

# Child Poverty and Education

## Increasing family incomes must sit alongside any long-term improvements to the education system.

Child poverty presents many challenges to the education system. A family's lack of money has a significant impact on the education of their children.

Even a good school and committed teachers can't fully compensate for the stress that living in poverty places on a family or for the social exclusion, poor housing, or a lack of books or a computer at home. This lack of resources means poor children face an uphill struggle just to have the same type of learning environment as their peers. Furthermore, a great deal of informal education takes place outside the school – at home and in the wider community, something poor children often miss out on.

Families struggling to meet the basic needs of food, housing and utilities simply can't afford the added costs of educational opportunities outside school. They often can't take advantage of extra curricular activities such as music lessons, sports clubs, family outings and holidays. As a result, poor children often miss out on the developmental benefits these experiences can provide.

Addressing the underlying financial struggles many poor families have to deal with is essential for the success of more targeted education initiatives. Benefits and child tax credits provide important support to poor families and have helped achieve some progress in reducing child poverty

levels. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that by investing a further £4 billion in benefits and tax credits, the Government can reach its 2010 target and lift a million children out of poverty. But, as well as direct investment in childcare, pre-school and school education, improving family incomes is a key component of any strategy to improve educational outcomes for poor children.

## 3.8 million children are living in poverty in the UK today

Child poverty is not inevitable, and progress has been made, but with one child in every three still experiencing poverty we have an urgent task on our hands.

The Campaign to End Child Poverty is made up of over 80 children's charities, child welfare organisations, social justice groups, faith-groups, trade unions and others concerned about the unacceptably high levels of child poverty in the UK - all working together for our common vision of a poverty-free UK.

## This is a series of briefings on our four key Campaign areas. Others will include:

### Child Poverty and Income:

To ensure an adequate income for families the Government must commit £4billion annual investment on benefits and child tax credits to reach 2010 target of halving child poverty.

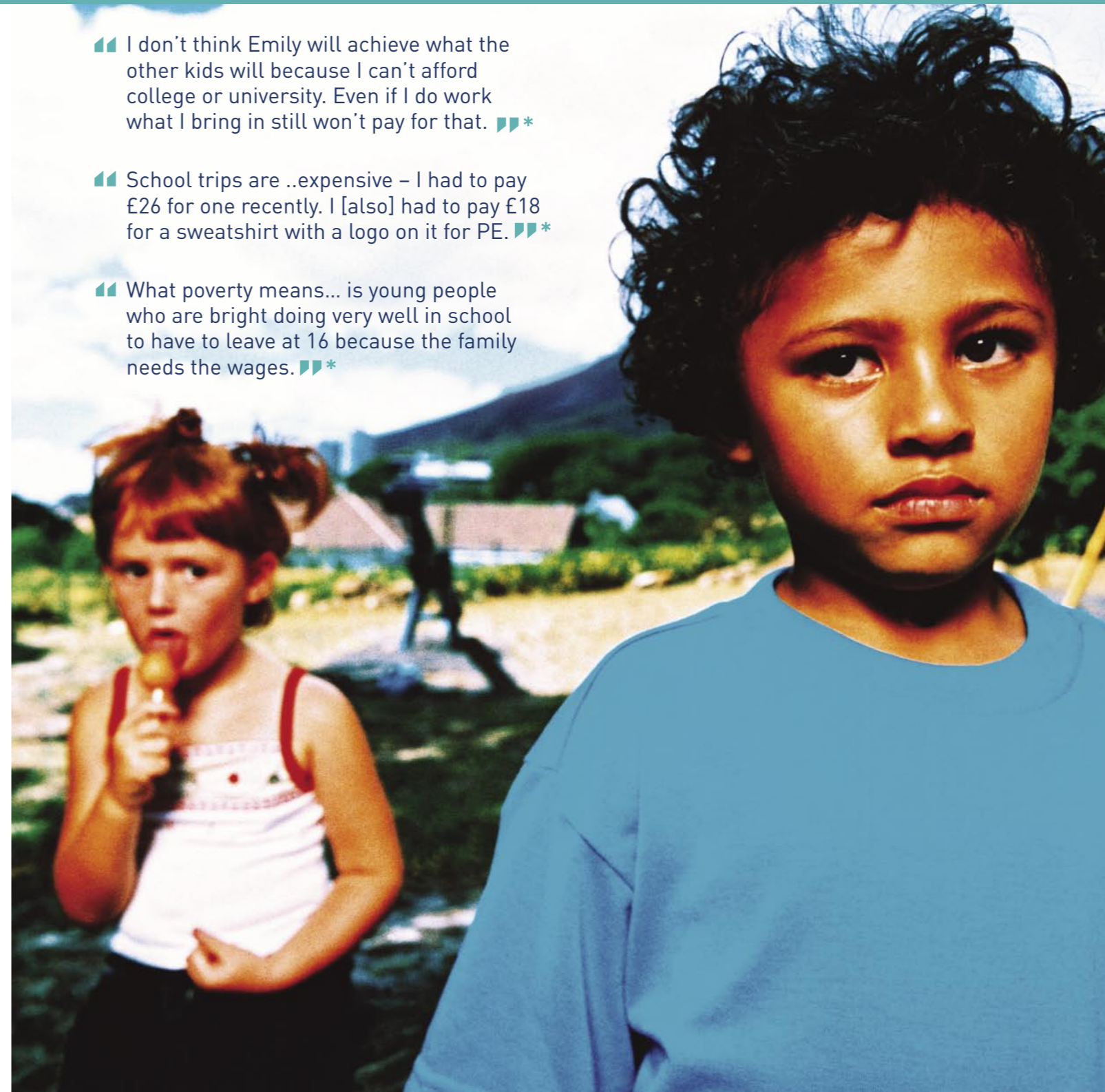
### Child Poverty, Employment and Childcare:

