

# Cost of living, diet inequalities and impact on learning

Ewen Trafford

Nutrition Education Officer, British Nutrition Foundation



# Introduction

- Childhood and adolescence is a challenging time due to high nutrient requirements and often less than adequate nutrient intakes.
- However, COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis risk exacerbating the problem further.
- We will review the health status in children and young people in Wales and the UK, and try to understand the implications of the cost of living crisis on schools and pupils.



# Health status in children and young people

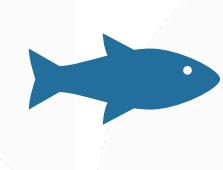
## Intake of key foods (11-18 year-olds in the UK)

 **12%**

getting 5-A-Day

 **4%**

getting enough fibre

 **2g**

avg. oily fish eaten per day

- Overall dietary quality in UK children and adolescents is poor
- This suggests that childhood and adolescence is a key time to make targeted changes

[NDNS: results from years 9 to 11 \(2016 to 2017 and 2018 to 2019\)](#)

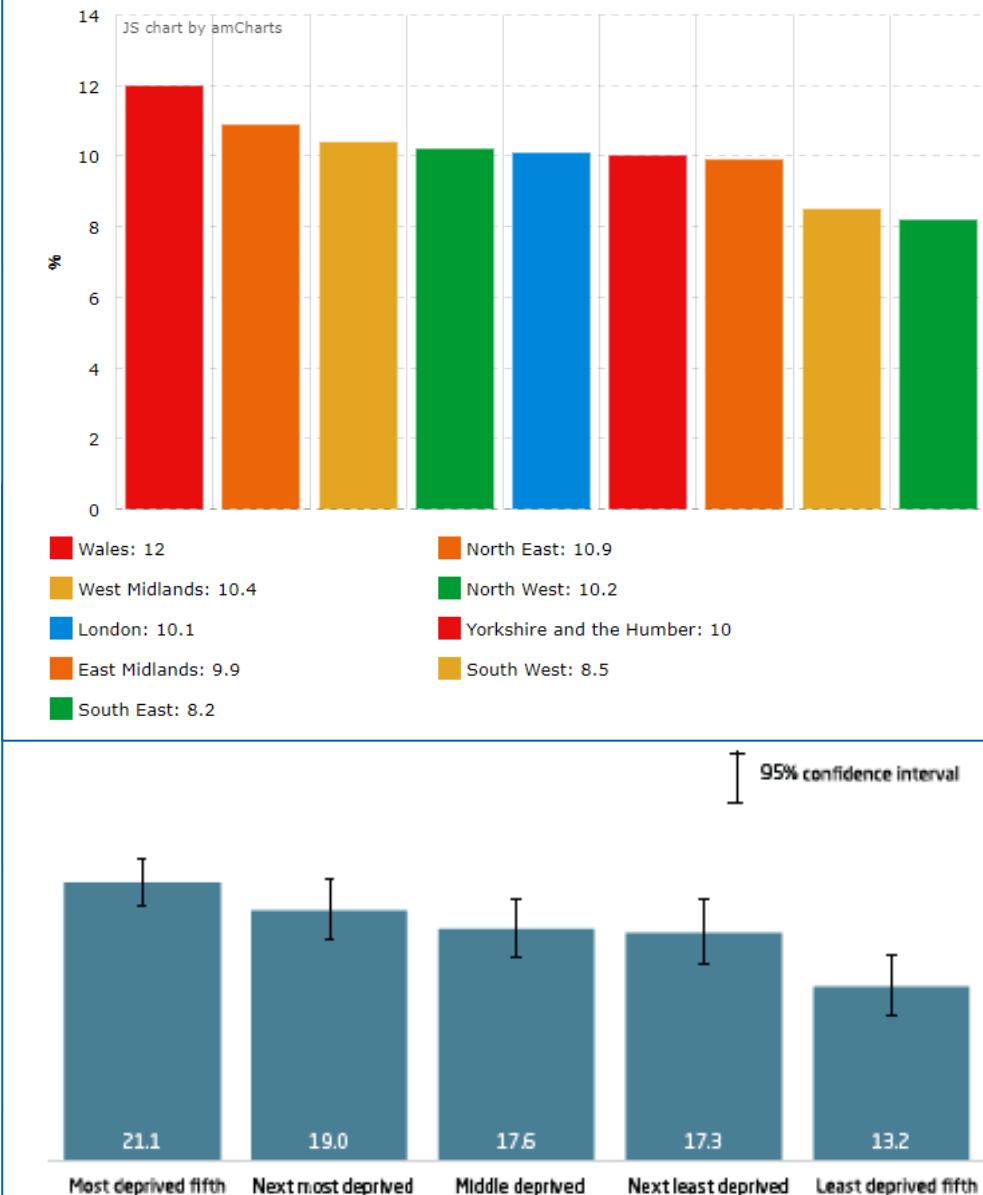


# Health status in children and young people

## Overweight, Obesity and Physical Activity



## Children at reception age classed as obese (2017-18) in Wales, Scotland and English regions



Sources: Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales (2019)

Child Measurement Programme Report 2020-2021

National Child Measurement Programme, England (21/22)

# Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales

## Food Environment

- Advertising
- Reformulation and Production
- Healthier Retail and Better Consumer Information
- Healthier foods purchased and eaten out of the home
- Community Food Environment

