

# STOP SCHOOL HUNGER

**Policy Paper, November 2019**

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#DysguNidLlwg  
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## SUMMARY

Deprivation and inequality exist in modern day Wales, with hunger and fatigue now having dramatically detrimental effects on a significant group of secondary schoolchildren.

Research published in May 2019 by Loughborough University, commissioned by the End Child Poverty Network (comprising Children in Wales, Oxfam Cymru, Barnardo's Cymru and Save The Children, amongst others) found that Wales was the only UK nation to see a rise in child poverty in 2017-2018 – with more than 206,000 children living in poverty in Wales (over 29% of children in total). It is safe to say that Wales has reached crisis point, with the Trussell Trust announcing in July 2019 that they saw a shocking 14% increase in emergency food parcels sent to Welsh children last summer.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires governments to assist parents and guardians who are in need, providing 'material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing'. Successive Welsh governments have indeed instigated a number of child poverty strategies with the – albeit admirable but ill-fated – aim of ending child poverty by 2020. This includes investing in 'holiday hunger' programmes, a free school breakfast for primary school children and the well-known Free School Meals, amongst other initiatives.

Award-winning charity, TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities), working in Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire, is now campaigning for an increase in the daily free school meals allowance, as a result of grassroots evidence that it is no longer fit for purpose and failing to alleviate hunger in secondary schools.

TCC has learnt that a significant group of secondary schoolchildren eligible for free school meals in North East Wales are arriving at school hungry and using their allowance to pay for breakfast, leaving them without sufficient money to pay for the nutritionally balanced lunchtime meal that the free school meals allocation is designed to provide. While its causes are multi-layered and complex, the extent of child poverty in Wales is clearly compromising the efficacy of free school meals in delivering meaningful relief from unrelenting hunger.

This has led to staff putting their hands in their pockets, to feed pupils who are desperate, and unable to focus on anything other than their empty stomachs. This marks a return to the very reason why free school meals were conceived in the first place: to stop teachers in the early 20th century using their own salaries to feed children, so that they would be better placed to take advantage of the mandatory education on offer.

Coupled with comparable evidence from across Wales and the UK on the effects of poverty and the many benefits of eating breakfast, TCC is adamant that this is a Wales-wide problem, requiring immediate action from Welsh Government. TCC is calling on Welsh Government to add a daily 80p to the free school meals allowance, time limited to the end of morning break, so that the poorest children in secondary schools have the opportunity to have both a nutritious breakfast and lunch, and will be better able to learn.<sup>1</sup>

This offers a cost-effective way for Welsh Government to alleviate the worst effects of hunger in secondary schools, with little to no further cost in terms of infrastructure.

The benefits of introducing an additional allowance specifically for breakfast would also apply to Welsh Government, in terms of helping meet its educational ambitions relating to the brand-new curriculum and safeguarding its investment in free school meals. It would also support the Welsh Government in meeting its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as ambitions contained within the 2015 Child Poverty Strategy and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

## WHO IS TCC?



TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities) is the UK's oldest broad-based community organising charity. Member-led and founded in 1995, TCC works across Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire, comprising over 35 schools, community organisations and faith groups.

TCC uses community organising to train and facilitate community leaders in identifying community issues and working with decision makers to enact positive change. This has led to a diverse range of successful social justice campaigns, including on the Living Wage, British Sign Language provision in schools and businesses, funeral poverty and securing a night shelter for homeless men and women in Wrexham.

Three years ago, TCC beat off stiff competition from over 700 other charities in the UK, to win the 2016 Guardian Charity Awards, which celebrated small-scale organisations involved in hugely inspiring and innovative projects that strengthened local communities. Judged by the chief executives of several leading charitable organisations, TCC was praised for its collaboration with other organisations, and for delivering impactful, practical improvements to its communities.

[1] This paper focuses specifically on an immediate problem relating to free school meals. Other crucial issues, such as broadening eligibility for free school meals, the quality of food on offer, the impact of later breaktimes and the unnecessary cost and environmental impact of selling bottled water in 'meal of the day' offers, are not discussed in detail in this paper, as they go beyond its remit.

## HOW THE STOP SCHOOL HUNGER CAMPAIGN STARTED

In early 2017, the Stop School Hunger campaign was kick-started by staff at a secondary school in Wrexham, who believed the free school meals allowance was no longer fit for purpose. They had observed an increasing number of pupils, who were in receipt of it, arriving hungry, buying breakfast at school, and being left with insufficient funds to afford the filling and nutritionally balanced lunch that the free school meals system aims to provide.

