

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, The Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education
The Rt Hon Mel Stride MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

10 March 2023

Dear Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer,

cc. Secretary of State for Education and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Education Anti-Poverty Coalition: if we want all children and schools to thrive, we must address child poverty first.

As a group representing governors, head teachers, teachers, school support staff, PTAs and others working in education across England, we are writing to raise our deep concern about the impact child poverty and hardship are having on the children we work with and our school system.

As the Spring Budget approaches, it is now urgent that the government invests in families with children by increasing their incomes, and ensuring every pupil has a fair chance at school.

We know **poverty at home** is the strongest statistical predictor of how well a child will do in school.¹ This is not surprising. It should be obvious that children who are worried, hungry, tired, more frequently ill, and lack resources and adequate clothing, find it harder to learn. And we see this increasingly every single day in our schools.²

What is surprising is that schools and their staff are expected to work harder and harder to try to break this link. Not only does this let children down by ignoring the root cause of the issue, which is insufficient household income,³ it also applies staggering pressure on schools. And however hard they try, schools cannot undo the damaging effects of poverty.^{4 5}

Child poverty and hardship in schools were endemic in England *before* the recent cost of living crisis, and it's getting much worse.⁶ Poverty has a stark knock-on effect, impacting pupil wellbeing,⁷ attainment⁸ and

¹ S Exley, *Life Chances*, CPAG, 2016

² NEU, [State of Education](#), 2022

³ IFS, [Education inequalities](#), 2019

⁴ Unison, [School support staff cost-of-living survey](#), 2022

⁵ See footnote 2

⁶ Sutton Trust, [Cost of Living and Education](#), 2022

⁷ DfE, [State of the Nation 2022: children and young people's wellbeing](#), 2022

⁸ FEA, [Report Card](#), 2022

attendance⁹ – all of which place enormous pressure on stretched school staff to try to resolve. It is also estimated that child poverty is costing the UK £38 billion a year.¹⁰

Ensuring families have enough to live on would significantly lighten the load for schools. For children, the evidence is clear and intuitive: increases in household income would substantially reduce differences in schooling outcomes¹¹ and improve children's experiences of school life.¹²

The Education Anti-Poverty Coalition is calling for:

- **An immediate £20 per week increase to child benefit.** This would pull 500,000 children out of poverty. Child benefit is simple, predictable and supports every child by being proportional to household size. It would support lower- and middle-income families whose budgets are increasingly squeezed.
- **Free school meals to be provided to every school-age child that needs one.** This would save families around £440 per year per child and prevent food-related worry and hunger at school.

If the government rightly wants all children and schools to thrive, then first and foremost, it must address family incomes. Inaction will risk losing a generation of children trapped in poverty, held back at school and denied a better future.

There is no time to lose.

Yours sincerely,

Education Anti-Poverty Coalition members:

Gina Cicerone and Samantha Butters, Co-CEOs, **Fair Education Alliance**

Leigh Elliott, CEO, **Children North East**

Jason Elsom, CEO, **Parentkind**

Alison Garnham, CEO, **Child Poverty Action Group**

Joe Hallgarten, CEO, **The Centre for Education and Youth**

Emma Knights, Chief Executive, **National Governance Association**

Rosamund McNeil, Assistant General Secretary, **National Education Union**

Cllr Dr Kindy Sandhu, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, **Coventry City Council**

Mike Short, Head of Education, **UNISON**

Liz Todd, Professor of Educational Inclusion, **Director of Newcastle University Institute for Social Science**

Paul Whiteman, General Secretary, **NAHT**

Please note: the contents of this letter will be shared with the media and the organisations involved will be publicising this letter.

⁹ DfE, [Pupil absence in schools in England, 2020/21](#), 2022

¹⁰ D Hirsch, [The cost of child poverty in 2021](#), 2021

¹¹ K Stewart, [Does money affect children's outcomes?](#), 2013

¹² CPAG, [The Cost of the School Day in England: pupils' perspectives](#), 2021