## Active Environment

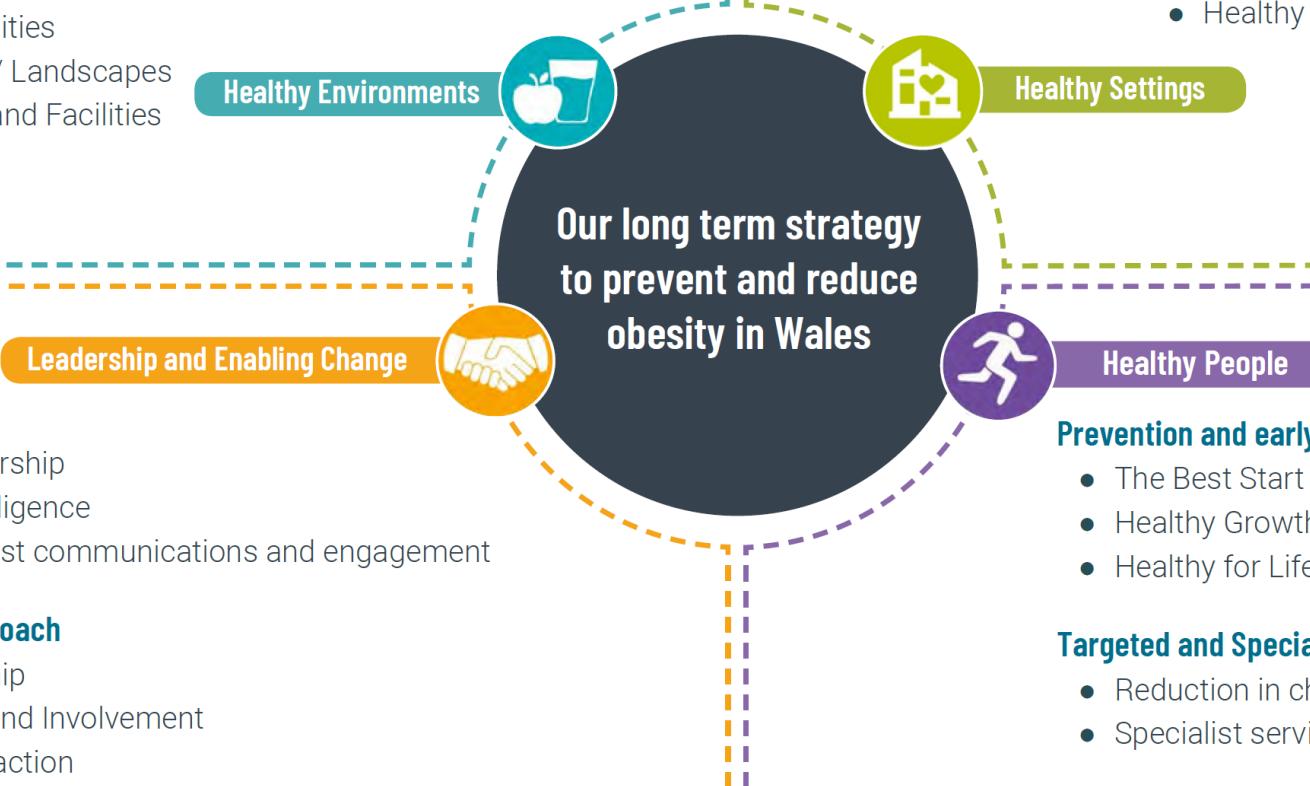
- Active Travel
- Safer Communities
- Green Spaces / Landscapes
- Infrastructure and Facilities

## National Delivery

- National Leadership
- Enhanced Intelligence
- Open and honest communications and engagement

## Systems Based Approach

- Local Leadership
- Collaboration and Involvement
- Enabling local action



## Healthy Learning

- Healthy Childcare Settings
- Healthy Schools
- Healthy Higher, Further and Other Educational Settings

