

- **At the same time, half (51 per cent)** of school staff report that schools have **less capacity to support struggling families and children**, with staffing cuts being cited as one reason for this.
- **Fifty-nine per cent** of school staff think that there are **fewer support services** for children and families outside of school than two years ago, which contributes to pressure. At the same time, 70 per cent of head teachers report an increase in parents asking for help with essentials such as food or clothing, **suggesting that families are directly asking school leaders and communities for help more often.**

Poverty is compromising children’s learning and children in lower-income families are finding it harder to catch up

‘I think our low-income children are falling further behind than ever before’ (Primary senior leader, South East)

‘Families are struggling financially and emotionally, and children are becoming more stressed and anxious. Pupils are not ready to learn.’ (Primary teaching assistant, North West)

‘Lack of space having a negative impact on [student’s] ability to study/do homework. More students arriving to school without eating breakfast and parents unable to top up their dinner money through lack of funds/cost of living rise. This impacts on their ability to focus and concentrate meaning they will not meet their full potential.’ (Secondary pupil support and welfare, London)

‘Children can’t do homework online as they don’t have devices at home. Often they don’t even have pencils, coloured pencils or other resources to do homework at home.’ (Primary teaching assistant, Yorkshire and the Humber)

‘[There is] absenteeism due to the costs of travel and also increased fatigue due to students undertaking more paid work to support themselves and their families.’ (Sixth form specialist, London)

Lesson time and learning are being significantly affected by high levels of child poverty. The survey responses show that pupils are frequently tired and hungry, unable to concentrate, and without the resources and equipment they need to fully engage with the curriculum. Following a pandemic where many children’s learning was affected, school staff report that those in poverty, with the added pressures of the cost of living crisis, are increasingly struggling to catch up:

- **Three-quarters** of all school staff (74 per cent) said there is evidence that children growing up in poverty **have fallen further behind** their peers in learning in the last two years, compared to previous years.
 - **More than half (53 per cent)** of all teachers reported an **increase in the number of pupils struggling to concentrate** on learning due to hunger and fatigue.
 - **Seventy-six per cent of secondary school staff** have seen an increase in pupils not having all the equipment and resources they need for lessons.
- Eighty-four per cent of all school staff told us that the effects of poverty on **pupils’ ability to learn and participate** in school have worsened over the last two years.

- **Nearly three in four** school staff (73 per cent) stated that they are concerned the lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic has made the impact of poverty on education worse.

Imagining better for pupils and schools in England

School staff across England are clear that, with governmental will and action, child poverty can be reduced and children can thrive at school

'Children need a brighter, more hopeful future.' (All-through senior leader, Yorkshire and the Humber)

While schools and school staff have in many cases risen to the growing challenge of providing support to families and pupils who are struggling, this cannot continue. Schools cannot solve child poverty; the efforts staff are making to deal with the effects of child poverty are pushing schools to their limits. And poverty is stealing children's educations.

School staff overwhelmingly believe that the government should do more to support struggling families, with 82 per cent calling for this. When asked which policies would have the biggest effect on reducing child poverty in their school:

- Eighty per cent of school staff said **providing universal free school meals to all school children**.
- Nearly two in three (63 per cent) said **increasing the amount of financial support low-income and middle-income families with children receive**.
- Sixty-eight per cent said more government **help for families with school costs** such as uniform and school trips.

'Some children are coming to school hungry... all children of school age should be given a free school lunch not just infants.' (Primary facilities staff member, North East)

Whole school communities in England – head teachers, teachers, governors, teaching support staff, administrators, catering teams and facilities managers – want to see real and urgent action from the government to tackle child poverty and support schools. They know it doesn't have to be like this.

Recommendations

A comprehensive plan to eradicate child poverty must sit at the heart of any government's education strategy, with a cross departmental approach, child poverty reduction targets and a long-term focus on increasing family incomes. However, school staff across England have also strongly indicated that there are immediate steps for government to take that would go some way to reducing poverty and hardship among children, helping pupils to learn and enabling staff to focus on the core parts of their roles.