



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Corrected oral evidence: Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Tuesday 28 January 2020

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Members present: Lord Krebs (The Chair); The Earl of Caithness; Lord Empey; Baroness Janke; Baroness Osamor; Baroness Parminter; Baroness Sanderson of Welton; Baroness Sater.

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 37 - 45

Witnesses

I: Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor of Psychology at the University of Northumbria; Dr Mary Bousted, Joint General-Secretary of the National Education Union; Alysa Remtulla, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Magic Breakfast.

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Examination of witnesses

Professor Greta Defeyter, Dr Mary Bousted and Alysa Remtulla.

Q37 The Chair: Welcome to our witness panel to this evidence session in our inquiry into poverty, food, health and the environment. This is a session on children and schools. Thank you very much for coming to join us. In a moment, I will invite each of our witnesses to very briefly introduce yourselves. This meeting is being broadcast live on the parliamentary website, so sotto voce comments may well be picked up by the microphones. I remind Members with relevant interests to place them on the record by making an oral declaration. Perhaps I can now invite the witnesses to introduce themselves, starting with Alysa.

Alysa Remtulla: I am head of policy and campaigns at Magic Breakfast.

Dr Mary Bousted: I am joint general secretary with Kevin Courtney of the National Education Union.

Professor Greta Defeyter: I am director of the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University.

Q38 The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I am going to kick off right away with a very general question. From your experience, how prevalent are the problems of poverty and food insecurity among school-aged children, and what impact do these have on the children who experience them? Who would like to kick off with that?

Professor Greta Defeyter: It is first worth mentioning that, in a recent public opinion poll, poverty ranked third as the biggest worry, following Brexit and the NHS. It is very much in the public eye. Recent data published by the End Child Poverty coalition clearly shows that poverty is rising, indeed in places where it is already highest. Child poverty is becoming the norm in many of our constituencies, and in some over 50% of children live in poverty. Child poverty is particularly rising in parts of major cities, especially London, Birmingham and Manchester, suggesting that inequality is growing.

In a similar vein, the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts that 5.1 million children will live in poverty by 2022. Similarly, the Households Below Average Income figures published by the Department for Work and Pensions in March 2019 indicate that almost 30% of all children—or nine children in every classroom of 30—will live in poverty.

While this number is the same as that reported in the previous year's figures, there has been an increase in child poverty of over 500,000 over the last decade. In addition, the HBAI figures show that 43% of children live in households with three or more children in poverty; 45% of children from black, Asian and minority ethnic families grow up in poverty; and 47% of children from lone-parent families, those who are most disadvantaged in our society, are in poverty. Some 70% of children in poverty are from working households; 53% of children growing up poor are under the age of five; and the HBAI's prediction is that 5.6 million

children in this country will be in poverty by 2022. That is 62% of children who live in single-parent households.

While there is a difference in those figures which is an artefact of the reporting measurement that we take, there is little doubt that child poverty has increased over the last decade. I could go on to some of the reasons why. Would you like me to talk about food insecurity briefly?

The Chair: Yes, if you would, but keep it brief. Just before you get there, we were asking for the definition of poverty in the previous session. Would you very briefly give us how you define poverty to support these numbers?

Professor Greta Defeyter: It is relative to 60% of median household income, so it has to be below that rate.

The Chair: That is slightly different from what the JRF gave us earlier on.

Professor Greta Defeyter: Correct.

The Chair: Thank you.

Professor Greta Defeyter: There are different ways of measuring it, and that accounts for the slight differences in the figures. However, there is little doubt that the actual rate of child poverty is rising. On that we all agree.

The Chair: Would you like to say a little about food insecurity?

Professor Greta Defeyter: Yes. It has not been measured in this country. It will be included in the Family Resources Survey. They will use the USDA food insecurity measure, which consists of 10 questions looking at food insecurity.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations defines food insecurity thus: "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so". I will be using this definition.

At the moment, we do not measure food insecurity. The data from the Family Resources Survey will not be available until March 2021. However, in the meantime, there are some estimates of food insecurity in the UK. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN estimates that 10.4% of the UK population—some 8.4 million people over the age of 15—live in moderate or severe food poverty, with estimates ranging between 20% and 30% of children suffering from food poverty under the age of 15 and 4% of children not having three meals a day. In addition, we have thousands of extremely vulnerable children who are entirely excluded from these figures because they are undocumented or have no recourse to public funds.

The rate of food insecurity is clearly demonstrated in the increased rate of food banks. I heard yesterday that there are more food banks in the

UK than branches of McDonald's, which is astounding. It is not only adults using food banks but families going for emergency food aid.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Would Mary and Alysa like to add anything to that very comprehensive summary?