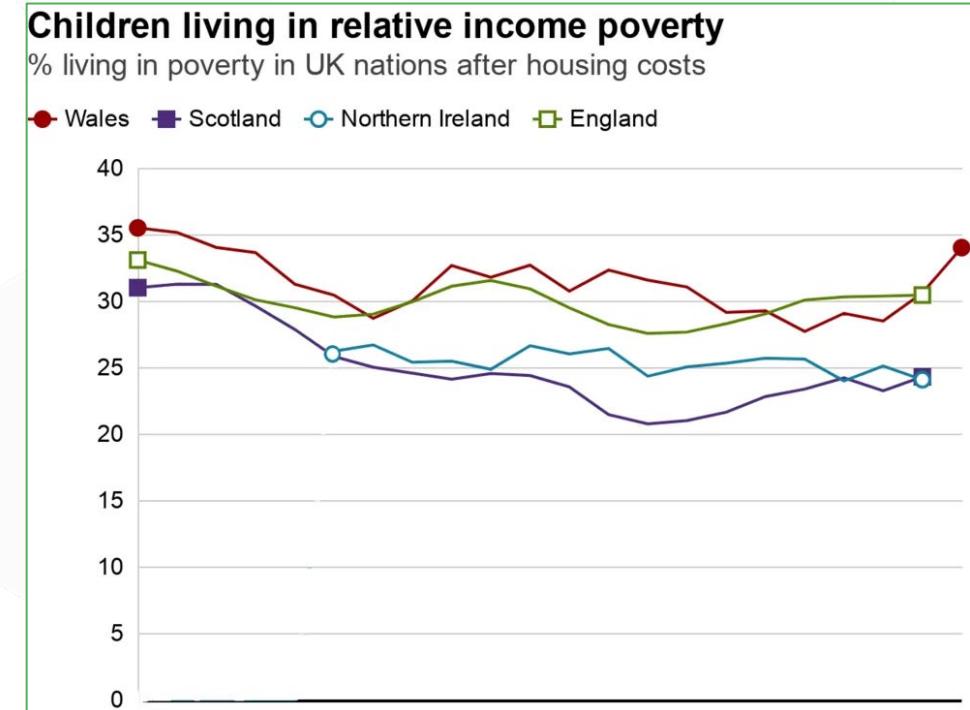
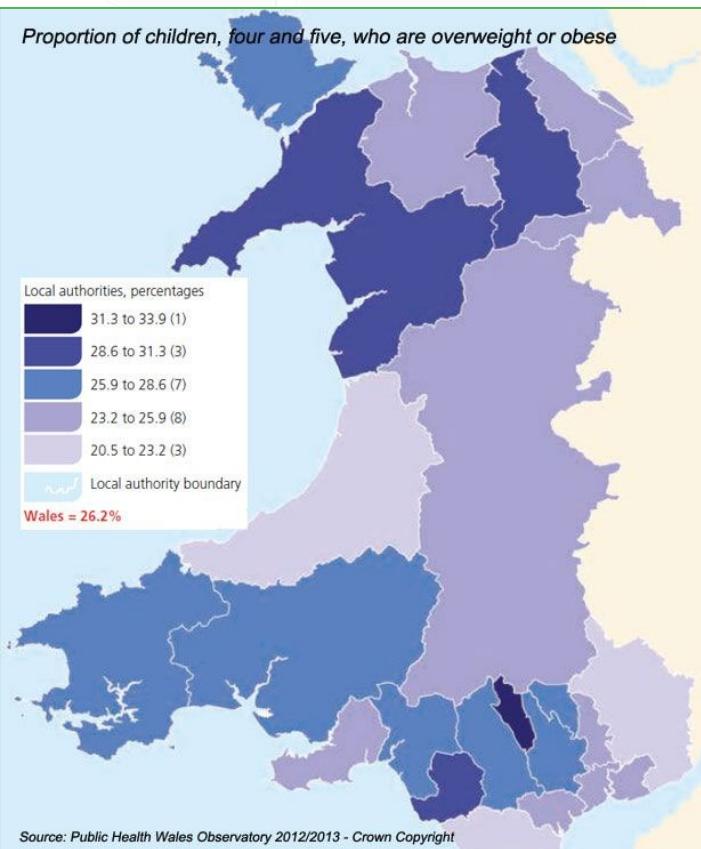
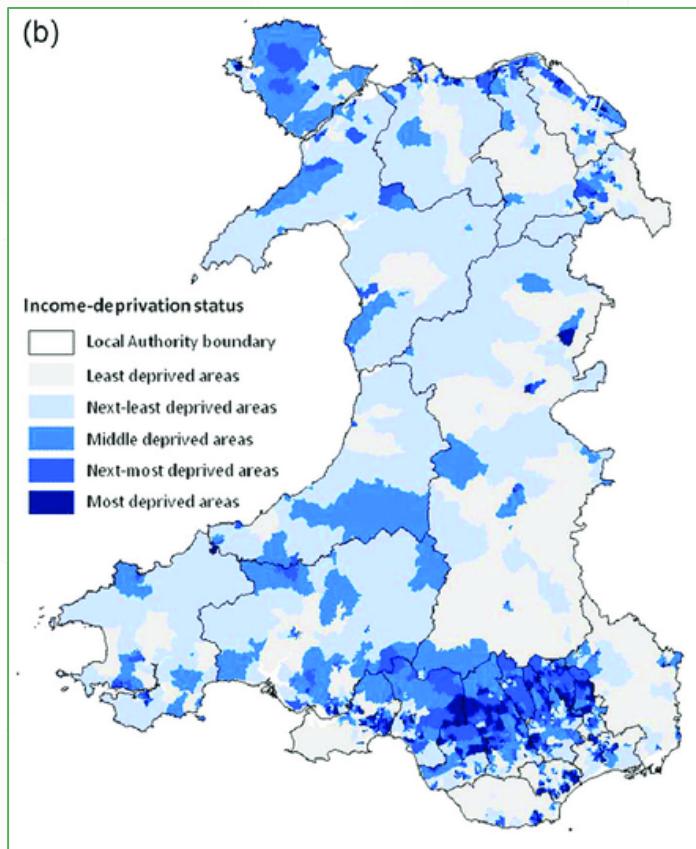
## Healthy Work and Community Settings

- Healthy Workplaces
- Healthy NHS
- Healthy Communities



# Poverty and obesity (Wales)

- Disparities are evident for areas of Wales in terms of poverty and food security.



# Cost of living – children and families

- 8 in every 30 children are in poverty.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated 500,000 more children will be pushed into poverty if wages don't increase with inflation.<sup>2</sup>
- Over a quarter of parents said their child's mental health had worsened due to the situation.<sup>3</sup>
- Courtney Sutton (Action for Children)<sup>4</sup> describes one family's situation:

“We’re working with a family who are on a low income. They aren’t entitled to public funding and they’re in a rented one-bedroom flat costing £1000 a month. The family rely on dad’s income, but mum has now returned to work to support the family – just three months after having a baby.

Without charitable support, the family would have struggled for basic food and essentials.”



1. [Child poverty facts and figures | CPAG](#)

2. [Cost-of-living report: impacts on children and young people | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

3. [Lack of support for low-income families will see 1.3 million people pushed into absolute poverty next year • Resolution Foundation](#)

4. [How is the cost of living crisis impacting children? | Action For Children](#)



# Cost of living affecting schools

- Costs of energy bills and resources for schools rising dramatically due to inflation.
- Anecdotal evidence of:
  - Reduced uptake of after-school clubs
  - Increase in pupils skipping meals
  - Increased absences due to fuel prices
  - Printing bans
  - Reductions in clothing donations
- Energy bills have as much as trebled in some schools.
- The National Association of Head Teachers says 9 in 10 schools will fall into a deficit by the next academic year.

