



**College of Arts,
Law and Social Sciences**

Food Poverty and Primary Schools: New Understandings of the Literature and Evidence

Professor Emma Wainwright and Dr Ellen McHugh

with support from Ms Ozlem Isik

June 2026

**Department of Education
Brunel University of London
Kingston Lane
Uxbridge
UB8 3PH**

Emma.Wainwright@brunel.ac.uk

Ellen.McHugh@brunel.ac.uk

Introduction

There is increasing focus on the demand for charitable food provision and its related socio-economic need within public and policy discourse, and across a range of different sectors, including Education. Effective strategies to alleviate hunger and its circumstances require evidence-led policy and practice which are underpinned by careful and critical evaluation of impact.

This report was commissioned by the Education Strategy Unit (ESU) of the City of London Corporation (CoLC). It has three aims:

- To review academic and grey literature on food poverty and food insecurity
- To highlight the prevalence and impact of food poverty and food insecurity among primary-aged children in the UK
- To distil current knowledge from a wide range of contemporary sources and generate new understandings of what can be done to better support families and children living with everyday hunger.

The geographical focus of the review is UK-wide to highlight the contextual drivers of food poverty and insecurity, with emphasis placed on the short- and long-term impacts of austerity policies and the on-going cost-of-living crisis. In so doing, it draws on and details the literature relating specifically to primary-aged children and their families, and the role schools and the wider education sector have in the mitigation of hunger.

Following this introduction the report consists of eight sections:

1. Terminology and definitions – highlights and defines the key and repeated terms used across the literature and evidence reviewed in this report.
2. Methodology – explains the approach to the selection, analysis and synthesis of the literature and evidence.
3. UK context – provides a concise picture of UK-wide food poverty and insecurity, its drivers and impact, to contextualise the proceeding focus on schools, families and primary-aged children.
4. Families with primary-aged children – focuses on the current prevalence of food poverty and insecurity on families with children.
5. Implications for children – disaggregates existing evidence to focus on the impact of food poverty and insecurity on children's *health* and *education and learning*.
6. Role of schools – highlights schools' awareness of increasing pupil hunger and their responses to it.
7. Case studies – showcases four selected studies that highlight different aspects of, and responses to, food poverty and insecurity among primary-aged children.
8. Key principles and recommendations – distils the literature and evidence to produce a set of key principles for schools to follow and embeds these within a final suite of recommendations for schools and policymakers.

A full reference list of all cited literature is provided at the end of the report, along with a listing of key networks and groups working to support schools in attending to food poverty and insecurity.

1. Terminology and Definitions

It is vital to have clear definitions of key terms when discussing issues around poverty, hunger and food. The literature and evidence reiterates the importance of understanding what terms mean, especially in the pursuit of food justice, that is, the need to address deep-seated inequalities in our food system to ensure all individuals have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food (Food Ethics Council; 2020; Murray, et al, 2023). Therefore, in defining these terms, we have drawn on key sources – charities and policy documents – that have considered the use of these terms, notably the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) (2024), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP, 2024), the House of Commons Research Briefings (Francis-Devine et al, 2025), the Institute for Government (2022), the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) (Dowler et al, 2001), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (Bestwick et al, 2024), the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2019) and Trussell (2025).

The advocacy group Sustain (Spelling, 2021) notes that ‘language matters’ for our conversations and understanding of food. It argues that language is itself a ‘powerful tool in the campaign to end food poverty’, and whilst some language can drive progress, others can hinder it by apportioning blame and responsibility to individuals or particular groups. Throughout this report, we highlight both the drivers and impacts of food poverty and insecurity, not as individual issues but as wider societal and systemic concerns.

Term	Definition
Charitable food provision	Support from food banks and other charitable food providers, as well as access to low-cost food from food pantries, social supermarkets and other low-cost food aid models.
Cost-of-living crisis	The fall in ‘real’ disposable incomes (that is adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits) that the UK has experienced since late 2021.
Food bank	An organisation that collects and distributes free emergency food parcels to people experiencing hardship or food poverty. In the UK, food banks are generally community-based organisations, including charities, advice centres, faith groups, schools, universities and hospitals. Access to a food bank typically requires referral from a front-line service provider, after which individuals receive an emergency food parcel, providing enough food for up to three or seven days.

Food parcel	An emergency package of non-perishable food items distributed by charities to individuals and families experiencing food poverty.
Food poverty	There is no agreed definition of 'food poverty'. It is often defined as a household that cannot acquire an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways or is uncertain about its ability to do so.
Food insecurity (or household food insecurity)	Food poverty is often used interchangeably with household food insecurity. Households are considered food insecure if they experience low or very low levels of food security.
Food security	Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.
Free School Meals (FSMs)	FSMs are provided by local authorities to eligible children from low-income households whose parents receive certain benefits. FSMs are provided to all primary schools in Wales and London. In Scotland, FSMs are provided to all children in primary 1 to 5. In Northern Ireland, FSMs are provided to eligible children if a parent or guardian receives qualifying benefits.
Hardship	Where people are going without basic essentials – such as enough food, heating and appropriate clothing – because they cannot afford them.
Hunger	When an individual has 'low' or 'very low' food security.
Material deprivation	A direct measure of poverty derived from the lack of items and activities deemed to be necessary for an acceptable standard of living.
Poverty	An individual is considered to be in poverty if they live in a household with an equivalised disposable income that falls below 60% of the national median in the current year.
Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSMs)	FSMs are provided for all children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 regardless of household income.

2. Methodology

This study was developed in collaboration with the ESU at the CoLC. Together, the research parameters were defined, including the key search terms, timeframes, and overall scope of the review. The study focuses on literature and evidence on food poverty, food insecurity, primary-aged children, schools, and the role of the education sector in the UK context.

A structured literature review and evidence search was conducted across a range of academic databases and online sources, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. In addition, policy reports, government publications, charity reports, and other grey literature were included where relevant to the research focus. Key search terms included combinations of the following: “food poverty”, “food insecurity”, “primary schools”, “children”, “education”, “school food” “UK”, “hunger” and “England”.

The review also benefited from the authors’ expertise in the areas of food poverty, young people, and education (McHugh et al., 2026; Wainwright et al., 2026). This ensured familiarity with key debates, recent developments, and lead sources within the field.

To support consistency in the review process, a set of guiding criteria was used when selecting and evaluating sources. These included:

- i. a clear statement of purpose and scope
- ii. transparency of methods used for data collection, where appropriate
- iii. relevance to the education sector
- iv. applicability to the UK and/or primary-aged children and schools in the UK.

Sources were considered based on their overall quality, credibility, and relevance to the aims of the report.

A literature and evidence matrix was developed to organise and review the selected sources systematically. This matrix included information on type of source, methods used, key findings, and relevance to the review. Sources were then assessed and rated according to their quality and contribution to the research aims. Over 100 sources have been used in compiling this report.

The selected literature and evidence in this review includes both qualitative and quantitative data and comes from published academic journal articles, policy statements, statistical data, case studies, surveys, and reports produced by government and charities. The final selection provides a broad overview of food poverty and insecurity and their implications for families, children and schools within the UK.

The academic literature is drawn from a range of relevant disciplines, including Education, Sociology, Human Geography, Public and Community Health, Childhood Studies, Social Policy, and Nutritional Studies. Using research from different disciplines enables a broad understanding of how food poverty and insecurity influence children’s lives and educational experiences.

The selected literature was reviewed and compared to identify common themes, patterns, and key issues related to food poverty, food insecurity and education. The majority of literature has been published from 2020 onwards. However, some key sources come from the 2010s, reflecting the period of austerity – the programme of deep spending cuts and tax increases implemented by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government – that increased household poverty. As the food bank charity Trussell, formerly known as The Trussell Trust (2019) asserts, the welfare cuts brought about during this period were the biggest contributory factor to everyday hunger and the increasing need for food banks.

3. UK Context

Data on the prevalence of food poverty and insecurity, along with the numbers of households accessing food banks, has grown in detail and accuracy in recent years. Along with the DWP, a number of organisations provide regular reports and analysis of national levels of poverty, child poverty, and food poverty and insecurity, including the JRF, CPAG and Trussell.

Deepening poverty across the UK is evidenced by the proportion of people who struggle to access enough nutritious and varied food. For a growing number of UK households, food insecurity is not a series of isolated emergencies, but a state of structural precarity that systematically erodes financial, social, and psychological wellbeing (Blake, 2026: 1). According to the JRF (2026a) the number of people in the UK who are food insecure has increased by 2.8 million between 2021/22 and 2023/34, which amounts to a 60% increase in two years. UK-wide research in 2024 by Trussell (2025) highlights the following key statistics:

- 14.1 million people were food insecure
- One in six households were experiencing food insecurity
- 6.5 million people were turning to charitable food providers.

There are stark differences based on geographic location (Francis-Devine et al, 2025), with households in the most deprived areas of the UK more than three times as likely to be food insecure than households in the least deprived areas (27% vs 9%) (Trussell, 2025). Higher levels of food insecurity have been reported in parts of Northeast England, Northwest England, Yorkshire and some inner-city areas of London, where many families experience higher levels of deprivation and financial hardship compared with other parts of England (Bryant, 2025; Francis-Devine et al., 2025). Goudie and McIntyre (2021) found that COVID-19 dramatically widened inequalities in food security and nutrition. Throughout the crisis, black and minority ethnic communities consistently encountered disproportionately higher levels of food insecurity compared with white ethnic groups.

