

Cost of living, diet inequalities and impact on learning

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Introduction

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



Health status in children and young people

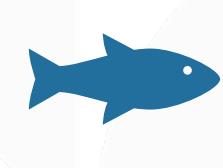
Intake of key foods (11-18 year-olds in the UK)

 **12%**

getting 5-A-Day

 **4%**

getting enough fibre

 **2g**

avg. oily fish eaten per day

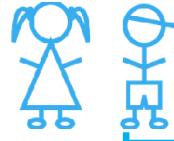
- Overall dietary quality in UK children and adolescents is poor
- This suggests that childhood and adolescence is a key time to make targeted changes

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

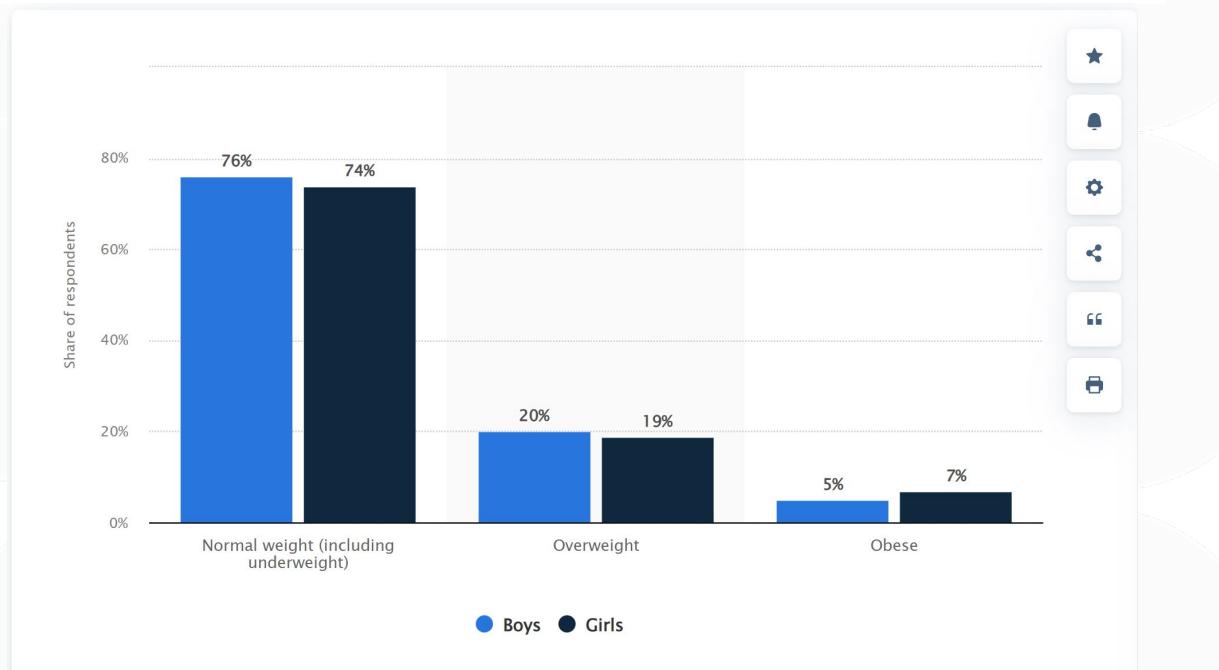


Health status in children and young people (NI)