1. [Schools face bankruptcy as energy bills jump 300% during cost of living crisis \(inews.co.uk\)](https://www.inews.co.uk/news/schools-face-bankruptcy-as-energy-bills-jump-300-during-cost-of-living-crisis-181120)
2. [Is cost of living causing children to miss school in Wales? \(bbc.co.uk/news\)](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news)
3. [Cost of living: Schools now 'part of the welfare state' \(schoolsweek.co.uk\)](https://www.schoolsweek.co.uk/cost-of-living-schools-now-part-of-the-welfare-state)
4. ['There is such high need': Teachers step in as UK cost of living crisis bites | Financial Times \(ft.com\)](https://www.ft.com/content/3a2a2a2a-0a2a-4a2a-8a2a-0a2a2a2a2a2a)

**Schools face bankruptcy as energy bills jump 300% during cost of living crisis**

**Is cost of living causing children to miss school in Wales?**

⌚ 14 November 2022

**Schools now 'part of the welfare state' as cost of living crisis deepens**

“There is such high need”: Teachers step in as UK cost of living crisis bites



# Additional research and professional opinion

- Mounting evidence of increased poverty in UK children is becoming more apparent in hospitals.<sup>1</sup>
- The Lancet recently published an editorial<sup>2</sup> on the cost of living for UK young people:
  - Children and young people living in poverty 72% more likely to be diagnosed with long-term illness.
  - 90% of the UK has seen a rise in living costs.
- The Senedd research into the cost of living crisis<sup>3</sup> showed that:
  - Food insecurity rose 69% in the last year
  - Purchasing of healthy food also falls, partly due to higher prices for many healthy options
  - Therefore, increase in hunger and lack of food, but also lower nutritional value of food

## Ymchwily Senedd Senedd Research

Topics ▾

Financial Scrutiny ▾

Knowledge Exchange ▾

Senedd Research > Research Articles >

The cost to life: how soaring living costs affect people's health and wellbeing

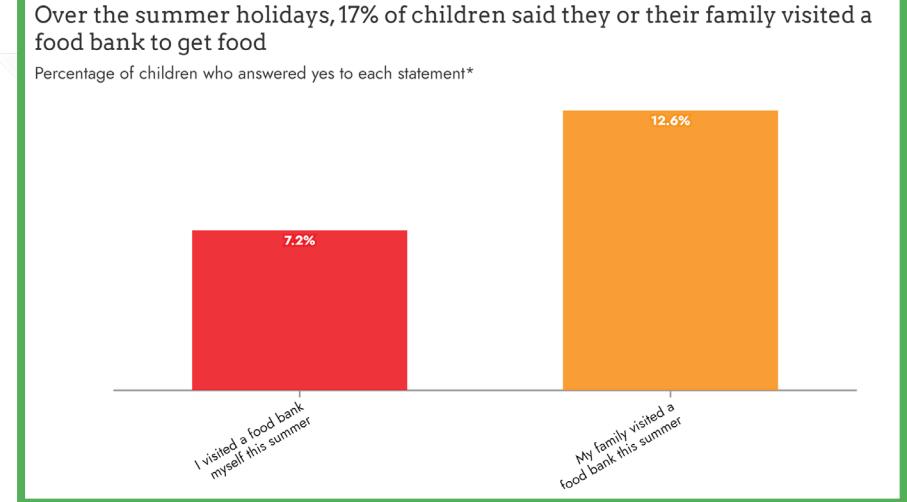
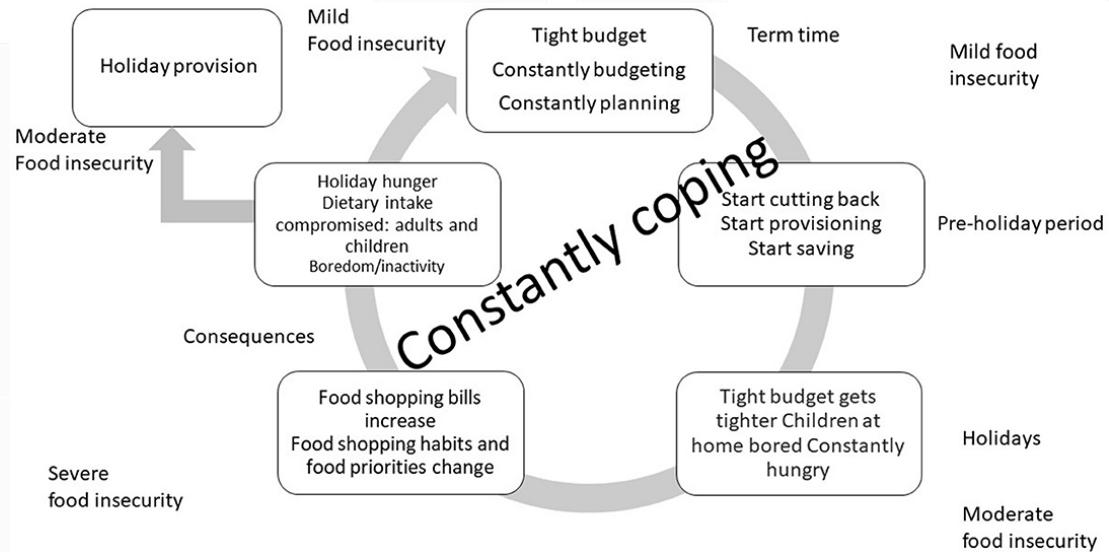