This UK-wide picture of food poverty and insecurity is attributed to various issues. A lack of policy interest and coherence in relation to wider poverty is a crucial one, with the JRF describing recent years as a period of 'basic cuts in support rather than investment' (2026b: 8). The COVID-19 pandemic sharpened the food insecurity of large segments of the UK

population, an insecurity which itself was created by the previous decade of austerity policies (Power et al, 2023).

The cost-of-living crisis after the COVID-19 pandemic, prompted by a rapid rise in inflation to 10% in July 2022, saw the cost of essentials rising faster than general inflation, with increases in Universal Credit not matching cost rises. As reported by the Government (HM Government, 2025), by October 2025 food costs were 37% higher and energy prices were 62% higher than in April 2020. With the current context of energy price increases and their knock-on inflationary impact (ONS, April 2026), food costs are set to continue to rise.

This matters most especially for lower-income families as they spend a larger proportion of their income on essential costs such as food (HM Government 2025). The current UK Government launched its Child Poverty Strategy (HM Government, 2025) aimed at improving children's lives and life chances and addressing the root causes of child poverty. Notably, the Strategy includes removal of the two-child benefit limit. In direct relation to food, the Government has expanded free school meals in England to all children in households in receipt of Universal Credit, rolled out free breakfast clubs and continued to invest in the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme (DWP, 2026a). Poverty, and food poverty, are now more discernibly on the policy agenda.

This matters as research consistently shows that some groups are at higher risk of hunger, and in need of food banks and other forms of charitable food provision, most especially those with a disability and from racialised communities (Francis-Devine et al, 2025). Most households referred to food banks are not in work though a significant and increasing minority are. Three in 10 (30%) people referred to food banks in 2024 were in working households, an increase from 2022 (24%) (Trussell, 2025). Charities continue to voice concerns about the persistence of food poverty and insecurity, the need for food banks, and the seeming normalisation of unmet basic needs.

Academic research has explored and critiqued the 'explosion' of food banks across the UK and the underlying reasons for this (Garthwaite, 2016). In influential work on hunger in Britain, Garthwaite (2017: 289) notes that the provision of charitable food allows the public to consider that 'something is being done', which then appeases the need to investigate the real reasons causing food poverty. Similarly, Loopstra and Lambie-Mumford (2023) argue that reliance on food banks to respond to food insecurity may ultimately impede the formulation of effective policy interventions to reduce food insecurity. They argue that it gives the illusion of widespread support for those experiencing poverty, whilst food insecurity persists among those receiving help from food banks and those who experience food insecurity but do not use food banks. Academic research, along with findings from Trussell (2025), strongly demonstrate the everyday challenges of living with food poverty and insecurity, including the sense of shame of needing to rely on various forms of food charity, be it community food banks, food parcels or food vouchers (Lambie-Mumford, 2016; May et al, 2018; Strong, 2021).

4. Families with Primary-Aged Children

Children are more likely to be living in food insecure households than other groups (DWP, 2026b) and food insecurity is most prominent among families headed by a single parent (JRF, 2026a). According to Trussell (2025), in 2024:

- More than one in four (27%) children were growing up in food insecure households
- Children aged 0-5 were particularly likely to be living in a food insecure household (31%)
- Over two in five (42%) families with three or more children experienced food insecurity, which was more than twice the rate of families with two children (20%).

These statistics feed directly into the debates around child benefit which, until recently, was capped at two children. This two-child limit ended in April 2026 (HM Government, 2026) giving families more financial support to lift children out of poverty. As a central plank of the Government's Child Poverty Strategy (HM Government, 2025), this change recognises that many children have not had access to adequate nutrition.

Over the past decade, food banks have been playing a bigger role in the provision of care to children generally, but particularly where childhood deprivation is high (Lambie-Mumford and Green, 2017), with current statistics suggesting the percentage of children in households using a food bank is now 6.6% (DWP, 2026b). 2.9 million food parcels were distributed by Trussell food banks in 2024/25, of which 1.02 million went to children (Trussell, 2025).

The Social Market Foundation (Shepherd et al, 2026) reports that over the past 12 months, 15% of parents reported not having enough food at some point, with 4% going without regularly. Just under one in ten (9%) of parents said their children had frequently not been able to eat enough due to a lack of food. Research conducted for the charity Barnados (Lejac et al, 2025) found that just over one quarter (26%) of UK parents had to buy unhealthy food for their child(ren) because they could not afford healthy ingredients/ meals at least once every fortnight. Financial constraints curb the possibilities of diet, especially in food deserts – low-income areas where households struggle to access affordable fresh fruit and vegetables (Smith et al, 2023). Limitations to the food environment at home then place greater emphasis on schools, with free school meals a vital resource for families (O'Connell et al, 2022).

Primary-aged children and food have been on the political agenda, highlighted most especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with renewed attention given to the role of school meals as a vital welfare intervention (O'Connell et al, 2022) and children's rights issue (Morris, 2024). The cost-of-living crisis further focused attention to experiences of wider food poverty and insecurity among school children. FSMs have been at the forefront of tackling concerns about hunger, food costs and children's diet with the aim of supporting both families and children, though the success of take up among those most in need has been queried (Hartgen-Walker and Lally, 2023).

England implemented the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSMs) policy for state-funded schools in 2014, and Scotland introduced a similar policy in 2015, both of which only

apply to children in the first three years of primary school (children ages 4–7 years at the beginning of the school year). In 2023, in response to increases in the cost of living, the Mayor of London’s Office announced emergency funding for universal FSMs for every primary-aged child in state-funded schools as a one-year intervention. This was extended in 2024 for a further four years and is a significant milestone in school food policy in England, ensuring an additional 270,000 children across London are entitled to a free meal.

In a ‘lived experience’ evaluation of the impact of this change, Urban Health (2024) reported positive impacts on family finances and children’s overall physical and mental health and wellbeing. A further study by Holford and Rabe (2024), which draws on a range of quantifiable data, found that provision of universal FSMs “unambiguously helps households with the cost of living” (p.4), as well as having small positive impacts on educational attainment in reading, and positive impacts on reducing obesity.

In January 2025, there were around 2.2 million state-funded pupils known to be eligible for FSMs, with an increase in the proportion of children eligible, from a low of 13.6% in January 2018 to 25.7% in 2025. In June 2025, the Government announced that in England, from the start of 2026, every school child whose household is on Universal Credit will be entitled to FSMs, removing the upper limit of £7,400 previously in place (Long and Roberts, 2026). According to the Department for Education (DfE) (2025a), this translates to over a half a million more children being able to access FSMs. In April-June 2026, the Government consulted on proposed changes to school food standards with the intention of limiting unhealthy foods on school menus (DfE and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OfHID), 2026) given ongoing criticism of the use of ultra-processed ingredients (Parnam et al, 2023).

Across England, eligibility for FSMs shows strong regional and local variations with rates highest in the northeast and lowest in the southeast, though there is greater variation between local authorities with Manchester the highest at 47.2%. There is also variation by ethnicity which, when taking account for numbers of children belonging to each ethnic group, shows highest eligibility rates among pupils of Travellers of Irish Heritage (67.3% of pupils) and Gypsy/Roma pupils (61.2%) (see Long and Roberts, 2026 for details).

According to The Food Foundation (Goudie, 2025), ending the two-child limit and the expansion of FSMs are key milestones in addressing hunger among children and signal a more concerted effort to address the broader issue of child poverty. A further government initiative has been the first phase national rollout of free breakfast clubs for primary schools, which commenced in April 2026 (DfE, 2026a). Eligible schools are those with 40% or more of pupils entitled to FSMs, or being the most disadvantaged school in the area, whichever is lowest. This extends the work being done by the charitable sector, for example Magic Breakfast, the UK-wide charity providing breakfasts to schools and children which was set up to support the elimination of child hunger (Magic Breakfast, 2025).

In addition to term time challenges, Shinwell and Defeyter (2021) found that during the school summer holidays, pressures on the already tight budgets of low-income families are compounded, particularly when the safety net of FSMs is removed. ‘Holiday hunger’ is defined as children and families not being able to afford adequate nutritious food during the school holidays and often refers to children who are eligible for FSMs during term time, but is

not limited to this group (Evans, 2020; NHD, 2025). However, less is known about these initiatives (Lambie-Mumford and Sims, 2018) in terms of full impact evaluations. With the continued government funding for the HAF programme, holiday hunger and its impact are being recognised as pressing public health and social justice issues which affect children from low-income families.

Repeated evidence shows that families with primary-aged children are at risk of food poverty and insecurity, leading to challenges, along with difficulties within educational settings linked to reduced concentration, lower classroom participation, tiredness, poor emotional well-being and difficulties engaging consistently in learning activities (Bradbury and Vince, 2025c; The Food Foundation, 2024). The implications for children are discussed in detail in the next section.