Overweight, Obesity and Physical Activity



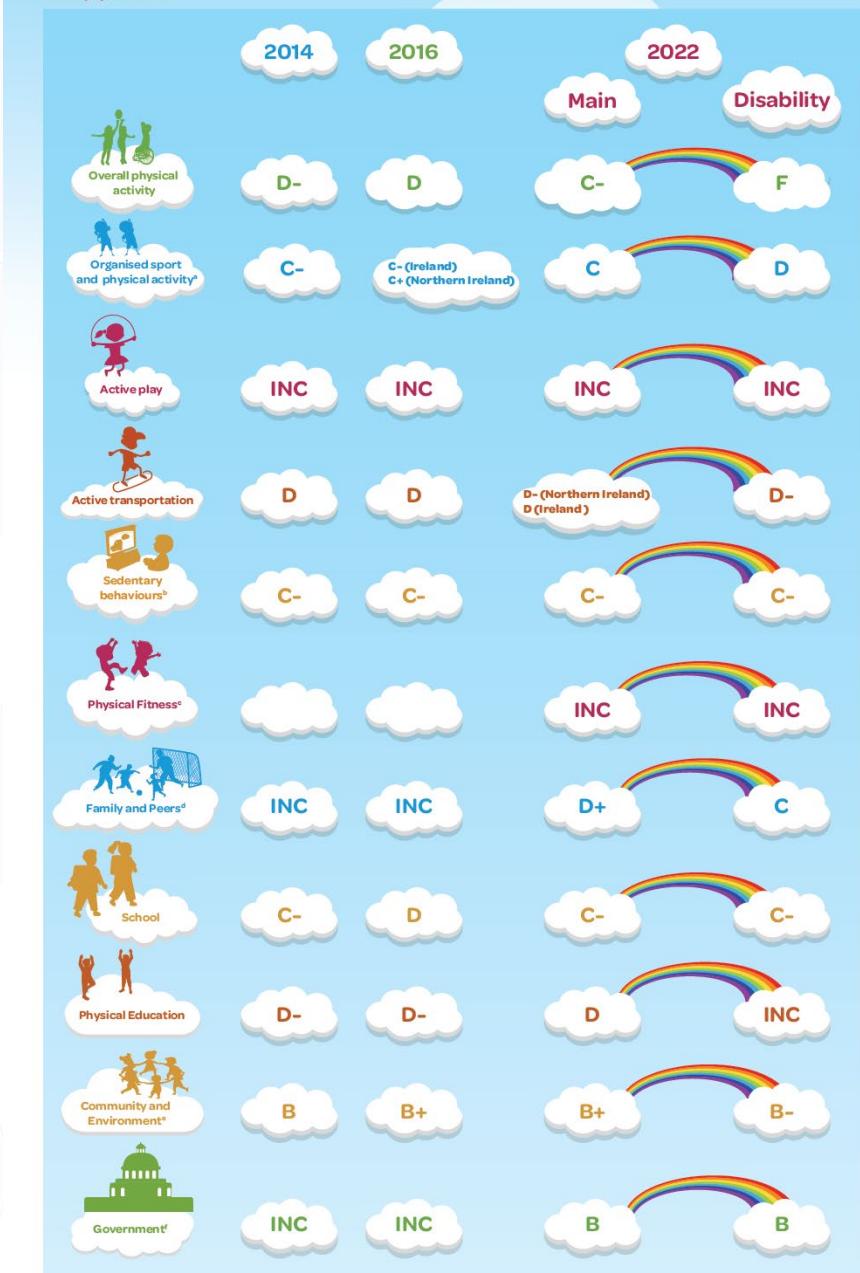
Around a quarter (25%) of children aged 2-15 were either overweight (20%) or obese (6%) - Similar to 2018/19