Knowing the positive impact of a healthy breakfast on learning, the school – and occasionally individual staff members – were sufficiently concerned to start buying breakfast for some of the poorest pupils. To their minds, doing so would ensure that these pupils would be less hungry, happier in themselves, and better prepared to focus on lessons throughout the morning. Indeed, each school department provides a free ‘mini breakfast club’ for all pupils on exam days.

These impromptu and improvised attempts to alleviate school hunger is a story replicated for teachers and schools across North East Wales, and beyond. Teachers and schools are committed to the educational development of their pupils, and their well-being. Stepping in to provide food at the start of the day helps children, who are already hugely disadvantaged, to replace their hunger for food with a hunger for learning – and use the free school meals allowance for a proper lunch, as initially intended.<sup>2</sup> However, this also drains the already very limited resources of schools that, arguably, should be spent on other things (such as meeting the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales 2022, for example).

With teachers across Wales and the UK<sup>3</sup> now feeling distressed enough to dip into their own personal funds to pay for a lunch or lend money to pupils, the very principles on which free school meals were conceived are under threat. The first iteration of free school meals was established in 1906 to stop teachers using their own salaries to feed children who were at school as a result of The Forster Act 1870, which made elementary education compulsory.<sup>4</sup>

While its causes are multi-layered and complex, the extent of child poverty in Wales is clearly compromising the efficacy of free school meals in delivering meaningful relief from unrelenting hunger.

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***I have [worked with] many young people who have to make a choice between breakfast and lunch, I have on occasions taken extra food in to share with them.***

*School based youth worker, Wrexham*

[2] Historically, this has been a meal provided free of charge at lunch time, to students from the most deprived backgrounds in society.

[3] Human Rights Watch (2019) Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, welfare cuts, and the right to food in the U.K

[4] See the appendix on outlining the history of Free School Meals in the UK.

## A PICTURE OF POVERTY

The children of Wales are in the grips of a poverty crisis. This section offers a sense of the wide-ranging research evidencing this, and how secondary school staff are stepping into the breach to alleviate the hunger and fatigue felt by some of their pupils.

Professor Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, found that, for the UK as a whole, one fifth of the population were living in poverty and 1.5 million people had experienced destitution in 2017.<sup>5</sup> He also reported that relative child poverty rates were expected to increase by 7% between 2015 and 2021, with overall child poverty rates reaching almost 40%.<sup>6</sup> According to the UN Special Rapporteur, Wales faces the highest rate of relative poverty in the UK<sup>7</sup> with almost one in four people living in relative income poverty.<sup>8</sup>

Research published in May 2019 by Loughborough University, commissioned by the End Child Poverty Network (comprising Children in Wales, Oxfam Cymru, Barnardo's Cymru and Save The Children, amongst others) also found that Wales was the only UK nation to see a rise in child poverty<sup>9</sup> in 2017-2018 – with more than 206,000 children now living in poverty in Wales (over 29% of children in total).<sup>10</sup> It is safe to say that Wales has reached crisis point, with the Trussell Trust announcing in July 2019 that they saw a shocking 14% increase in emergency food parcels sent to Welsh children during summer 2017.<sup>11</sup>

The latest DWP figures also show that almost one in three children in Wales lives in relative poverty, after housing costs,<sup>12</sup> with children arriving at school hungry, and schools and individual teachers providing food for them and their families.<sup>13</sup> The recent Children's Future Food Inquiry report, Children's Right to Food, also outlines how poverty and food insecurity manifests itself in all aspects of children's lives, including health and relationships as well as school attainment.<sup>14</sup> The Inquiry also heard evidence of children arriving at school without having had breakfast, spending their free school meal allocation at break and not having money left for lunch.<sup>15</sup>



[5] See Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur (2018), 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights', 5 16 November <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1> p.4

[6] *ibid*, p.6 | [7] *ibid*, p.19 | [8] *ibid*, p.117

[9] This means a child is living in a household where the income is below 60% of the median income.

[10] India Pollock, BBC Wales Social Affairs Correspondent (2019) 'Child poverty: Wales is the only UK nation to see increase' BBC Wales Online 15 May <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-48259327>

[11] Tomos Povey (2019) 'Figures show shocking rise in food parcels being handed out to children in Wales' South Wales Argus 16 July <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/17771190.figures-show-shocking-rise-food-parcels-handed-children-wales/>

[12] Francis-Devine et al (2019), 'Poverty in the UK: statistics', House of Commons briefing paper 7096, 2 July, p.34.