5. Implications for Children

a. Health

Discussions of food and nutrition and the home and school food environments have found themselves in both political and popular discourse in recent years. Much of this has focused on increasing obesity, and consumption of ultra and highly processed foods (Onita et al, 2021) with a spotlight on school meals and the place of broader food education (Hart and Page, 2020; Parnham et al. 2023). More recent attention has explored the impacts of children arriving at school hungry and malnourished due to rising levels of poverty (Bradbury and Vince, 2025a) and the impact on physical and mental health.

The Food Foundation (2024) notes that healthy foods are nearly three times more expensive than less healthy foods per calorie, which means families may be more likely to eat food that is cheap but nutritionally poor, leading to obesity and malnutrition in children. These issues have long been the concern of health professionals (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2025) and continue to come to the attention of government (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2021) to inform policy shifts (HM Government, 2025).

Food poverty and insecurity have significant implications for children's physical health, mental wellbeing, and overall development (Aceves-Martins et al, 2018). Children have high nutritional requirements relative to their size in order to meet demands for growth, development and physical activity. In terms of physical health, research has shown that limited access to healthy and nutritious food may contribute to tiredness, lower energy levels, poor concentration, and difficulties maintaining a balanced diet (The Food Foundation, 2019). Studies have also linked food insecurity to increased risks of poor nutrition, obesity, and wider long-term health inequalities among children from low-income households (Marmot, 2020; Loopstra, 2024). There have also been reports of nutritional rickets (Julies et al, 2020) due to dietary vitamin D and calcium deficiencies, though cases remain very low.

Food insecure children are at higher risk of being under or overweight, largely due to unaffordability of healthy diets. The Food Foundation (2025) highlights that children from the most deprived fifth of the population are nearly twice as likely to be living with obesity in their first year of school compared to children from the least deprived fifth. Its 2023 report

stressed that “suboptimal nutrition during the critical development period of childhood can have lifelong implications” (Goudie, 2023: 39) with the following key statistics highlighted:

- Children in the most deprived tenth of the population are on average up to 1.3 cms shorter than children in the least deprived tenth by age 10–11
- Almost a quarter (24%) of 5-year-olds have dental decay, with 2.5 times as many children in the most deprived fifth affected compared with the least deprived fifth.

Research into FSMs and their reach highlights the health benefits of universalising access. Holford and Rabe’s (2022) study indicates measurable health benefits, particularly among disadvantaged groups, by improving access to regular meals and potentially diet quality, arguing for universal FSMs to improve the diets of all pupils.

As more families are accessing and relying on food banks, concern has been raised about the nutritional value and impact on health of foods received. Two systematic reviews of literature (Bazerghi et al, 2016 and Oldroyd et al, 2022) have found that while food banks have an important role to play in providing immediate solutions to severe food deprivation, they are limited in their capacity to improve overall food security outcomes. This is due to their limited provision of nutrient-dense foods in sufficient amounts, especially from dairy, vegetables and fruits, and therefore they do not solve health problems linked to food poverty.

In terms of dental health, good nutritional status and good oral health are closely interconnected (Forde et al, 2021). Children from deprived backgrounds are more likely to have poor dental health, with the consumption of sugary foods and drinks more common in food insecure households, increasing the risk of dental decay (Hartgen-Walker and Lally, 2023; RCPCH, 2025). Moreover, food is often prioritised over hygiene products, including toothbrushes, when households are struggling financially (Gunstone et al, 2022). Dental health has been further impacted by the cost-of-living crisis (Cope et al, 2023). Recent figures from the OfHID (2023) shows that year 6 school children living in the most deprived areas of the England were more than twice as likely to have experience of tooth decay (23%) as those living in the least deprived areas (10%).

Household food poverty and insecurity are also associated with worse childhood mental health after adjustment for other social risks (Yang et al, 2022). In a compilation of research findings, Hartgen-Walker and Lally (2023) highlight two key points around children’s mental health. First, that children can be aware of parents’ own stress around food as they sacrifice their own diet to protect their children from hunger. And second, that children who worry about food show higher rates of negative emotion and self-harm compared with their food-secure peers, even if they are not hungry themselves.

Food poverty and insecurity in childhood have longer term implications and can contribute to wider health inequalities across the life course. Limited access to nutritious food during childhood has been linked to poorer long-term health outcomes, including obesity, diet-related illness, and ongoing inequalities connected to poverty and deprivation (Marmot, 2020). As a result, food poverty should be understood as both a public health issue and a social inequality issue that affects children’s health, wellbeing, educational experiences, and future opportunities.

b. Education and Learning

Previous research suggests that food poverty and insecurity can negatively affect children's learning and development in different ways, depending on both the child's age and the duration of reduced food intake (Ke and Ford-Jones, 2015). From a medical and developmental perspective, inadequate nutrition during childhood may negatively affect brain development, cognitive functioning, memory, energy levels and emotional regulation, all of which are important for learning and academic performance (Nyaradi et al., 2013). Poor nutrition may also affect children's attention span and information processing abilities, making it more difficult for pupils to maintain focus throughout the school day (Gundersen and Ziliak, 2015). Children experiencing food poverty and insecurity may therefore find it harder to concentrate, complete classroom tasks and engage consistently in educational activities.

Hunger due to food poverty may also affect children's social relationships and behaviour within schools. Research discussed by Chefs in Schools (2024) indicates that many teachers believe child hunger has become a serious issue affecting behaviour, emotional well-being and learning within educational settings. Hunger may contribute not only to physical tiredness but also to irritability, stress, anxiety and difficulties with emotional regulation, which may influence classroom behaviour and peer relationships (Chefs in Schools, 2024; Goudie, 2023). Children experiencing food insecurity may also feel embarrassment or social exclusion because of financial hardship or reliance on food support programmes, which may affect their confidence and sense of belonging within school environments (Bradbury and Vince, 2025b). These issues are important because emotional well-being, positive peer relationships and classroom engagement are closely connected to academic participation and educational achievement (Zöggeler-Burkhardt et al, 2023; Wang et al, 2018).

It has been noted that hunger and poor nutrition may affect children's ability to concentrate, focus, engage and participate in classroom activities (Defeyter et al, 2015). In educational settings, the impact of school-aged children arriving hungry to school is recognised by teachers. The most recent National Education Union (NEU) survey of its members (2025) found that, because of poverty:

- 87% of teachers observed signs of tiredness and fatigue, rising to 92% in the most deprived areas
- 59% of teachers observed signs of hunger among pupils.

In addition, 39% reported signs of physical underdevelopment; 82% reported that pupils are unable to concentrate and 72% reported lesson disruption and difficulties completing homework. A further report by the food company Kellogg's (2025) found that 97% of teachers believe that arriving at school hungry affects education progress, and on average teachers are spending over a half a day's teaching time each week (4 hours) supporting hungry children.

Following on from the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, school attendance has declined (Pearce, 2024). It is increasingly clear that low income is a major contributor to poor attendance, with transport and uniform costs, as well as financial pressures associated with the cost-of-living crisis, identified as key barriers (House of Commons Education Committee,

2023). The link between attendance and attainment is strong. In England, pupils with higher attainment at Key Stage 2 in 2019 had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment. This link continues for older pupils with higher levels of absence over Key Stage 4 (year ten to year eleven) having lower GCSE attainment (Long and Roberts, 2025).

While improving school attendance remains a top priority for policymakers across the UK, persistent absence – defined as missing 10% or more of school sessions each term – remains high, particularly among children eligible for FSMs (CPAG, 2025). In 2022/23, 36.5% of FSM-eligible pupils in England were persistently absent, compared with 15.6% of pupils that were not eligible (Long and Roberts, 2025). It should be noted that knowledge and research on food poverty and insecurity and its impact on attainment and learning remains limited.

Given the high rates of childhood food poverty and insecurity across the UK, schools are becoming increasingly important in responding to the structural challenges and inequalities that children and families are facing, as detailed in the next section.

6. Role of Schools

Schools are ideal environments for health and educational interventions linked to food, with the term ‘school food environment’ now commonly referred to in research (Moore et al, 2023). This framing recognises the importance and effectiveness of ‘whole school’ approaches to food, whether in terms of food education or consumption of nutritional meals, and have been found to increase the emotional and behavioural wellbeing of children (Brennan et al, 2020).

However, with rising rates of food poverty and insecurity among primary-aged children, the school food environment has become more vital and has expanded to new activities. Research undertaken across England by the Sutton Trust (2022) found that 38% of teachers reported an increase in children coming into school hungry, with 17% saying there was an increase in families asking to be referred to food banks.

Against this backdrop of hunger, a greater range of charitable food models has emerged within schools, including free breakfast clubs, food banks, pantries and community shops (Baker et al, 2024). Following the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, schools have increasingly provided free food and other welfare provision to children and families in their communities (Baker, 2023; Baker and Bakopoulou, 2023; Baker et al, 2024, 2025; Bradbury and Vince, 2025a and b). As Bradbury and Moss (2026: 27) note, schools are “locally embedded community institutions” that are well placed to understand and respond to families’ needs.

