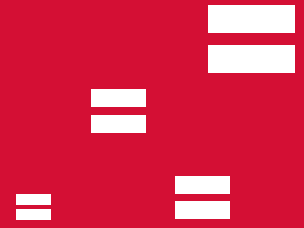




Fair
Education
Alliance



Fair Education in 2024:

Priorities for a New Government

About the Fair Education Alliance

The Fair Education Alliance is a coalition of nearly 300 of England's leading organisations from business, the third sector and education, all working towards a world where our education system is fair – where no child's educational success is limited by their socioeconomic background.

This is a world where disadvantage no longer determines literacy and numeracy rates at primary school, GCSE attainment at secondary school, the emotional wellbeing and resilience of young people, participation in further education or employment-based training, or university admissions.

Acknowledgments

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Designed by breezign

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Our members



Thank you to the following organisations for their generous support:



Executive Summary

Our Fair Education Impact Goals paint a stark picture. Perhaps most concerning is the fact that the gap in attainment between children from low-income households and their peers increases from 4.8 months at age 5 to 19 months at age 16 – a fourfold increase.

Whilst there are issues outside the school system that result in inequalities at the start of school, the gap grows rather than shrinks as children move through education.

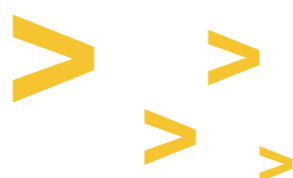
It is now more than a decade since we established our Fair Education Impact Goals to track our progress towards a future where no child's education success is determined by their socioeconomic background.

Our members – businesses, charities and social enterprises, think tanks, unions, universities and schools – have worked tirelessly to make education fair: innovating, bringing new ideas and sharing best practice.

And yet, in 2024 education outcomes remain deeply correlated with socioeconomic background and many children are not provided opportunities to fulfil their potential. As society faces a cost-of-living crisis, housing crisis, deepening poverty and threats to global peace, education, and equity of educational opportunity, struggle to capture the attention of the media and the public.

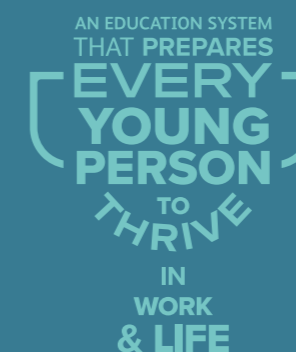


The new Government has an opportunity to attack educational inequality at its root, standing us in better stead for whatever challenges we face in the future.



The 2024 Fair Education Priorities build on the four priorities we set out in 2023. We believe that strategic focus on these areas can fundamentally shift the barriers to opportunity.

We call on the new Government, and wider society, to address these priorities as a matter of urgency:



▶▶ Too few young people feel their education engages their passions, fosters a sense of belonging, or prepares them for the world they'll enter after school.

For the next generation to be ready to take on employment, civic engagement, and the ups and downs of life, we need a system that values wellbeing and skills, whilst supporting every young person to get the grades they need to follow the path they want.

The Fair Education Alliance believes that this more holistic approach to education is needed to begin to rebuild the social contract between schools and families. Families will only support children to attend and engage with school when they trust schools to secure a brighter future for their children. That contract has fractured to crisis point. Not only are we failing to provide all children with the education they need to thrive when there, but we are in the midst of an attendance crisis where children are not coming to school at all. We must make a credible commitment to families – especially families of children facing the greatest challenges – that engagement with school is in the best interests of their children, so we can stop school absence from driving a wedge into the existing disadvantage gap.



Schools and colleges continue to face severe recruitment and retention issues for teaching and support staff, particularly in schools serving the highest proportion of pupils from low-income households.

Declining real-terms pay is one issue driving this workforce crisis, with increased workload and stress another contributing factor. The employment landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade, making careers in other industries more flexible and attractive, and if our schools are going to truly reflect the communities they serve, we must see a cultural shift to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENT

- = Fund schools to pay staff fairly.
- = Reduce workload and stress through an accountability system that values inclusion and rewards the complex work of serving low-income communities.
- = Build a more diverse workforce through inclusive practice.

WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENT

- = Develop essential skills and physical and emotional health alongside academic and foundational skills, with a universal framework to monitor progress.
- = Collect, across agencies, comprehensive data on the wellbeing of young people, so local governments, schools, the third sector, and funding bodies can better understand where investment is needed.
- = Continue to fight the learning loss of the pandemic through targeted, high-quality, 1-1 and small-group tuition.
- = Invest in the teacher training, infrastructure and hardware required to close the digital divide, so schools can adapt to technological developments at speed
- = Commit to uphold children's right to participate by establishing processes to meaningfully engage young people from all backgrounds in decisions affecting them and their education.



A JOINED-UP SYSTEM THAT MEETS RISING NEEDS

Whether a child spends the first years of their life at home, at a nursery, or with a childminder, the evidence is clear that their early development has a significant impact on their life outcomes.

As childcare rises to the top of political priorities, we must address the needs of children and view childcare as more than a way of encouraging the workforce participation of parents. We must also consider all children – including those with special educational needs and other vulnerabilities. Early years provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities is too difficult to access and funding needs to increase to cover the true cost of quality childcare provision.

WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENT

- = Build a workforce that can deliver high quality early years provision.
- = Make high quality early childhood education and care accessible and affordable for every family, including those whose children have special educational needs.
- = Increase strategic focus on learning from birth in the home.

As we address multiple complex issues, we must adopt a more holistic, joined-up approach to support children and families.

With local authority resources declining, schools and trusts are spending a growing proportion of their budgets fighting the hidden costs of poverty – children are coming to school hungry, cold, and tired, leaving them less able to concentrate. 72% of all teachers, and 82% of those in Educational Improvement Areas, said that they are helping pupils more with non-academic matters than they did five years ago, including support with mental health, buying key supplies, or signposting families to support.

Whilst increased funding for schools is urgently needed, we must also develop a long-term sustainable strategy to support children and address root causes so schools can focus on educating, rather than tackling the symptoms of poverty alone.

WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENT

- = Build long-term strategies for adequately funding and delivering services that support families in need.
- = Enable early identification and support for children with SEND through funding, guidance, and collaboration across services.
- = Adopt a joined-up approach at national and local levels, including shared outcomes and the scaling up of Family Hubs or another single point of contact for children and families.
- = Ensure there is sufficient funding, from early years to post-16, targeted toward lessening the impacts of poverty on educational outcomes.



Foreword from the Chair



As we welcome a new Government, our collective of nearly 300 cross-sector organisations has no illusions about the enormity of the challenge before us.

The gap between poorer pupils and their wealthier peers remains wide – the widest it has been for many years and it increases as children move through the system. By post-16, the attainment gap means that most young people entitled to the pupil premium will not be in the national A-level cohort, and those who will achieve less than their wealthier peers. In addition, the technical and applied learning pathway that is an alternative to A-level is not consistently of sufficient parity or quality across the country. This is not acceptable.

We must not be by-standers when the life-chances that a good education offers are not equally accessible to all.

There is a strong moral imperative to deal with the disadvantage gap and there is also a strong business case. Wasted talent and increased social costs are obvious financial drains on society – but they also lead to alienation and social division.

Since we published our Fair Education Manifesto in 2023, we have seen increasing and wide support for our combined vision to build a fairer education system for England’s children and young people. There is growing awareness of the complexity of the challenges facing children, young people and their families, and more unity than ever in the priorities we called for a year ago – and build on here.

We hope this Government will share in the FEA’s collective vision for an education system where all children are valued. Our members, comprising educators and other public servants, the private and corporate sector, and the third sector, are unified in their call for:

- = A strong and supported education workforce.
- = An education system that prepares every young person to thrive in work and life.
- = The best early education and care for every child, and
- = A joined-up system that meets rising needs.

Crises at home and abroad will compete fiercely for limited resources but policymakers must begin to think longer term. There is promising cross-sector practice happening right across the country; compelling examples of this are included here.

Much of this practice could be spread at little cost, although some of our calls to action in this document will require more investment. We believe these investments are necessary for a fair education system.

These priorities have been put together with collective input from the practitioners, businesses, school leaders, young people and education policy experts who make up the FEA’s coalition. We make a call to arms for policymakers on our key priorities – and, importantly, we also make an offer.

We know that closing the disadvantage gap in education requires a united effort. We offer the resources of our coalition. Our membership stands ready to support policymakers’ work in a multitude of ways – through our research, data, test-and-learn initiatives, grassroots and scaled projects and social entrepreneurship expertise. We have a plethora of cross-sector resources at the disposal of government – and the collective energy and drive to be a powerful backing for progress on our agenda.

Education has a foundational role in building a better society. A fair start in life for all children through access to a good education is critical.

The Fair Education Alliance is already working hard at this and having impact at local level. The policy ask is for government to support us in scaling this. Join us in our campaign – for our children and for our future.

Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE



Priorities for this Government

In our 2023 Fair Education Manifesto, after consulting our members, we set out four priorities.

We called on the next Government, and wider society, to address these priorities as a matter of urgency. We were pleased to see the Labour Party acknowledge the importance of each of these priorities in its Manifesto. However, the work of developing thoughtful and practical solutions still lies ahead of us.

STRONG & SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

To deliver a great education for every child, we need a strong, diverse and sustainable education workforce – especially in areas serving children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

THE BEST EARLY EDUCATION & CARE FOR EVERY CHILD

To ensure all children are starting out with a fair opportunity to thrive in school, we must increase access and quality of early years learning and development for every child from birth.

AN EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT PREPARES EVERY YOUNG PERSON TO THRIVE IN WORK & LIFE

Our young people need a strong foundation in academics, skills and emotional health and we must ensure that everyone is included.

A JOINED-UP SYSTEM THAT MEETS RISING NEEDS

Schools cannot serve all the needs of children, young people and their families. We must free up schools to focus on teaching and learning by joining-up and properly funding support services beyond the school that set strong foundations for children to thrive.

Bold policy action from the Government was needed to tackle the complex and thorny issues we outlined. Unfortunately, we are yet to see this. We need creativity, long-term thinking and real investment, not sticking plasters that have modest short-term gains but great long-term cost. ▶

Introduction

Strong education outcomes for children from all backgrounds are essential to taking on the world’s biggest challenges.

These outcomes are key to the future success of business, civil society and government.

However, the topics of education and equity of educational opportunity still struggle to capture the attention of the media and the public. Fewer than 1 in 8 voters rank education as a top priority¹. At a time when we also face a cost-of-living crisis, housing crisis, deepening poverty and threats to global peace, it is understandable that an issue concerned with investing in the future may feel less urgent to a new Government.

Unfortunately, the need for urgent action remains. We must ensure that long-term investment in education is high on the new Government’s agenda.

In 2024 education outcomes remain deeply correlated with socioeconomic background and many children are not provided opportunities to fulfil their potential.

The long tail of the COVID-19 pandemic is still impacting education. How much it holds the next generation back in the years to come is up to us.

We need to act, and this isn’t a task for the education sector alone.

We need support from those across education, the third sector, business and policy, and we need to involve young people directly in determining the future of their education system. Finally, we need the Government to commit to tackling educational inequality as if it can be solved – because it can.

The Fair Education Alliance brings together 280 organisations and young people with lived experience of barriers to education to achieve a future where every child gets a great education regardless of their socioeconomic status. Our members - businesses, charities and social enterprises, think tanks, unions, universities and schools – work with children and young people from cradle to career in over half the education settings, and in all local authorities. Despite their diverse backgrounds, our members are united under a shared vision for what our country needs to prosper. For the last ten years, we have measured our progress against five Fair Education Impact Goals. These aim to close a range of gaps between poorer students and their peers. We draw on the collective evidence, experience and insights of our members to present recommendations for change.

And yet, we do find cause for optimism in the shifting national conversation on each of these priorities. Our passionate and focused members are generating new ideas and innovative solutions every day:

- = Whilst the school workforce picture is as worrying as ever, **there has been further exploration of the cultural change needed to make the profession attractive, inclusive and sustainable.**
- = Pupil mental health and persistent absence rates have failed to improve, but **there has been a flurry of research and analysis into root causes and potential solutions.**
- = Although curriculum and assessment still need rethinking to ensure education is inclusive for all and relevant in a rapidly changing world, **there is growing evidence on how to build the skills young people need and a growing number of schools and trusts forging new paths.**
- = Whilst the poorest children and those with additional needs still face the biggest challenges to access high-quality early education and care, **there is more creative thinking than ever around how to create rich and educational home learning environments.**
- = Local services and early years support continue to be stripped due to budget pressures, but **we have seen more third sector innovation than ever on how to support families beyond the school and college gates, and take the pressure off the education system.**

We recognise that there is much that could be done beyond these areas, but we urge readers – and this Government – to prioritise the fundamental investments and shifts outlined here, that will make a difference for the next generation.