[13] Human Rights Watch (2019) Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, welfare cuts, and the right to food in the U.K., p.37.

[14] 2019, Children's Future Food Inquiry, Children's Right to Food, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Childrens-Future-Food-Inquiry-report.pdf>

[15] *Ibid*, p.43.



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires governments to assist parents and guardians who are in need, providing ‘material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing’.<sup>16</sup> Successive Welsh governments have indeed instigated a number of child poverty strategies with the – albeit admirable but, ill-fated – aim of ending child poverty by 2020.<sup>17</sup> This includes investing in ‘holiday hunger’ programmes,<sup>18</sup> a free school breakfast for primary school children<sup>19</sup> and free school meals,<sup>20</sup> among other initiatives.

However, teaching staff and others continue to see the negative impact of hunger on educational attainment. This includes Geoff Barton, the General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), who said in a speech in March 2019 that the most significant contemporary challenge facing headteachers and teaching staff is the impact of austerity and the rise in poverty on pupils’ day to day lives.<sup>21</sup> Referring to an ASCL survey, which gathered the views of 407 secondary school headteachers across Wales and England, Barton repeated the words of one: “In 24 years of education I have not seen the extent of poverty like this. Children are coming to school hungry, dirty and without the basics to set them up for life. The gap between those that have and those that do not is rising and is stark.” This survey found that 43% of secondary schools provide food to pupils, or their families, with another respondent commenting, “We have students who come in to school hungry. They cannot focus and learn effectively whilst they are hungry”.<sup>22</sup>

Teachers are understandably finding it increasingly difficult to stay detached when faced with the reality of child poverty in their classroom, and as a result are taking action themselves. A joint National Education Union (NEU) and Child Poverty Action Group survey of 900 teachers (of which 47% worked at secondary schools) said that over a third provide food to pupils on a termly basis, with 12% doing so every single week.<sup>23</sup>

[16] UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC) Art 27 (3).

[17] (2016) ‘No end to child poverty by 2020, Welsh Government says’ BBC Wales Online 13 December <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-38308763>

[18] See The Bevan Foundation’s review of the Welsh Government’s investment in holiday hunger programmes here: (2019) ‘Kids on the breadline: Solutions to holiday hunger’ <https://41ydv1cuyvlonsm03mpf21pub-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Kids-on-the-Breadline-070519-Final-New-Cover-2.pdf>

[19] April 2015, Welsh Government, ‘Free Breakfast in Primary Schools’: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/free-breakfast-in-primary-schools.pdf>

[20] March 2019, Welsh Government, ‘Free School Meals in Wales: Information for Schools’: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/free-school-meals-in-wales-information-for-schools.pdf>

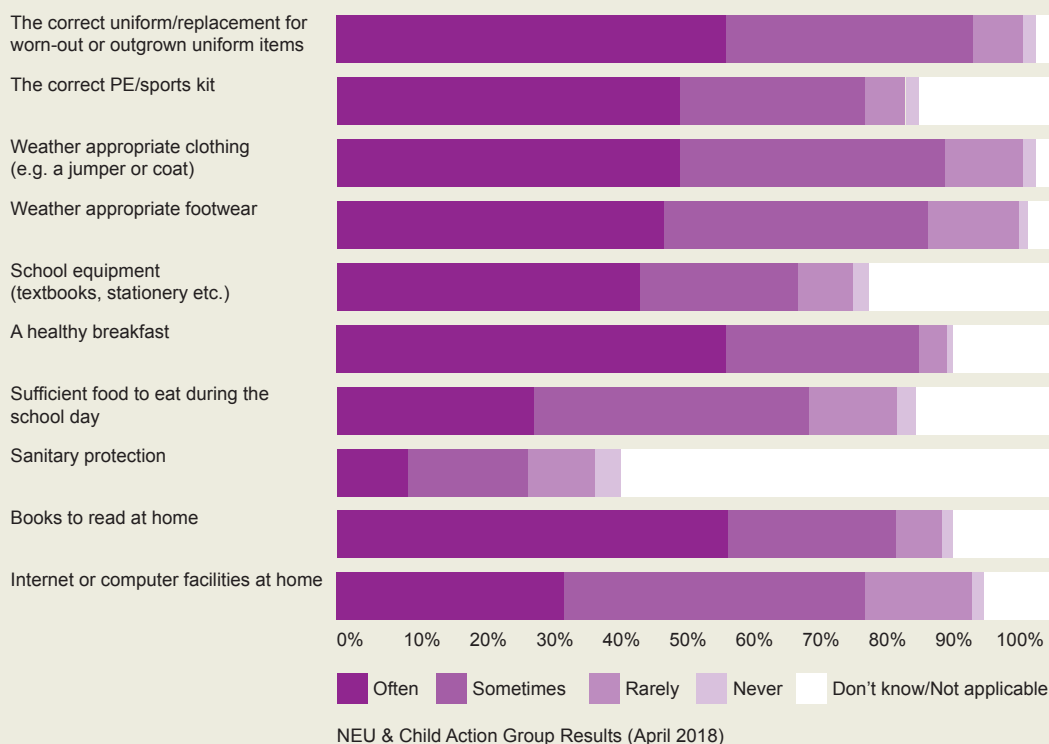
[21] Geoff Barton, ASCL General Secretary (2019), Annual Conference Speech, 16 March <https://www.ascl.org.uk/professional-development/conferences/ascl-annual-conference/geoff-barton-annual-conference-2019-speech.html>. Accessed 3rd July 2019.