Dr Mary Bousted: Sorry, what was the question again?

The Chair: Just to be clear, the question is how prevalent are the problems of poverty and food insecurity? Greta has given us a very thorough account of that. The other half is what impact do these issues have upon those children experiencing them? Could you elaborate a bit on that part?

Dr Mary Bousted: Of course. Thank you for those figures. I do not have to present them, which is really great, because you did it much better than me.

Since April 2018, the National Education Union has done five member surveys into child poverty and its effect on children. They are the surveys to which we get the biggest responses from the membership. We regularly get over 1,000 members responding, which makes them significant for the union. Over half of the teachers responding to our 2019 survey on poverty in the classroom told us that their students experienced hunger: 57% said that they witnessed hungry pupils.

Lord Empey: What percentage?

Dr Mary Bousted: It was 57%. And 50% said that they witnessed ill health, which includes mental ill health as a result of poverty. We know that poverty is absolutely detrimental to children's learning. From the Education Policy Institute study in 2016, we know that 40% of the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their normal peers, those who are not in poverty, is created before you start school. Children who have lived in poverty between the ages of one and five, even children who might dip into poverty and come out again, start school with this 40% attainment gap. It does not need to be persistent: the stress of experiencing poverty, particularly food insecurity, is long lasting. That attainment gap grows throughout school, so by the time that they are 16, disadvantaged children will be two years behind their more advantaged peers in their learning.

Our members talk about the physical effects of poverty, such as clothing and uniform—shoes are a particular problem. Here are some quotes from members: "Many children wear ill-fitting uniform and some have broken shoes. They don't seem to have holidays or go anywhere outside of school, this affects the width of experiences to enrich their learning and understanding". It also means that they cannot buy school equipment. A member wrote, "I asked a learner to buy a calculator to use in class and the student said 'I am poor.' On the same issue another said 'I will have to wait until I am paid next.'" They talk about parents working full-time in jobs but still not able to get the basics. They talk about children lacking

sleep. These children get little sleep at home, often because they are in accommodation that is very crowded or with very damp walls. Some members write about children sleeping in beds with bedbugs. They talk about rats and fleas. You get a deluge of information about that. They get little sleep at home and poor nourishment. The school system is focused on things that do not take priority for these children because if you are hungry, cold, tired and stressed, learning is very much a third-order priority.

Another member said, "Poverty is having a massive effect. Children's attitudes & aspirations are changed due to home life. They are starting school significantly behind because of an impoverished start. They are often angry & confused." Perhaps this is the most telling: "For some children they haven't eaten, or slept and are wearing the uniform they've slept in. Many of our children even when poorly are brought to school as parents are in zero-hour contracts and if they don't go to work will not be paid. Many staff members, including myself will spend our own money buying socks, tights and underwear to replace old ones and also biscuits, breadsticks and crackers to boost snack times. The ones who are in crisis are not only the children whose parents do not work, but the ones who do! This government should hang their heads in shame over what they've done to this generation!"

The spread of children living in poverty or in danger of it is uneven among our state schools. There is an increasing stratification of children going to different schools. Certain schools will educate disproportionate numbers of poor children, many in poor and disadvantaged areas, coastal areas, poorer parts of cities and poor towns, such as Bolton, where I come from. These schools find it more difficult to recruit and keep teachers and leaders. If you are a child going to a disadvantaged school where there is a predominantly disadvantaged intake, you are twice as likely to be taught by a teacher who is not qualified in the subject that they are teaching. It is much more difficult to get and keep teachers and leaders into these schools because the accountability regime simply does not take into account the context in which these schools are working. These poor children start school 40% behind and the schools get terrible Ofsted grades because they haven't caught up.

I will finish with this point. We find—and our members report very strongly in the surveys—with 40% to 50% cuts in local authority spending, these schools are left without speech and language therapists, family therapists or children's social workers. The waiting list for CAMHS is six months. When they look for welfare support officers and family attendance officers, they are simply not there. The school is left alone. Our members report that these teachers do not have the time or training to deal with facing the onslaught of the effects of poverty. It makes it very difficult to work in these schools.

The Chair: Thank you. That was very compelling evidence. I will ask two quick questions. Were the quotes from heads of primary or secondary schools?

Dr Mary Bousted: They were from members and are likely to be from teachers, not school leaders, as they make up the main part of our membership. I think that that is very powerful, because they are with these children all day; that is their lived and working reality. We do not know if they are primary or secondary—we get a mix in our surveys, generally half and half. Some of the quotes here are about A-level classes and young people not being able to buy the textbooks, et cetera, but the children are five to 18.