Youth Steering Group statement of support

We, the Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group, urge the new Government to prioritise addressing educational inequality because education has the power to tackle some of our most pressing social challenges.

By investing in education, the country is choosing to boost our economy as well as ensuring that future generations from all backgrounds have opportunities to fulfil their potential—whether in employment, further education or other life pathways.

Our Fair Education Priorities provide policy recommendations that would tackle both the causes and the symptoms of educational inequality and ensure that no child's access to high quality education is restricted due to the income of their parents, the colour of their skin, their SEND status, the area they live in or which school they go to.

Involving young people in decision-making about education is crucial. By engaging a diverse group of young people, we can ensure that policies reflect the real challenges young people are facing and respond to the rapidly evolving needs of society. Therefore, one policy ask in this document we are particularly passionate about is our call for the new Government to establish processes to meaningfully engage young people from all backgrounds in decisions affecting them and their education. This approach would not only make educational reforms more impactful but would also set a positive example of inclusivity, collaboration and a commitment to children's rights. It would also empower young people to articulate their needs and ideas, take on active roles as citizens and lead change within their communities which can have a positive impact beyond education.

We call on the next government to demonstrate their commitment to young people and future generations by committing to the policy recommendations in these Fair Education Priorities. We believe if the Government did this, it would pave the way to building an education system that addresses systemic injustices and understands each individual's unique aspirations and requirements for success. This collective effort can lead to a society where every child, regardless of background, has the potential to reach their goals through a fair education system.



Photo credit: Youth Steering Group



Photo credit: Youth Steering Group

Purpose of this document

As the new Government takes shape and policies are formed, we're uniting behind these key priorities, built on the collective knowledge and expertise of our members.



This document is a starting point — there is work to do, but we believe that the solutions outlined here will bring us closer to a world in which no child's success is limited by their socioeconomic background.

Through this document we raise awareness of the latest data on our Fair Education Impact Goals, which measure the gaps in attainment, skills, wellbeing and destinations after school.

In each section in Chapter 3, you'll find a summary of why we've chosen this priority, what is causing the problem, and our proposed solutions. You'll find recommendations that we believe should be

implemented immediately, as well as other high-level proposals that need thoughtful development. On these, we stand ready to convene our members to develop solutions informed by evidence and experience.

You'll also find case studies of promising practice – practice that could be scaled up more easily with policy support from government.

Finally, you'll find a young person's view on each priority, because hearing from those experiencing education right now is crucial.

We hope this document is used:

- = By policymakers, to understand the latest data on inequality in education, build support for the four priorities, and put detail to the high-level policies in their own manifesto. We urge policymakers to build awareness of the promising practice we highlight, and accept our invitation to draw on the experience, evidence and insights of our membership in developing solutions to our biggest challenges.
- = By our members and other stakeholders, to understand and use the latest data on our Fair Education Impact Goals, use our collective recommendations to shape their own priorities, better understand how their work connects to the root causes of the challenges we face, and feel motivated to work with other members to push these priorities forward.

This document includes two types of recommendations:

Those that we'd like Government to take forward immediately, as detailed development is not required or has already been completed by experts.

Those that we invite Government to work with our members on, as they will require detailed development in consultation with experts.

As we welcome a new Government, Fair Education Alliance members will continue to innovate and push forward to meet new and growing challenges. Their work will have a greater impact with vision, leadership, and engagement by this Government. We hope that we can count on our political leaders to invest in our children and young people today, so they can build the country we want to see tomorrow.

The Fair Education **IMPACT GOALS**

The Fair Education Impact Goals measure our progress in working towards **a vision where no child's success is determined by their socioeconomic background.**

There are several measures we consider under each goal, but our primary focus is this: *What is the gap in attainment and progression between children from low-income households and their peers?* These impact goals inform our strategy, priorities and activity.

More than a decade since we started using the Fair Education Impact Goals, alarmingly, the gaps are as wide as when we started. This is a stark message for those of us working to improve the situation. It could be argued that any lack of progress has been driven by many social, economic and political factors and without the work of our members the gaps might be even wider. However, the seriousness of the picture prompts the question: *What do we need to do differently in the next ten years to produce strong and sustained progress?*

This year, we also highlight the gap in development at age five, before the Fair Education Impact Goals begin measurement, recognising that many children face barriers in their early years that make succeeding in school difficult.

Together, these impact goals cover a young person's educational journey from the very start of school until they enter the workforce – and paint a picture of the inequalities that exist early in childhood and grow at each stage of education.

A note on measurement:

- We measure gaps in months of learning which is calculated based on average attainment scores of disadvantaged pupils versus all other pupils.
- For regional comparisons, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils locally is compared to the attainment of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.
- When we refer to “pupils from low-income households”, this is based on eligibility for free school meals unless otherwise stated. When we refer to those “who have been low-income the longest”, we mean those classified as “persistently disadvantaged”, defined as having been on Free School Meals for 80% or more of their time in education.



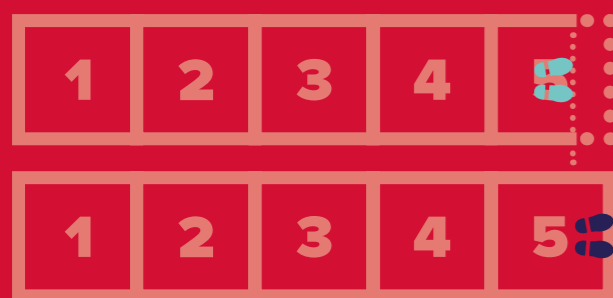
What is the gap in attainment and progression between children from low-income households and their peers?

What do we need to do differently in the next ten years to produce strong and sustained progress?

Photo credit: Chiltern Learning Trust



A WIDENING GAP



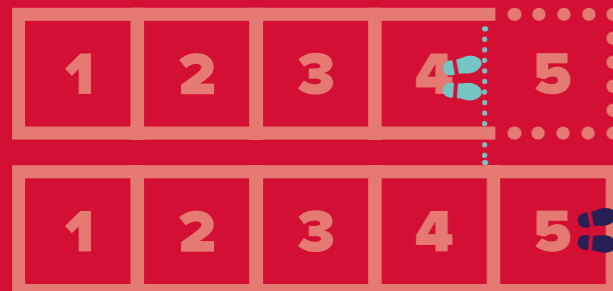
AT THE START OF PRIMARY SCHOOL, CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE **4.8 MONTHS BEHIND** THEIR PEERS IN MEETING EARLY LEARNING GOALS

Children from low-income households
When starting Primary School: **4.8 months**

Children not from low-income households
When starting Primary School: **0 months**

Children not from low-income households

THIS IS THE **WIDEST GAP SINCE 2014**



The picture is even starker for those with additional needs: CHILDREN RECEIVING SEN SUPPORT ARE **12.4 MONTHS BEHIND**

Children from households living on a low income for over six years are **12.2 MONTHS** behind others at the end of primary school, and

22.7 MONTHS (nearly two years of learning) at the end of secondary school.

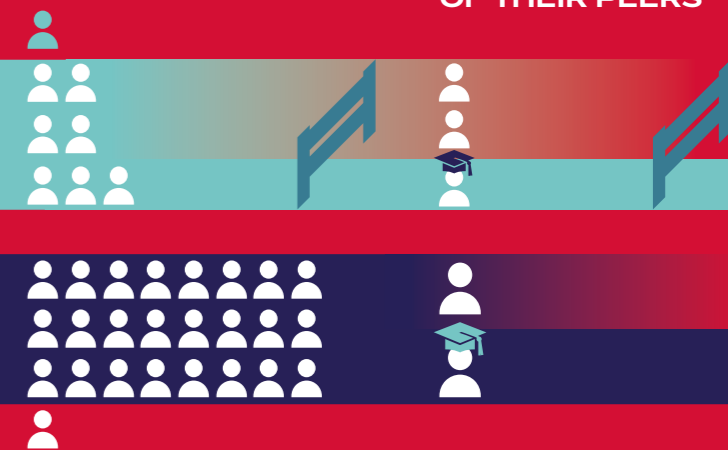
LIKE THE PRIMARY GAP, THIS IS THE **WIDEST GAP SINCE 2012**

When taking GCSEs: **19 months**

Post-16:

1 IN 8 YOUNG PEOPLE FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE NOT IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET) COMPARED TO **1 IN 25** OF THEIR PEERS

1 IN 3 STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS PROGRESS TO UNIVERSITY COMPARED TO **1 IN 2** OF THEIR PEERS



The following pages explore these widening gaps in more detail and show progress towards our five Fair Education Impact Goals.

IMPACT GOAL

ONE

narrow THE GAP IN LITERACY & NUMERACY AT PRIMARY SCHOOL

CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE ON AVERAGE **10.3 MONTHS BEHIND THEIR PEERS** AT THE END OF PRIMARY SCHOOL²

Attainment gap in literacy & numeracy at the end of Year 6

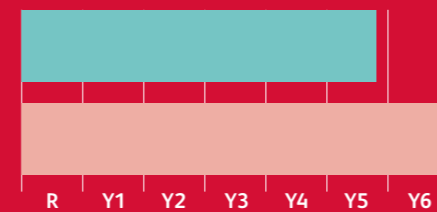


This applies to about nine children in a class of 30³.



CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN IN LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS THE LONGEST ARE **12.2 MONTHS BEHIND OTHERS** AT THE END OF PRIMARY SCHOOL⁴

Attainment gap at the end of Y6



This applies to about four children in a class of 30⁵.



AFTER SIX YEARS OF PROGRESS CLOSING THIS GAP (BETWEEN 2012 & 2019), THE GAP HAD STARTED WIDENING AGAIN.

THIS WAS THEN EXACERBATED BY THE PANDEMIC,

AND ALL THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE PREVIOUS DECADE HAS NOW BEEN REVERSED.

There is a notable difference between regions:

CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS IN THE SOUTH WEST



MONTHS BEHIND THEIR PEERS

CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS IN LONDON



LONG-TERM VIEW

The gap at the end of primary school is the widest it has been since 2012, with a worsening picture for those who have been in low-income households the longest. The effects of the pandemic are also still being felt.

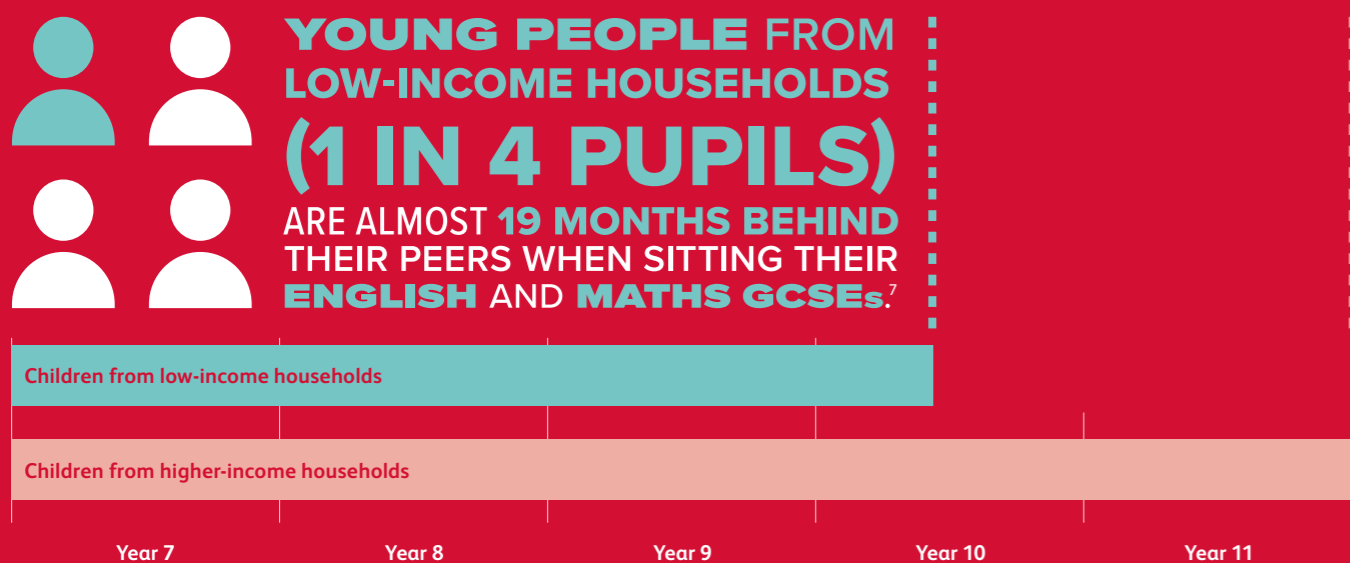
IMPACT GOAL

TWO

narrow THE GAP IN

ENGLISH & MATHS

GCSE ATTAINMENT AT SECONDARY SCHOOL



BY SECONDARY SCHOOL THE **GAP** HAS GROWN

WIDER STILL. THIS GAP WAS ALREADY WIDENING IN 2019 BUT INCREASED BY **OVER A MONTH** OVER THE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC.