Given the growing scale of charitable food provision in education settings, schools have been framed as the ‘fourth emergency service’ (Adams, 2019). School staff have reported that schools are increasingly being asked to provide ‘emergency’ and ‘crisis’ support to vulnerable children and families who are struggling to access relevant services elsewhere (Baker et al, 2024). In a report on the impact of hardship on primary schools, Bestwick et al (2024) found that staff across Britain are regularly seeing children who are hungry, tired and in need of emotional support. On average, staff estimate more than a third of their pupils

came to school hungry (35%) at some point across the school year, rising to 44% in deprived areas. The NEU (2025) survey of its members found that schools were using different mechanisms to support their pupils:

- 58% of teachers said their school provides free breakfasts
- 37% of teachers reported that their school had a food bank
- 35% of teachers reported that their school supplied free lunches beyond the FSM allowance
- 42% of teachers reported that their school also provides extra food for hungry children

In an extrapolation of data, research by Baker et al (2024) suggested that one in five schools was operating a food bank, and that these are disproportionately found in schools with high numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged children.

Research shows the important benefits food banks offer to parents, children and schools (Baker and Bakopoulou, 2023). Findings from research examining the impact of school run food banks by Bradbury and Vince (2025a, b and c) suggest improvements in home-school relationships including more positive school-parent relationships which allowed schools to then signpost families to additional support services. Operating a food bank was considered to have 'social benefits', with school-based food banks convenient for families and less stigmatising than public food banks (Bradbury and Vince, 2025c: 117). Moreover, schools have a strong sense of responsibility and moral obligation to support hungry children and families within the school community.

This growth of school-based food banks is complemented by a growing number of charitable support organisations, such as the National Pantry Agency (NPA), aimed at providing financial support and practical advice on setting up a school food pantry for children and their families. Both are symptomatic of the prevalence of food poverty and insecurity affecting children's everyday engagement with schools. The NPA and similar organisations also recognise that schools are not resourced – either financially or in terms of infrastructure – to readily respond to food poverty and insecurity.

Establishing and operating a food bank can be both costly and labour intensive for schools. In a survey of 10,000 teachers across England, the charity School Food Matters (2024) found that schools are having to use their own budgets to support children who arrive at school hungry. This is both in terms of having to write off school meal debt, alongside the funding of emergency food banks. Furthermore, the burden of support is too often falling on teachers. Kellogg's (2025) survey of parents and teachers on the impact of morning hunger amongst children in the classroom found the average teacher spending nearly £25 a month of their own money feeding hungry pupils, and 16% of teachers regularly spending their own funds to buy food or snacks for students. This diverts resources – in terms of time, money and space – away from education and the core work of schools (HM Government, 2025) and shows very clearly that schools are having to step in where welfare support is failing.

As hunger has become an everyday occurrence in educational settings, schools are increasingly adopting a 'more than food aid' approach (Milbourne, 2024) to tackling poverty, which includes extending support to children and families beyond food provision. The JRF reports that a quarter of staff say their schools provide essential items such as toiletries, energy top-up vouchers, beds and bedding (Bestwick et al, 2024). Rising levels of hygiene poverty among children is also a growing problem (Prescott-Smith, et al, 2024). According to the Hygiene Bank, almost three million school children in the UK are estimated to have experienced hygiene poverty (The Hygiene Bank, 2025).

While schools have been identified as being in a good position to support children and families experiencing food poverty and insecurity, questions have been raised around whether schools should serve as venues for food banks and the "responsibilisation of schools to address the problem of child poverty" (Bradbury and Vince, 2025c: 128) particularly in the absence of clear guidance, policy and sustained funding. Schools are currently implementing a whole range of food-related interventions, from the welfare support of FSMs and free breakfast clubs to crisis relief, of which the food bank has become the most visible form (Blake, 2026).

7. Case Studies

Four case studies have been identified that highlight a range of concerns linked to food poverty and insecurity among primary-aged children and reflect on the role of schools in the delivery of food support. We offer an overview of each study, including the methods employed, key findings and overall impact and outcomes.

Case study 1: PTA Pantry at Elm Grove School in Brighton

Context The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Elm Grove School in inner city Brighton became aware that some children were arriving at school hungry. In response, and within the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the PTA worked with the charity FareShare Sussex and Surrey to establish a free, accessible pantry in the school playground. The pantry, housed in an outdoor shed, is stocked with food, toiletries and spare uniform items. It is freely accessible to all families. FareShare was a UK charity that redistributes surplus food to organisations and charities, including schools who then provide it to individuals. FareShare is now part of The Felix Project.

Methods The PTA worked with several local organisations, including FareShare, Brighton and Hove Food Partnership and Neighbourly, to build a network of suppliers to donate both food and funding towards the pantry. Conscious of the stigma often associated with free food provision, the decision was made to open the pantry to all families regardless of income.

Key Findings

1. The pantry receives around 500kg of surplus fresh, chilled and ambient food delivered every Tuesday by FareShare Sussex and Surrey volunteers.
2. Pop-up veg fairs were held in December and January, and 850kg of fresh vegetables were distributed to parents and children directly in the playground. Families can access the pantry without entering the school building.

3. Additional funding was secured from Feeding Britain, which was used to support families during the school holidays.
4. The PTA requests donations of food and household items from families who can contribute financially. Proceeds from the Christmas concert collections are also used to purchase items for the school pantry.

Main Impact/Outcome

1. The pantry is open daily at drop-off and pick-up times. It is discreet and located in a familiar school setting.
2. Funds have been secured from Feeding Britain, a charity that aims to eliminate hunger in the UK.
3. This regular support helps ease some of the daily cost-of-living pressures families face.
4. Following the success of the pantry, FareShare Sussex and Surrey is looking to expand its work with schools and roll out similar school pantries across the region, demonstrating the effectiveness of this free food model in supporting families and the community at a local level.

References: PTA (2026) Our PTA Pantry helps families in need. Available at: <https://pta.co.uk/running-a-pta/community-engagement/our-pta-pantry-helps-families-in-need/> and

Berger, H. (2026) 'FareShare Sussex & Surrey: Could a school pantry help your community?', *Farnham Herald*, 22 February 2026. Available at: <https://www.farnhamherald.com/news/fareshare-sussex-surrey-could-a-school-pantry-help-your-community-877966>

Case study 2: Working with a private, voluntary or independent (PVI) partner to deliver a free school breakfast club - Department of Education's free breakfast club early adopters scheme

Context Court Lane Junior School in Portsmouth is working with a PVI childcare provider to offer a free breakfast club available to all pupils through the Department of Education's (DfE) free breakfast club early adopters scheme.

The DfE free breakfast club early adopter scheme launched in April 2025 with 750 schools. The scheme provides funding to schools to deliver a free 30-minute breakfast club available to all pupils, and the flexibility to deliver the free breakfast club in a way that best meets the needs of their school, pupils and families.

With £80 million investment for the financial year 2026-2027, the DfE started a national roll out of free breakfast clubs from April 2026. This links to the Government's manifesto commitment to ensure that every state-funded school with primary-aged pupils in England offers a free breakfast club to pupils.

Methods The longstanding PVI childcare provider at Court Lane Junior School has delivered paid-for wrap-around childcare for several years. Following the school's acceptance onto the early adopter free breakfast programme, the PVI partner continued to deliver its existing before-school childcare from 7:15 to 8:10 as paid for provision, alongside the new free breakfast club from 8:10 to 8:40am. The free breakfast club takes place in the school hall.

Key Findings A strong working relationship has been established between the school business manager and the PVI provider, which has resulted in the successful delivery of the breakfast club. This has resulted in regular open conversations where both parties are able to identify and discuss issues or challenges and work collaboratively to find solutions acceptable to both parties.

Adopting a 'whole school approach' which includes senior staff, kitchen staff and senior business management, alongside the PVI provider, has meant that the club has run smoothly. The following aspects have been identified as being helpful:

1. The free breakfast club is operated and staffed by the PVI provider.
2. Additional responsibilities such as clearing up have been taken up by school kitchen staff and care takers.
3. Senior leaders at the school provide support when needed.

Main Impact/Outcome

Since its launch in April 2025, schools engaged in the DfE early adopter free breakfast scheme, including Court Lane Junior Primary School, have reported benefits including:

1. Improved punctuality and attendance
2. Children's readiness to learn due to a calmer environment during the school day (DfE, 2026)
3. Working with a PVI has reduced the administrative burden as tasks such as organising the weekly food delivery, storing food in fridges and freezers, overseeing all childcare operations at the school, and ensuring a consistent approach to behaviour and safeguarding aligned with the school's policies have been consolidated.

Reference: Department for Education (DfE) (2025b) *Working with a PVI partner to deliver a free school breakfast club*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/working-with-a-pvi-partner-to-deliver-a-free-school-breakfast-club>

Case study 3: Universal Primary Free School Meals in London – policy evaluation

Context Responding to the cost-of-living crisis, in February 2023 the Mayor of London announced £130 million of funding for the emergency provision of free school meals in state-funded primary schools in London boroughs. While this support was primarily intended to aid

families during the cost-of-living crisis, other anticipated benefits of this provision included positive impacts on pupil attainment, attendance, wellbeing and health.

Methods An independent evaluation of universal provision of free school meals in London boroughs was commissioned to help build a robust evidence base on the effects of expanding access to free school meals. The evaluation by University College London's Institute of Education and funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) examined the impact of the policy on attainment and attendance, implementation and experiences of pupils, parents and schools.

