

# Cost of living crisis: Increasing numbers of non-FSM pupils cannot afford school lunch...

An estimated 800,000 children are living in poverty and yet do not qualify for free school meals. With the cost of living crisis biting hard, schools are reporting stark increases in the numbers of children who cannot afford lunches and who are coming to school hungry and with inadequate winter clothing...

Pupils unable to concentrate, tired, without adequate winter clothing, coming to school hungry, and families unable to afford school lunches—the impact of the cost of living crisis on families across the country has been spelt out in the starkest terms by new research.

A survey of more than 6,200 school teachers and leaders in England, commissioned by the Sutton Trust, reveals worrying increases in the numbers of pupils facing serious issues linked to the cost of living. The results show that teachers are seeing a number of problems in state schools:

- 74% of teachers have seen an increase in pupils unable to concentrate or tired in class.
- 67% have more students with behaviour issues.
- 54% have seen an increase in those coming into school without adequate winter clothing.
- 38% report an increase in children coming into school hungry.
- 17% say there has been an increase in families asking for food bank referrals.

Around half of senior leaders in state-funded schools (52%) also reported that the number of children ineligible for free school meals and yet unable to afford lunch has increased this autumn.

FSM eligibility has become a hot topic as the cost of living crisis pushes more families into poverty.

Pupil census information (DfE, 2022) shows that 1.9 million pupils were eligible for FSM as of January 2022—equating to 22.5% of the student population and an increase of nearly 160,000 since January 2021, and of around 450,000 since January 2020.

The Food Foundation's Feed the Future campaign is pushing for all families on Universal Credit to be given access to FSMs. It is estimated that 800,000 children



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living in poverty are still not eligible. The latest child poverty figures show that the number of children living in relative poverty after housing costs in the UK stands at 3.9 million. This represents 27% of the UK's children.

However, the government did not take the opportunity presented by the Autumn Statement to expand FSM eligibility in face of soaring rates of inflation and a cost of living crisis.

The Sutton Trust research found that leaders working in the most deprived schools, with the highest proportions of existing pupils eligible for FSMs, were even more likely (59%) to report increasing numbers of pupils unable to afford lunch.

In a commentary analysing the findings, Rebecca Montacute, senior research and policy manager at the Sutton Trust, said: 'Keeping all our country's children warm and fed should be an absolute minimum, for their safety and their wellbeing.'

'It is shocking and deeply unfair that any children are hungry and cold. But the scale of the problem indicated by these

figures is no less than a scandal. While it is welcome that the government has now announced that benefits will increase with inflation, the change is not due to come into force until April. Children and their families clearly need much more urgent support.

'It is also clear that the current cut-off for FSMs is not set at the right level, with many teachers seeing children unable to afford lunch who are not currently eligible. Access to FSMs should be expanded to fully capture those in need, by making them available to all families on Universal Credit. Children cannot learn effectively when living in poverty. On an even more basic level, children simply should not be living in these conditions.' **CHHE**

- DfE: *Academic Year 2021/22: Schools, pupils and their characteristics, 2022:* <https://bit.ly/35yjQe2>
- Montacute: *The cost of living crisis and its impact on education, The Sutton Trust, 2022:* <https://bit.ly/3h9qdxJ>
- Sutton Trust: *Cost of Living and Education, 2022:* <https://bit.ly/3W4NFes>

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# ...while four million children are living in households classified as 'food insecure'

With inflation at record levels, the cost of a basic basket of weekly shopping has risen by 14-16% in six months, leading to one in four households experiencing food insecurity—and with food inflation set to hit 17%, the situation is expected to get worse...

With food inflation soaring, one in four households with children have experienced food insecurity this term—equating to four million children.

Food insecurity is classified as households where someone is forced to eat smaller meals, skip meals, go hungry, or not eat for a whole day because they are unable to afford food.

The Food Foundation's Food Insecurity Tracker update, published in October, shows that 18% of households have experienced food insecurity in the last month, rising to 26% of households with children. This equates to 9.7 million adults and four million children.

These are the highest levels of food insecurity seen since the tracker was launched in early 2020.

At the time of writing, inflation is sitting at around 11% (CPI), but food inflation, according to the Office for National Statistics, hit 16.4% in the 12 months to October 2022.

And things are getting worse. Food inflation is set to hit 17% early next year according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Nabarro, 2022), and with winter ahead of us, rising energy costs are expected to hit families hard, especially those already struggling financially.