THE **1 IN 10** YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE LIVED IN **LOW-INCOME** HOUSEHOLDS THE LONGEST FACE AN EVEN LARGER **GAP**



AT THE END OF SECONDARY SCHOOL⁸

LONG-TERM VIEW

Like the primary gap, this gap is also the widest it has been since 2012, and those who have been in low-income households the longest are the furthest behind. However, the gap for pupils with SEND has narrowed over the course of the pandemic, continuing a positive trend since 2011, albeit at a slower rate⁹.

IMPACT GOAL

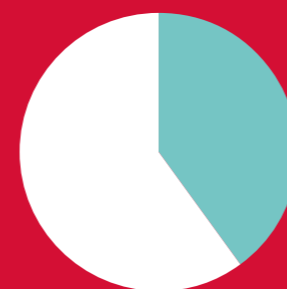
THREE

ENSURE YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

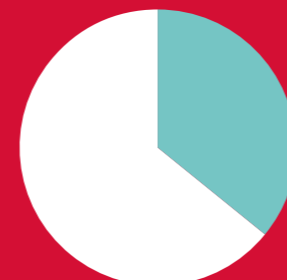
GOOD MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING



PUPILS FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE DRAMATICALLY MORE LIKELY TO HAVE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS THAN OTHERS.¹⁰



OVER 40% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE AN EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE PLAN FOR SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS, AND 36% OF THOSE REQUIRING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM SUCH NEEDS ARE FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS¹⁵



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE WITH SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ABSENT FROM SCHOOL & TO HAVE BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES WHICH CAN LEAD TO SUSPENSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS.^{16,17}



This is why we look at absence, suspensions, and exclusions as an indicator of social and emotional competencies, mental health and wellbeing.

Children with SEND have had the greatest increase absence post-pandemic indicating acute challenges adjusting after an extended period at home¹⁸.

LONG-TERM VIEW



Absence rates are still higher overall compared to pre-pandemic, and the gap in absence between low-income pupils and others is widening. This is particularly pronounced for low-income pupils with SEND. The gap between pupils from low-income households with social, emotional and mental health needs and others has remained roughly stable, but the total number of pupils with such needs has risen.

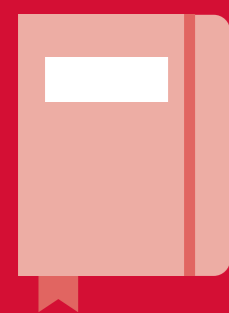
IMPACT GOAL

FOUR

narrow THE GAP IN THE PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE



TAKING PART IN FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING AFTER FINISHING THEIR GCSEs



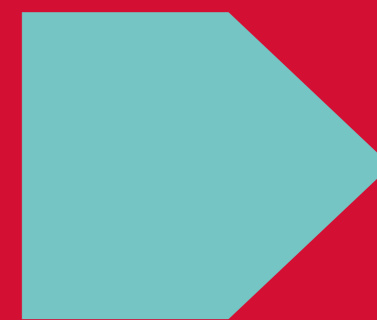
1 IN 8 YOUNG PEOPLE
FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS*
ARE **NOT IN EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET)**
COMPARED WITH ONLY **1 IN 25** OF THEIR PEERS.¹⁹



*eligible for pupil premium funding

THE **WIDEST GAP** EXISTS

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM
GYPSY ROMA TRAVELLER
COMMUNITIES, WHERE
1 IN 3 YOUNG PEOPLE
ARE **NEET** AFTER
FINISHING THEIR GCSEs.²⁰



ESSENTIAL SKILLS
CAN MITIGATE FOR **SOCIAL**
DISADVANTAGES IN EMPLOYMENT²¹



**BUT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM
LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS
ARE LESS LIKELY TO ACCESS
OPPORTUNITIES**

SUCH AS
**EXTRA-
CURRICULAR
ACTIVITIES**^{22,23}



**LONG-TERM
VIEW**



The gap in young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has been widening slowly since 2017, with a more substantial increase after the pandemic began. The gap for young people who identify as Gypsy Roma Traveller, however, has remained consistently wide across the last decade²⁴.

IMPACT GOAL

FIVE

narrow THE GAP IN UNIVERSITY ACCESS

1 IN 3  
STUDENTS
FROM LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS
PROGRESS TO UNIVERSITY

COMPARED TO  
1 IN 2
OF THEIR PEERS ²⁵

FOR MORE PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITIES

ONLY **1 IN 20** OF STUDENTS

FROM **LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS** PROGRESS TO UNIVERSITY

COMPARED TO 1 IN 10 OF THEIR PEERS ²⁶

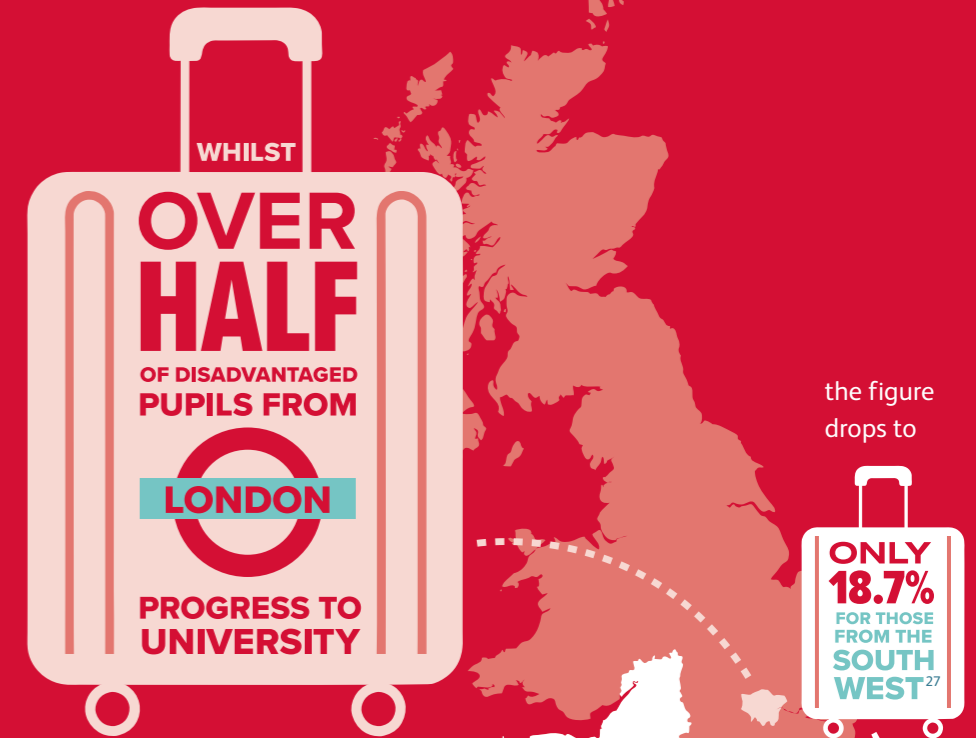


WHILE THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME ATTENDING UNIVERSITY IS GOING UP,

THE GAP IN THE PROPORTION OF STUDENTS FROM **LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS** ATTENDING UNIVERSITY VERSUS OTHERS

HAS WIDENED TO THE **LARGEST** SINCE RECORDS BEGAN.

Regional disparities also remain stubbornly fixed:



LONG-TERM VIEW

Despite the second highest number of 18-year-olds from low-income households securing a place at university or college since records began, the proportion of low-income students versus others has generally been increasing over the last decade.

The Fair Education Priorities

The Fair Education Alliance has identified four key priorities for a fair education in 2024, these are:

AN EDUCATION SYSTEM
THAT PREPARES
**EVERY
YOUNG
PERSON**
TO
THRIVE
IN
WORK
& LIFE

page 38


THE BEST
**EARLY
EDUCATION
& CARE**
FOR EVERY CHILD

page 45

STRONG
& SUPPORTED
WORKFORCE

page 32

A JOINED-UP
SYSTEM THAT
**MEETS
RISING
NEEDS**

page 52

As we welcome the new Government, we are pleased to see that each of our four priorities already figures heavily in the national conversation about education.

However, there are no silver bullets to solving these challenges, and tackling them will take input from experts and practitioners across sectors — for which we hope policymakers will use our Alliance as a source. This document is an invitation to explore promising practice already happening across the country and to begin putting detail to high-level ambitions.

How can we enable every school to achieve a stable and diverse workforce, reflective of its local community?

How do we ensure our education system is relevant for both society and for the full breadth of students it is meant to serve?

Priority One:



The Labour Party has acknowledged the need to act on teacher recruitment, but we also need to address the root causes of poor teacher retention, which are most pronounced for schools serving high numbers of pupils from low-income households.

We must enable every school to achieve a stable and diverse workforce, reflective of its local community, and recognise the unique challenges of serving children with complex needs.

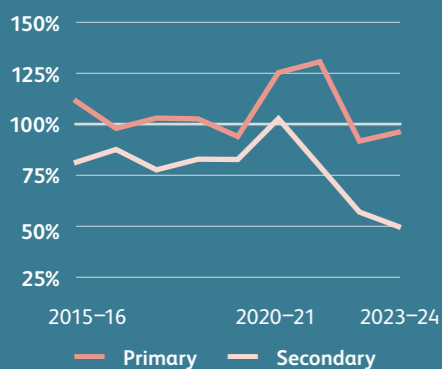
The alarming state of teacher recruitment and retention has only worsened since we published our 2023 Fair Education Manifesto. Although applications to initial teacher training

programmes have increased slightly in the last year, the Department for Education is predicted to miss its targets by a substantial measure, as shown in the first chart below.

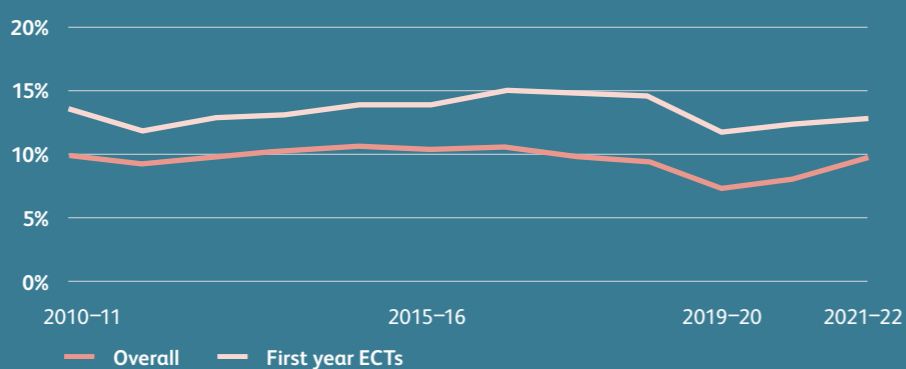
While attrition rates are similar to pre-pandemic levels, as pictured in the second chart below, higher rates of attrition are concentrated in the schools serving pupils from

low-income households, with 9.5% of teachers leaving those secondary schools in the year 2020, compared to 7.1% in schools serving the most affluent areas²⁸. The situation in further education (FE) is even worse: around 25% of college teachers leave the state sector every year, compared to 15% of school teachers²⁹.

Post-graduate ITT recruitment vs Target



Teacher leaving rates



Source (both charts): Teacher recruitment and retention in England data dashboard, NFER. Credit (both charts): Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2024

Without great teachers and teaching assistants in every classroom, we cannot deliver on our vision for a fair education system.

Recruitment and retention of support staff are also growing more challenging, with one survey finding over 99% of SEND coordinators struggling to find enough support staff for children with additional needs³⁰.

When the system does not recruit the staff it needs, schools and colleges serving low-income communities and those facing the greatest challenges suffer the most. Further, positive relationships between pupils and teachers are positively correlated with positive academic outcomes, particularly for pupils with complex needs³¹. When there's heavy turnover or use of supply, children can fail to form bonds that are essential to their engagement with, and success at, school.

Rate of secondary school teachers leaving the state-funded sector (attrition)

Source: Teacher recruitment and retention in England data dashboard, NFER



What's causing the problem?