Key Findings

1. 17,446 schools were included in the analysis.
2. Families, particularly those who fall just above the threshold for means-tested support, were positive about the introduction of universal FSMs, and many reported reduced financial stress, and improved wellbeing from knowing that their child received a hot meal each day.
3. Compared with similar pupils outside London whose access to FSMs did not change, pupils in London boroughs offering universal FSMs made no additional progress, on average, in their Key Stage 2 assessments. It should be noted that the evaluation will continue over two years, allowing for a longer period to look at the impact of this provision in relation to progress and attainment.

Main Impact/Outcome

1. Uptake of FSMs was high across all groups with around 90% participation among newly eligible children.
2. Most schools offered a choice of hot meals to all pupils.
3. Schools reported using the policy to improve the lunchtime experience including redesigning dining space and providing new opportunities for pupils to socialise and develop independence. Pupils were also encouraged to try new foods, interact with peers, with evidence suggesting this helped facilitate a greater sense of belonging.
4. Nearly half of surveyed schools reported that allocated funding did not meet the cost of delivering meals. In response to this, the amount of funding for free meals has been increased.
5. A second report is scheduled to be published in 2026 which will examine how universal free school meals are experienced and implemented as the policy becomes more established.

Reference: Hardman, M., Sims, S., Anders, J., Crawford, C., McCarthy, F., Kusha A., Pillinger, C., Riordan, S. & Meliss, S. (2025) *Universal Primary Free School Meals in London: Interim report* Education Endowment Fund. Available at:

Case Study 4: Hunger in the primary school setting: evidence, impacts and solutions according to school staff in the North East of England, UK.

Context ‘Holiday hunger’ (i.e. food insecurity during school holidays) has received increasing attention from charities, the media, industry and policymakers. With schools increasingly expected to provide additional pastoral support, including holiday club provision, it is important to understand school staff views and perspectives on holiday hunger, its impacts within school and the potential ways it can be addressed.

Methods Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 12 primary school staff the study explored staff understanding and experiences of holiday hunger including their views on the impact of holiday hunger on children and ideas about what could be done to overcome the issue.

Key Findings ‘Holiday hunger’ is just one part of a broader issue of material deprivation experienced by families year-round. Staff views on the effects of hunger encompassed three key themes:

1. Physical effects – Children appeared tired and lacking in energy, and there was concern that hunger and poor childhood nutrition could have detrimental effects on children’s longer-term growth and development.
2. Social, emotional and behavioural effects – Staff reported that hungry children displayed a range of emotional responses, which manifested in different ways in the classroom. Some children appeared irritable, frustrated and upset, leading to classroom disruption, while others became more withdrawn from their peer group due to low self-esteem.
3. Cognition and learning – Staff reported that hungry children, regardless of children’s age and level of ability, were unable to focus fully on their schoolwork, which had a negative impact on their learning and attainment.

In addition, four themes reflected staff views on what could be done to tackle the issues of hunger and holiday hunger which point to a more holistic approach to tackling the broader issues of hunger and poverty rather than just solely focusing on holiday hunger.

1. Year-round multi-agency approach – Staff emphasised that there was a need to address hunger throughout the year, including term time and school holidays, and that the responsibility for such provision should not rest solely on schools. While schools could monitor children, staff reported that additional support needed to be provided through multiple agencies.
2. Education – Staff highlighted the need for increased education around budgeting, cooking skills and healthy eating. This should include offering classes to upskill parents and prioritising cooking across the school curriculum to support positive, lifelong food habits.

3. Financial considerations – Staff reported that low-income families are at greatest risk of holiday hunger and therefore efforts should be made to reduce benefit cuts and encourage financial stability for families.
4. Difficult to address – Holiday hunger is not a simple issue to address due to its multifaceted nature and the perceived stigma associated with hunger; therefore, interventions need to be wide reaching to address the multiple reasons behind family food insecurity. Feelings of shame and stigma surrounding hunger made it difficult for families to request help and for older children to disclose family food insecurity.

Main Impact/Outcome

The findings from this study support recommendations for food provision to be made available to families during school holidays to reduce child food poverty and hunger. They also demonstrate a need for a consistent, year-round family support that is directed at families before they reach crisis point. While schools are in a good position to provide support, help should also be multi-disciplinary and multi-functional to address the array of issues that lead to family food insecurity. There is also a need for a more collaborative approach between policymakers, schools, communities and local authorities to ensure that support for families is reliable, equitable and delivered without prejudice.

Reference: Gooseman, A., Defeyter, M.A. & Graham, P.L. (2020) 'Hunger in the Primary School Setting: Evidence, Impacts and Solutions According to School Staff in the North East of England, UK', *Education 3-13*, 48(2):191-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.16021>

8. Key Principles and Recommendations

There is a growing and discernible body of literature and evidence on food poverty and insecurity, their prevalence and direct and indirect impacts on children of primary-school age. While there are slight variations in quantitative findings across different data sets, and varying qualitative emphases, there is consistency and coherence in the overall picture: food poverty and insecurity are serious problems negatively impacting the everyday lives of large numbers of children across the UK. While the current government, through the Child Poverty Strategy, are taking significant steps to alleviate food poverty and insecurity, most especially through enhancing family finances and bolstering the provision of food within schools, material deprivation and hardship are still experienced by too many families.

This report concludes by setting out key principles and actionable recommendations to support schools in developing a coherent and localised response to pupil hunger and the food poverty and insecurity being experienced by families in their wider community. The report ends with a set of broader recommendations for policymakers.

Key Principles

From this literature and evidence review, and drawing on the case studies, we have identified six interconnected key principles to support schools in their response to children and families who are experiencing food poverty and insecurity. Together, these principles

offer a framework for schools to guide the *how* of their support in relation to the design, detail and implementation of actionable recommendations.

Whole School Approach

Food poverty and insecurity, and mechanisms for their alleviation, require the understanding and backing of all those working within and linked to the school environment. This includes school governors, senior leaders, teachers and support staff, parents and families, and children. It may also include third-party providers of food and linked supplementary support. Developing good relationships within and beyond the immediate school environment is vital for a joined-up whole school approach that mitigates inconsistencies in engagement and support which can miss families and children most in need. A whole school approach should also advance emergency provision alongside capacity-building activities aimed at developing greater awareness of food and longer-term interventions to support food insecure households. Schools – through curriculum focus and community-engagement activities – can be transformative spaces where broader conversations and understandings of food, nutrition and diet can be developed and implemented which are aimed at supporting all children and their families.

Openness and Inclusivity

School support needs to be equitably accessible to and inclusive of all families in the school community. It needs to be offered in ways that enable the development and building of trust between schools and families, and schools and the wider community. This requires a fundamental respect and courtesy towards families facing food poverty and insecurity, and recognition of the stigma often faced, and shame often felt, in accessing support. This stigma and shame are notable in relation to accessing emergency food banks, despite research showing that school food banks are preferable to community-based provision. Consideration needs to be given to the location and direct accessibility of emergency food provision and where this fits with any desired anonymity of users. Therefore, a discreet location within a playground or other similarly familiar setting is preferable. There also needs to be acknowledgement of the concerns among some families to engage with schools and potential anxieties of using a school-based food bank in terms of perceived and potential negative impact on their children's school experience. The approach and tone of school communications and interactions therefore matter with an openness to, and inclusivity of, all families prioritised.

Terminology and Language

Terminology and language matter in two distinct ways. First, and in relation to emergency food support, the potentially stigmatising terminology of food banks needs to be considered. The use of larder or pantry has been found to avoid negative connotations of reliance on food banks and further makes their use more acceptable and accessible. Second, in communications with families and parents about support offered by schools, use of language and terminology should avoid a focus on individual problems and challenges and instead refocus on wider social challenges and cost-of-living increases. Use of language in this way can help mitigate any potential blame felt by parents, avoid individualised assumptions around need, and encourage families to reach out for support.

Cultural Awareness

Any food support offered through school must be culturally sensitive and appropriate. This requires schools to have a wide knowledge of the local community and the backgrounds of their children in terms of religion and ethnicity and will enable all those who require support to access, make use of, and meaningfully engage with it. Moreover, in communicating with parents, schools must ensure that language is not a barrier deterring families in need from accessing support. This may require collaborative outreach to particular communities and other charitable providers to ensure awareness of support is raised consistently across the school community.

More than Food

Families and children experiencing food poverty and insecurity are likely dealing with many forms of material deprivation and hardship. Therefore, any emergency support needs to move beyond a focus just on food. Provision of non-food basics such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, and other hygiene products, including nappies for babies and sanitary products for girls and women, are essential for inclusion in any support provision. Furthermore, support needs to be in the form of direction towards and engagement with wider services available beyond the school gates. Schools have an opportunity to connect families to various forms of government, local-authority and charitable support, whether bringing information and support into the school or extending parents' links beyond.