The Chair: The quotes you gave us were about poverty in general, including the ability to buy clothes, have a decent place to live and so on. Food poverty is part of that. Is your view that we should see food poverty as simply one section of poverty, not a distinct entity?

Dr Mary Bousted: Yes. I have quotes about food poverty. I thought that that was the next question. I will be able to give them later on in the session.

The Chair: If you do not get a chance to, could you send them in?

Dr Mary Bousted: Yes. Our members do talk about children begging for food from other children, schools staying open on Christmas Day because children will not get a Christmas dinner otherwise and schools providing food banks. We did a survey asking teachers if they spent their own money on children. They regularly buy food for them, as well as shoes. Shoes are a really big item for poor families, and buying them is a major expense for them.

Alysa Remtulla: I would echo most of the points already made. Here are two quick learnings from our programmes. We also survey the 480 schools that we work with every year. This year, we found that 70% of our schools reported that hunger was increasing and 80% reported an increase in poverty among their school community. The main reasons they gave were largely down to the rollout of universal credit and the instability of zero-hours contracts. I think the children put the impact on their lives more articulately than I probably ever could. Here are a few quotes from our programmes. Children describe the impact of hunger on their own lives thus: "I feel tired and stressed, like I can't concentrate on lessons"; "It hurts my stomach sometimes"; "I feel angry and also very tired"; "I feel worried because I want to eat very soon, as soon as I can".

The Chair: Thank you very much. I would like to move on to Baroness Janke.

Q39 **Baroness Janke:** Following what you have said, I have seen the union's report. One of the things that was in it as well, I believe, was about the significant numbers of children who do not attend school because they cannot afford the right equipment or do not have sufficient clothes. I want that down as well.

What is your view on the eligibility criteria for primary and secondary school pupils receiving free school meals? What would be the impact of extending eligibility?

Alysa Remtulla: From our conversations with schools, we believe that the current eligibility criteria are becoming an increasingly unreliable determinant of need. Teachers are telling us that the children arriving at school hungry are not only those who are eligible for free school meals but there is a second group whose families do not qualify for free school meals because of their income thresholds but are nevertheless struggling to put food on the table. You heard a lot about that group of families in the previous evidence session. In addition to that group of working poor families, the current eligibility criteria do not include children from families with no recourse to public funds. It is a massive issue that these children are being excluded. We definitely recommend reviewing the eligibility criteria and considering extending it to those groups at least, as well as considering universal provision. There is a lot of evidence demonstrating how that would reduce stigma and increase take-up.

Different eligibility criteria are used in the Government's free school breakfast programmes. These merit consideration. They rely on IDACI, the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, which our school partners have found quite an accurate measure of need. It uses the child's registered address to determine the likelihood that they live in an out-of-work or low-income family. The school becomes eligible for the National School Breakfast Programme if 50% of the pupils in that school fall into bands A to F, which are the highest levels of deprivation.

That is not to say that that could be brought across to free school meals immediately, because the school is eligible in the breakfast programme, rather than a specific child. However, it is worth considering some of the other indicators out there that we are finding measure need more accurately on the ground than the current eligibility criteria.

Baroness Janke: Could you tell me again, what is IDACI?

Alysa Remtulla: Yes, it stands for the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index.

Baroness Janke: Thank you.

The Chair: Mary and Greta, do you wish to add anything?

Dr Mary Bousted: It is the NEU's policy that there should be universal free school meals. We think that this would end what our members report as the stigma for children who get free school meals. Some children get bullied because of it, and children can be very cruel. If a child does not wear the right clothes, does not look right or is dirty or hungry, it is not necessarily that children will be kind. They are often not.

Families have to sign up to gain free school meals, which can be a huge barrier to poor families as some do not have access to a computer or the internet, and 16% of adults cannot fill out an online application form. The very fact that they have to sign up using a computer is a problem. I do not know if you have seen "I, Daniel Blake", but that illustrates the problem very well.

In the October survey last year, more than a third of our teachers told us that they had seen children being bullied because of their poverty. They obviously stop this when they see it. It is not true that children do not bully and are lovely all the time. They can bully.

Professor Greta Defeyter: I would like to add something to that. I really urge the Government to consider a school meal service rather than having free universal or free anything. I am of an age where I remember the choice being hot dinners or packed lunches. The choice was very simple. I had hot dinners. My parents would probably have qualified for free school meals under the current status.