There are various issues driving the school and college workforce crisis, including pay, workload, stress, and a failure to modernise³². These are also true for early years practitioners, as discussed later in this document.

Declining real terms pay

Teacher pay has deteriorated in real terms since 2010 and has lost competitiveness with other professions, especially for experienced teachers³³.

Bursaries have helped bring new entrants in some subjects, but aren't nearly enough to reach teacher recruitment targets³⁴. The problem is even more severe for support staff, who can often make a higher

salary in unskilled jobs such as retail, and whose jobs are becoming less secure in the face of school funding pressure³⁵.

Pay is also the primary factor driving the increase in vacancies in colleges – particularly those in further education. A teacher at an FE college makes an average of £9,000 less than one in a school and £6,000 less than one in a sixth-form college³⁶.

We cannot expect potential school staff to choose a career that, for support roles, doesn't enable them to make ends meet and, for teachers, isn't competitive with other professions.

Workload and workplace autonomy

Teachers experience higher workload and lower workplace autonomy than other similar professions, two measures associated with job satisfaction and retention³⁷.

The work and stress resulting from the perceived need to serve inspections are a huge burden:

In Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index, 77% of education staff

respondents reported being stressed – a 3% increase from 2022.

71% of respondents thought that school inspections negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of school staff³⁸.

It is imperative that we address the stress and workload created by Ofsted – anticipation of inspection should not be a constant stress in teachers' lives. Further, our accountability system currently poses a disincentive ▶

to teaching in challenging contexts: schools with lower Ofsted ratings find teacher recruitment more challenging³⁹.

There is a direct correlation between poorer Ofsted judgments and high rates of students eligible for free school meals or with low prior attainment⁴⁰, and 60% of education staff disagreed that inspections take into account the level of deprivation within a school or college community⁴¹.

In other words, judgments may be reflective of a student’s context when they arrive at a school more than the quality of the work being done by school staff. At its worst, this can weigh against a truly inclusive school environment and cause school leaders to see students with complex needs as risks to results.

We know that schools serving students with complex needs are often going above and beyond to fill gaps left by other underfunded services, as discussed in the final section of this document. This work not only heightens the stress and workload of teachers serving some of the poorest communities; it’s not currently valued by our system, creating further barriers to recruitment and retention for the most challenged schools.

Failure to modernise

The employment landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade, making careers in other industries more flexible. This too has posed an obstacle to recruitment and retention – both of graduates and of the mid-career women who are the bedrock of the teaching workforce⁴².

With 77% of classroom teachers female, and in a world where women still do the majority of parenting and domestic labour⁴³, a failure to accommodate the needs of working parents has had serious consequences. Further, even those current and prospective teachers without children will be presented with more flexible and less demanding employment options.

Some will choose teaching because they feel it is their calling; however, a national workforce cannot be built solely on those willing to put passion ahead of practical realities.

We must also do more to ensure that we aren’t losing great people because they don’t feel welcome in schools.

While graduates of colour are more likely than white graduates to apply to teacher training programme, they are less likely to be accepted or to become qualified, and that disparity becomes more pronounced as they move through teaching⁴⁴. The result is a dramatic underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in teaching: We would need to promote four times as many teachers of colour to headteacher positions – about 2,500 more – for the role to become representative of the ethnic makeup among people of the same age in the wider population⁴⁵.

In two-thirds of English primary schools and almost a fifth of secondary schools, there are no teachers of colour⁴⁶.

There is evidence that children can attain better outcomes when taught by a teacher from their own racial or ethnic background⁴⁷; not only is a lack of diversity hampering our ability to attract and keep the number of teachers we need, we may also be missing an opportunity to maximise the academic potential of every child.

Solutions

Pay staff fairly

Teachers and support staff must be compensated fairly, with a long-term strategy to keep salaries competitive.



Build a more inclusive workforce

We must make a cultural shift to ensure that we are attracting and retaining great teachers, regardless of their background or circumstances – a diverse staff is linked to a more inclusive school culture. More flexible and part-time working is needed to accommodate the needs of parents, carers, and disabled people. We also need strategies for improving racial diversity and retaining working mothers in the workforce. These should be underpinned by training on inclusive practices and greater sharing of best practice from a range of contexts. Schools will need adequate funding to support these changes.

With additional resource, schools and trusts should publish data on diversity, and actions to improve it. Further, our accountability system – including multi-academy trust accountability – should review whether schools have built an inclusive culture⁴⁸ that values its staff, meets their needs, and promotes their retention.

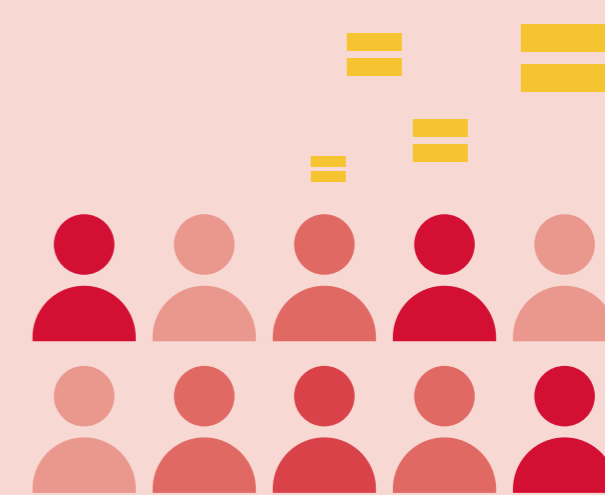
Reduce workload and stress through an accountability system that values inclusion

Workload and stress must be reduced – particularly for those teaching in and leading schools serving the lowest-income communities. A significant driver is our accountability system; the stakes of a school inspection should be proportionate to the value it delivers.

Our inspectorate should facilitate support for any issues identified and any behaviours driven through inspections should lead to the best possible outcomes for all students, with a particular focus on schools creating inclusive environments that engage every child in learning. This should be enabled by training and resource to support early identification of and support for needs.

Shared local outcomes would help incentivise collaboration, rather than competition, between schools. Further, a school’s data should be compared to similar schools whose students are more likely to face the same needs and challenges, so any support offered is right for that school.

We must also recognise the immense challenges facing schools whose communities are struggling to stay safe, fed, and housed. We should celebrate and reward the work of teachers and leaders who go above and beyond to support these families, while acknowledging that this is sometimes a symptom of failures in wider systems.



Recommendations

We ask the Government to:

- = **Develop a sustainable plan** to make school and college staff pay fair and competitive with competing professions over the long-term, fully funded for schools and colleges so they do not need to make cuts elsewhere.

- = **Provide training and resource** to enable school staff to effectively implement whole-school inclusive practice, meeting the needs of all children.

We invite the Government to work with our members to:

- = **Implement a fairer accountability system** that recognises the complexities of serving children from low-income households, with inclusion of every child at the heart. Only through whole-school inclusion can we meet our high ambitions for every child.

- = **Develop a strategy, with appropriate resourcing, to make the teaching profession more diverse and inclusive.** This should include greater flexibility and measures to increase racial diversity and retention of working mothers, with training, mentoring, and accountability measures for schools and trusts to ensure these are implemented.

Young person's view

"How can students be helped if teachers are not?"

Teachers are vital in supporting students with their learning and development, especially because students spend a lot of time within school."

Haseeb, age 17,
Youth Steering Group



Photo credit: Chiltern Learning Trust

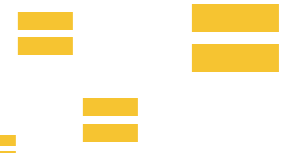


Photo credit: Chiltern Learning Trust



Photo credit: Chiltern Learning Trust

Case study: Chiltern Learning Trust



Chiltern Learning Trust's long-term focus on belonging has increased diversity in the workforce and resulted in staff retention rates well above the national average.

Based in Luton, Chiltern Learning Trust (CLT) serves a community with a large population of people from ethnic minorities. Over the last five years, they have been building a sense of belonging for everyone in their school communities: pupils, teachers, and support staff.

This culture of belonging is underpinned by inclusive processes and practices and everyone – from governors to support staff – is trained in them. The trust's strong moral purpose is consistently communicated to the school and wider community.

Recruitment has been transformed; having recognised the need to increase ethnic diversity within their workforce, CLT introduced a blind application process and a tracking system to monitor data on applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds. This allowed them to identify trends and highlight the schools and departments

where further training on fair recruitment practices may be needed.

Chiltern's Initial Teacher Training programme now comprises over 60% of students from an ethnic minority background, many of whom were educated in a trust school. This 'grow your own' approach has resulted in a staff team invested in their home community and far more likely to stay working at the trust. Applications from the local community have increased as people see themselves represented, adding to the high numbers of applicants the trust receives for every role they advertise – even in schools with lower Ofsted ratings.

As with many other sectors, there have been challenges in building a diverse leadership team, and while two of their last three headteacher appointments have been from ethnic minority backgrounds, they make no claims to perfection. Hard conversations about what still needs to be improved are encouraged through a culture of reflection, at both an individual and institutional level.

In this document we have called for greater availability of flexible and part-time working to better accommodate the needs of parents, carers, and disabled people.

As part of their wider strategy, this is something Chiltern have invested in. Parents on leave with young children are supported through free, informal CPD and networking events at a local farm, where children can come and play while their parents stay up to date with what's happening in education. In addition, they partner with FEA member The Maternity Teacher Paternity Teacher Project to support staff on parental leave through 'back to work' workshops and group coaching. This catalogue of support, set against the backdrop of a culture of belonging, goes a long way towards retaining great talent, experienced teachers and future leaders – providing stability to the workforce and allowing the trust to focus on making improvements in other areas.

Chiltern Learning Trust is just one example among many schools and trusts who are showing what is possible through a commitment to inclusion, despite limited funding and a challenging national context. With further Government backing we hope to see every school better equipped to support their staff and, ultimately, the children and young people we all set out to serve.

A culture of belonging doesn't just impact racial and ethnic diversity. CLT seeks to be inclusive of every difference that make a person unique.



Priority Two:



Too few young people feel their education engages their passions, fosters a sense of belonging, or prepares them for the world they'll enter after school

For the next generation to be ready to take on employment, civic engagement, and the ups and downs of life, we need a system that values wellbeing and skills, whilst supporting every young person to get the grades they need to follow the path they want.

Our accountability mechanisms, curriculum, and teacher training each have a role to play in this.

The Fair Education Alliance believes that a more holistic approach to education is needed to begin to rebuild the social contract between schools and families. Families will only support children to attend and engage with school when they trust schools to secure a brighter future for their children. That contract has fractured to crisis point. Not only are we failing to provide all children with the education they need to thrive when there, but we are in the midst of an attendance crisis where children are not coming to school at all.

If we don't take bold action to repair this gap between low-income young people and their peers, it will grow further. Children receiving free school meals are currently more than three times as likely as their wealthier peers to be severely absent (missing at least 50% of school) and more than twice as likely to be persistently absent (missing at least 10% of school)⁴⁹. Children who are severely or persistently absent are substantially less likely to pass at least five GCSEs⁵⁰ which is a key predictor of employment outcomes – leading to young people from low-income households being more than twice as likely to not be in education, employment, or training than their peers⁵¹. We must make a credible commitment to families – especially families of children facing the greatest challenges – that engagement with school is in the best interests of their children, so we can stop school absence from driving a wedge into the existing disadvantage gap.

What's causing the problem?

The legacy of COVID-19 continues to impact the education system, and will for years to come.

The impacts of the pandemic on academic attainment have been well-documented: pupils lost about a third of their learning time between March 2020 and April 2021, and this was concentrated amongst pupils from low-income households⁵².

This turbo-charged the attainment gap, with secondary schools serving a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils showing a learning loss 50% higher than other schools⁵³, and pupils from low-income households showing a greater drop in attainment than others⁵⁴.

It is also clear that the pandemic impacted the mental health of children and young people, but this was more severe for those who were worse off. Over the course of the pandemic, children and young people from low-income households had worse mental health and more symptoms of behavioural, emotional, and attitudinal difficulties than others⁵⁵.

Without more drastic action, these impacts are likely to continue for at least a decade⁵⁶.



We need bold action to enable this generation to thrive in work and life.

Mental health, wellbeing, and the desires of young people aren't currently prioritised by our education system

This is, in part, due to the priorities of our accountability system, which doesn't always support or reward schools in the work they do to engage the most vulnerable pupils (see priority one for further discussion). Further, lack of resources and support for a range of special educational needs (as discussed in priority four) combines with these pressures to lead to disengagement, suspensions and exclusions.