Community Knowledge and Engagement

Any school response to food poverty and insecurity needs to be underpinned by knowledge of the socio-economic circumstances of the school and wider community, including levels of material deprivation and any localised challenges facing families. Moreover, responses need to engage the wider school and, where appropriate, local community. For example, responses can be co-designed with or encourage participation from the school community, be it pupils, parents, key local stakeholders such as community and faith groups, or other support providers in the local area. Such a community-engaged approach is best placed to respond to questions on how to most effectively support local families. This approach recognises that schools are not separated from their local communities but are an integral part of them yet, at the same time, they do not have the resourcing or expertise alone to respond to food poverty and insecurity.

Recommendations

Drawing on the literature and evidence review, alongside the case studies and key principles outlined above, we make the following recommendations for schools and policymakers to inform their responses to primary-aged children and their families who are experiencing food poverty and insecurity.

For Schools

1. Raise awareness among all school staff and governors about food poverty and insecurity, their impact on children and families, and possible responses to them.

This is to ensure schools can respond more confidently and effectively to everyday hunger. This awareness should address various forms of support available to families, recognise the stigma and access-related anxieties associated with emergency food provision, as well as ensure use of effective communication and appropriate terminology. It should also demonstrate cultural knowledge and sensitivity and, where possible, encourage meaningful community engagement and outreach. This awareness building should be implemented as part of a whole school approach and aligned with key priorities and long-term interventions to support children and their families.

2. Encourage school discussions around food, cooking and nutrition within the curriculum or as part of co-curricular activities. Structured and unstructured discussions provide an opportunity to better understand children's own experiences of food, develop capacity-building activities and events, and co-design longer-term food-based support interventions to benefit the whole school community.
3. In consultation with the school community, consider operating a food bank, or otherwise named pantry or larder, to support families with immediate and emergency food needs. This can be supported by, and developed with, outside charitable providers and/or draw on the resources offered by external networks aimed at alleviating hunger within schools (see page 26). Any charitable food provision should be healthy and nutrient dense. Additionally, this should offer essential non-food items, including toiletries, sanitary products, and household supplies, to address the broader impacts of material deprivation and hardship. Pre-packed food and non-food item parcels can be prepared and distributed to families as and when needed.
4. Strengthen knowledge and understanding of the local community through the enhancement of partnerships with wider services including other local schools, third-sector organisations, community centres, faith groups, and local authorities. Such partnerships need to more fully consider food poverty and insecurity to enable the creation of effective and coordinated support that can be shared across schools and with families.
5. Collaborate with local authorities and other external providers to establish and run food clubs and/ or community kitchens during school holidays to facilitate communal cooking skills and culturally informed food education including around diet and nutrition. Families and children should be encouraged to access, make use of, and co-design these activities. These food clubs and/or kitchens should be accessible to all families, thereby promoting openness and inclusivity, and at minimal or no cost.

For Policymakers

1. Ensure school food is accessible, nutritious, and inclusive, and work towards expanding universal FSMs in all primary schools across England. Consideration should also be given to expanding the eligibility for the HAF programme in line with FSMs criteria so that all children in households receiving Universal Credit are included.

2. Ensure robust and systematic data collection through a national survey to establish how many schools provide emergency food provision for families and how many operate food banks or similar within school settings. This survey should be led by central government to generate reliable and comparable data that will provide clear evidence of the role schools play in addressing food poverty and insecurity and in supporting their communities. It will also enable local authorities and academy trusts to respond effectively to the evolving needs of schools, families, and local communities. This evidence can then inform strategy development, resource allocation, and short and long-term policy responses.
3. Develop a comprehensive food insecurity toolkit, informed by research and underpinned by key principles, to support schools providing emergency food provision to families. This toolkit should serve as a practical guide, containing resources, guidance, and information to help schools identify and support families experiencing food poverty and insecurity through initiatives such as food banks and pantries, food clubs, community kitchens and other resources. This toolkit should identify best practice and ensure that support is delivered in an open, inclusive and transparent manner, without stigma, thereby enabling schools to respond more effectively to food poverty and insecurity.
4. Introduce a *Support and Engagement Officer* role situated in local government, to support schools and families in addressing food poverty and insecurity and wider socio-economic deprivation. This role would coordinate and streamline access to information, resources and support relating to basic needs; provide targeted training and practical resources for school staff and parents; and support schools in identifying and securing funding to establish, maintain, and sustain food support structures within school settings.
5. Central and local government should consider the function and purpose of schools beyond term time, including their potential as spaces for charitable food provision and community kitchens. Appropriate resourcing and infrastructure should be provided, alongside the facilitation of opportunities for children and families to learn and cook together.

Useful links and resources

Bite Back 2030 is a youth-led movement of young people across the UK challenging school food, junk food marketing and fighting for a healthier future. It's Bite Back in Schools campaign is aimed at years 7-10 (rather than primary schools). However, it provides ideas and resources for all schools <https://www.biteback2030.com/>

Bristol Food Education Charter is an example of a co-designed charter with children and young people from across the Bristol area, and sets out eight demands about what they want to learn about food <https://www.feedingbristol.org/resources/bristol-food-education-charter/>

City Harvest London is a food charity that rescues nutritious surplus food from farms, manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers, and delivers it, for free, to over 130,000 people a week via organisations feeding those facing food poverty, including schools <https://cityharvest.org.uk/about-city-harvest/>

Feeding Britain supports a national network of 141 regional and local anti-hunger partnerships comprising more than 700 frontline organisations – ranging from community centres and schools to local authorities and social enterprises <https://feedingbritain.org/>

Feed London is charity working with Thomas Franks food fulfilment company, to deliver fresh food boxes straight to the families' door at the start of the school holidays <https://www.feedlondon.org/>

Food ladders toolkit is a way of thinking about community food provision. It aims to help structure approaches to building local food security, moving away from an individualistic, poverty-based approach <https://geofoodie.org/food-ladders-toolkit-welcome/>

Magic Breakfast is a children's food and education charity that supports schools in England and Scotland, and works with local authorities to provide breakfasts to children <https://www.magicbreakfast.com/>

MCKS is a charity with the mission of alleviating hunger by delivering practical, stigma-free food support that strengthens families and builds resilient communities. It currently supports around 200 schools through their School Pantries programme, providing food, snacks and toiletries <https://mckscharity.co.uk/school-pantries/>

National School Pantry Network is aimed at alleviating child food poverty by providing practical and consistent support to schools to operate a school pantry <https://www.nationalschoolpantrynetwork.co.uk/>

The Felix Project is an organisation that rescues good, surplus food from the food industry that cannot be sold and would otherwise go to waste and deliver it to hundreds of food banks, charities, primary schools and holiday programmes in London. <https://thefelixproject.org/who-we-help/schools>

The Food Foundation is a charity aimed changing food policy and business practices to ensure everyone, across the UK nations, can afford and access a healthy and sustainable

diet. It offers a range of useful resources, including a health and diet inequalities dashboard that highlights how parliamentary constituencies perform across key health, diet, and poverty indicators <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/health-and-diet-inequalities-dashboard>

The School Food Project brings together five of the UK's leading food and education charities — Bite Back, Chefs in Schools, Jamie Oliver Group, School Food Matters and The Food Foundation with the aim of transforming school food and food education across England. It will provide practical, hands-on support tailored to individual schools. <https://schoolfoodproject.org.uk/>

References

- Aceves-Martins M., Cruickshank M., Fraser C. & Brazzelli, M. (2018) 'Child food insecurity in the UK: a rapid review', *Public Health Research*, 6 (13). <https://doi.org/10.3310/phr06130>
- Adams, R. (2019) 'Schools have become the 'fourth emergency service' for poorest families', *Guardian*, 15 March. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/15/schools-have-become-fourth-emergency-service-for-poorest-families>
- Baker, W. (2023) 'Schools and food charity in England', *British Educational Research Journal*, 49, 387–1402. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3931>
- Baker, W. & Bakopoulou, I. (2023) 'Children's centres, families and food insecurity in times of crisis', *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 31(1), 27-44. <https://doi.org/10.1332/175982721X16656688767912>
- Baker, W., Knight, K. & Leckie, G. (2024) *Feeding Hungry Kids: Food Banks in Schools in England*. Bristol Working Papers in Education, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10879984>
- Baker, W., Leckie, G. & Knight, C. (2025) 'Food banks in schools in England', *British Educational Research Journal*, 52(1), 685-699. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70024>
- Bazerghi, C., McKay, F.H. & Dunn, M. (2016) 'The role of food banks in addressing food insecurity: a systematic review', *Journal of Community Health*, 41(4), 732-740. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-015-0147-5>
- Berger, H. (2026) 'FareShare Sussex & Surrey: Could a school pantry help your community?', *Farnham Herald*, 22 February 2026. Available at: <https://www.farnhamherald.com/news/fareshare-sussex-surrey-could-a-school-pantry-help-your-community-877966>
- Bestwick, M. & Schmuecker, K. (2024) *The impact of hardship on primary schools and primary and community healthcare*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/the-impact-of-hardship-on-primary-schools-and-primary-and-community-healthcare-47c9d1453b89be5f2c95081bc6e49860.pdf>
- Blake, M. (2026) *Building resilience: The role of food clubs in UK Food Security*. Report. Comic Relief. Available at: https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/5Nkhx11c3EiNcw2EwfIDMG/3b835a7cef5fb0f7b7a7bbb6a60c280d/Building_Resilience_The_Role_of_Food_Clubs_in_UK_Food_Security_Full_Report.pdf
- Bradbury, A. & Moss, G. (2026) 'School communities and policy responses in England in a time of polycrisis', in N. Barnes, S. Riddle, B. Hughes, J. Hughes and B. Beabout (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Schooling in Times of Crisis*, London, Routledge, pp. 27-40
- Bradbury, A. & Vince, S. (2025a) 'The role of schools in alleviating child poverty through food banks: A vital but unrecognised service', *FORUM*, 67(3), 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.3898/forum.2025.67.3.06>
- Bradbury, A. & Vince, S. (2025b) *Food Banks in Schools and Nurseries*. Bristol, Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447375548>
- Bradbury, A. & Vince, S. (2025c) *Nurseries, schools and food poverty in England*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Brennan, S.F., Lavelle F., Moore S.E., Dean, M., McKinley, M.C., McCole, P., Hunter, R.F., Dunne, L., O'Connell, N.E., Cardwell, C.R., Elliott, C.T., McCarthy, D. & Woodside, J.V. (2020) 'Primary school-based food environment intervention for improved behaviour, food knowledge and dietary habits: results from Project Daire, a randomised-controlled, factorial design cluster trial evaluation', *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 79(OCE3), E738. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665120007247>