The charity warns that the cost of its 'basic basket'—a weekly basket of shopping that would provide a 'reasonably-costed, adequately-nutritious diet'—has risen by 14% in six months to £45.55 for women and by 16% to £49.36 for men.

The Food Insecurity Tracker also finds that food insecure households are more likely to cut back on buying fruit and vegetables. And, unsurprisingly, levels of food insecurity rise in households with more children.

An analysis by Shone Goudie, the Food Foundation's policy research manager,



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states: 'High food prices along with high energy prices could have a devastating impact on the health of the nation; 60% of food insecure households reported using appliances such as the oven, hob or microwave less to save money on energy bills meaning less cooking from scratch and greater reliance on pre-prepared foods; 48% report buying less veg and 58% less fruit.'

She adds: 'Combined with the increased need to use energy to stay warm over the winter, the trajectory of food insecurity levels will inevitably deteriorate further in the coming months. If government fail to act now to support people to afford food, they will be condemning millions of people to spend the coming months hungry and dependent on food that damages their health for years to come.'

The Food Foundation is calling for the expansion of free school meals to all children on Universal Credit as part of its Feed the Future campaign.

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said that

the Food Insecurity Tracker confirms what his members have been seeing in their classrooms 'for months'.

He added: 'Food insecurity not only has a negative impact on health and livelihood, it also impacts a child's ability to learn.'

'The food they receive at school may well be the only meal they get that day.'

'It is clear that the government must invest in school food and roll out free school meals for all children in primary school to put money back in parents pockets and ensure that all children get a hot, nutritious meal every day.'

- *Food Foundation: Food Insecurity Tracking: [www.foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking](http://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking)*
- *Goudie: How are food prices changing? Food Foundation, October 2022: [www.foodfoundation.org.uk/news/food-prices-tracking-october-update](http://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/news/food-prices-tracking-october-update)*
- *Nabarro: UK outlook: Why we need to do things differently, IFS, October 2022: <https://bit.ly/3DtbcOr>*

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# Almost one in five children have probable mental health condition, NHS figures reveal

Annual NHS statistics reveal that 18% of 7 to 16-year-olds has a probable mental health condition—a slight increase since last year. The figure rises to 26% of 17 to 19-year-olds. In publishing its analysis, the NHS has issued a specific warning about the prevalence of eating disorders, sleep problems, and self-harm

Almost one in five children aged seven to 16 have a probable mental health disorder according to the latest NHS research.

The Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 study (Newlove-Delgado et al, 2022) has raised particular concerns about eating disorders, problems with sleep, and incidence of self-harm.

Overall it finds that 18% of 7 to 16-year-olds have a probable mental health disorder, with this figure rising to 25.7% of 17 to 19-year-olds—one in four.

The figure for 7 to 16-year-olds is broadly in line with 2021's iteration of this research (17.8%), however the 17 to 19-year-old figure has risen sharply since last year when it stood at 17.4%.

And these are all notable rises from 2017, when the study was first carried out and when 10.1% of 17 to 19-year-olds and 12.1% of 7 to 16-year-olds had probable mental health conditions.

The 2022 study is based on responses from 2,866 children and young people aged between 7 and 24.

It uses the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire which assesses different aspects of mental health including problems with emotions, behaviour, relationships, hyperactivity, and concentration. It then concludes whether the young person has a possible or probable mental health disorder or is unlikely to have one.

Alongside the headline findings, the study also investigates a number of factors that might be linked to poor mental health.

*Disadvantage and school life:* Children with a probable mental disorder were more likely than those without to live in a home experiencing financial strain. They were also more likely to report negative views and experiences at school and more

likely to report being bullied online. In particular, school absence rates were higher in children with a probable mental disorder—12.6% missed more than 15 days of school a year compared with 3.9% of those unlikely to have a mental disorder.

*Gender reversal:* The study finds that at primary age more boys than girls seem to suffer from mental health disorders and yet by age 17 this has flipped to more girls than boys.

It found that among those aged 7 to 10, prevalence of a probable mental disorder was nearly twice as high in boys (19.7%) as in girls (10.5%).

However, rates were similar in boys (18.8%) and girls (22%) at age 11 to 16 while among 17 to 24-year-olds, the prevalence was much higher in young women (31.2%) than young men (13.3%).

*Eating disorders:* The report includes evidence on potential eating disorders among the respondents after asking a number of screening questions.