An increasing number of families feel that their relationship with school has broken down, and that schools care more about data than the individual needs and challenges

of their children⁵⁷. Too many young people also have a negative school experience, where they are left with a poor conception of their own abilities⁵⁸. The education system should strengthen the wellbeing of children and young people by giving them a sense of belonging and opportunities to develop their passions; unfortunately, that's not currently the case⁵⁹.

In many schools, the physical and creative activity we know to be linked with improved wellbeing⁶⁰ has been scaled back⁶¹. A relationship with a trusted adult, which we know to be protective of the mental health of

a young person⁶², declines over the course of the school journey⁶³. ▶

Poor mental health and wellbeing are strongly correlated with behavioural issues, including those that lead to suspensions and exclusions⁶⁴.

Young people want their views and contributions to matter, but they don't currently feel listened to by the systems that serve them⁶⁵, particularly when it comes to the root causes of their behaviour⁶⁶. We know that social, emotional, and mental health needs are contributing to heightened absence rates, especially amongst disadvantaged pupils⁶⁷. Surely, it does not come as a surprise that students are alienated by a system in which they feel unsupported and disregarded.



Our system isn't building the skills that today's and tomorrow's workforce needs

Our education system doesn't currently prioritise building the skills employers want and are likely to need in the future, like communication, teamwork, and problem solving⁶⁸. Yet, disadvantaged young people have more gaps in such skills than their wealthier peers⁶⁹. Even when they progress to university or enter employment, young people from low-income households are less likely to succeed once they get there, with higher drop-out rates at university⁷⁰ and lower average salaries in employment⁷¹. Further, recent labour market data⁷² shows that unemployment is rising for young people despite high vacancies, confirming that skills shortages are a barrier.

We know that the skills employers most value are transferable skills, (also called 'essential skills'), like communication, problem solving, creativity and teamwork⁷³. These essential skills are helpful for adapting to new contexts and remaining resilient in the face of unexpected change⁷⁴, and they will be increasingly important in the future⁷⁵.

We don't currently have a strategy for building essential skills in students, and young people have low confidence that

their school is supporting them to build the skills they need for the future.

Artificial intelligence is just one example of the seismic changes happening to jobs market and to society; we must ensure that unpredictable and rapid changes to the employment landscape don't multiply existing inequalities.

The curriculum is one opportunity we're currently failing to leverage in building the skills students need; extracurricular experiences are another. Access to extracurricular activities varies by socioeconomic status, with wealthier children being more likely to take part in every type of activity, and independent schools offering an unparalleled breadth and range of activities compared to the state sector⁷⁶. Students eligible for free school meals are less likely to attend sports, hobby, art or music clubs, exam support, or one-to-one careers advice in years 9 and 10⁷⁷. However, there is evidence that extracurricular activities can support better engagement with school, academic outcomes, and wellbeing^{78,79,80}.

Solutions

Rebuild the confidence of students and their families, assuring them that the school system has their best interests at heart

Young people have valuable first-hand experiences to share about how well they are being supported to develop their passions, achieve their goals, and access enriching experiences. Meaningful participation by young people in education reforms will bring their valuable perspectives to bear, and

make any changes feel more relevant to them.

Further, opportunities for young people to use their abilities and build relationships with trusted adults will build a greater sense of community, increase confidence in the system, and contribute to better attendance^{81,82}.



Prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of young people by better understanding the challenges and how to address these in school

Collecting nationally consistent, comprehensive data about the wellbeing of young people, using the work of #BeeWell as a model, would be a huge step forward. We have seen #BeeWell's data already inspire solutions across society⁸³. School leaders could use this data to

better understand the needs of their pupils and what interventions might be required. Data could also help the Government understand the case for investment in training, resources, and interventions, and how to secure the best value-for-money solutions. In addition to the wellbeing of young

people being an important goal in its own right, there are links between wellbeing and attainment⁸⁴, and exclusions⁸⁵, with early evidence that academic and wellbeing interventions are each more effective when paired⁸⁶.

Provide opportunities for skills development through education, so that today's students are prepared for a rapidly changing world

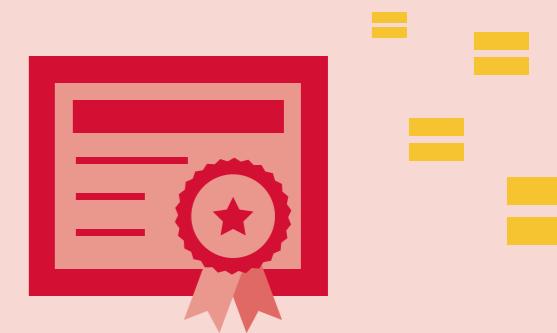
Essential skills like problem solving, creativity, communication, and teamwork are important for employability and will become more so in the future⁸⁷.

These skills can be built through a combination of explicit teaching and experiences⁸⁸, but this needs

prioritisation and integration with the curriculum. These skills are also correlated with pupil wellbeing⁸⁹ and are what young people want to see prioritised⁹⁰. We must ensure every child can access experiences that build these skills, such as extracurricular activities⁹¹ and work experience⁹²,

building the foundations they'll need for future employment, emotional health, and meaningful contribution to society.

We should adopt a universal framework such as that used by organisations within the Skills Builder Partnership⁹³, and we may also look ▶



to international measures, such as the PISA creative thinking assessment⁹⁴, so we can assess progress and help young people articulate the skills they're gaining from experiences inside and outside the classroom.

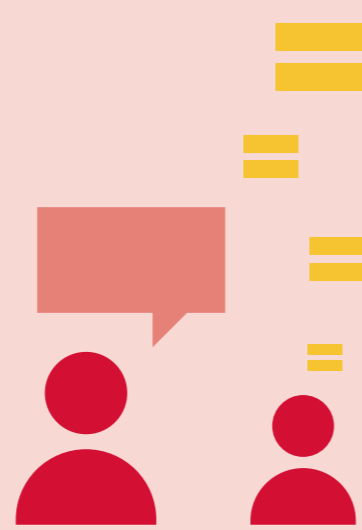
As we modernise our curriculum, we must also invest immediately in the infrastructure and workforce necessary to leverage the opportunities and mitigate the risks of advancing technology. While generative artificial intelligence (AI) presents huge opportunities, it also threatens to widen the disadvantage gap. As independent schools and the best-resourced state schools leverage AI to turbo-charge learning, many schools are unable to get to the starting line⁹⁵.

Continue to fight the learning loss of the pandemic through targeted intervention

Ensuring young people leave school with the academic qualifications they need to progress in life remains paramount, and we should renew our commitment to high-quality tuition to close gaps worsened by the pandemic.

Qualifications open or close doors to young people: not only are GCSEs necessary to progress to in education — they are a major predictor of

whether a young person will be NEET⁹⁶. We know now that academic attainment, essential skills, and a sense of belonging at school are not at odds with each other. Essential skills help young people to realise the benefits of academic learning⁹⁷, those with better mental health find it easier to engage with learning, and tutoring can improve mental health and attendance⁹⁸.



Young person's view

“Rebalancing the education system to accommodate and include all young people demands a shift in perspective, where success is not solely measured by accolades and grades, but by the depth of skills cultivated and the resilience of wellbeing upheld.”

Policy-makers should acknowledge that true fulfilment stems not just from reaching just academic milestones, but from the application of skills and knowledge beyond the school setting. The education system is not a one size fits all for young people.

Young people have a right to be educated beyond the curriculum, in a manner that sets them up for the best in life.

Young people shouldn't become a product of a system that doesn't prioritise their needs.”

Mama, age 18,
Youth Steering Group

Recommendations

We invite the Government to work with our members to:

- = **Build essential skills and physical and emotional health alongside academic and foundational skills.** A framework for building essential skills, such as the Skills Builder Universal Framework, should be adopted to align goals and articulate progress.
- = **Resource activities known to build essential skills, including high-quality work experience and enrichment activity such as sport, arts, hobbies and social action activities⁹⁹.**
- = **Provide a further tranche of funding for high-quality, one-to-one and small-group tuition for the students in schools and colleges facing the greatest challenges.** Evidence should be gathered so we can better understand the holistic impact of academic and other one-to-one interaction with a trusted adult.
- = **Invest in the teacher training, infrastructure and hardware required for schools to close the digital divide, so they can adapt to technological developments at speed.**
- = **Collect comprehensive data, across agencies, on the wellbeing of young people, as #BeeWell have done, so local governments, schools, the third sector, and funding bodies can better understand where investment is needed, what work is improving wellbeing, and how data can stimulate action across society.**
- = **Commit to uphold children's right to participate¹⁰⁰ and establish processes to meaningfully engage young people from all backgrounds in decisions affecting them and their education.**

Case study: The New School

It's in the name: this school is trying to do something new and address some of the challenges we see in our current education system.

The New School is a non-fee-paying, all-through independent school. Its current offer goes up to Year 9 as they grow their school to capacity.

Its student body is ethnically diverse, with higher rates of free school meals eligibility and SEND than the national average. Notably, 75% of its initial intake was previously home-schooled, all incoming students reported low feelings about school, preparedness for learning, and self-worth. The school aims to change this by working toward outcomes of self-esteem, self-efficacy, wellbeing and life satisfaction, and educational engagement.

On each of these measures, it's had early success: in their first year, 55% experienced a positive change in self-

esteem, 71% believed they could do most things if they tried, 82% agreed that their life was going well, and 74% experienced an improvement in their response to learning. These are hugely positive results considering some of the pupils' starting points.

The New School also takes an individual approach to time in school

based on pupil needs, such as later starts if required for higher needs young people, and five flexible holiday days in term time. While there are a range of factors impacting attendance as with any school, The New School does have attendance between 94 and 95%, which is above the national average. ▶



Photo credit: The New School

So, how have they achieved such a positive school culture?

The New School curriculum is built on extensive research into social-emotional learning and invests in ongoing school-based research through partnerships with UCL and other universities.

This research has highlighted five distinctive practices that support The New School to foster an inclusive culture:

Relationships and belonging:

There is a familial atmosphere within the school among staff and pupils. Staff host morning and closing circles to foster group cohesion and address individual needs.

The school was founded on the principle of working in partnership with young people, so teachers seek to build strong, trusting relationships. Specifically, emphasis is put on respecting and amplifying pupil voice, reflected in the school decision-making structures.

Self-directed Learning:

Pupils are allocated time to pursue personal interests and projects, ranging from the academic (such as learning new languages) to the recreational (such as solving a Rubik's cube or developing football skills). They also have the freedom to change their mind on what they are working on at any time.

This practice develops the executive function skills necessary for personal and academic success. The current curriculum requires the time allocated to self-directed learning to be reduced as pupils draw nearer to GCSEs, but The New School constantly reviews the balance it offers and supports students to make active choices on which courses they take to forge the best path for themselves.

Flexible structures and boundaries:

Each class makes classroom agreements, taking both the teacher and pupils' preferences into consideration. The teacher and the entire class hold each other to account, communicating when it is not working and negotiating changes.

The classroom agreement model extends all the way up to the school council where whole-school decisions are made in partnership with young people. At school council, pupils are supported to develop their executive function skills needed to not only make decisions but also to implement them and see a project through.

Play:

Play is prioritised across the whole school – teachers play with pupils during breaks, chat in the classroom, integrate playful elements into lessons and offer opportunities for 'extra play'.

This is prioritised because not only do children learn and enhance their social skills through play, they also really enjoy it.

Play also features heavily in Wednesday afternoon workshops, which any staff member or pupil can run on a topic of their choosing.



Photo credit: The New School

Photo credit: The New School

Multi-sensory Learning:

Learning environments are tailored to meet pupils' diverse needs.

The clear but respectful boundary setting at The New School offer pupils the opportunity to make sensory adjustments around noise levels, eating while working, use of fidget toys, or moving desks to enhance focus. These balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the group.

The New School is committed to ongoing evaluation of its bold approach, and to learning from researchers and practitioners in the sector, including through the FEA's Wellbeing and Inclusion working group. While The New School is outside the state sector, they are keen to share their knowledge more widely with the sector and become a research and development hub. Their approach offers food for thought when considering how to improve pupil wellbeing and engagement with school, especially for those who have struggled in mainstream settings.

Priority Three:



Whether a child spends the first years of their life at home, at a nursery, or with a childminder, the evidence is clear that their early development has a significant impact on their life outcomes.

In recent years, we have seen childcare rise to the top of the priority list for both the Labour and Conservative parties. However, when developing policy related to children's early education and care, it is crucial that we prioritise the needs of all children and not just the workforce participation of parents. We must also consider all children –including those with special educational needs and other vulnerabilities.

The earlier a child is given the support and resources they need to develop, the better their chances of having a positive experience of education – avoiding school exclusion and getting good GCSEs¹⁰¹.