We also have to look at those children who start school aged seven. I will not address preschool provision or nursery. When children start primary school, there are universal infant free school meals for the first three years. The take-up in that scheme has been phenomenal, and all the research reports suggest that it has reduced the stigma. More importantly, it is teaching our children good skills around what they consume, as well as the social enjoyment of sitting down and eating together. I get so annoyed when I see my university students walking around eating food. I am a bit of a traditionalist like that. I think that having that social experience of eating together, sharing food and having that downtime from school time is very important.

However, the provision is patchy across the UK. Up until the age of seven, children in Scotland and England benefit from universal infant free school meals regardless of their family income, but there is no universal provision in Wales and Northern Ireland. Depending on where you live in the UK, it is a postcode lottery whether you will have that provision. Children in England and Scotland benefit from the free fruit and vegetable scheme, which provides a piece of fruit or vegetable each day. We know the importance of vegetable and fruit consumption. Again, in Wales and Northern Ireland, there is no such scheme. In Wales, all children in primary school are entitled to a free breakfast—that is the whole school, which differs from the national scheme in England—but uptake is relatively low among the most disadvantaged.

As you have already heard, school meals are means-tested from the age of seven. For the life of me, for the last 15 years I have scoured every developmental theory of cognitive and physical development and of mental health and well-being, and the only accountability that I can see for having this come in at the age of seven is financial. There is no other reason whatever. We now know that brain maturation continues all the way until the age of 21. Therefore, while the first years of life are very important, especially when children are self-serving and learning when they become satisfied with food, it is important to maintain and establish good nutrition and dietary intake habits early on.

According to a recent report, extending universal infant free school meals to all primary and secondary school pupils on universal credit would extend eligibility to around 820,000 students in secondary schools through years 7 to 11 in 2024, but the cost would be between £280

million and £310 million, depending on the funding rate. This is looking at indexed inflation-related costs of school meals. Coupled with the cost of universal primary school meals, the promise would cost between £1.1 billion and £1.2 billion. This is a lot of money, but you have to offset it with the longer-term gain.

We know that food insecurity is related to a whole host of physical illnesses, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer and stroke. I could go on. Sir Michael Marmot could do it far better than I possibly can. We know that food insecurity is also related to mental health and well-being. Children who consistently experience food insecurity are two to three times more likely to have mental health issues than those who are not experiencing food insecurity. We know that food promotes and helps children attain learning through the glucose blood-brain barrier—through glucose uptake. It is therefore not just important that you eat food but what type of food you eat. Those underlying cognitions—executive function, short-term memory and attention—are fundamental processes to learning.

If we are looking at making an impact on educational attainment, school meals are a good system through which to do that in terms of attainment and health. However, I will qualify that statement by saying that the research on universal infant free school meals is quite patchy. Apart from some initial research evaluations that took place in the pilot programmes in 2013, which showed a two-month increase in educational attainment compared to a control group after introducing the scheme for the most disadvantaged children, little research has been conducted on educational attainment as an impact of introducing free school meals. However, there is clear evidence of the impact of school feeding programmes on children's attainment in tests of cognitive ability, as well as on their physical and mental health and well-being.

Dr Mary Bousted: I would like to add that 41% of the school leaders involved in the universal infant free school meal programme pilot, whom we surveyed, reported that the profile of healthy eating and making wise choices about eating had improved greatly in their schools. School leaders are very supportive of it.

The Chair: Greta, regarding the costs and benefits, although you can add up how much it would cost, that has got to be offset against savings in the future through people's contributions to society and requirements for health support. Has anybody done any modelling of that?

Professor Greta Defeyter: No. Some research has looked at the impact of breakfast, which is much easier for researchers to explore. I think that there are two parts to this question. Whether we are looking at school meals or breakfast, you have to look at the impact of the food versus the impact of the experience, and the two are often muddled up. Some of the research that cites gains from breakfast clubs is from breakfast, and some of the gains from universal infant free school meals may be attributed to the meal, or it may be multifactorial and about sitting in and

having time together. There has been no proper modelling on universal infant free school meals to my knowledge.

Alysa Remtulla: I will mention a few pieces of research that we have been looking into. There is quite good research now showing the link between breakfast and GCSE attainment: a child who regularly eats breakfast achieves, I think, two GCSE grades higher on average than a child who rarely eats breakfast. The DfE itself has done some very good modelling around the economic productivity benefits of achieving your GCSEs: your lifetime productivity increases by around 140,000 if you achieve them.

The Chair: Could you possibly send us a link to that study, Alysa, and to any evidence that you referred to, Greta?

Alysa Remtulla: Absolutely.

Professor Greta Defeyter: Yes. Is that for breakfast?

Alysa Remtulla: The lead study is, whereas the GCSE one is just about GCSEs.

The Chair: I would like to move on to Baroness Sanderson.