[22] ASCL ‘ASCL survey finds rising tide of pupil poverty’ 15 March 2019 <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/ASCL-survey-reveals-rising-tide-of-pupil-poverty> (Accessed 2 November 2019)

[23] The survey also showcases how schools provide families with low-cost food clubs, clothing banks and free or subsidised family meals. See (2018) ‘Child poverty and education: a survey of the experiences of NEU members’ National Education Union and Child Poverty Action, April 2018. <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/child-poverty-and-education-survey-experiences-neu-members>



## How often, if ever, do you encounter pupils/students without the following items which you would attribute to being a result of poverty? (862 answered)



Strikingly, the majority of respondents said they had encountered pupils who had not eaten a healthy breakfast because of poverty, with a massive 55% saying they did so 'often'. Well over half of respondents also encountered pupils without sufficient food to eat during the school day because of poverty, with 28% doing so 'often' and 39% doing so 'sometimes'.

This survey also demonstrates how individual teachers have stepped up where the state has pulled back. In addition to food, over half of respondents said they provide pupils with school equipment, with a fifth supplying pupils with PE kits and sanitary / other hygiene products.<sup>24</sup>

## WHY FOOD MATTERS

The crucial importance of nutritious food for children to be happy, healthy, ready and able to learn is well known; this is why breakfast clubs have been established in primary schools and free school meals are focused on the provision of a nutritionally balanced meal at lunchtime. Littlecott et al found in their 2015 study of 5,000 9- to 11-year-olds that the free breakfast initiative for primary schools in Wales demonstrated significant associations between eating breakfast and educational outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

[24] ibid

[25] Littlecott et al (2015) 'Association between breakfast consumption and educational outcomes in 9–11-year-old children' Public Health Nutrition <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c747/c7568f8e570c605278052cf005263b52b0d3.pdf>

Recent research by Coulthard et al, using data from the UK's National Diet and Nutrition Survey Rolling Programme, confirms that those who consume breakfast frequently have a better overall nutritional profile than those who skip breakfast.<sup>26</sup> In a cognitive function study of 12- to 14-year-olds by Cooper et al in 2011, those who consumed a low glycaemic index (GI) breakfast had better response times and accuracy to tests than those who had omitted breakfast, or who had consumed a high glycaemic index breakfast.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Rampersaud et al<sup>28</sup> summarised 47 studies (looking at both adolescents and children) that considered the benefits of eating breakfast, of which 22 looked at the link between breakfast and academic performance. They concluded that the evidence did show that eating breakfast improves cognitive function around memory and school attendance. Similar results and benefits in terms of overall health and well-being were also found in a review by Lundqvist et al.<sup>29</sup>

The Welsh Government launched the Free Breakfasts Initiative for primary schools in 2004.<sup>30</sup> Although this initiative is not without its problems (including creeping charges<sup>31</sup> and waiting lists<sup>32</sup>), the Welsh Government has made the decision that providing free school breakfasts for primary schoolchildren in Wales is an effective use of its resources. Older children need as much nutrition as their younger counterparts and cost families as much to feed, if not arguably more. However Welsh Government currently makes no provision for those children who need energy in order to complete important exams and has no plans to do so.<sup>33</sup>

## WHY THE FREE SCHOOL MEALS ALLOWANCE IS NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

Despite research demonstrating the importance of breakfast for secondary schoolchildren in terms of educational attainment and general health and well-being, Welsh Government policy is limited to the provision of a free school meals allowance that is only designed to cover lunch. This key tool in addressing child poverty is now clearly failing to alleviate the hunger of those greatest in need. For those pupils in their early secondary education, the contrast will perhaps be particularly felt in their stomachs and in the pockets of their parents, given that they will no longer benefit from the free breakfast that should have been available to them in their primary years.