We know the current approach leads to stark education inequality: at age five, children from low-income households are an average of 4.8 months behind their peers, accounting for 40% of the attainment gap that exists at age 16¹⁰². Sadly, without support for every child to develop in the early years, the gap that exists at the end of reception is unlikely to close and will continue to put children from low-income households at a disadvantage at the very start of their schooling.

Some of our recommendations are both low-cost and transformative, such as putting greater strategic focus on the home learning environment. Others require more substantial investment, however we know that investing early pays dividends later. Early intervention tends to be less expensive than crisis intervention¹⁰³, and there are significant social benefits to more children developing to their potential¹⁰⁴.

What's causing the problem?

Insufficient high-quality provision

A key component of ensuring quality is having enough well-qualified and experienced staff.

While it is promising to see the Department for Education's 2024 recruitment campaign, the early years workforce, like the school and college workforce, continues to experience a stark recruitment and retention crisis¹⁰⁵.

Contributing factors include low pay (which providers cannot afford to increase), the low status of the profession, and a lack of progression opportunities. The results – staff turnover, and a growing number of under-qualified or less experienced staff – will negatively impact children from low-income households¹⁰⁶.

An increasing proportion of children growing up in poverty access Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) settings rather than maintained ones. Unfortunately, PVI settings located in low-income areas are more likely to be of lower quality than those operating in more affluent areas¹⁰⁷.



There is also a substantial gap in qualification levels between staff in PVI and maintained settings, with the former also making greater use of temporary staff¹⁰⁸.

Lack of strategic focus on a home learning environment

When we discuss quality care to support early childhood development, we must recognise the importance of the home learning environment (HLE), which is one of the strongest predictors of a child's development in the early years¹¹⁶.

The HLE influences outcomes at five over and above factors such as socioeconomic status, maternal education, and family income¹¹⁷.

Early childhood is a period of rapid physical and mental growth and change, and this period offers the greatest opportunities for learning and development. Yet, families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to access enrichment opportunities in a child's first year, particularly those types of activities intended to improve parent-child communication and interaction¹¹⁸.

Poverty puts tremendous pressure on families and creates barriers (like stress, anxiety, limited capacity, material deprivation, limited disposable income for experiences or activities), which makes it harder for parents to create the conditions or provide the resources and activities needed to maximise children's ability to play and learn.

Rising levels of child poverty have increased the scale of the challenge, and the likelihood of a deteriorating situation for children in the UK over the coming years.

Evidence shows that the most significant early protective factor is the nature and frequency of parents' active engagement with their children, particularly in activities that develop

children's oral language skills¹¹⁹. A good quality HLE can mitigate the effects of disadvantage, even into the teenage years, and can moderate the impact of socioeconomic background on cognitive skills and socioemotional difficulties¹²⁰.

Insufficient access

There is currently less provision of ECEC in low-income neighbourhoods, and the Government's recent extension of entitlements to children of working parents is likely to worsen this.

This was the single biggest expansion of the welfare state in recent decades, and yet the bottom third of families by income distribution will not benefit at all from these changes¹⁰⁹.

400 Providers closed their doors last year¹¹⁰ (at a higher rate in deprived neighbourhoods¹¹¹), primarily due to insufficient income or staffing¹¹².

While the recent uplift to the early years funding rates is very welcome, it still does not cover costs, and it is still predicted that many more providers will close as the extension of funded hours to younger children is rolled out¹¹³. To make ends meet, providers cross-subsidise from parent-paid fees, but as a greater proportion of places become government funded at fixed rates, the alternative becomes

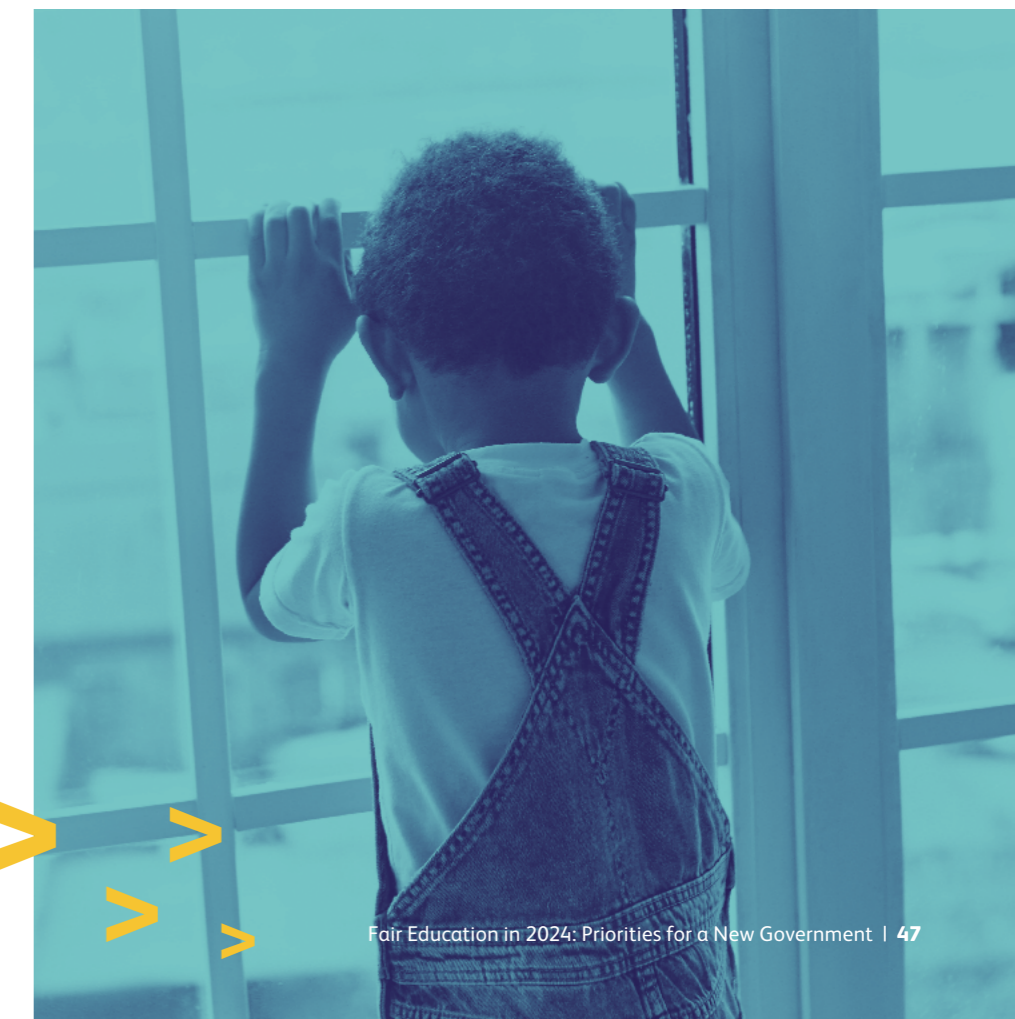
an increase in "voluntary" top-up fees. Such additional fees are not affordable for low-income families, so it is sometimes impossible for providers to operate in low-income neighbourhoods.

The extension of the entitlements only to children of working parents may arguably serve the short-term economic purposes of childcare, but it likely works against the educational and developmental interests of children from low-income families.

This inequity is compounded by the staggering lack of ECEC provision for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). Over

80% of local authorities don't have enough childcare for children with SEND¹¹⁴. The SEND funding available is difficult to access and does not cover the cost of supporting children with SEND.

Finally, the complexity of the current system acts as a barrier for low-income families. Uptake of ECEC support that is available through Universal Credit is low¹¹⁵, and the multiple schemes that interact to provide ECEC can be confusing, creating a barrier to understanding and claiming the full entitlement — especially for those who speak English as an additional language or lack access to technology.



Solutions

Build a workforce that can deliver high quality provision

As we respond to the economic need to make childcare more affordable, quality should remain a focus.

We need a long-term strategy to build a strong workforce through better pay and increased respect for the profession, including through opportunities for career progression and improved access to evidence informed training and development opportunities.

We have seen promising signs through the COVID-19 early years education recovery programme, with recruitment sign-on bonuses and a commitment to uprate hourly funding rates over the next three years in line with inflation and minimum wage

increases. More needs to be done, however, to bring together a holistic strategy for recruiting, training, progressing and rewarding the early years workforce.

We must also plan for raising the quality of those PVI providers, including nurseries and childminders, who serve an increasing number of children from low-income households due to decreasing maintained provision. Additional government funding for training, like the National Literacy Trust's Early Words Together¹²¹ programme and the National Day Nurseries Association's Maths Champions¹²² programme, should be considered.



Make high quality early childhood education and care accessible and affordable for every family

Government-funded hours should be extended to families with parents not in formal employment, and we must ensure funding is sufficient to meet the true cost of quality provision, so providers aren't reliant on cross-subsidy through paid hours. In recognition that full, universal provision may not be feasible from the end of parental leave, low-income families should be prioritised for funding. Further, the Early Years Pupil Premium rate should be brought in line with the primary rate so providers can viably operate with the resources they need to support children facing the greatest challenges. We

acknowledge that this would need to be phased in over five -ten years, and providers would need to be supported to spend this funding effectively to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Solving entrenched access issues for children with SEND will take a combination of long-term strategic thinking, funding, and creativity, many of which can be found in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan¹²³. The complicated systems families need to navigate to access the services they are entitled to must be simplified easing the pressure on time-poor parents and carers of

children with SEND. Simultaneously, all early years settings should be supported and incentivised to meet the needs of children with SEND and other vulnerabilities. By removing the requirement for children to receive Disability Learning Allowance (DLA) before a setting can receive Disability Access Fund (DAF), we could give and create more places for children with SEND. Eligibility would instead be determined by a child's involvement with a SEND professional, or by assessment in a setting using a consistent framework, which we recommend be developed.

Increase strategic focus on learning from birth in the home

A greater emphasis and strategic focus on the home learning environment in early years policy, as well as the wider education sector, will lead to substantial improvement in children's outcomes and future earnings¹²⁴.

The choice to support children at home must also be supported with the same access to support, resources and funding, especially as

children from low-income households are less likely to access early years care and education in settings outside the home¹²⁵. This can be achieved by embedding support for home learning as a core element of the Family Hubs that already exists across 75 local authorities, in addition to rolling the model out nationally, prioritising the areas of greatest need.

Young person's view

"When teachers working in the early years workforce go unappreciated potential knowledge that could be used to nurture children diminishes."

Angel, age 17,
Youth Steering Group

Recommendations

We ask the Government to:

- = Provide **sufficient, independently determined funding** to meet the actual cost of quality provision, with a particular focus on supporting access in low-income areas.
- = Move towards bringing the **Early Years Pupil Premium** in line with the rate allocated to primary pupils to remove barriers to nurseries providing places to low-income families, alongside supporting settings to ensure that the funding is used effectively.
- = **Extend funded hours to parents in training.** If needed, low-income parents should be prioritised for funded hours.
- = Streamline entitlements and applications and make the system **less complex** for families to navigate.
- = **Develop a long-term strategy for recruiting, training, progressing, and rewarding the early years workforce,** including continued funding for the Early Years Professional Development Programme.

We invite the Government to work with our members to:

- = **Develop and maintain a variety of routes** into the profession, create new ones, and connect and equip the professionals supporting families.
- = Provide support, incentives, and clear guidelines that enable all early years settings to meet the needs of children with **special education needs and disabilities**, and other vulnerabilities, even without a formal diagnosis.
- = Provide far greater emphasis and strategic focus on the **home learning environment** in early years policy, as well as that of the education sector, including clear channels through which families can find information, resources and support that meets their needs. This should be a core element of what Family Hubs (or any successor policy) deliver as the model is rolled out nationally, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Case study: The National Literacy Trust

The NLT's Swindon Hub is representative of many hubs across the country taking a holistic, place-based approach to support literacy skills in the early years.



Photo credit: The National Literacy Trust

They work in a town without a Family Hub or children's centre and where early help support has drastically reduced over the last decade.

At the heart of the hub's work is a collaborative approach to working with families living in an increasingly challenging context, worsened by the cost-of-living crisis: lower wages and spending power, rising in-work poverty and less time to invest in sociocultural development.

This collaborative approach goes beyond their work with families: the hub seeks to address the socioeconomic issues around literacy in close partnership with a broad range of organisations across Swindon including the local authority, early years settings, schools, and businesses.

It was not always this way. When they began in 2018, they brought together professionals working to

support disadvantaged families and realised that there was little understanding of what each other is doing how are the families supposed to know?". Since then, the Hub has worked with families and other services to develop approaches that mitigate the pressures of socioeconomic hardship and support literacy development as a vehicle to unlock children's potential.

