



House of Commons
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Sarah Champion
Member of Parliament for Rotherham

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Sarah Champion supports child-led inquiry into the costs of going to school

Local MP Sarah Champion has been gathering evidence as part of a new inquiry which has been set up to help tackle poverty across England.

During a special session in Parliament, Rotherham MP Sarah Champion helped young people from The Children's Commission on Poverty ask experts questions about the cost of going to school. The inquiry was the first of its kind where children were able to lead the inquiry into the matters most affecting them.

Sarah said "It was wonderful to be able to support children to ask questions of the experts, on an issue that affects them directly. It is often easy to overlook the voice of young people when we are making policy decisions on their behalf, so I believe having children there asking the questions really made a difference.

"Child poverty is still endemic in modern Britain: there are 3.7 million children living in poverty. That is a genuinely shocking statistic and I am pleased that my role in this inquiry will help alleviate some of the day to day burdens that families in poverty face, such as the costs of going to school."

The Children's Commission on Poverty questioned witnesses over three days, and investigated how struggling families manage to bear the costs of school essentials such as lunches, uniforms and basic materials, including text books and access to computers.

Cyrus, a young commissioner, aged 14, said: "We held an inquiry to try and find out the cost of things at school and the reasons for this. We want to achieve changes to help children living in poverty. So we invite you to tell us what you think and see in order to help us make changes."

Matthew Reed, The Children's Society's Chief Executive, said: "We are grateful for Sarah's support for the young people today and their commitment to ensuring children's views are heard on this issue. The crisis of child poverty is growing, yet children's views have been largely absent from the poverty debate. Children's ability to benefit fully from their education is critical to their future. Yet too often, children in poverty are missing out because of the costs involved."

The Commission is a unique opportunity for children to join forces and examine first-hand the stark realities facing thousands of families living below the poverty line. It comprises a panel of 15 children and teenagers from across England, ranging in age from 12 to 19, leading the Commission's 18-month investigation into child poverty in the UK.

The Commission is investigating the financial and emotional effects that the costs of school life have on children and their families. This includes the extent to which children and young people in poverty are – or feel – excluded from important areas of school life as well as how they are treated by fellow pupils, teachers and other school staff.

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Notes to editors:

- According to the [latest official statistics](#), there are 3.7 million children in poverty. Figures are according to the relative low income measure, and are based on income after housing costs.
- From this September, the government will introduce free school meals for all infant school children, meaning 200,000 more children in poverty will get this key support. It is vital this key support is extended to the 500,000 school children living in poverty who will continue to miss out.
- The Children's Society is supporting the first-ever [Children's Commission on Poverty](#). The commissioners want the government to draw on children's actual experience – not just the statistics — when developing measures to tackle child poverty. The Children's Commission on Poverty is being supported by The Children's Society and led by a panel of 16 children and teenagers from across England, ranging in age from 12 to 19. They are leading an 18-month investigation into child poverty in the UK. It provides a crucial platform for children to speak out about what poverty is really like and reveal, through their own eyes, the day-to-day challenges they face and what needs to be done.
- By 2020, [an estimated three quarters of a million more children](#) will be living in poverty than today.
- [The Children's Society](#) wants to create a society where children and young people are valued, respected and happy. We are committed to helping vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including children in care and young runaways. We give a voice to disabled children, help young refugees to rebuild their lives and provide relief for young carers. Through our campaigns and research, we seek to influence policy and perceptions so that young people have a better chance in life.

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