[26] Coulthard, J.D. et al (2017) 'Breakfast consumption and nutrient intakes in 4 to 18-year-olds: UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey Rolling Programme (2008-2012)'. British Journal of Nutrition, Vol 118 (4), pp.280-290. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114517001714>

[27] Cooper et al (2011) 'Breakfast glycaemic index and cognitive function in adolescent school children'. British Journal of Nutrition, Vol 107 (2), pp.1823-1832. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114511005022>

[28] Rampersaud et al (2005) Breakfast Habits, Nutritional Status, Body Weight, and Academic Performance in Children and Adolescents. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2005.02.007>

[29] Lundqvist et al (2018) Effects of eating breakfast and school breakfast programmes on children and adolescents: a systematic review <https://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1243060/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

[30] For more information, go to: <https://gov.wales/free-breakfast-primary-schools>

[31] (2019) 'Monmouthshire school breakfast club attendance drops after charge' BBC Wales Online 10 June <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-48585807>

[32] (2018) 'Parents queue up overnight for Cardiff school breakfast club' BBC Wales Online 19 July <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-44887865>

[33] Kirsty, Williams AM. Letter to Ken Skates AM. 19th March 2019 (forwarded to TCC).



Most recently, many organisations have raised concerns about the number of children – both primary and secondary level – who have lost their free school meals entitlement, following changes to the eligibility criteria. Only children in families with net earnings of up to £7,400 are now entitled to receive it under the new Universal Credit benefit system.<sup>34</sup> The Children's Society estimates 55,000 children now miss out on free school meals because of these new rules, despite living below the poverty line, with the majority coming from working families.<sup>35</sup> The Bevan Foundation and others are seeking a review of child nutrition in Wales and a change to the recent £7,400 cap, both of which TCC supports. In October 2019, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Welsh Assembly Committee recommended doubling the earnings threshold for families entitled to free school meals in 2020.<sup>36</sup>

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**18% of secondary schoolchildren were unable, or unwilling, to explain why they were coming to school on an empty stomach.**

*TCC survey, Spring/summer 2018*

#### **Breakfast – a choice?**

During the 2018 spring and summer terms, TCC surveyed almost 500 pupils and teachers from five secondary schools in North East Wales, of which almost one in four pupils received free school meals. The primary purpose of the survey was to establish whether the poverty picture found in the original school in Wrexham would be replicated in other neighbouring schools.<sup>37</sup> TCC found that, for a small but no less significant group of pupils, particularly those in receipt of the free school meals, sourcing breakfast and lunch had become an ongoing problem, negatively impacting on their well-being and ability to learn.<sup>38</sup>

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**Over 88% of secondary schoolchildren in receipt of free school meals, who buy breakfast at school and don't have enough left over for lunch, do so for reasons beyond running late or 'not being a breakfast person'.**

*TCC survey, Spring/summer 2018*

Of course, secondary schoolchildren do not always want breakfast or have time for it. This is backed up by the survey, with over half of all pupils never having, or sometimes missing, breakfast because of these reasons. However, 18% of secondary schoolchildren were unable, or unwilling, to explain why they were coming to school on an empty stomach (it is worth noting here that some children may have been reluctant to say there was no food at home).

[34] Martin George (2018) 'Government sets £7,400 annual income threshold for free school meals' TES 7 February <https://www.tes.com/news/government-sets-ps7400-annual-income-threshold-free-school-meals>

[35] Children's Society response to Welsh Government consultation on revised eligibility for FSM.

[36] Daniel Davies, BBC Wales Social Affairs Correspondent (2019) 'Free school meals: Double earnings threshold, say AMs' BBC Wales Online, 24 October <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-50158154>

[37] This survey provided a snapshot to TCC on hunger in secondary schools in general, but also the effectiveness of the free school meals allowance to alleviate hunger. Qualitative research will take place during the campaign.