Health Survey (NI) 2020/21
2022 Active Healthy Kids Ireland
Statista, 2023

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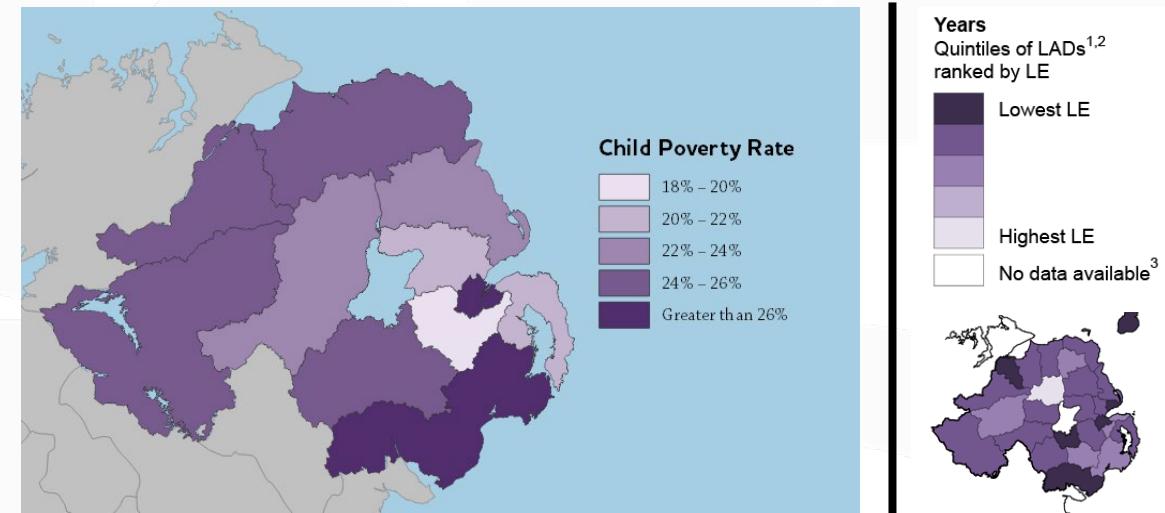
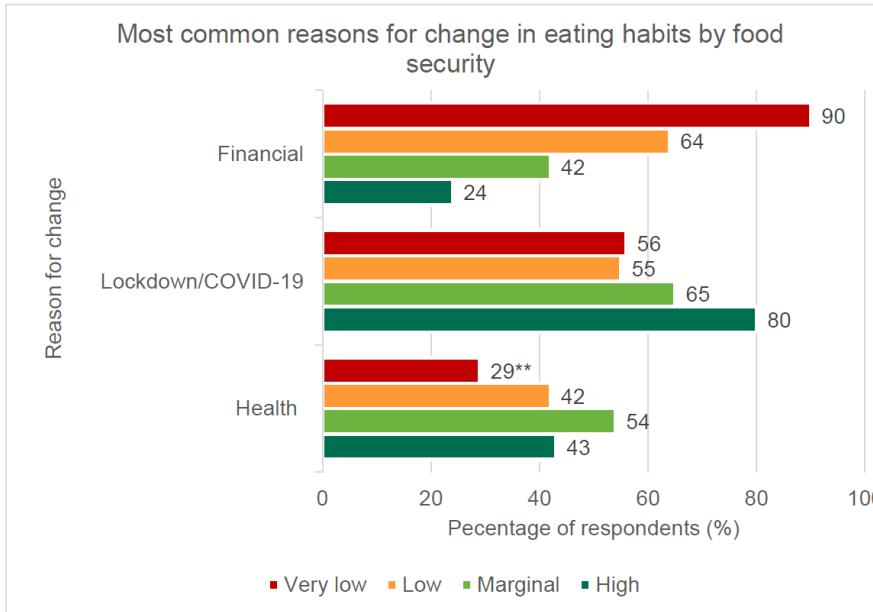
Figure 3: Summary of grades awarded to each indicator for Irish Report Card 2014 (7), 2016 (6), 2022 (2)



Poverty and Food Insecurity (NI)

- Disparities are evident for areas of Northern Ireland in terms of poverty and food security.
- Food insecure families are more at risk of changing eating habits due to financial pressure.

Figure 4. Food insecure respondents were more likely to have changed eating habits due to financial reasons



There is a growing gap in the poverty rate of people in ethnic minority and white households in Northern Ireland



[Poverty in Northern Ireland 2022](#)
[Food Security in Northern Ireland \(FSA, 2021\)](#)
[Food security, food purchasing and nutritional intake in Northern Ireland \(FSA, 2018\)](#)
[Life expectancy at birth \(ONS, 2021\)](#)



Cost of living – children and families

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



Cost of living affecting schools

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

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

Cost of living: Northern Ireland's most vulnerable pupils are 'facing a crisis this winter'