The Government must ensure that work pays, ensure that parents are not trapped in poor quality jobs and make sure that all parents can combine work and family life through the provision of a sufficient supply of high quality, affordable, accessible childcare.

### Child Poverty and Housing:

To ensure an adequate home for every child the Government must have built 20,000 additional social rented homes per year to lift 154,000 children out of bad housing.

- “ I don't think Emily will achieve what the other kids will because I can't afford college or university. Even if I do work what I bring in still won't pay for that. ”\*
- “ School trips are ..expensive – I had to pay £26 for one recently. I [also] had to pay £18 for a sweatshirt with a logo on it for PE. ”\*
- “ What poverty means... is young people who are bright doing very well in school to have to leave at 16 because the family needs the wages. ”\*



To learn about child poverty, take action and get involved in the Campaign, go to:

[www.endchildpoverty.org.uk](http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk)

Registered Charity no. 1099008.



A briefing by Barnardo's, CPAG, NUT and Save the Children for the Campaign to End Child Poverty

\* All quotations from parent on low incomes in Unequal Choices, published by ECP 2006 or from It Doesn't Happen Here, published by Barnardo's 2007.

# Child Poverty and Education

## Summary

### 3.8 million children – one in three - are currently living in poverty in the UK. One area in which the effects of poverty are particularly felt is in education.

By the time they start school, many poor children are already lagging behind their peers, often setting the stage for a downward spiral of unequal chances and diminishing returns that will play out for the rest of their lives.

Poor families often can't afford proper breakfasts or school uniforms. The costs of school trips or of art or music supplies are equally out of reach. Many poor children say they're bullied and made to feel they don't belong. Often, schools are unable to meet the additional needs of poor children because of a lack of funding and resources. Not surprisingly, many leave school early or without qualifications.

The Government has pledged to halve child poverty by 2010 and eliminate it by 2020. This, ambitious, long-term commitment needs to ensure that children in poverty today do not remain in poverty as they grow up. An important factor in this effort will be education and how the education system supports poor children.

Poverty predicts educational outcomes in the UK more strongly than in any other OECD country. This means poor children often have an unequal chance from the start. By the age of three, poor students can lag as much as nine months behind their better off peers.<sup>1</sup> This gap grows over time, with many poor children falling two years behind by the age of 14.<sup>2</sup>

Educational attainment at school has a significant effect on earnings in later life. A lack of qualifications and skills makes it much harder to obtain secure, well-paid employment. A good education is, therefore, critical to breaking this cycle of poverty.

Closing the education gap is essential if we are to improve the life-chances of the children living in poverty in the UK and meet the Government's 2020 target. More must be done to ensure that children receive a high quality service that meets their needs so that they have

the chance to overcome the hurdles poverty places in their path and have a real and equal chance to succeed.

The Campaign to End Child Poverty believes that if we are to achieve this, the Government must:

**1) Ensure access to high quality early years provision for every child from a low-income family.**

**2) Aim to close the gap between state and private school funding levels and ensure that new spending is geared towards schools in the poorest areas or with the poorest intake.**

**3) Ensure education works for all children by rolling out personalised learning agendas in schools to guarantee increased support, particularly for those from the poorest backgrounds.**

**1) The Government must ensure access to high quality early years provision for every child from a low-income family.**

Poverty begins to have an effect on a child's future very early on in their lives. For example, there is evidence of both psychological and behavioural differences by social class, in children as young as 22 months.<sup>4</sup>

Good early years provision can help to combat some of these initial disadvantages. Early years provision has been shown in particular to give children from poorer backgrounds a better start in school, including enhancing the child's social, emotional and linguistic development.<sup>5</sup> At the same time as aiding young children's development, affordable and accessible childcare is an important factor in enabling parents to participate in the workforce.