It finds that 12.9% of 11 to 16-year-olds and 60.3% of 17 to 19-year-olds had a possible eating problem. Across all age groups, the rate of possible eating problems was notably higher in girls than boys.

*Sleep:* The report finds that sleep problems are more common in children and young people with a probable mental disorder. Overall, 34% of 7 to 16-year-olds and 64% of 17 to 23-year-olds were affected by problems with sleep three or more times over the previous seven nights. Of those with a probable mental disorder, this rose to 72.3% and 89.5% respectively.

*Loneliness:* Loneliness was also more

common among children and young people with a probable mental disorder: 5.2% of 11 to 16-year-olds reported that they often or always felt lonely, rising to 18% among those with a probable mental health disorder.

*Self-harm:* Those with a probable mental disorder were more likely to report self-harm: 28.3% of 7 to 16-year-olds and 68.6% of 17 to 24-year-olds with a probable mental disorder had ever tried to harm themselves. Of those unlikely to have a mental disorder, these figures are 2.5% and 17.8% respectively.

Commenting on the research, Amy Dicks, policy and impact manager at the Children's Society, said the figures 'laid bare the horrifying scale of mental health issues affecting children and young people'.

She added: 'One in six younger children are struggling with a mental health disorder, as many as during last year's lockdown, showing that children are in desperate need of long-term support.'

'However, the crisis in children's mental health long pre-dated the pandemic, with a failing system turning children away or making them wait months on end for treatment.'

'We want early support hubs in every community so young people can get immediate support when issues arise, and the government to measure children's wellbeing so it is easier to identify those who are struggling and provide targeted action and investment preventing mental ill-health.' **CHHE**

● *Newlove-Delgado et al: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022, NHS Digital, November 2022: <http://bit.ly/3AX0zTC>*

# Mental ill-health rises among year 12 and 13 students with self-harm a key concern

A study involving 13,000 year 12 and 13 students has concluded that almost half are above the threshold for 'probable mental ill health' and one in five has self-harmed.

The paper, published by the COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) study, warns that incidence of poor mental health among 16 and 17-year-olds has increased by more than a quarter since similar research in 2017.

The study (Holt-White et al, 2022) investigated the mental health and wellbeing of 13,000 young people who were in year 11 in 2021. They were recruited from across 500 schools in England and had been due to take their GCSEs in 2021. Most of them have recently begun year 13.

It finds that 44% of the 16 to 17-year-olds reported elevated psychological distress and met the threshold for 'probable mental ill health'. This is up from 35% recorded in similar research in 2017, and 23% in 2007.

The latest study also reveals that students who experienced 'major life events' during the pandemic were also more likely to report high psychological distress, including those who saw more arguments

between parents or guardians (69%), were seriously ill (68%), struggled to afford food (67%), and argued more with parents or guardians (67%). This compares to 30% of those who did not have these experiences.

The study finds that 17% of the participants said they had self-harmed in the past year—this figure was notably higher for non-binary and female students than male (61% and 23% respectively compared to 11%); 8% of the students said they had attempted to end their life.

Half of the pupils from comprehensive or grammar schools in the study rated their school's mental health support as 'not very good' or 'not at all good' compared to just a quarter of those attending independent schools. And half of the young people said that they are now less motivated to study and learn as a result of the pandemic, with those who reported high psychological distress many more likely to say so (68% compared to 37%). Those reporting poor mental health were also more likely to say they had fallen behind their class mates (45% compared to 27%).

The COSMO study is being led by the UCL Centre for Education Policy

and Equalising Opportunities, the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, and the Sutton Trust. The report calls for improved ring-fenced funding for mental health support in schools and increased funding for preventative and early intervention services. It says schools should be allowed to spend catch-up funding on mental health interventions.

Dr Jake Anders, deputy director of the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities and COSMO's principal investigator, said: 'The levels reached are the continuation of a trend that is evident over the past decade or so. While it is likely that the pandemic has sped this trend up, we should not lay all the blame for this picture at its door. Things were bad before, and that means there are big systematic issues that need fixing.'

- COSMO: <https://cosmostudy.uk/>
- Holt-White et al. *Wave 1 Initial Findings – Mental Health and Wellbeing. COSMO Study. Briefing No. 4, UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities & Sutton Trust, 2022: <https://bit.ly/3HoH9Lo>*

## Only a third of teachers mental health trained

Only one-third of secondary teachers have received training to support students who are struggling with their mental health.

Furthermore, 82% say they have seen increasing levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms among students, including low mood and disengagement.