Bryant, M., et al. (2025) *Hungry for Change: Tackling Obesity and Food Insecurity in the North of England: A report prepared for the Child of the North All-Party Parliamentary Group*. Available at: <https://www.healthequitynorth.co.uk/app/uploads/COTN-APPG-2025-EMBARGOED.pdf>

Chefs in Schools (2024) *The impact of hunger in schools*. Available at: <https://chefsinschools.org.uk/n-i/news/press-release-shocking-research-reveals-the-impact-of-hunger-in-schools-80-of-teachers-say-child-hunger-is-an-issue/>

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) (2025) *Prices out of school: how lack of money prevents young people from attending school*. Available at: https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Priced-out-of-school-CPAG-May-2025_5.pdf

Cope, A.L. & Chestnutt, I. (2023) 'The implications of a cost-of-living crisis for oral health and dental care', *British Dental Journal*, 234, 501–504. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-023-5685-0>

Defeyter, M. A., Graham, P.L. & Prince K. (2015) 'A qualitative evaluation of holiday breakfast clubs in the UK: Views of adult attendees, children and staff'. *Front. Public Health*, 3, 199. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2015.00199>

Department for Education (DfE) (2026) *Guidance. Free breakfast clubs: guidance for schools and trusts for phase 1 of the national rollout from April 2026*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-breakfast-clubs-guidance-for-schools-and-trusts/free-breakfast-clubs-guidance-for-schools-and-trusts-for-phase-1-of-the-national-rollout-from-april-2026>

Department of Education (DfE) (2025a) *Press release: Over half a million more children to get free school meals*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-half-a-million-more-children-to-get-free-school-meals>

Department for Education (DfE) (2025b) *Working with a PVI partner to deliver a free school breakfast club*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/working-with-a-pvi-partner-to-deliver-a-free-school-breakfast-club>

Department for Education (DfE) and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) (2026) *School Food Standards: updating the legislative framework*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/school-food-standards-updating-the-legislative-framework>

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) (2024) *United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024: Introduction*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024-introduction#about-the-uk-food-security-report>

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2026a) *Guidance: Holiday activities and food programme 2025 to 2026 financial year*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2025>

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2026b) *Accredited official statistics. Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the UK income distribution: FYE 1995 to FYE 2025, March 2026*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2024/households-below-average-income-an-analysis-of-the-uk-income-distribution-fye-1995-to-fye-2024>

Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) (2024) *Summary: Review of the UK Material Deprivation Measures*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-uk-material-deprivation-measures/summary-review-of-the-uk-material-deprivation-measures>

Dowler, E., Turner, S. & Dobson, B. (2001) *Poverty Bites: Food, health and poor families*. London: Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).

Evans, J. (2020) *Holiday Activities and Food: Literature Review*. Department for Education. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/945244/180730_HAF_LitReview_Final.pdf

Food Ethics Council (2020) *On the road to food justice: A framework for a fair food future*. Available at: https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/On-the-road-to-food-justice_FINAL.pdf

Forde, C.G., McKinley, M.C., Woodside, J.V. & Nugent, A.P. (2021) 'Nutritional Considerations in Children', in McKenna, G. (eds) *Nutrition and Oral Health*. Springer: Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80526-5_2

Francis-Devine, B. (2024) *Food banks in the UK*. House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8585/>

Francis-Devine, B., Malik, X. & Foley, N. (2025) *Food poverty: households, food banks and free school meals*, House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9209/CBP-9209.pdf>

Garthwaite, K. (2016) *Hunger Pains: life inside food bank Britain*, 2016, Policy Press, Bristol. <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447329121>

Garthwaite, K. (2017) 'I Feel I'm Giving Something Back to Society': Constructing the 'Active Citizen' and Responsibilising Food Bank Use.' *Social Policy & Society* 16, 283-292. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746416000543>

Goudie, S. (2025) *Will the Child Poverty Strategy be enough to reduce food insecurity*, The Food Foundation. Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/news/will-child-poverty-strategy-be-enough-reduce-food-insecurity>

Goudie, S. (2023) *The broken plate, 2023: the state of the nation's food system*, The Food Foundation. Available at: https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/TFF_The%20Broken%20Plate%202023_Digital_FINAL..pdf

Goudie, S & McIntyre, Z. (2021) *A crisis within a crisis: the impact of Covid-19 on household food security*, The Food Foundation. Available at: https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf

- Gooseman, A., Defeyter, M.A. & Graham, P.L. (2020) 'Hunger in the Primary School Setting: Evidence, Impacts and Solutions According to School Staff in the North East of England, UK', *Education 3-13*, 48(2), 191-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.16021>
- Gundersen, C. & Ziliak, J.P. (2015) 'Food insecurity and health outcomes', *Health Affairs*, 34(11), 1830–1839. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>
- Gunstone, B., Gosschalk, K., Stoker, M., Owen, M., Zabicka, E. & Harmer, L. (2022) *The Hygiene Bank: Hygiene Poverty 2022. Report*. YouGov. Available at: https://thehygienebank.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Hygiene-Bank_2022_Hygiene_Poverty_report_v9.0.pdf
- Hardman, M., Sims, S., Anders, J., Crawford, C., McCarthy, F., Kusha A., Pillinger, C., Riordan, S. & Meliss, S. (2025) *Universal Primary Free School Meals in London: Interim report Education Endowment Fund*. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/universal-primary-free-school-meals-in-london-evaluation>
- Hart, C. and Page, A. (2020) 'The capability approach and school food education and culture in England: 'gingerbread men ain't gonna get me very far'', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 50(6), 673-693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1764498>
- Hartgen-Walker, S. & Lally, C. (2023) *Child food insecurity and Free School Meals*. Report. UK Parliament. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.58248/PN704>
- HM Government (2026) *Guidance: Benefits for families with more than 2 children before 6 April 2026*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claiming-benefits-for-2-or-more-children>
- HM Government (2025) *Our Children, Our Future: tackling child poverty*. Report. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/696646bc99fdbc498faecd98/child-poverty-strategy.pdf>
- Holford, A. & Rabe, B. (2024) *The impacts of Universal Free School Meal Schemes in England*. Report. Institute for Social & Economic Research. Available at: <https://saphna.co/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Holford-Rabe-2024-Impacts-Universal-FSM-Final-Report.pdf>
- Holford, A. & Rabe, B. (2022) 'Going universal. The impact of free school lunches on child body weight outcomes'. *Journal of Public Economics Plus*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubecp.2022.100016>
- House of Commons Education Committee (2023) *Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils*. Report. House of Commons. Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41590/documents/205047/default/>
- Institute for Government (2022) *Cost of living crisis*. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/cost-living-crisis>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2026a) *Food Insecurity*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-statistics/food-insecurity>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2026b) *UK Poverty 2026: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*, JRF. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2026-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>
- Julies, P., Lynn, R.M., Pall, K., Leoni, M., Calder, A., Mughal, Z., Shaw, N., McDonnell, C., McDevitt, H. & Blair, M. (2020) 'Nutritional rickets under 16 years: UK surveillance results', *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 105(6), 587-592. <https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2019-317934>

Ke, J., & Ford-Jones, E. L. (2015) 'Food insecurity and hunger: A review of the effects on children's health and behaviour'. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 20(2), 89–91. <https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2019-317934>

Kellogg's (2025) *Hungry to Learn: The impact of morning hunger on our schoolchildren*. Available at: https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/content/dam/europe/kelloggs_gb/pdf/R6_Hungry_to_Learn.pdf

Lambie-Mumford, H. (2016) 'The Rise of Food Charity: Issues and Challenges.' *Geography*, 101, 11-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00167487.2016.12093978>

Lambie-Mumford, H. & Green, M.A. (2017) 'Austerity, welfare reform and use of food banks', *Area*, 49, 273-279. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12233>

Lambie-Mumford, H. & Sims, L. (2018) "Feeding Hungry Children": The Growth of Charitable Breakfast Clubs and Holiday Hunger Projects in the UK'. *Children & Society*, 32(3), 244-254. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12272>