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

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

1. [Schools face bankruptcy as energy bills jump 300% during cost of living crisis \(inews.co.uk\)](https://www.inews.co.uk/news/schools-face-bankruptcy-as-energy-bills-jump-300-during-cost-of-living-crisis-181111)
2. [Cost of living: Northern Ireland's most vulnerable pupils are 'facing a crisis this winter' \(belfastlive.co.uk\)](https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/cost-living-northern-irelands-most-vulnerable-pupils-are-facing-a-crisis-this-winter-181111)
3. [Cost of living: Schools now 'part of the welfare state' \(schoolsweek.co.uk\)](https://www.schoolsweek.co.uk/news/schools-now-part-of-the-welfare-state-181111)
4. [‘There is such high need’: Teachers step in as UK cost of living crisis bites | Financial Times \(ft.com\)](https://www.ft.com/content/10333333-0a20-4a20-8a20-0a200a200a20)



Additional research and professional opinion

- Mounting evidence of increased poverty in UK children is becoming more apparent in hospitals.¹
- The Lancet recently published an editorial² on the cost of living for UK young people:
 - Children and young people living in poverty 72% more likely to be diagnosed with long-term illness.
 - 90% of the UK has seen a rise in living costs.
- Research from Ulster University found that (Q4, 2021):
 - Almost a quarter turned heating down or off despite their house being cold
 - Over a quarter had insufficient funds to cover an unexpected but necessary £500 bill

THE LANCET
Child & Adolescent Health

EDITORIAL | VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1, P1, JANUARY 2023

The high cost of living for children in the UK

The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health

Published: January, 2023 • DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(22\)00355-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(22)00355-8) • 

26 MAY 2022

New data on poverty and social security highlights need for an Executive to tackle poverty in NI

New data on poverty and social security highlights need for an Executive to tackle poverty in NI

1. [How the cost of living crisis is damaging children's health | The BMJ](#)
2. [The high cost of living for children in the UK - The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health](#)
3. [New data on poverty and social security highlights need for an Executive to tackle poverty in NI – Ulster University, 2022](#)



Food insecurity in children

Northern Ireland deprivation: One in 10 children living with 'food insecurity'

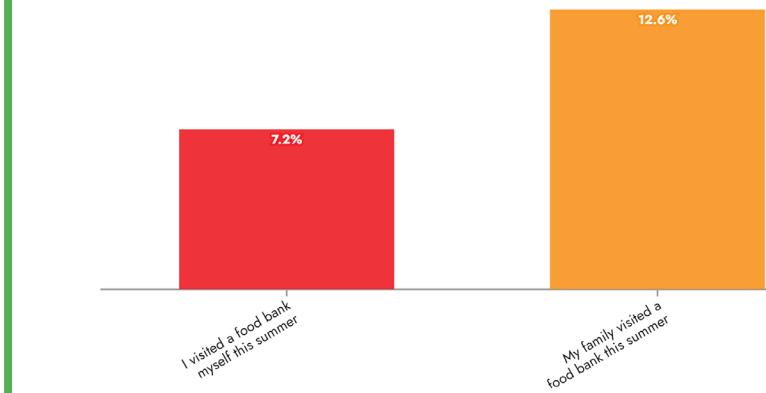
⌚ 5 August 2021

More than 31,000 food parcels were provided to children in Northern Ireland between April 2020 and March 2021, according to the UK's largest food bank network.

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

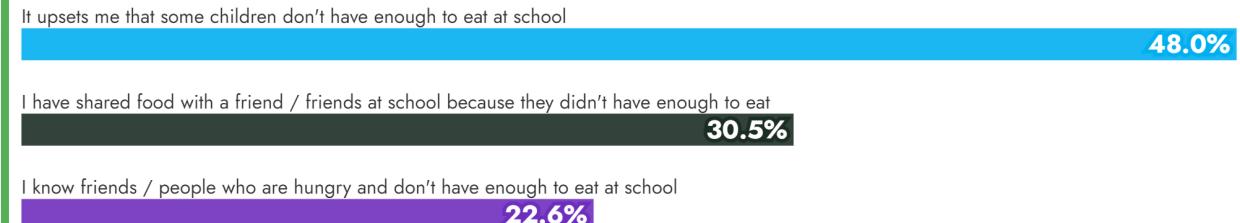
Over the summer holidays, 17% of children said they or their family visited a food bank to get food

Percentage of children who answered yes to each statement*



Food poverty is upsetting children, and nearly a third have shared food with friends because they didn't have enough

Percentage of children who answered yes to each statement



Free School Meals

- In England, pupils get FSM for 3 years.
- In Scotland, FSM extended to all pupils P1-5.
- The Mayor of London recently announced free school meals for all primary children in London for 1 year.
- The National Education Union has warned that meal provision in Northern Ireland is 'falling behind'.
 - To provide school dinners daily for three primary aged children for one month would be an extra monthly outgoing of £156.
 - The rising cost of food and of fuel is affecting all families, irrespective of income.