The hub runs a variety of interactive initiatives that respond to the needs expressed by the community, including volunteer-led stay and play sessions; story and rhyme sessions, and the evidence-based 'Early Words Matter' programme for parents and children to nurture literacy through reading, singing, speaking, mark making, playing, and visiting the library.

These programmes do more than develop literacy in the setting; they enhance the parents and carers' confidence and knowledge of how to create rich learning environments at home, and empower them with the tools to support their child's development far beyond the programme.

The Early Words Matter programme is currently working in 40% of the most deprived local authorities in the UK with some of the highest numbers of children not meeting the standard for literacy at age five. To identify the areas of highest literacy need National Literacy Trust hubs use data from an experience map – much like the FEA's ecosystem map — to target the communities that will benefit most from their support. Beyond work with families, the hub is piloting 'Early Words Together for Childminders' alongside the Education Endowment Fund to support childminders to use evidence-based activities to develop the



Photo credit: The National Literacy Trust

Priority Three: The best early education & care for every child

Photo credit: The National Literacy Trust

communication, language, and early literacy of children aged 2-4, which lead to improvements in their home learning environments.

The Swindon National Literacy Hub has prioritised understanding the motivations of families to support the engagement of some of the highest need families, and they have found that the bonding and social and cultural capital built through participation in the hub's programmes is a driving factor for families' involvement. One parent shared, "my kids, aged one and three years old, love the story and rhyme times and they helped with their speech. They pick books, and they like to engage more now with reading.

The group atmosphere has given me and my kids friends."

The benefits to families on are clear:

Parents report significant improvements in not just literacy skills, but speech, reading interest and social interaction.

National Literacy Hubs continues to work towards discovering and sharing the best approaches to tackling literacy inequality in the early years by supporting families to learn together in the community and develop rich home learning environments.

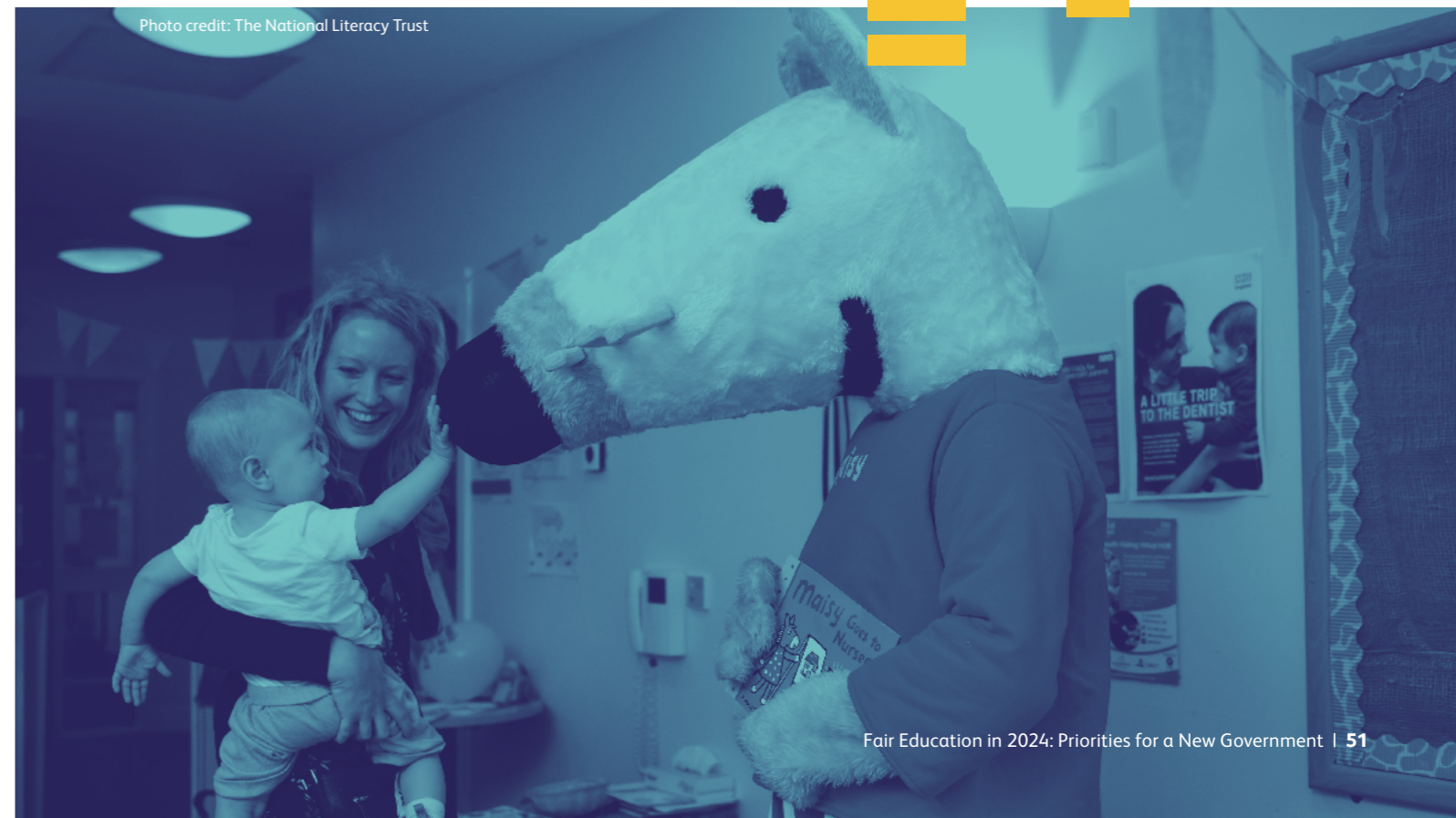


Photo credit: The National Literacy Trust

Priority Four:

A JOINED-UP SYSTEM THAT MEETS RISING NEEDS

In a time of rapidly rising need, schools cannot be left to act alone

Education can be a great lever for social justice, but schools must be a part of a system of support around families, with agencies and local organisations funded to work together, each with clear roles and responsibilities, toward shared outcomes for children and young people. Schools themselves must be funded to fill the necessary gaps while local systems are being rebuilt.

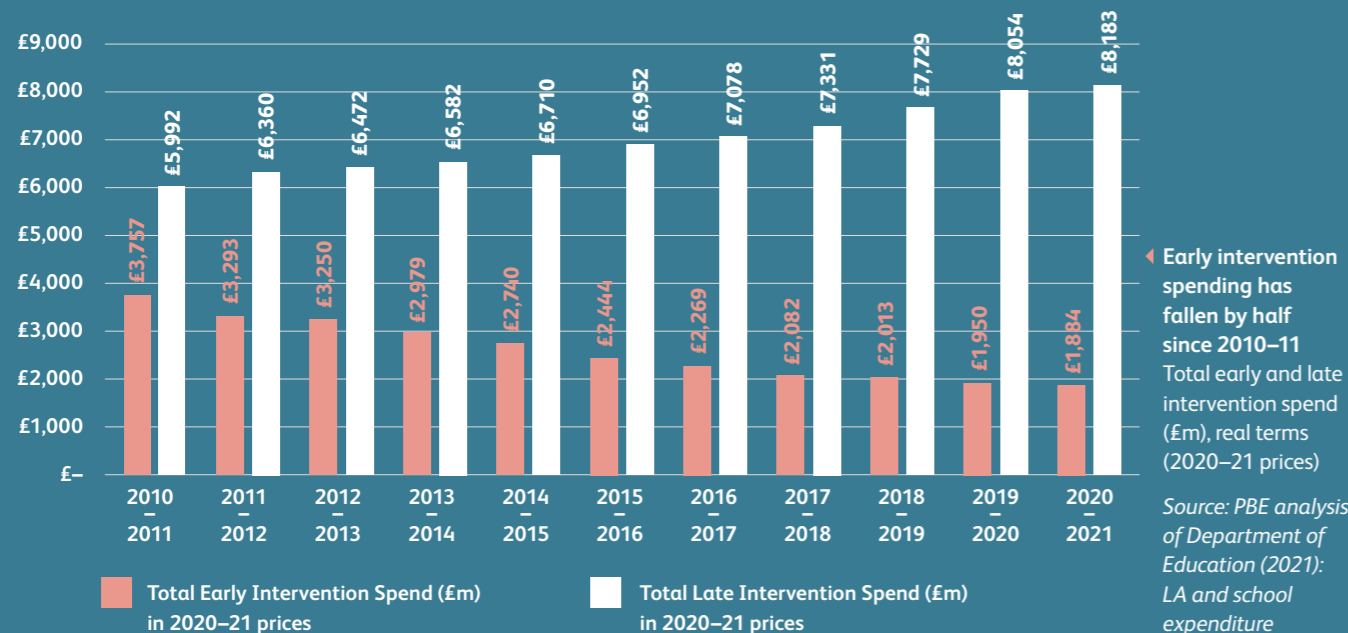
It has often been said that schools are the fourth emergency service.

As the only institution that has a consistent touchpoint with most children in the country, it is unavoidable – and right – that schools should play a crucial role in the support system around families. However, more and more, school capacity and budgets are filling holes in underfunded local services that lack the long-term community investment needed to help meet

growing needs. As early intervention services have been stripped back, we've seen the cost and severity of crisis-point need grow¹²⁶.

Schools and trusts are spending a growing proportion of their budgets fighting the hidden costs of poverty¹²⁷, including meals, transportation, laundry, and the range of support provided by family support officers. This is leading to schools and other services believing they are simply tackling the symptoms rather than the root causes of inequalities¹²⁸.

That expenditure also means that schools have less to spend directly on teaching, learning, and experiences. We cannot expect the gaps (defined in our Fair Education Impact Goals) to narrow if schools continue to face rising costs in meeting the basic needs of pupils. We also know that these poverty-related factors are a driver of the present school attendance crisis¹²⁹. We cannot achieve the Fair Education Impact Goals if children and young people aren't attending school in the first place.



What's causing the problem?

Rising need and declining local resource

Local authority resources have declined over the course of the last decade¹³⁰, with early intervention services like children's centres and family support being cut¹³¹. The impacts of these cuts have been compounded by rising and deepening child poverty:

4.3 million children across the UK were living in poverty in 2022/23. Alarming, this is around 9 pupils in a classroom of 30¹³².

Further, the mental health of children and young people is worsening. 10% of 10–17-year-olds have low wellbeing¹³³, and over one in five 8–19-year-olds have a probable mental disorder¹³⁴ – a deteriorating picture over the past decade.

Sometimes, emotional stress is

related to the rising poverty described above¹³⁵. Of those with a probable mental disorder, 26% had a parent who could not afford for them to take part in activities outside of school (compared to 10% of the overall population)¹³⁶, which we know to be one mitigation for poor wellbeing¹³⁷. Referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have increased drastically over the last decade, exacerbated by the pandemic¹³⁸, and schools are left to support the huge proportion of pupils who are unable to access this service.

Meanwhile, special educational needs are going unmet. Applications for Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) have skyrocketed, while the capacity of local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties has plummeted¹³⁹. Unmet special educational needs and disabilities have serious and disparate impacts: Students with EHCPs are five times more likely to be excluded, with the likely figure for undiagnosed

SEND to be much higher¹⁴⁰; pupils with unmet SEND are more likely to display behavioural issues¹⁴¹, one of the greatest causes of stress for teachers¹⁴². This is particularly true for autism and related issues like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: the number of families trying to access support for these conditions has skyrocketed, as have the waiting times for diagnoses¹⁴³. This group, especially those awaiting an assessment, is at greater risk of social and school exclusion¹⁴⁴.



Schools report that more children are coming to school hungry, cold, and tired, leaving them less able to concentrate¹⁴⁵.

Schools often step in where they can: 72% of all teachers, and 82% of those in Educational Improvement Areas, said that they are helping pupils more with non-academic matters than they did five years ago, including support with mental health, buying key supplies, or signposting families to support.

Schools are now the most common location for food banks¹⁴⁶.

Understandably, filling the gaps left by struggling local authorities and rising poverty has an impact on ▶

staff workload and stress. Providing this wider support also comes at a cost to school budgets: for example, hiring on-site social workers or buying washing machines and dryers. These investments surely make a difference to the school community, but schools have not been funded to make them. We highlight just one multi-academy trust doing this holistic work – our member Summit Learning Trust (Summit) – in the case study that follows this chapter. While Summit and schools and trusts like them are already tackling important and complex problems head-on, this work isn't currently recognised or supported to the extent it should be by government funding or Ofsted.