[38] In their report, 'Nothing Left in the Cupboards', Human Rights Watch spoke to teachers who echoed what teaching staff in north east Wales have told TCC about hunger at breakfast, namely that children miss breakfast for multiple reasons, but a significant core of pupils do so on a habitual basis, due to lack of resources at home: Human Rights Watch report [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/uk0519\\_web3.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/uk0519_web3.pdf)

When asked whether they had ever bought breakfast at school and had later found they did not have enough money to buy lunch, 34% of all pupils said they had experienced this at one time or another. The vast majority (over 88%) of pupils receiving free school meals and who had bought breakfast at school said they did so for reasons beyond running late or 'not being a breakfast person'.

Over half of pupils in receipt of free school meals told TCC they arrive at school feeling "sad" or "hungry", with one commenting "I feel hungry before lunch and then I get angry because I'm hungry".



**49% of teaching staff 'sometimes' provide food to pupils, with 13% doing so 'often'.**

*TCC survey, Spring/summer 2018*

TCC also surveyed over 100 secondary school teaching staff in North East Wales in relation to school hunger. The survey found:

- 49% of teaching staff 'sometimes' provide food to pupils, with 13% doing so 'often'. One teacher pointed to the potential pitfalls: "I started bringing breakfast for one pupil who had not had breakfast at home, then she came to rely on me bringing her a breakfast or snack".
- 69% of teaching staff have referred children for help, because they don't have enough money for food.
- 75% of teaching staff believe a free breakfast for secondary school pupils in receipt of free school meals would make a difference to their learning, with one teacher saying, "their minds would be focused on something other than hunger".



**69% of teaching staff have referred children for help, because they don't have enough money for food.**

*—TCC survey, Spring/summer 2018*

As part of the survey, teachers also outlined their day-to-day experience, and spoke about how some children would not necessarily want to show they were struggling: "They are at an age where they wouldn't always say if they are hungry certainly not in front of others. I suspect it is happening a lot though". Another commented: "A young man will often hoard food when it is available just in case he doesn't have any when he gets home. This has happened with a few learners over the years."

Many spoke of the ways in which they dip into their own salaries to try and alleviate some of the obvious suffering: “More often than not I see children go without lunch as they don’t have enough money in their account. I do provide them with money to tide them over.” Comments also relate to the unsustainable cost to teaching staff:<sup>39</sup> “I have helped pupils with paying for dinner as they have run out of money, so help with organising money or free extra breakfasts would be helpful.”

The free school meals allowance received by pupils varies across Wales, often by county and sometimes by school.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the local arrangements, the price of a main meal at lunch should match that of the free school meals allowance for that authority or school. It is currently sufficient to pay for lunch, but little else (see below table for examples). For example:

County	Free school meal allowance	Main meal at lunch
Cardiff	£2.95	Meal of the day £2.95 (served with bottled water) <sup>41</sup>
Denbighshire	£2.35	Meal of the day £2.35 Cold meal of the day £2.35
Flintshire	£2.40	Set meal price £2.35 <sup>42</sup>
Wrexham	£2.45	£2.45 <sup>43</sup>
Swansea	£2.40	Meal of the day £2.40 (served with bottled water) <sup>44</sup>

[39] The TCC staff questionnaire was completed by both teachers and teaching assistants, although information on the roles of respondents was not collected. Teaching assistants however, are often not paid a Living Wage.

[40] The Bevan Foundation (2019) Back to school? Local variations in help with costs of school meals and uniforms.

[41] These ‘meal of the day’ offers include a bottle of water, which seems an unnecessary cost, both financially and environmentally, and almost certainly contravenes the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, in her Charter for Change notes that, in some cases, bottled water was the only option, with water fountains either turned off or unavailable. Looking at the menus for secondary schools across Cardiff, for example, the inclusion of bottled water inevitably pushes up their prices unnecessarily. Such menu construction means that pupils in receipt of FSM allowance are further disadvantaged by the way some school caterers construct and price their menus. Cardiff menu here.

[42] Latest available information on <https://www.newydd.wales/en/Secondary-School-Meals.aspx>

[43] Secondary school menu prices are not available on the Wrexham County Borough Council website; this information has come from conversations TCC has had with school staff.

[44] Information on <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/secondaryschoolmeals> during July 2019 stated a full balanced meal was £2.30 including dessert and bottled water. Hot pasta pots were priced at £1.45 (15p more than the £2.30 FSM allowance at the time) and advertised as ‘will satisfy your hunger’. The cost of a full meal has since risen to £2.40, but the FSM allowance is not clear on the website.