Q40 **Baroness Sanderson of Welton:** I think that you have probably covered quite a lot of this already. How effectively is the system of free school meals being delivered, and is it sufficiently funded? You have partly covered the second question about the impacts of universal infant free school meals. Would you like to add anything? You also talked about being bullied. Is there anything from the children receiving free school meals about how they find that experience or think that things could be done differently?

Dr Mary Bousted: We have not surveyed the children.

Baroness Sanderson of Welton: I mean through the teachers.

Dr Mary Bousted: I go into a lot of schools. There is no doubt that they do it differently. They try not to make a difference at the point of getting the free school meal. At schools where the parents put money on something and the children go and spend from that, the schools put money on. Schools do everything they can to try to disguise who is and is not on free school meals. Unfortunately, for these children that is difficult because many of them will look poor. Whether a child gets free school meals, every school I know will provide food for that child if they look hungry. They will just do it. They run breakfast clubs and after-school clubs, which will always have food. They will make sure that the children eat at lunchtime. One teacher in here says that children who are not eligible for free school meals but are from poor families choose bread rolls at lunchtime. That is noted and those children's diets are supplemented.

That has been very hard for schools. They have seen highly significant cuts to their funding over the last 10 years. It is all about making choices all the time. There is the effort involved in providing food, clean clothing and shoes at schools in deprived areas, where many of these children go. One respondent to a survey said, "We ran a breakfast club, but we don't have the funding to do it anymore". These children are often marked out and noticeable because they look poor. One respondent remarked, "When they come back from the long summer holidays, these children are visibly undernourished".

The Chair: Would either of the other panellists like to add something very briefly?

Professor Greta Defeyter: It will be very brief. I will talk about the funding process itself. It is quite pertinent to the discussion today. I conducted a study in 2018-19 in which we looked at the mechanism of funding schools from the Government to local authorities. The Government sets a budget for the DfE, which is sent to local authorities, which have their own funding arrangements negotiated with schools. In 2018-19, the DfE gave local authorities about £505 million collectively for means-tested free school meals rather than universal infant free school meals.

As a result of the children's future food inquiry, one of the young food ambassadors asked why her biometric system—a card or a fingerprint—which was credited for £2.30 per day was wiped clean at the end of the day if she had not been at school. We did some work looking into where this money that had been claimed by those entitled but who had missed a day of school went and where was the money? We used the COLLECT data from the DfE for 2016-17 and calculated that there is approximately £88.3 million per annum in the system going missing. Nobody, including the DfE, seems to quite know where that money is. I believe that the National Audit Office is currently looking at this. If that money can be recouped in the system, that tremendous saving could offset some of the cost of providing a school meal service, so to speak.

From the recent report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, we know that the cost of food has risen—we do not know what will happen following Friday—but that the funding provided to caterers has not risen with that. To maintain the same standard of provision, the funding rate would have to increase from £2.30 to £2.51 this year. There have been recent reports from the children's future food inquiry about the poor quality of food served in some schools. It is important to note that school caterers do a wonderful job and, alongside the teachers, are often the heart and soul of the school community. However, if we are going to be serious about school meals having an impact on children, we must correctly and properly fund the process and system.

The Chair: That £88 million that has disappeared is very interesting. Do you have an estimate of how much of the current £2.30 goes into the meals?

Professor Greta Defeyter: No. Nobody seems to be able to answer that for me either.

The Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful. Please can we move on to Baroness Osamor to ask the next question?

Q41 **Baroness Osamor:** The question is for Alysa Remtulla. Can you talk us through the part that your organisation plays? What is the thinking behind breakfast clubs? How effectively and sustainably has the National School Breakfast Programme been rolled out? Lastly, is it appropriate for schools to be tasked with the problem of dealing with child food poverty?

Alysa Remtulla: Magic Breakfast exists to ensure that no child starts their day too hungry to learn. We deliver healthy breakfast food and provide expert support to schools to help them reach the children at greatest risk of hunger. We work in 480 schools in England and Scotland. We also partner with another charity, Family Action, to deliver the National School Breakfast Programme, which runs in an additional 1,800 schools in England.

The thinking behind the breakfast clubs—our theory of change—is very simple: a hungry child cannot concentrate on their lessons and misses out on hours of valuable learning. That means they fall behind their wealthier peers and that contributes to the educational attainment gap, which we have already discussed on this panel. Very strong evidence demonstrates that school breakfasts can play an important role in addressing this. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that, compared to those in a school with no breakfast provision, children at schools with universal free school breakfast provision made two months' additional progress over the course of an academic year. Our own results from Magic Breakfast monitoring indicate that this is largely a result of improvements to the classroom environment through behaviour, punctuality, attendance, emotional and mental well-being, social skills and a whole range of effects that affect children's ability to learn and contribute to them being more ready to learn in the classroom.