Lejac, B., Hannan, Z. & McNulty, P. (2025) *Nourishing the Future: making healthy food accessible for every child*. Policy Report. Barnardo's. Available at: https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Nourishing%20the%20Future_making%20healthy%20food%20accessible%20for%20every%20child.pdf

Long, R. & Roberts, N. (2026) *School meals and nutritional standards (England)*, London, House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04195/SN04195.pdf>

Long, R. & Roberts, N. (2025) *School attendance in England*, London, House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9710/CBP-9710.pdf>

Loopstra R. (2024) 'Growth in UK children living in households with food insecurity', *BMJ*; 385, 997 <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.q997>

Loopstra, R. & Lambie-Mumford, H. (2023) 'Food banks: Understanding their role in the food insecure population in the UK'. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 82(3), 253-263. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665123002720>

Magic Breakfast (2025) *Nourishing Futures: our strategy for 2040*. Available at: <https://www.magicbreakfast.com/wp-content/uploads/Magic-Breakfast-Nourishing-Futures-strategy.pdf>

Marmot, M. (2020) *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On*. London: Institute of Health Equity. Report: Available at: <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/marmot-review-10-years-on/the-marmot-review-10-years-on-full-report.pdf>

May, J., Williams, A., Cloke, P. & Cherry, L. (2018) 'Do food banks help? Food insecurity in the UK', *Geography Review Magazine*, (32), 30-34. Available at: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/116503/1/A%20Williams%202018%20Do%20food%20banks%20help%20magazine%20article%20pub%20ver.pdf>

Mayor of London (n.d.) *Free School Meals*. Available at: <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-mayor-does/priorities-london/free-school-meals>

- McHugh, E., Wainwright, E. & Bhuyan, M. (2026) *On-campus food poverty in England: student hunger and university free food provision*. Brunel University of London. Available at: <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/32536/1/Final-report.pdf>
- Milbourne, P. (2024) 'Beyond 'feeding the crisis': Mobilising 'more than food aid' approaches to food poverty in the UK', *Geoforum*, vol 150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.103976>
- Moore, S.E., Brennan, S.F., Lavelle, F., Dean, M., McKinley, M.C., Olgacher, D., McCole, P., Hunter, R.F., Dunne, L., O'Connell, N.E., Elliott, C.T., McCarthy, D. & Woodside, J.V. (2023) 'Capturing the whole-school food environment in primary schools', *Public Health Nutrition*. 26(8), 1671-1678. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980023001131>
- Morris, K. (2024) Young and Hungry: School Meal Policies and Children's Right to Food in the UK and Ireland. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 32(2), 354-379. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-32020003>
- Murray S., Gale F., Adams D. & Dalton L. (2023) 'A scoping review of the conceptualisations of food justice'. *Public Health Nutrition*, 26(4), 725-737. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980023000101>
- National Education Union (NEU) (2025) *State of education: Pupil poverty*. Available at: <https://www.neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/state-education-pupil-poverty>
- NHD (2025) *Holiday hunger: causes and solutions*. Available at: <https://www.nhdmag.co.uk/blog/holidayhunger>
- Nyaradi, A., Li, J., Hickling, S., Foster, J. & Oddy, W.H. (2013) 'The role of nutrition in children's neurocognitive development, from pregnancy through childhood', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2013.00097>
- O'Connell, R., Brannen, J., Ramos, V., Skuland, S. & Truninger, M. (2022) 'School meals as a resource for low-income families in three European countries: a comparative case approach'. *European Societies*, 24(3), 251-282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2022.2078498>
- Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) (2023) *National Dental Epidemiology Programme (NDEP) for England: ohealth survey of five year old children 2022*. GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/oral-health-survey-of-5-year-old-children-2022/national-dental-epidemiology-programme-ndep-for-england-oral-health-survey-of-5-year-old-children-2022>
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2026) *Consumer price inflation, UK: March 2026*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/march2026>
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2019) *Persistent poverty in the UK and EU: 2017*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/articles/persistentpovertyintheukandeu/2017>
- Oldroyd, L., Eskandari, F., Pratt, C. & Lake, A.A. (2022) 'The nutritional quality of food parcels provided by food banks and the effectiveness of food banks at reducing food insecurity in developed countries: a mixed-method systematic review'. *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 35(6), 1202-1229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12994>
- Onita, B., Azeredo, C., Jaime, P., Levy, R. & Rauber, F. (2021) 'Eating context and its association with ultra-processed food consumption by British children', *Appetite*, 157 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2020.105007>

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (2021). *Event summary: Food insecurity and children's health*. UK Parliament. Available at: <https://post.parliament.uk/event-summary-food-insecurity-and-childrens-health/>

Parnham, J.C., Millett C. & Vamos E.P. (2023) 'School meals in the UK: ultra-processed, unequal and inadequate'. *Public Health Nutrition*, 26(1), 297-301. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980022002336>

Pearce, E. (2024) *Poverty and School Attendance*. Available at: <https://www.oneeducation.co.uk/poverty-school-attendance/>

Power, M., Doherty, B., Pybus, K. & Pickett, K. (2023) 'How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty', *Emerald Open Research*, 2(11), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.35241/emeraldopenres.13539.2>

Prescott-Smith, S., Gray, H., Owen, M. & Gosschalk, K. (2024) *The hygiene bank: hygiene poverty in 2024*, London. Available at: <https://thehygienebank.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Hygiene-Bank-Hygiene-Poverty-in-2024-Report-May-2024.pdf>

PTA (2026) *Our PTA Pantry helps families in need*. Available at: <https://pta.co.uk/running-a-pta/community-engagement/our-pta-pantry-helps-families-in-need/>

Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health (RCPCH) (2025) *RCPCH responds to alarming health inequalities in oral health of young children*. Available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/rcpch-responds-alarming-health-inequalities-oral-health-young-children>

School Food Matters (2024) *Schools dipping into their own budgets to stop children going hungry*. London: School Food Matters. Available at: <https://www.schoolfoodmatters.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/School%20food%20matters%20report%20v3%20%283%29.pdf>

Shepherd, J., Payne, D. & Montacute, R. (2026) *Growing up hungry: measuring UK child food insecurity in 2026*, Social Market Foundation, London. Available at: <https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/family-and-child-hunger-2026/>

Shinwell, J. & Defeyter, M.A. (2021) 'Food Insecurity: A Constant Factor in the Lives of Low-Income Families in Scotland and England'. *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.588254>

Smith, D. & Thompson, C. (2023) *Food Deserts and Food Insecurity in the UK: Exploring Social Inequality*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003184560>

Spelling, C. (2021) *Language matters, especially when it comes to achieving food justice*. Available at: <https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/jan21-language-matters-achieving-food-justice/>

Strong, S. (2021) 'Facing Hunger, Framing Food Banks, Imaging Austerity.' *Social & Cultural Geography* 23, 1333–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1921247>

Sutton Trust (2022) *Teachers report growing numbers of hungry, cold and tired pupils*. Press release: Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/teachers-report-growing-numbers-of-hungry-cold-and-tired-pupils/>

The Food Foundation (2025) *The broken plate, 2025: the state of the nation's food system*. Available at: https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/TFF_The%20Broken%20Plate%202025.pdf

The Food Foundation (2019) *The broken plate, 2019: ten vital signs revealing the health of our food system, its impact on our lives and the remedies we must pursue*. Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/The-Broken-Plate.pdf>

The Hygiene Bank (2025) *Marked absent*. Available at: <https://thehygienebank.com/marked-absent-by-smol/>

The Trussell Trust (2019) *State of Hunger: a study of poverty and food insecurity in the UK*, London. Available at: <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

Trussell (2025) *Hunger in the UK: September 2025*, London. Available at: https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-11/hunger_in_the_uk_261125.pdf

Wainwright, E., McHugh, E. & Bhuyan, M. (2026) 'Feeding hungry students: geographies of on-campus free food provision across England', *Area*, 58(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.70094>

Wang, M.T., Kiuru, N., Degol, J.L. & Salmela-Aro, K. (2018) 'Friends, academic achievement, and school engagement during adolescence: A social network approach to peer influence and selection effects', *Learning and Instruction*, 58, 148-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2018.06.003>

Urban Health (2024) *More than a meal: An independent evaluation of universal primary free school meals for children in London*. Report. Available at: <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/loUH-Free-School-Meals-Report.pdf>

Yang, T.C., Power, M., Moss, R.H., Lockyer, B., Burton, W., Doherty, B. & Bryant, M. (2022) 'Are free school meals failing families? Exploring the relationship between child food insecurity, child mental health and free school meal status during COVID-19: national cross-sectional surveys' *BMJ Open* 12(6), e059047. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-059047>

Zöggeler-Burkhardt, L. Emacher, E. M. & Smidt, W. (2023) 'Social relationships, interactions and learning in early childhood – theoretical approaches, empirical findings and challenges', *Early Child Development and Care*, 193(11-12), 1199-1203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2023.2260976>

Report Citation:

Wainwright, E. and McHugh, E. (2026) *Food poverty and primary schools: New understandings of the literature and evidence*. Brunel University of London. <https://doi.org/10.17633/rd.brunel.32688648>