The research, which has been published by the Anna Freud Centre and the Early Intervention Foundation, coincides with the launch of a free resource to support school staff.

The Classroom Wellbeing Toolkit offers teaching staff a range of evidence-based and practical strategies to support secondary-age students. It covers five broad areas: building supportive relationships;

creating a classroom environment where all students feel they belong; general advice for promoting good mental health; how to respond to stress, low mood, and anxiety; and preventing bullying, cyber-bullying, and sexual harassment.

Specific topics include how to help your students talk about their feelings and how to prevent sexual harassment in your classroom.

The research, which involved more than 5,000 secondary school teachers, found that 40% of teachers do not feel confident when helping their students with their mental health, while only 36% say they have received specific training in this area.

Meanwhile, separate research from

YoungMinds shows that more than one-third of young people say they experience stigma and discrimination when seeking mental health support, with 51% of those surveyed saying they were embarrassed or ashamed to reach out for treatment or support.

YoungMinds is promoting its End the Wait campaign calling on the government to end the crisis in young people's mental health, including by introducing an early support hub in every community, offering easy access for young people without referrals or appointments.

- To access the Classroom Wellbeing Toolkit, visit [www.annafreud.org](http://www.annafreud.org)

# Resources support schools with identification of young carers ahead of census change

As many as one in five students could have some kind of caring responsibility, but these young people can be very hard to identify with some often reluctant to come forward for fear of the consequences for their families. But from January, the annual schools census will require schools to identify their young carers...

With one in five students having caring responsibilities, schools are being helped to identify and support these vulnerable young people ahead of new census requirements.

The number of young carers in England remains, officially, unknown with many hiding their caring role and therefore remaining unsupported in school.

However, from January 2023, schools are being asked to identify young carers as part of the annual school census (DfE, 2022).

A young carer is a child or young person who cares for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, a mental health problem, or an addiction, cannot cope without their support.

Estimates vary as to how many young carers there are. The 2011 national census identified 178,000 young carers in England and Wales. One in eight of those were aged under 8.

However, in 2018, the University of Nottingham estimated that there could be as many as 800,000 young carers aged 11 to 16 in England, while the Carers Trust has suggested that there may be as many as one in five secondary-aged pupils with caring responsibilities.

It can often be a challenge to identify these vulnerable young people, who can worry about the consequences for their families if they are found to have caring roles.

Writing in 2019, wellbeing expert Dr Pooky Knightsmith said: 'It is common for young carers to bottle up their concerns rather than letting them out and they often do not want to upset others by talking about their fear of losing a loved one to illness, or the day-to-day reality of their caring duties.'

Research earlier this year involving 600 young carers in the UK (Carers Trust, 2022) found that a third were caring for

20 to 49 hours a week, with 14% caring for 50-plus hours a week. They said they often feel worried, lonely, burnt-out, and stressed.

Bullying is also a significant problem with a quarter of young carers being bullied because of their caring role.

The pandemic has exacerbated the situation for many young carers as essential services were closed during lockdown or difficult to access.

When it comes to their studies, a quarter of young carers aged 11 to 15 miss school or struggle with their education. Previous research from the Children's Society tells us that young carers achieve on average one grade lower per subject in GCSEs than their peers without caring responsibilities.

Ahead of this January's new school census requirements, the Carers Trust and Children's Society have published a new resource to help schools identify and support young carers.

Entitled *A step-by-step guide for leaders, teachers, and non-teaching staff*, it is designed for use in primary and secondary schools.

It offers 10 steps to help schools identify and support young carers, with associated resources and downloads.

Steps include reviewing current provision, introducing a young carers schools operational lead, and raising awareness among staff and families.

The guide is part of the Young Carers in Schools programme, jointly run by the Carers Trust and Children's Society, which provides resources to help identify young carers and embed support for them in schools.

Vicky Morgan, head of young carers and young adult carers at the Carers Trust, said: 'Young carers have the extra pressure of juggling their school work with caring responsibilities at home, but support from

teachers and school teachers can make a big difference to their lives, helping them feel better understood and able to prioritise.

'We know from talking to teachers and pupils about the strides in academic achievement and self-confidence that can be made once schools understand a young carer's role.'

Luella Goold, service manager at the Children's Society's Include programme, which runs the Young Carers in Schools programme with the Carers Trust, added: 'Through our work with young carers, we hear time and time again that a lack of understanding and support in school is the issue they face the most. Young carers tell us that if they have help in school they feel better able to cope with the challenges that arise.'