We have implemented the National School Breakfast Programme since March 2018 in collaboration with Family Action. The contract is worth about £12 million annually and is funded from the soft drinks industry levy. Our assessment is that the programme has been very successful and has achieved some very similar results to Magic Breakfast's own programme, such as improvements in behaviour, attendance and healthy eating habits. At the moment, there are 1,800 schools on the programme. Earlier this month, the Department for Education announced that it would extend funding for those schools for an additional term, so those schools will now end support in July 2020. At the same time, it also announced that it will fund Magic Breakfast and Family Action to recruit up to 650 new schools to take part in the programme. Those original schools will lose government funding in July 2020 and will have to find other forms of support, either from the private sector or their own school budgets, which, as we have already heard, are incredibly tight. We are working with those schools to see what can be done. It is too early to say

how many will be able to continue their programmes beyond the life of the programme. Our assessment is that schools see the value of school breakfast clubs but have many competing demands on their budgets. We are working on this now. The new schools that we recruit into the second phase of the programme will also end their support after a year.

Our overall assessment is that we very warmly welcome the Department for Education's commitment and the leadership that it has shown on school breakfasts. This is really a flagship programme. However, we would be the first to acknowledge that it is not "job done, problem solved". Even with government funding, we are reaching about 20% of the children who we think are at risk of hunger. The funding is only short term. After the year or two of support, schools are left to find their own financial support for their breakfast club. This is a very different approach to that which the Government take on other issues in schools, such as free school meals. I will stop there for now.

The Chair: The second half of the question was: is it appropriate for schools to be tasked with the problem of dealing with food poverty? It seems to me that when the Government have a problem with something—terrorism, food poverty or whatever—they let the schools sort it out. I declare an interest because my daughter is a schoolteacher. I know that they do lots of other stuff, such as educating and teaching the children. Is it right that schools are asked to do this?

Alysa Remtulla: At their best, schools can be a hub for services and can very effectively deliver a range of interventions, but they need to be properly funded to do that so that they have the resources. As you said, teachers have full-time jobs to teach. If they are going to be tasked with delivering services to counteract the impact of poverty, they will need proper funding for that. The longer-term drivers of poverty and food insecurity, which were very well highlighted in the previous evidence session, need to be addressed as well. We cannot rely only on schools to fill in the gaps.

The Chair: Mary, do your members have things to say about that?

Dr Mary Bousted: They do. I think that it very much depends on the school in which you teach, such as one with a significant percentage—over 30%—of children living in poverty, who come to school hungry, thirsty and cold, in inadequate clothing, often not washed properly because the washing facilities are not appropriate and tired because they do not have a good place to sleep.

Poverty also brings stress into the family home. Children often come to school having witnessed or been subject to family dysfunction in various ways. I was in a school in Blackpool recently where the school leader said, "We spend 98% of the time in this school safeguarding children". That is the key thing. When the children come through the door, there is a screening process to pick up the signs of children whose circumstances have changed from one night to the other. We are finding schools reporting that they are the hub. The last Labour Government wanted the

every child matters principle because primary schools were in pram-pushing distance. They are a public building that parents overwhelmingly engage with in a way that they may not with other public services.

If we are going to ask schools to be that support service for poverty, we have to make sure that they are supported; that they have the money to feed children properly; that they have children's social workers and family therapists; that there is proper access to child and adolescent mental health services, rather than a wait of over six months and only being seen if you say that you are suicidal or have attempted suicide; that there are Sure Start centres, which have been drastically cut down, so that the parents who have grown up in disadvantaged families themselves get early intervention about the best ways to care for, feed and play with their children to break a cycle of deprivation. The one thing we know is that cycles of deprivation are endemic and that, unless there is early intervention, you will do to others what was done to you. Learned behaviour is very hard to break.

I think that teachers, support staff and school leaders are the heroes here. In many schools, they do an impossible job under uniquely challenging circumstances. Yet being in those schools is a career-ending threat for school leaders and teachers. All it takes is one Ofsted inspection that says, "This school is not providing a wide or broad enough curriculum", or "The children in this school aren't progressing as well as the children in other schools", which is impossible for the schools in the most deprived areas, to threaten and ruin your career.

You cannot require a profession to be heroic, nor can you require leaders and teachers to work in schools where it is draining and exhausting because of the daily contact with the reality of the effects of poverty on children and young people's lives, which is distressing. You take it home with you and it causes your own mental health problems and strains. You cannot require people to do that and then say, "Oh, and by the way, you are going to be told through an unfair and invalid inspection process that you are the problem".