"We welcome that some schools are rising to meet this need by offering more pupils free meals, recognising that there are more families than ever not entitled to this benefit but who are struggling. However given the pressure on school budgets the provision is patchy and we need to see consistent and fully funded school meals for all primary school children."

30-09-2022

Northern Ireland school meal provision falling behind

1. [Providing free school meals to families with no recourse to public funds \(NRPF\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-free-school-meals-to-families-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds-nrpf)
2. [School leaders report rise in pupils not on free meals going hungry | Schools | The Guardian \(ampproject.org\)](https://www.theguardian.com/schools/2022/sep/01/school-leaders-report-rise-in-pupils-not-on-free-meals-going-hungry)
3. [Northern Ireland school meal provision falling behind, NEU, 2022](https://www.ampproject.org/northern-ireland-school-meal-provision-falling-behind-neu-2022)



School Food Standards

- The Standards are being reviewed. It was hoped the new Standards would launch in 2022, but they are not yet live.
- The original Standards still contain valuable advice relating to the nutritional quality of school meal provision.
- The 'Essential guide' to school food contains guidance around establishing a whole school food policy, breakfast clubs, water provision, dining experience and more.

1. [Nutritional standards \(DOE, 2008\)](#)
2. [School food: the essential guide \(DOE, 2007\)](#)