Photo credit: Summit Learning Trust

Agencies and organisations delivering local support often operate in silos, without the ability to see the full picture, communicate easily, or have clarity about roles and responsibilities

This happens even across education institutions, where data on student context and needs is often patchy in managed moves or transitions between phases¹⁴⁷.

A lack of join-up has led to inefficient delivery of services and interventions to the families most in need, without the formation of stable relationships, agency by the communities being served, tailoring to local needs, or a long-term strategy for working collectively to improve outcomes¹⁴⁸.

The siloed working happening in many localities is mirrored nationally. For example, there are many departments, such as the Department for Culture, Media and

Sport and the Department for Health and Social Care that make policies relevant to education. We need closer collaboration in the business-as-usual strategic planning of departments.

Too often, different services are pitted against each other for funding when each is an important part of the puzzle.

Instead, more planning should be done with holistic outcomes for the child or young person in mind.

The funding streams meant to mitigate some of the impacts of poverty on education have flatlined over the past decade, while need and costs have risen

More teachers report children arriving at school hungry, which we know to be linked to poorer attendance, attainment and behaviour¹⁴⁹.

The very low ceiling for free school meal (FSM) eligibility means about one third of children living in poverty do not qualify. Further, the funding for free school meals has not kept pace with inflation, meaning schools must top up the amount they receive to fulfil their statutory duties¹⁵⁰.

The Pupil Premium, another source of funding for the pupils with the highest needs, needs review.

This was originally calculated to give disadvantaged pupils an equal level of funding as pupils in the independent sector, but the amount of funding has barely risen

since it was introduced in 2008¹⁵¹, despite deepening poverty¹⁵², sharp inflation¹⁵³, and rising fees in the independent sector¹⁵⁴. Due to wider real-terms loss of school funding, a third of school leaders report using their Pupil Premium funding to plug gaps in their budgets¹⁵⁵, diverting it from its original function: a targeted funding stream for well-evidenced approaches to mitigate the effect of poverty on educational outcomes.

Solutions

Build long-term strategies for adequately funding and delivering the services supporting families in need

It was encouraging to see early commitments to improving children's social care and mental health services in the Labour Party Manifesto. The Government's plans should include implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care¹⁵⁶ and the Commission for Young Lives¹⁵⁷.



Develop a sustainable plan to meet the educational needs of every child

Local authorities must have the resource to meet the needs of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), but we must also identify and meet the special educational needs of pupils at an early stage.

If we can enable whole-school inclusion that meets the needs of pupils with and without EHCPs (as discussed in priority 1) and fund local authorities to meet the existing need, we will have a more sustainable system in the future, as children have better educational outcomes with an earlier diagnosis, and the overall cost to the system is lower^{158,159}.

Ensure there is sufficient school funding targeted toward lessening the impacts of poverty on educational outcomes

Whilst the need for schools to address barriers existing outside the school gates continues, these funding streams are crucial in closing the attainment gap.

Fundamental to this is that no child goes hungry at school, and extending FSM to all children receiving Universal Credit would present a significant return on

investment. The Pupil Premium also needs review; if the methods used to calculate the rate in 2008 were used today, the funding amount would nearly triple.

We need an uplift to Pupil Premium to keep it in line with inflation, and an extension to the full spectrum of education: from early years through to post-16.



Adopt a joined-up approach at national and local levels, putting children and families at the centre

Clearer roles and responsibilities and better channels for communication between locally delivered services can have a huge impact on children's outcomes.

For example, strengthening relationships and ways of working between multi-agency partners has been shown to prevent school exclusions¹⁶⁰ and holistic planning amongst cross-sector organisations can improve outcomes for communities¹⁶¹.

Principles of successful place-based change, including shared outcomes, a long-term commitment, community leadership, and creating the infrastructure for partnership working, should be applied across the public services and organisations serving families locally.

This approach needs funding to create the capacity needed to link up work and keep the child at the centre through regular joint meetings and shared plans.

The Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes¹⁶², bringing together the Departments of Education and Health and Social Care, present an opportunity to do this and should be rolled out nationally, with sufficient funding. We now have a better

understanding of the long-term impacts of a previous initiative to create central access points (Sure Start) which had a significant impact on the health outcomes of children¹⁶³, with research currently underway to evaluate its impact on developmental outcomes.

In rolling out these programmes we must tailor to local needs and consider whether these are the right structures to meet the wide spectrum of needs presented by 0-19-year-olds and if not, what else is needed. Expansion of the Youth Investment Fund¹⁶⁴ presents an opportunity.

Developing shared outcomes for children and families across all public services would also support the development of joined-up strategies and plans. The Children's Commissioner has presented an Outcomes Framework that could be used to develop a common language and shared goals¹⁶⁵. A reduction in poverty is key to achieving such shared outcomes and must be a goal of such a joined-up strategy. We're pleased to see our call for a unique child number used across public services getting traction, as this will further support collaboration, and ideally will allow records across health, education, and locally provided services to be linked and practitioners to understand what other support a child is accessing. It could also enable automatic enrolment in benefits such as FSM.



Recommendations

We ask the Government to:

- = Bolster the funding streams meant to mitigate the impacts of poverty on education, including:
 - = Extending free school meals eligibility to all children whose families are eligible for Universal Credit, and automatic enrolment of those eligible for free school meals.
 - = Indexing free school meals funding to inflation.
 - = Restoring Pupil Premium funding to 2015-2016 rates, with a guarantee that this will rise with inflation in the future.
 - = Extending the Pupil Premium to early years (at the primary rate) and establishing a 16-19 Student Premium.
- = Improve funding and provision of locally-delivered services, including children's mental health support (as recommended by the Commission for Young Lives)¹⁶⁶ and children's social care (as recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care)¹⁶⁷, to ensure that every child is safe and well, with a plan for sustaining funding into the future.

We invite the Government to work with our members to:

- = Share outcomes across the public services and organisations supporting children and families locally, with joined-up strategies and plans at a national level that secure the best outcomes for all young people.
- = Complete the national roll-out of Family Hubs or a successor policy, with an analysis of what gaps exist in serving the full remit of 0-19 year-olds, and a plan for addressing these and fully integrating all services around families.
- = Develop systems and funding to enable early identification and support for children with SEND, including a better articulation of what good inclusion looks like and stronger collaboration between education, health, and other services.

Young people's views

“As immigrants who did not speak English, it was difficult for my parents to understand what it meant for their child to have SEN.

I was really lucky that my teachers were supportive and helped my mum and dad figure things out step by step. For a lot of people this process can be distressing and confusing so it is essential that cross sector professionals (such as policy makers, social workers, teaching staff, NHS, community support) work together to better support families to ensure young people can access the correct support early on in their life and flourish in future.”

Farzana, age 21,
Youth Steering Group

“Communication is a key skill which young people are expected to develop in school, it is crucial to be able to efficiently engage with a wide range of stakeholders to work towards a common goal.

Yet this is something which at times may be absent from local service support, as over stretched public services struggle to productively collaborate to support a young person and their family.

In my experience, better funding and join up of local support is integral to making sure young people and their families are able to access the multifaceted support that is required to thrive. Collaborative local support, utilising communication and multi-agency working is likely to have been transformative and may have enabled me to re-engage with education at an earlier date. I believe it would be greatly beneficial to see better funding and communication between local support to proactively support young people and their families, especially those most at risk.”

Elijah, age 18,
Youth Steering Group

Case study: Summit Learning Trust

Summit Learning Trust (Summit) has made a firm commitment to meet the basic needs of its children and young people without means testing, promoting inclusivity and dignity within their school and wider community.

As schools work to fill the increasing gaps left by underfunded local services, they inevitably end up tackling symptoms rather than root causes of poverty and educational disadvantage. Schools are shifting their resources to address the rising levels of child poverty and tackle issues that prevent pupils from fully engaging in school, but this often takes investment away from educating.

Summit Learning Trust run an initiative called Summit Base Camp, a name drawn from a staff member's trip to Everest's South Base Camp and in line with their vision of "scaling new heights, for our children, young people and communities".

They work to ensure that every child has their basic needs met to enable them to achieve their academic potential, whilst providing them with a rich educational experience.



Photo credit: Summit Learning Trust

Schools across the trust support the children who need it most in the following 8 key areas:

- = Food to eat.
- = Perfect uniform to wear.
- = Hygiene and health care products and services available.
- = A bed to sleep in.
- = Equipment, books and all revision materials for public examinations.
- = Digital equipment and platforms to enhance learning.
- = Transport to be able to safely travel to their academy and to travel home where needed.
- = Cultural experiences that will prepare them for later life.

Having recognised not all families who are struggling meet the threshold for Universal Credit or free school meals (for example, time-poor parents working multiple jobs to support the family), Summit Base Camp aims to offer provision where it can. It took the trust significant time and financial resource to build relationships with charities and businesses, and to carve out budget, to offer their full Base Camp suite, but they are now reaping the benefits.

Unsurprisingly, their offer is having a positive impact on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children: across the trust the gap in educational

outcomes is closing between children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and their peers. They are seeing the greatest benefit for younger children, highlighting the significance of early support. Beyond the impact on outcomes and results, their extended school day, food offer and holistic support has driven a reduction in severe and persistent absence.

Summit is convinced their offer could be enhanced if local services were better joined up with shared outcomes. Changes of this size are complex and one suggested first step would be to raise Pupil Premium in line with inflation. The National Tutoring

Programme has also made a significant impact on their disadvantaged learners and Summit would be keen to continue that investment.

Summit Learning Trust should be applauded for their clear vision to provide for all the children in their care as long as is necessary, but they stand with the Fair Education Alliance in highlighting the challenges faced by schools and asking some difficult questions: should schools be responsible for sourcing a bed (through charity partners) so children can get a good night's sleep? Should schools need to provide hygiene products to children and their families?

Tackling the root causes of issues upstream, before children get to the school gate, will save time and money for families, schools and the Government, and reduce the emotional turmoil for the families who struggle to make ends meet.

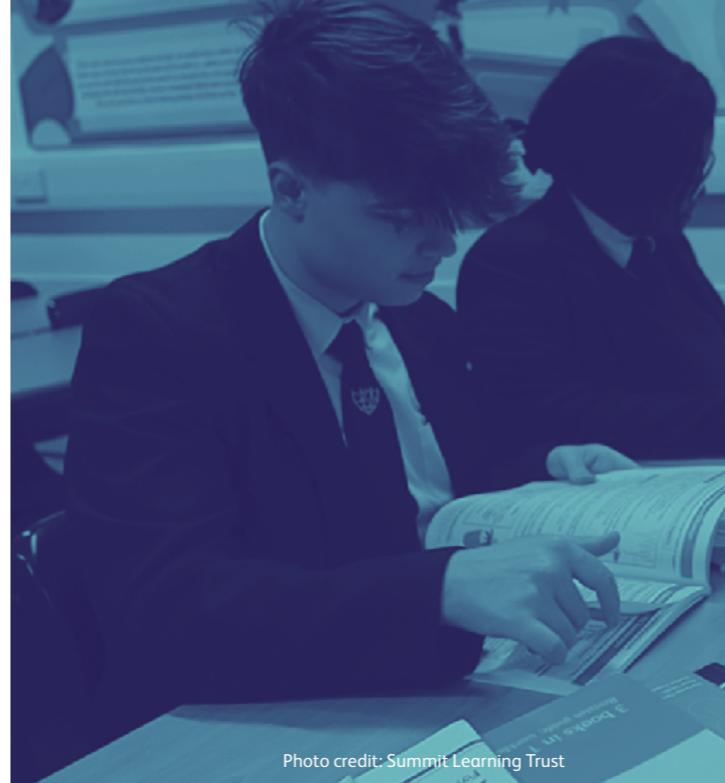


Photo credit: Summit Learning Trust



Photo credit: Summit Learning Trust



Photo credit: Summit Learning Trust



Photo credit: Summit Learning Trust

Driving systems change together

As a society, we want the best for our children and young people, but the reality is far from that.

For this to change, we must make education – and specifically educational inequality – political priorities again.

This is a matter of social justice; it's also a matter of wise investment. Investing early in support and development not only gives every child a better shot at a great education, it also saves money later on – and sets our country up to succeed. This requires more than quick solutions that deliver short-term gains. It requires concerted, long-term effort, investment and collaboration.



How we can take it forward together:

**SHARE
& USE THIS
DOCUMENT &
RELATED RESOURCES**

If you are a policymaker,
reach out to us to

**DISCUSS
THESE IDEAS**
& BE CONNECTED TO OUR MEMBERS

If you are a member
or other stakeholder

**CONTACT US
TO BE CONNECTED
TO OUR MEMBERS TO
COLLABORATE
ON THESE THEMES**





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