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Fixing a broken system

A new report, published by the Centre For Young Lives, has called for more support for schools to fix the 'broken' school food system and boost children's physical activity in order to tackle issues such as childhood obesity and food insecurity (Eddy et al, 2024).

The report, *A country that works for all children and young people*, produced in collaboration with the N8 Research Partnership, Child of the North, Health Equity North, comes to a series of conclusions about the lack of proper provision for children to thrive and flourish during their school years. It cites evidence that the health of children and young people in the UK is worsening and that they are being adversely affected by sedentary lifestyles and poor diets. According to the report, around 2.2 million 5–16 year olds do not get 30 minutes of activity a day and that this physical inactivity is costing the UK an estimated £7.4 billion every year.

The findings of the report also show that young people from the most deprived backgrounds are the least likely to be active, with only 44% achieving 60 minutes of physical exercise daily. The report also found that a shocking 82% of 5–15 year olds do not consume the recommended five daily portions of fruit and vegetables. The authors make a number of recommendations, including establishing whole-school approaches for physical activity and healthy nutrition, and supporting schools to deliver an ethos where the health and wellbeing of pupils is central.

Professor Greta Defeyter, one of the report's authors, said: 'The government needs to fund initiatives such as national auto-enrolment for free school meals, improve the nutritional and dietary content of school meals, provide additional opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day, and opportunities for children and young people both before and after school, such as universal school breakfast clubs and holiday provision.'

The report concludes that, 'Current strategies are making too little of a difference. It's time to superpower our schools and communities to help children and young people eat well, engage in physical activity, and be healthy'.



Eddy L, Bryant E, Daly-Smith A, Wood M et al (2024) A country that works for all children and young people: An evidence-based plan for supporting physical activity and healthy nutrition with and through education settings. <https://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/news-centre/child-of-the-north-centre-for-young-lives-report-calls-for-schools-to-be-supported-to-fix-the-broken-school-food-system-and-boost-physical-activity-to-tackle-britains-child-obesity-crisis> (accessed 4 June 2024)

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