I will finish with this. The Education Policy Institute did a study in 2016 on Ofsted inspections. It is worth the Committee looking at this. It may seem a bit of a way from what you are about. The study found that, even if they achieved a very robust measure of value-added progress over a three-year period, schools in deprived areas were still likely to get a negative Ofsted judgment. If there was a three-year decline in the same measure of value-added progress in schools in the leafy suburbs, they were much more likely to be rated good or outstanding. I think that the reality of child poverty is so unpalatable that people would rather not confront it and instead blame the schools in those areas, which are doing the hardest job under the most difficult circumstances. That means that the teachers change around more frequently. Those children need the security of a teacher who they know. They also have fewer teachers and fewer leaders, so they are triply disadvantaged.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is a very comprehensive answer.

We are running out of time and have three more topics that we want to cover. I ask you to be really brief so that we can get through this in the next 10 minutes.

Q42 **Baroness Sater:** I did not declare an interest. I was previously chair of StreetGames and am now its patron. We roll out holiday hunger programmes.

We know that children across the country experience holiday hunger, and I think that you have touched on the effects of that today. How prevalent do you think that it is? How can central and local government combat these issues?

Alysa Remtulla: I would make a conservative estimate that around 3 million children are affected by holiday hunger. That includes those who are eligible for free school meals and lose that access during the holidays, as well as an additional 2 million living in working poor families.

Our view is that, at the moment, the response to holiday hunger is largely driven by the third sector and is piecemeal. It is like a postcode lottery which depends on where in the country you live and whether you have access to the work that the charity is doing. Magic Breakfast runs a holiday club at five schools in Tower Hamlets with funding support from Morgan Stanley. We would like to see a co-ordinated national response from the Government. At the moment, the Government's funding for holiday hunger is around £9 million, which reaches 50,000 children—a small fraction of the children that we think might need those services.

Dr Mary Bousted: We asked our members in 2018 if they were seeing more holiday hunger. More than half of the members polled confirmed that children in their school experienced holiday hunger, and 77% said that the situation had got worse in the previous three years and was affecting more children. There were strong concerns that local initiatives, including food banks, were not equipped to meet demand. That is when a member said, "I see children come back to school in September looking visibly less well nourished." The NEU's concern is that, as Alysa said, the Government's response is piecemeal. There are projects and holiday club projects, but, if you are not in that project, where do you go to stop holiday hunger? Most recently, there was the *Sunday Times* readers' shock horror that children were in this level of poverty and they gave millions of pounds for children in poverty and hunger. The reality is extremely unpalatable, but piecemeal approaches will not help.

The Chair: Greta, would you like to add anything very briefly?

Professor Greta Defeyter: Yes. The 3 million figure comes from the *Hungry Holidays* report by Feeding Britain and Frank Field's team. It is very piecemeal. I have now conducted research on over 800 holiday clubs. I dislike "holiday hunger" for two reasons. Historically, we adopted the term from the USA, where holiday clubs have run for about 20 years. They are still running, so policy has not driven a big change in holiday hunger. I also think that it does not encapsulate all that these holiday clubs do. Holiday clubs, or holiday provision, offer a range of activities,

including physical activities, childminding or childcare and cultural trips; they bond communities together; they run cooking classes for parents—and I could go on. When we look at the effects of poverty across the holiday period, they are not just in relation to food insecurity but poor people are encapsulated and defined by the neighbourhood that they live in because they do not have money for transport to leave those areas or visit cultural activities and hubs. Even though the holiday club provision is very patchy and piecemeal—as in the paper that I wrote in 2019—we know that they are hitting those most in need.

The Chair: Thank you. I would like to move quickly on to Baroness Parminter.

Q43 **Baroness Parminter:** How effective is the Government's school food plan? It is mandatory, but there is no money going into it.

Alysa Remtulla: Out of *The School Food Plan* came a recommendation about mandatory school food standards. I will focus my assessment on this. I consulted with School Food Matters and am very grateful to them for their opinions. Overall, the feeling was that the standards were a good shift in the right direction and that their launch presented an opportunity to engage schools around school food standards and was in itself a good opportunity to start that conversation.

Here are the disadvantages or areas for improvement. There is a loophole in the legislation that means that around 4,000 academies are exempt from the standards. This needs addressing. However, the biggest challenge that we see is the lack of monitoring of the standards. Because of that, they are not necessarily enforceable. There is no watchdog or body that monitors how the standards are implemented.

Baroness Parminter: Who would you want to do that?