### **The cost to life: how soaring living costs affect people's health and wellbeing**

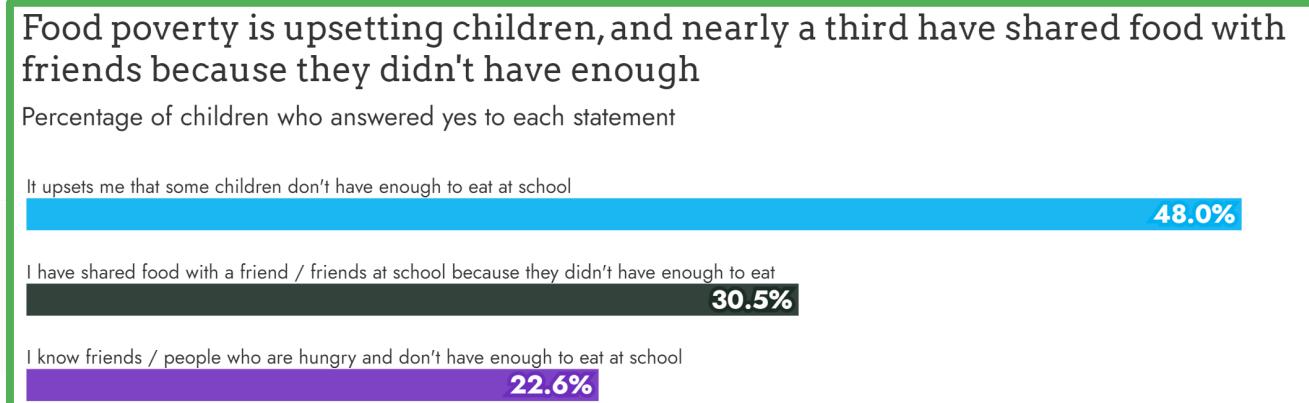
1. [How the cost of living crisis is damaging children's health | The BMJ](#)
2. [The high cost of living for children in the UK - The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health](#)
3. [The cost to life: how soaring living costs affect people's health and wellbeing \(Senedd Research\)](#)



# Food insecurity in children

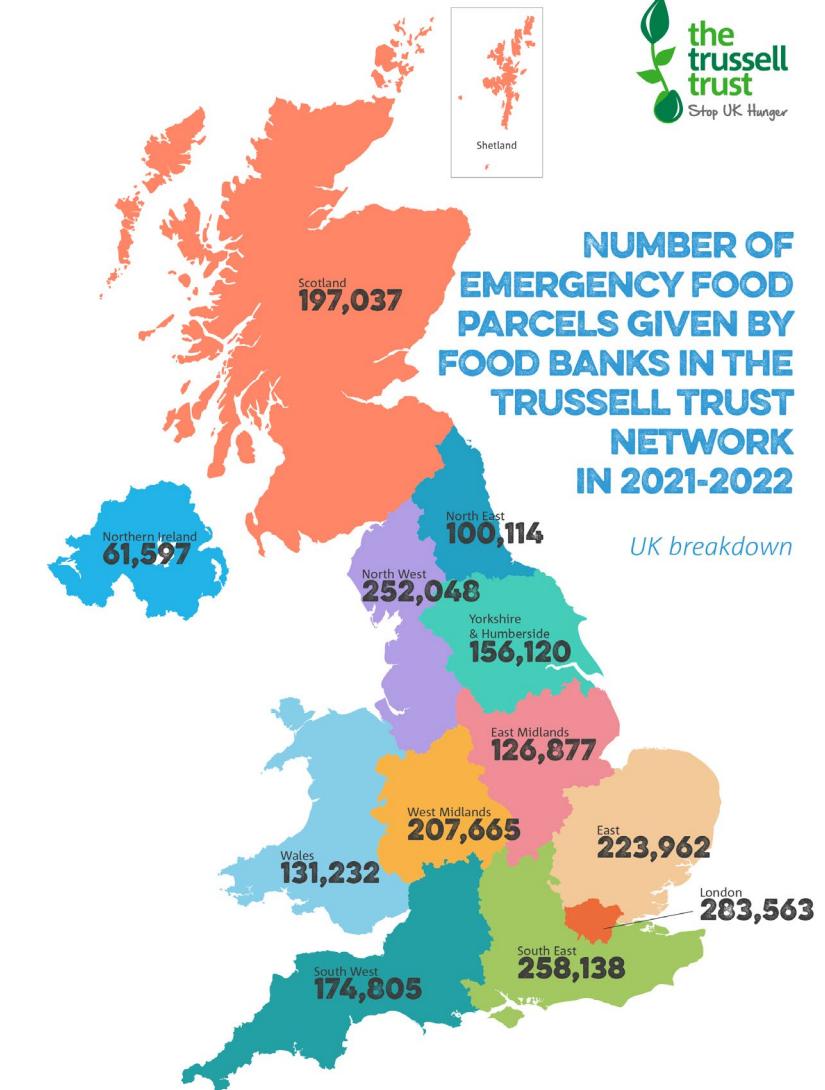
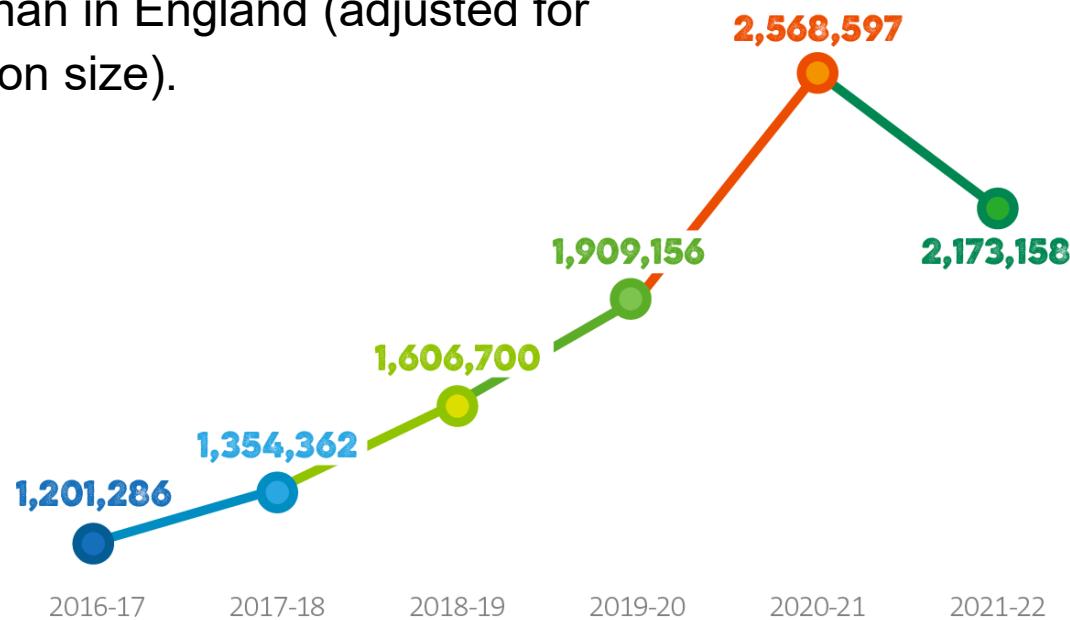