The quality of provision, however, is critical. Children make more progress in settings with well-qualified employees and where there are warm, interactive relationships between staff and children.<sup>6</sup>

The Government has made a significant investment in expanding high quality early years provision, particularly in disadvantaged communities through Sure Start Children's Centres and the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI).

However, there is evidence that despite this expansion, there is still only one registered childcare place for every three children under age 8.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, childcare is still not reaching many disadvantaged groups. A National Audit Office report revealed that childcare settings are advertising themselves as accessible for disabled children when many only actually offer one place suitable for a disabled child.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, much of the new provision has benefited from start-up funding, enabling providers to offer subsidised or even free places to the most

disadvantaged families. New research raises doubts about the sustainability of such provision particularly for poorer communities. As start-up funding tapers off, nurseries are increasingly charging market rates, reducing staff numbers and offering less flexible provision;<sup>9</sup> some may even close.

If the Government is serious about reaching out to poorer families and providing access to high quality early years provision, they must ensure that progress that has been made does not disappear through lack of sustained investment.

**2) Aim to close the gap between state and private school funding levels and ensure that new spending is geared towards schools in the poorest areas or with the poorest intake.**

Money matters in schools; it can make a great difference to children's outcomes. The evidence suggests that money may matter most for children living in poverty.<sup>10</sup> Currently the average annual spending per pupil in the private sector is £8,000; in the state sector it is less than £5,300.<sup>11</sup> In March 2006, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, set

**3) Ensure education works for all children by rolling out personalised learning agendas in schools to guarantee increased support, particularly for those from the poorest backgrounds.**

Although it has been described in different ways, personalised learning is essentially about meeting the needs of individual children and young people.

Personalised learning can play an important part in fulfilling the "Every Child Matters" agenda as a means of giving children the support they

out a vision to close the gap. While we strongly support this, we would urge the Government to concentrate first on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Why does money matter so much in schools? Among other things, proper funding can provide smaller class sizes, more pastoral care, a broader range of activities with better facilities and resources for art, science, technology and sporting activities, as well as more experienced staff.

These are the opportunities that the private sector is able to buy in with

require, whatever their needs and abilities, or their background and circumstances.

We believe that as part of the roll out of personalised learning, all learners should have a guaranteed personal entitlement. This entitlement should include learning away from school, such as outdoor activities and visits to museums and galleries, which families in poverty can rarely afford.

Furthermore, the Campaign calls on the Government to ensure that personalised learning is developed on a school-by-school basis and

*"...an infant who grows up in a poor family is less likely to stay on at school, or even attend school regularly, less likely to get qualifications and go to college, more likely to be trapped in the worst job or no job at all, more likely to be trapped in a cycle of deprivation that is life long...less likely to reach his or her full potential, a young child's chances crippled even before their life's journey has barely begun..."*

**Gordon Brown MP<sup>3</sup>**

its greater resources. Yet, ironically, for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, although funding levels are far below those of the private sector, the needs are typically greater.

In addition, children in poverty may come through the school gates with a range of barriers to learning – English as an alternative language, greater social welfare needs – and often with less support at home. Meeting their needs effectively and breaking down the barriers to learning that many face requires more support from a range of professionals – and this all costs money.

not imposed in a top-down fashion. Individual schools know best the particular needs of their students and communities and are most qualified to identify the most appropriate way of meeting these needs.

**Without these significant improvements within the funding and provision of education, the Government's long-term goal to end child poverty by 2020 will not be reached.**

<sup>1</sup> Users guide to second millennium cohort study, Institute for Longitudinal Studies London 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Social Mobility: Narrowing Social Class Educational Attainment Gaps, DfES, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Our Children Are Our Future – Joseph Rowntree Lecture by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, 8 July 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Feinstein L (2003) "Inequality in the early Cognitive development of children in the 1970 cohort" *Economica* Vol 70, no 277.

<sup>5</sup> Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 12 - The Final Report: Effective Pre-School Education*. London: DfES / Institute of Education, University of London.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Gregg P, Harkness S and Macmillan L (2006) *Welfare to work policies and child poverty* Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> National Audit Office (2004) *Early years progress in developing high quality childcare and early years education accessible for all*, London, stationary office.

<sup>9</sup> T. Smith et al (2007) *NNI Implementation Study, NatCen Childcare Providers Survey (2005 & on-going, publishing on the DfES website)*.

<sup>10</sup> Machin, S., McNally, S. and Meghir, C. (2007). *Resources and standards in urban schools*. London: LSE, CEE.

<sup>11</sup> Emerson, C (2007) *Public Spending, presentation following the 2007 Budget at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, 21st March*.