Alysa Remtulla: The children's future food inquiry is calling for a watchdog that could have children in its membership, uphold the standards and hold schools to account. We think that some kind of watchdog needs to be set up.

Dr Mary Boustead: I have nothing to add to that.

The Chair: Greta, do you have anything to add?

Professor Greta Defeyter: I think that we should go beyond a watchdog and that it should be included in Ofsted inspections. In August 2016, the first chapter of the Government's childhood obesity plan stated, "we will introduce a new voluntary healthy rating scheme for primary schools to recognise and encourage their contribution to preventing obesity by helping children to eat better and move more. This scheme will be taken into account during Ofsted inspections". This scheme has not been introduced. In fact, in the latest childhood obesity plan of June 2018, I could not find any reference at all to healthy eating.

Dr Mary Bousted: I absolutely disagree with that. The thing is to always try to cram more into Ofsted inspections. Inspectors have two days in schools and, in my view, do not make valid and reliable judgments because they have too much to look at and are not qualified to do so. The danger is that there is always pressure to put more into the Ofsted inspection framework. If we look at food standards in schools, this should be done by people who know something about food standards. We cannot require Ofsted inspectors to be nutritionists and food standards experts as well. They have enough difficulty being education experts.

The Chair: Do you want to very briefly respond to that in a couple of sentences? We are nearly out of time.

Professor Greta Defeyter: I will respond. In England, the problem at the moment is that the school governors are accountable for school food standards and the meal plan. I have been a governor at a school for eight years now and school food has never been mentioned in a governors' meeting, apart from our looking at introducing a school breakfast club. While I take the point around Ofsted inspectors not being equipped, there must be some mechanism so that Ofsted can collect data on what is served, whether through an inspection on the day or menus being served, with the watchdog feeding into that to account to that reporting body.

The Chair: We clearly have a diversity of views, on which we will cogitate. I come on to our last point. Back to you, Baroness Sater.

Q44 **Baroness Sater:** What do you think would be the most effective intervention to reduce levels of poverty and food insecurity among school-aged children?

Alysa Remtulla: I will come at this from the perspective of a charity working on school breakfasts. We are calling for school breakfast legislation. We want to see it put into law in the same way that schools are currently obliged to provide lunch. At the moment, whether you have access to a free school breakfast depends on what part of the country you live in, what school you go to and whether it happens to be one that a charity is working in. We believe that legislation would extend that right to all children and would mean that no child was starting the day too hungry to learn.

The Chair: What would be your one magic bullet?

Dr Mary Bousted: It would be universal free school meals.

Professor Greta Defeyter: I will have parts A and B, but I will count them as one if that is okay. My first ask would be to increase funding to schools. Teachers should not have to subsidise their classroom activity. My son is a schoolteacher and takes in pens, paper, stickies, all kinds of things. On average, he spends about £25 a week on this to supplement what is in the school.

The problem is that the school budget is under immense pressure. I am sure that my colleague on the right-hand side would know far more about that than me. When we look at an intervention, we cannot look at one magic bullet. Children experiencing poverty experience it before, in and after school, as well as across the summer holidays. I am sure that you have all heard about the benefit reforms that lots of people are suggesting. We need a coherent and comprehensive approach to tackling poverty, all days of the year, for children. They are the same children going to breakfast clubs, wearing the shabby uniforms and going to the holiday provision.

Q45 Lord Empey: In a previous intervention you said that there was an amount provided for school meals but you could not quantify how much was actually spent on food. It seems a fairly basic piece of information that one needs. How can you work out the budget? If the costs of wages continue to rise, the proportion of money spent on food will be where the crunch comes. Without that information, how do you make a judgment?

Professor Greta Defeyter: I asked the DfE for that information and some transparency over local funding arrangements negotiated with schools. The response from the DfE was that that was a local arrangement. I have also asked some of the caterers how much is on the plate in monetary terms. I have not had a response to that either.

Costs vary in different parts of the country, depending on whether you are a local authority cook or have been a cook in a private organisation. The easiest way to address this would be to work from the bottom up. You cost a three-week menu of food provision on the plate, add in all your overheads and end up with a figure that should be funded.

Lord Empey: Can we ask the department for information on that?

The Chair: I would like to thank our three witnesses, who have given some very interesting and powerful evidence. It will all contribute to our inquiry when we come to write the report. As I mentioned at the beginning, there will be a transcript of this session sent to you for any corrections that you wish to make. There have been a few points where we have asked you to send us some further evidence—a couple of reports, one from Alys and one from Greta. If there is anything that you feel that we did not ask but you wish we had, or to which you would like to add additional points on further reflection, please write in and we will incorporate that into our evidence. Thank you very much indeed.