- The Trussell Trust reported a 75% increase in food parcels provided in 2020/21
- The Food Foundation publishes surveys, including 'Children's experiences of food poverty in England'



# Emergency food parcels

- Trussell Trust reports on emergency food parcels distributed around the UK.
- In '21-'22, the number of children in Wales receiving emergency food parcels was 26% higher than in England (adjusted for population size).



# Free School Meals

- In England, pupils get FSM for 3 years.
- In Scotland, FSM extended to all pupils P1-5.
- The Mayor of London recently announced free school meals for all primary children in London for 1 year.
- Wales is rolling out Universal Free School Meals for all primary pupils by 2024.
- Research into UFSM shows that it could:
  - Decrease hunger
  - Decrease stigma
  - Provide substantial savings to families
  - Potentially reduce obesity in some children

Number of UK children in food poverty nearly doubles in a year to 4m

Support grows for expansion of free school meals to struggling families in face of rising hunger



1. [Providing free school meals to families with no recourse to public funds \(NRPF\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/announcing-free-school-meals-for-all-primary-pupils-in-london)
2. [School leaders report rise in pupils not on free meals going hungry | Schools | The Guardian \(ampproject.org\)](https://www.theguardian.com/schools/2023/jan/10/school-leaders-report-rise-in-pupils-not-on-free-meals-going-hungry)
3. [Universal Primary Free School Meals \(UPFSM\)](https://www.amp-project.org/universal-primary-free-school-meals-upfsm)

# School Food Standards

- Introduced in 2014, based on the Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure – 2009.
- Includes:
  - At least one portion of vegetables (primary) or two portions (secondary) per day
  - Fish must be provided at least once (primary) or twice (secondary) each week. Oily fish at least twice during any 4 week period
  - Meat cuts must be provided on at least two (primary) or three (secondary) days each week
  - Restrictions on some HFSS foods.

## Healthy eating in maintained schools

Statutory guidance for local authorities and governing bodies



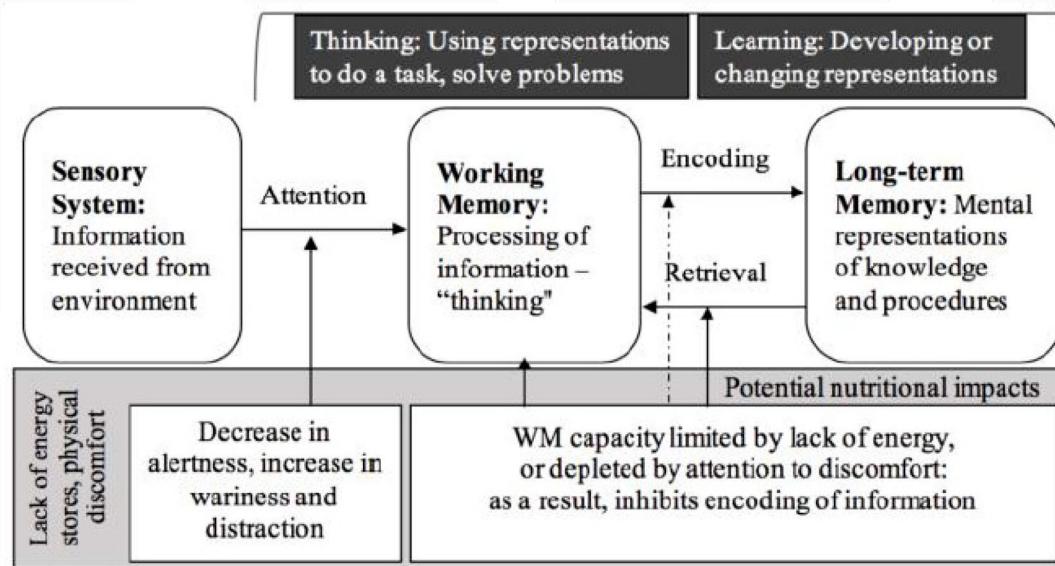
Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

[www.cymru.gov.uk](http://www.cymru.gov.uk)