Hunger and learning – acute and chronic effects

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

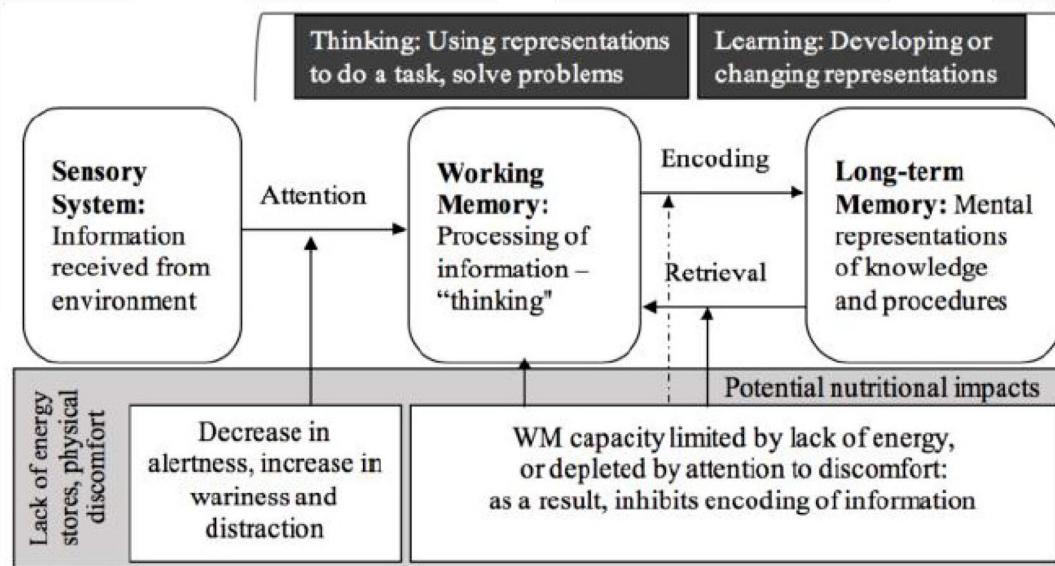


TABLE 1 Potential findings associated with food insecurity and hunger*

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

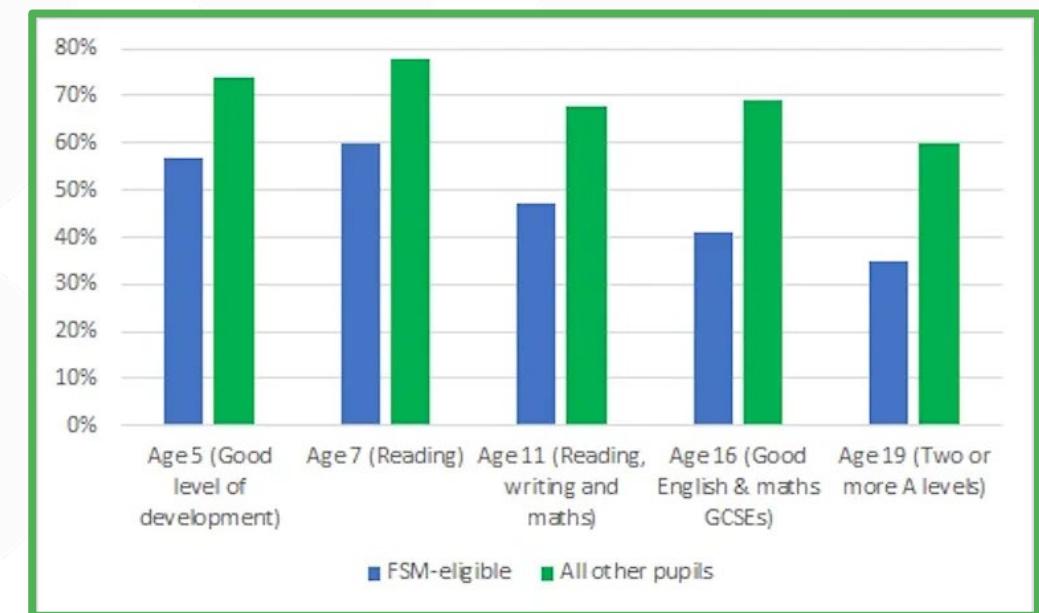
* Causality not necessarily confirmed

2



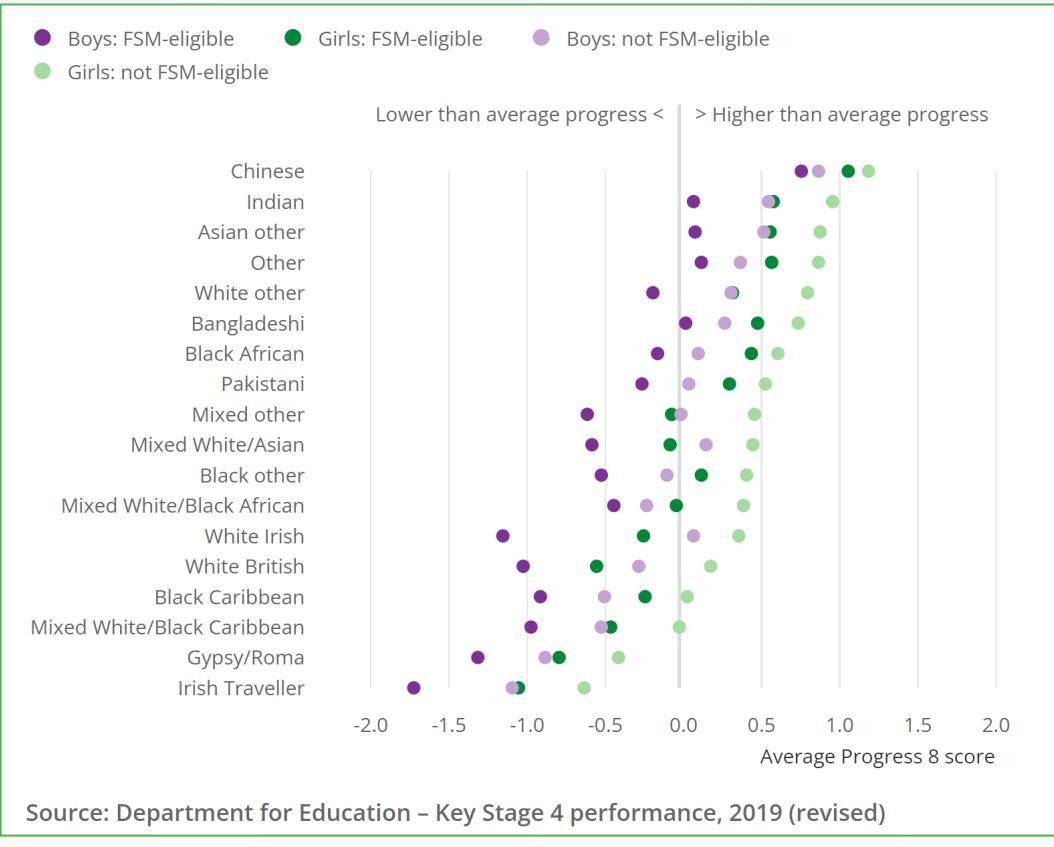
Financial inequality and attainment

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



Financial and ethnic inequalities

- DfE data shows lower attainment for certain ethnicities, as well as lower on average for those who are FSM-eligible.
- Boys are also shown to be performing worse, on average, than girls.



1. [Child poverty and education outcomes by ethnicity - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/childlessnessandfamilies/childpovertyandincome/childpovertyandeducationoutcomesbyethnicity)
2. [Key stage 4 performance 2019 \(revised\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-performance-2019-revised)



The Cost of the School Day

