to eradicate child poverty. Keeping Mum shows that women are more likely to be poor than men, with 30 per cent of women (double the proportion of men) having a weekly income of less than £100. Two thirds of people on a low income are women and four in ten poor children live with a lone parent, who is usually a woman at high risk of having a low income.

The campaign also shows that having a baby increases the chances of a woman losing her job, moving into low paid work (including part time or home working) and getting into debt. One statistic speaks volumes: an estimated 30,000 women per year lose their jobs when they become pregnant.

As well as tracing the disadvantage many mothers – and therefore their children – face in Britain today, the campaign shows how this is totally preventable. Countries like Finland and Denmark both have much lower rates of child poverty than in the UK and mothers in those countries are not put at greater risk of poverty.

The campaign highlights a number of areas for urgent action.

- **Protection:** stronger laws to stop pregnant women losing their jobs.
- **Fair Pay:** increase maternity entitlements to the minimum wage.
- **Transparency:** mandatory pay audits for all organisations.
- **Support:** increase from four hours to 16 the time mothers can work each week without losing their benefits.
- **Rights:** equal treatment for temporary and agency workers, many of whom are women and mothers.

More details on the campaign and details about how you can contact the Prime Minister to ask him to address mothers' poverty at priority can be found at www.fawcettsociety.org.uk. In addition to Fawcett and CPAG, the campaign is supported by the UNITE union, Oxfam, One Parent Families and Single Parent Action Network.



Your donations make a difference

Child Poverty Action Group is a charity promoting action for the relief directly or indirectly of poverty among children and families with children. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention;
- bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty;
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty: improving children's lives today and helping to abolish child poverty tomorrow.

Please make a donation

- Send us a **cheque**, **postal order** or **Charities Aid Foundation** voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
- By **credit card** online at www.cpag.org.uk.
- Set up a **standing order** through your bank to make a regular gift.
- Make a will and leave us a **legacy**.
- Set up **Give As You Earn** (payroll giving) with your employer.

Add Value. Gift Aid It!

Donations to CPAG qualify for tax relief. For every £1 that you donate we can receive an extra 28p. Anyone who pays income tax (on a salary, a pension or investments) or capital gains tax can complete a Gift Aid declaration form.

For more information visit our website www.cpag.org.uk, email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

Keep the Promise: end child poverty

In 1999, the Government made the boldest political promise of a generation: to end child poverty. Now you can hold them to it.

The Campaign to End Child Poverty will be holding the largest ever event in the UK to end child poverty. The Keep the Promise march and event will be held in London on Saturday 4 October. This will provide children, families and other supporters of our member organisations from across the UK a unique opportunity to show their desire for an end to child poverty and to set the agenda for the following parliamentary session.

The Budget 2009 is the last realistic chance for the Government to meet the 2010 target and keep alive its promise to end child poverty. But the Government is likely to increase investment to the level needed with far more significant and sustained public pressure. With your support, we can build the support and pressure needed. We can ensure that they Keep the Promise of a generation and end child poverty.

Please help us make it happen. Visit www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/promise to register your supporter and demand that the Prime Minister keeps the promise he has made to the millions of British children living in poverty. And please attend on

4 October to prove to the Government, the other main parties and the media that British people do care about ending child poverty. Please tell your friends too!



OCTOBER 4TH
TRAFALGAR SQUARE
1-3pm

Success on fuel poverty representation

Following ongoing campaigning by CPAG in Scotland and others, the Scottish Children's Fuel Poverty Coalition is to join key players representing Scottish energy firms, consumer and environmental groups to advise the Scottish Government on tackling fuel poverty with the reconvening of the Scottish Fuel Poverty Forum. As well as announcing the reconvening of the Forum, Health and Wellbeing Cabinet Secretary Nicola Sturgeon also announced the publication of the Scottish Government's *Review of Fuel Poverty*.

The review shows that current fuel poverty programmes are not helping 543,000 Scottish households – nearly one million people – classed as fuel poor.

Speaking on behalf of the Children's Fuel Poverty Coalition, Head of CPAG in Scotland John Dickie said: 'We look forward to making a valuable contribution to the work of the Fuel Poverty Forum. There are around 100,000 Scottish children who live in fuel poverty and their plight needs to be at the heart of discussions. The consequences of fuel poverty for children are misery, discomfort, ill-health and debt. No parent should have to choose between putting the heating on to provide a warm home, buying food for the days ahead or getting into debt.'

We hope the Forum will persuade the Scottish Government of the action needed to keep the promise of eradicating fuel poverty by 2016.'

New Scottish Parliament inquiry into child poverty

An inquiry into child poverty in Scotland by the Local Government and Communities Committee has been announced following lobbying from CPAG and members of the End Child Poverty campaign in Scotland. The inquiry will focus on identifying solutions and scrutinising child poverty targets.

Committee Convener Duncan McNeil MSP said: 'Child poverty adversely affects every aspect of a child's life including their health, education, future employment and wellbeing.'

'The Committee wants to identify those areas where action would bring about the most immediate and significant difference, such as how the targets on ending child poverty by 2020 and halving child poverty by 2010 can best be met.'

John Dickie, Head of Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, welcomed the

inquiry saying: 'It is an important recognition of the key role the Scottish Parliament has to play in ending the scandal of child poverty. It is vital that MSPs scrutinise child poverty targets and policies to ensure central and local government spending reaches our worst-off families and that families have the advice needed to access benefits and tax credits they are entitled to, whether in or out of work. We look forward to giving evidence to the Committee on how best to take forward these actions to help end child poverty.'

As well as scrutinising plans to meet the 2010 and 2020 targets, the Committee's inquiry will include supporting parents into, and remaining in, decently paid work; maximising the take-up of benefits; and equality issues such as exclusion of sections of society that remain out of reach of policies designed to reduce poverty.

MPs debate child poverty in Scotland

Following publication of the Scottish Affairs Committee report into child poverty in January, MPs debated the issue in the House of Commons on 1 May. Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee, Mohammad Sarwar MP, stressed 'the importance of co-ordination to the fight against child poverty. The UK Government and the Scottish Government must continue to work together on that. Scottish local government also has a vital role to play, providing key services such as education and childcare.'

Angus McNeil MP, one of several MPs citing CPAG's debate briefing, highlighted the need for an adequate financial support for families, saying:

'The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland...has provided an excellent brief for MPs that draws attention to some of the 20 recommendations in the Committee's report. Recommendation 6 says: 'the tax and benefits system must, at a minimum, ensure that no-one in full-time work is living in poverty'... It is important that we recognise the failures in our society and accept that there are better ways of dealing with the problem.'

CPAG in Scotland expressed disappointment with the Government's formal response to the Committee's poverty recommendations, believing the Committee's calls for more resources, new research and higher child benefit for younger children in a family deserved a more positive response.

Head of CPAG in Scotland John Dickie said: 'Time is running out. Poverty continues to grind down the life chances of one in four children in Scotland and more resources are desperately needed to boost the incomes of our poorest families. The Government needs to build on recent Budget announcements and invest the additional £3 billion a year still needed to halve child poverty by 2010.'