# Hunger and learning – acute and chronic effects

- Hunger is associated with:
  - Poorer cognition and learning
  - Mental health concerns
  - Behavioural issues
  - Higher risk of chronic disease
  - Higher risk of overweight and obesity



**TABLE 1** Potential findings associated with food insecurity and hunger\*

Infant	Increased risk of weakened attachment to parents (8,13)
Child	Poor performance on language comprehension tests (3)
	Inability to follow directions over the first five years of age (3)
	Delays in socioemotional, cognitive and motor development (3)
	Higher level of hyperactivity/inattention and poor memory (7,8)
	Higher frequency of chronic illnesses (14,15)
Youth	Increased risk of childhood obesity (16,17)
	Depression and suicidal ideation (11)
	Mood, behaviour and substance abuse disorders (12)
Maternal and family	Increased risk for maternal depressive disorders (19)
	Mothers of severely hungry school-age children more likely to have a lifetime diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder or substance abuse (24)
	Higher likelihood of unresponsive caregiving practices (3,24)

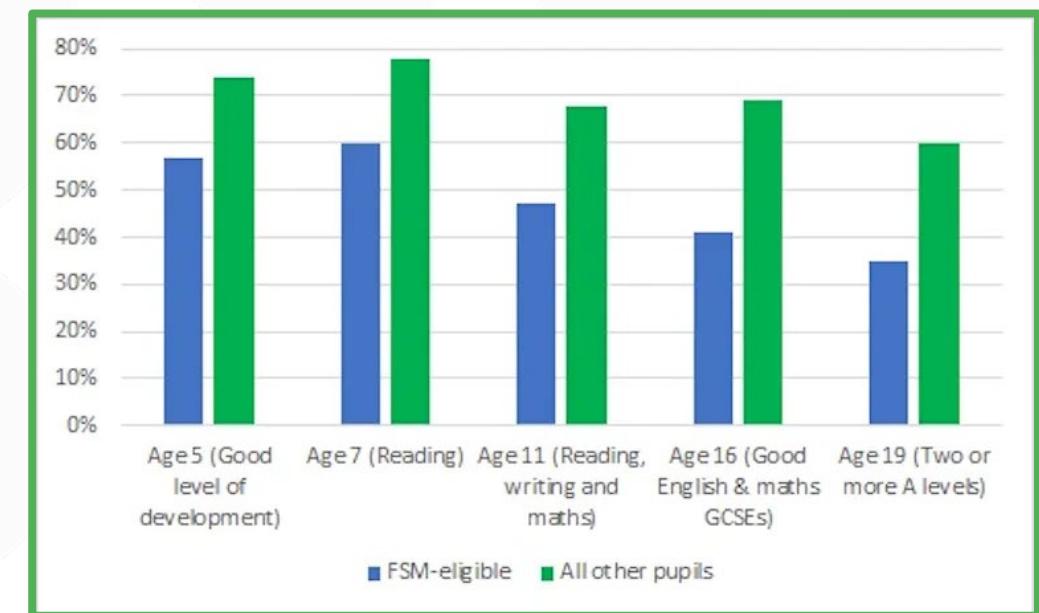
\* Causality not necessarily confirmed

**2**



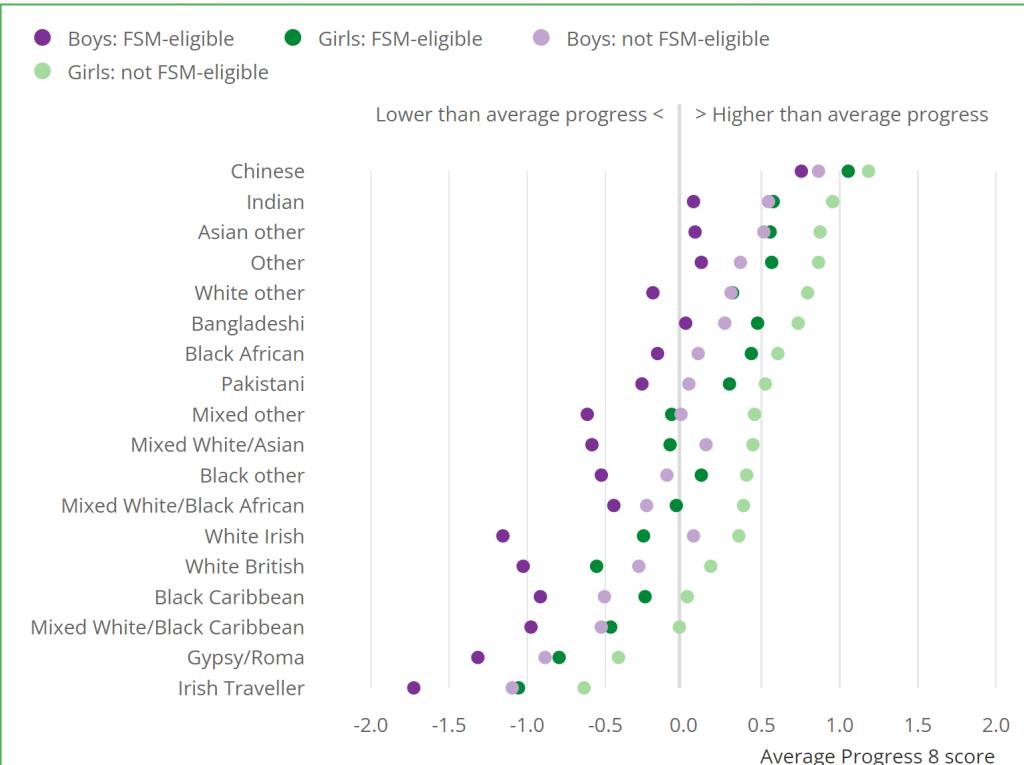
# Financial inequality and attainment

- Research consistently demonstrates lower attainment for children from disadvantaged households, gaps widening with age.<sup>1</sup>
- Over three quarters of educators responding to a survey stated that their students had demonstrated fatigue or poor concentration as a result of poverty.<sup>2</sup>
- More than half said their students had experienced hunger or ill health.<sup>2</sup>
- Over a third said their pupils experienced bullying due to their financial circumstances.<sup>2</sup>



# Financial and ethnic inequalities

- DfE data shows lower attainment for certain ethnicities, as well as lower on average for those who are FSM-eligible.
- Boys are also shown to be performing worse, on average, than girls.
- Some specific statistics for KS4 in Wales [available online](#).