Item	Price
Toast	30p Neath Port Talbot (one school) 31p Powys 38p Wrexham 30p – 50p Gwynedd
Cereal	41p – 50p Monmouthshire (for one school, higher price is for porridge) 73p Wrexham
Piece of fresh fruit	40p Cardiff 55p Powys
Tea/coffee	50p Gwynedd (one school) 60p Powys

Not every local authority provides price information for its individual menu items in secondary schools, and, where schools set their own free school meals allowance, menus may not be available on school websites at all.<sup>45</sup> However, what is clear from a brief look at a selection of local authority and school websites, is the price variation in breakfast and healthy snack items.<sup>46</sup>

As the free school meals allowance is just enough to cover the cost of the nutritionally balanced lunch, each and every day some children have a stark choice to make, either:

- fending off hunger by paying for breakfast or a mid-morning snack, knowing they will forfeit a proper lunch and become hungry again during afternoon lessons; or
- struggling through morning lessons and waiting until lunchtime for a filling meal.

TCC's findings are consistent with research carried out by other organisations. For example, the Children's Commissioner for Wales (following a round of 550 workshops and conversations with young people) found that the free school meals allowance, in some cases, was 'coming up short' even in paying for a proper lunch that would provide adequate sustenance for the school day. It is certainly not robust enough for pupils to purchase a breakfast and lunch, with one pupil saying they "just had to starve until lunch time while everyone else could buy what they wanted."<sup>47</sup>

[45] For example, schools in Conwy, Monmouthshire and Neath Port Talbot.

[46] Prices gathered from local authority and school websites (July 2019 and September 2019), or in conversation.

[47] Children's Commissioner for Wales (2018) 'A Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the impact of poverty' <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/A-Charter-for-Change-Protecting-Welsh-Children-from-the-Impact-of-Poverty.pdf> p.14



## ADDING 80P TO THE FREE SCHOOL MEALS ALLOWANCE

### Free School Breakfast Extension

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has written extensively about the impact of poverty on secondary schoolchildren, and the way many schools have set up breakfast clubs with the Pupil Development Grant, and/or voluntarily, with the good will of teachers, local organisations and occasional small grants.<sup>48</sup> These have been important given the number of children who are living in poverty in Wales, yet who do not qualify for free school meals.

### The benefits of 80p for breakfast

TCC recognises that there are significant, macro problems with the free school meals system as it stands today and is supportive of other organisations' work to help Welsh Government overcome them.

TCC's solution is focused on delivering immediate relief to the poorest secondary school pupils in Wales, who are unlikely to be meeting their academic potential, owing to hunger and fatigue. TCC believes that, given the context of contemporary poverty and how hunger is presenting itself in secondary schools, the free school meals allowance is no longer fit for purpose, and that this is a Wales-wide problem.

TCC is calling on Welsh Government to increase the free school meals allowance by 80p (inflation linked) per school day for each secondary school pupil who is eligible to receive free school meals, as an immediate way of alleviating their hunger. Secondary school pupils with demanding appetites and a demanding cycle of learning and assessment would, generally, be able to purchase at least one item to start the day and would help Welsh Government meet several of its existing policy objectives and ambitions, at minimum cost.

It has been established that, despite receiving the free school meals allowance, many pupils are – very understandably – struggling to focus on anything other than their empty stomachs. This means that the current investment by Welsh Government in providing approximately 29,223 secondary schoolchildren with free school meals is not meeting its objectives or delivering impactful outcomes, as children are too hungry to learn. A modest investment facilitating the purchase of a breakfast would safeguard this original outlay.



***Many pupils were either going without breakfast or were spending all of their free school meals allowance in the morning and then not having anything left at lunchtime.***

*Teacher, Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan*

[48] *ibid*

[49] This figure is based on statistics by StatsWales (Pupils eligible for free school meals by school, 2019), which listed 26,145 secondary school pupils as being eligible for free school meals (and this has been understood to mean 'eligible', as opposed to 'eligible and claiming'). There were also an additional 2,085 pupils at special schools eligible for free school meals, and 3,050 at middle schools. Additional data from StatsWales shows 53% of SEN pupils are secondary school aged and 65% of middle school pupils are secondary school aged, so we have included this percentage of pupils for each group, bringing the total to 29,223.