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

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

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY

TOOLKIT



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



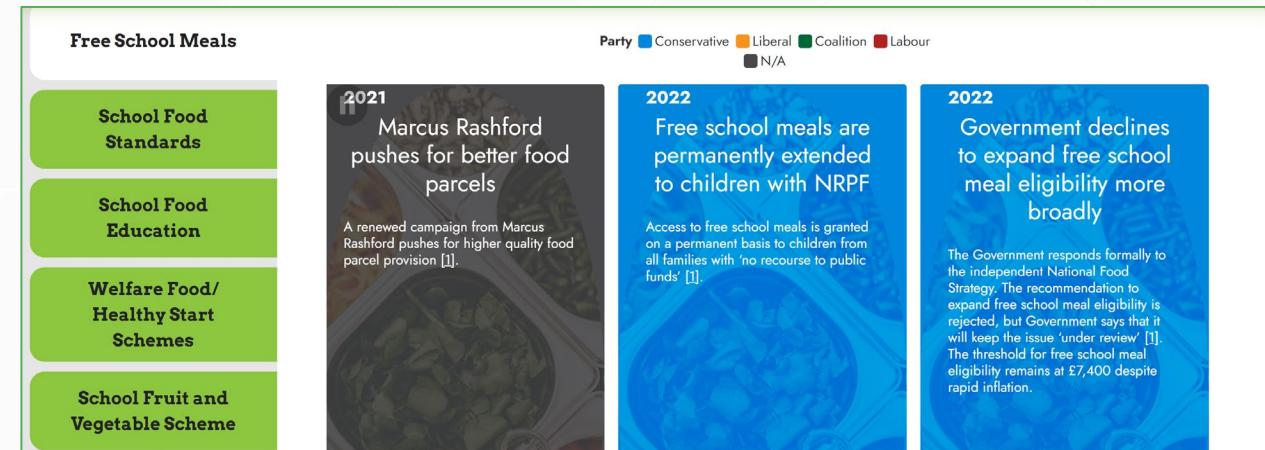
Conclusion

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



Additional resources

- The Children's Food Policy Library is hosted by the Food Foundation.¹
- The Library serves as a guide to campaigns and legislation over time that affects policy.
- This is a useful resource for keeping up to date with relevant legislation surrounding schools
- Education Authority Northern Ireland has published 'School Improvement and Self Evaluation for School Governors'.²
- DfE have published Nutritional Standards Guidance for Northern Ireland, but this is due to be updated.³



1. [Children's Food Policy Library | Food Foundation](#)
2. [School Improvement and Self Evaluation for School Governors \(EANI, 2022\)](#)
3. [Nutritional Standards Guidance \(NI\), DfE 2011](#)





Thank you