Source: Department for Education – Key Stage 4 performance, 2019 (revised)

1. [Child poverty and education outcomes by ethnicity - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)
2. [Key stage 4 performance 2019 \(revised\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



# The Cost of the School Day

- Growing concerns about levels of child poverty in Scotland, exacerbated by COVID-19.
- The Cost of the School Day Toolkit was commissioned by Public Health Scotland, to help schools 'investigate cost barriers and poverty related challenges.'
- The Toolkit contains a 5-step programme to walk through the procedure from start to finish:
  - Do the Groundwork
  - Involve Your School Community
  - What Did You Find Out? Identify Actions
  - Put Cost of the School Day Actions in Place
  - Regularly Revisit Your Action Plan

[The Cost of the School Day](#), Child Poverty Action Group, 2021

## THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY

### TOOLKIT



Resources to promote equity and reduce financial barriers to participation at school



# The Cost of the School Day - Wales

- CPAG has produced additional specific resources to support schools in Wales
- Resources are available in English and Welsh
- Contain additional context around child poverty in Wales, how to have conversations with parents and pupils.

## REDUCING THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY IN WALES

February 2022



*"Education is supposed to be free, but a lot of things at school are not"*

(Member of the youth parliament)

### Background to the issue

The pandemic has illuminated the vast gaps in resources that exist between households in Wales. Even prior to the pandemic, we know that around 195,000 children were living in households below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Child poverty exists in every part of Wales, from the Valleys to the coast, from our inner cities to the rural midlands. There isn't a single council ward anywhere in Wales with a child poverty rate below 12%.<sup>2</sup>

Child poverty exists because families with children do not have sufficient income to have a reasonable standard of living. Child poverty causes deep and lifelong harm to the outcomes of children, and these impacts are more profound the longer a child remains in poverty. As well as the risk of material deprivation, poverty also exposes



## Tackling poverty together

Creating compassionate services to support families in poverty at school

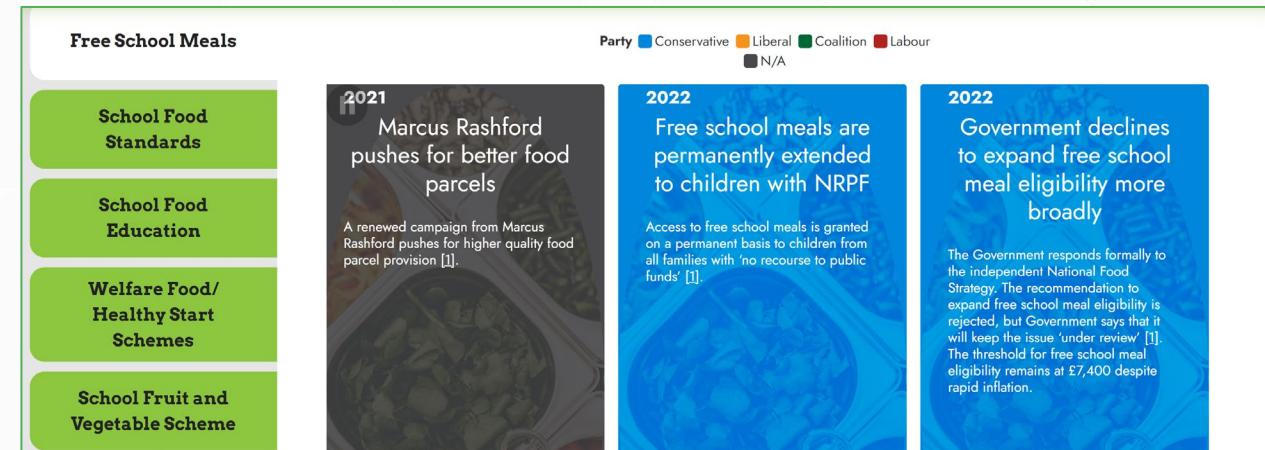


1. Reducing the cost of the school day in Wales
2. Tackling poverty together (English)
3. Trechu tlodi gyda'n gilydd (Welsh)



# Children's Food Policy Library

- The Children's Food Policy Library is hosted by the Food Foundation.<sup>1</sup>
- The Library serves as a guide to campaigns and legislation over time that affects policy.
- This is a useful resource for keeping up to date with relevant legislation surrounding schools



1. [Children's Food Policy Library | Food Foundation](https://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/childrens-food-policy-library)



# Conclusion

- We face stark challenges related to obesity outcomes and other facets of health.
- 1 in 5 children leave primary school obese, and nutritional status in adolescents is poor.
- Continuing cost of living crises are likely to exacerbate these issues.
- Schools continue to try to cut costs to curb increased prices.
- Much of the quantitative data on disparities and health status is from 2021 or earlier and so the full extent of the cost of living crisis is yet to be fully realised.





# Thank you