Breakfast for 80p per day	Cost for 190 school days	£152 per pupil
	Cost for 29,223 (approx.) pupils who are eligible for free school meals	£4,441,896
	Cost assuming 69% of the pupils who are eligible for free school meals take up the offer of breakfast	£3,064,908

TCC calculates that approximately 29,223 pupils are eligible for free school meals.<sup>49</sup> Given there are 190 school days each year, providing each pupil with 80p for breakfast would cost a maximum of £4,441,896.

Currently, only 69%<sup>50</sup> of secondary school pupils who are eligible for free school meals, actually take them up. Based on this 69% take-up rate, TCC calculates that the total approximate cost would be £3,064,908.<sup>51</sup>

TCC appreciates that there are many demographic, geographic and financial factors that affect the way the school day is managed across Wales. Introducing any change on a national scale requires potential practical complexities to be worked through. To overcome one of the biggest barriers to delivering such an initiative, TCC suggests the 80p breakfast allowance be available to pupils until the end of morning break and then removed from the system (as it is in West Lothian, a Scottish local authority which has already implemented a similar solution). This would accommodate those secondary schools whose canteens do not currently open for breakfast, and those where school transport arrives just before registration. This would also mean there would be no need for an additional supervision resource or infrastructure.

Making this modest investment would not only safeguard the existing free school meals investment but also support current Welsh Government policies and commitments. For example, the Welsh Government formally adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 14 January 2004, committing itself to the principle that children and young people have the following basic human rights: the right to life, survival and development (Article 6), the right to access adequate, nutritious food, clean water, and the best possible healthcare (Article 24) and the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27). While parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to provide for the child's material needs, 'the State' – read Welsh Government – has a responsibility to assist parents and guardians to alleviate poverty where needed.

[50] South Wales Food Poverty Alliance (2019), Food Poverty in South Wales: A call to action. p18.

[51] Obviously, the potential cost decreases as take up decreases. Therefore, a take up of 50% would be approximately £2,220,948.



Increasing the free school meals allowance would also help Welsh Government meet its obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, developing a more ambitious and resourceful solution to poverty. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 continues to provide the legislative framework for tackling child poverty in Wales, placing a duty on Welsh Ministers and named public bodies, including local authorities, to set objectives for tackling child poverty. TCC's proposal offers an immediate and inexpensive route to help implement its Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2015, particularly its third objective to 'reduce the inequalities which exist in the health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest'.

Ultimately, this is an opportunity to alleviate the worst effects of hunger in secondary schools and reduce the instances of teachers bailing out government by spending their hard-earned money on lessening hunger in the classroom. It would mean children would be less hungry, happier, and their academic performance, over time, would improve. Crucially, it would support delivery of the new curriculum for Wales, ensuring each pupil is able to participate fully in this new and exciting, innovative approach to learning. Pupils are more likely to be ambitious and capable learners and healthy, confident individuals if they are not hungry.

## APPENDIX

### HISTORY OF THE FREE SCHOOL MEALS ALLOWANCE <sup>52</sup>

**The Forster Act 1870:** elementary education became compulsory with the introduction of this act. However, hundreds of thousands of poor schoolchildren were regularly arriving at school underfed and unable to benefit from this education. Philanthropic measures to alleviate suffering, many instigated by teachers using personal funds, spread throughout the country.

**Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906:** this act allowed Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to provide free meals to elementary schoolchildren, funded out of local rates. Robert Morant, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education, argued that this would enhance the ability of poor children to receive a decent education, and that a better and more widely educated workforce would help the UK to compete with technically advanced countries, such as Germany and the US.

**The Education Act 1944:** this act required all LEAs to provide a midday meal and set nutritional guidelines to follow. This was soon deemed too costly and subsequent governments sought to curtail spending. In 1949, the Labour government allowed LEAs to charge 6d. per meal while still providing some meals free to disadvantaged schoolchildren; in the 1950s and 1960s approximately 50% of school children - both elementary and secondary - were taking nutritionally-designed midday meals with 5 to 10% getting them free. Over 90% had free daily milk.

**1980s onwards:** Since 1980, successive governments have rowed back from the mid-century attempts to ensure nutritionally-balanced school menus as part of the 'nanny state', opting instead for parental control over children's diets. By the early 1980s, only 50% of secondary school pupils were having meals in school either for payment, or free of charge. The 1980 Education Act removed the obligation to provide school meals except for pupils whose parents were in receipt of supplementary benefit or family income supplement and the type of meal provided free of charge was considered suitable also for those paying pupils, if the LEA extended feeding beyond this statutory minimum.