- *The Young Carers in Schools website has been updated to make it more accessible. The site includes information about the Young Carers programme alongside resources and the award schools can apply for: <https://youngcarersinschools.com/>*
- *To access the updated resource, A step-by-step guide for leaders, teachers, and non-teaching staff, visit <https://youngcarersinschools.com/ycis-guide/>*
- *Carers Trust: It's harder than anyone understands, March 2022: <https://bit.ly/3quitYu>*
- *DfE: Complete the school census, last updated November 2022: <https://bit.ly/3PbNKLO>*
- *Knightsmith: Five ways to help your school's young carers, SecEd, April 2019: <https://bit.ly/3PdbHSc>*
- *University of Nottingham: New research suggests more than one in five children in England carry out some care for sick and disabled family members, September 2018: <https://bit.ly/3knDSPp>*

# Higher than normal notifications of scarlet fever and invasive group A streptococcus disease

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA, 2022) has reported higher cases of scarlet fever (851 in week 46 compared to an average of 186 in previous years) and life-threatening invasive group A streptococcus (iGAS) disease (2.3 cases per 100 000 children aged 1 to 4 compared to an average of 0.5 in the pre-pandemic seasons [2017 to 2019]) than normal over the past few weeks. At the time of writing 15 deaths have been reported in under-15-year-olds (5 in under-10-year-olds): 13 in England, one in Northern Ireland and one in Wales (The Guardian, 2022; UKSHA, 2022). Investigations are currently underway.

The UKHSA (2022) stated that 'due to these uncommon but potentially severe complications, clinicians and health protection teams should continue to be mindful of potential increases in invasive disease and maintain a high degree of clinical suspicion when assessing patients, particularly those with preceding viral infection (including chickenpox) or close contacts of scarlet fever.'

The report emphasised the importance of prompt notification of

cases and outbreaks to local UKHSA HPTs, obtaining throat swabs (prior to commencing antibiotics) when there is uncertainty about the diagnosis, and exclusion of cases from school until 24 hours of antibiotic treatment has been received to limit spread.

- *The Guardian*. Strep A child death toll in UK rises to 15. 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/08/strep-a-child-death-toll-in-uk-rises-to-15>
- UK Health Security Agency. Scarlet fever: managing outbreaks in schools and nurseries. 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scarlet-fever-managing-outbreaks-in-schools-and-nurseries>
- UK Health Security Agency. Group A streptococcal infections: report on seasonal activity in England, 2022 to 2023. 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/group-a-streptococcal-infections-activity-during-the-2022-to-2023-season/group-a-streptococcal-infections-report-on-seasonal-activity-in-england-2022-to-2023>



**Close-up of a rash on the skin of a 15-year-old female patient with scarlet fever**

DR P. MARAZZI / SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

## One in four children suffer 'frequent' bullying

A quarter of children say they are frequently victims of face-to-face bullying, with those on free school meals or with SEND more likely to be targeted.

Research published by the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) during Anti-Bullying Week last month, also shows that 6% of children are being frequently bullied online.

Meanwhile, separate research from the Diana Award reveals that 83% of children have experienced bullying, with the vast majority stating that the bullying took place within school grounds, and half of those being bullied saying that the focus of the bullying was related to their appearance.

Anti-Bullying Week is organised by the ABA and offers schools support and

resources to help boost anti-bullying work and education.

In a survey of nearly 30,000 pupils – from infant to secondary – in England, conducted by ABA and analysed by Goldsmiths, University of London, 24% of the respondents told researchers they were being frequently bullied face-to-face. This figure rises to 31% for those with SEND and 30% for those on free school meals.

The research asked about pupils experiences in the last few weeks and finds that both those being bullied and the children who bully others have a bad experience of school life, disliking school, feeling less safe, and having poorer relationships with their teachers.

It also finds that victims have significantly poorer wellbeing, although

those who frequently bully others have the poorest wellbeing of all.

Elsewhere, the research from the Diana Award and Nationwide has found that 83% of children have experienced bullying, with 84% of the victims saying that it took place in school.

The research, which involved more than 1,000 children aged six to 15, reveals that half of the victims said they were bullied due to their appearance, while 36% were victimised due to social factors. A quarter of the children surveyed also said they had been bullied online.

The research marks the launch of The Positive Post Box campaign, which aims to send hundreds of thousands of letters filled with kind messages to children around the UK.