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Joint General Secretaries  
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The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
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13 October 2020

By email & post to: Prime Minister, Boris Johnson  
Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

CC by email to: Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP

Dear Prime Minister and Chancellor,

We understand these are unprecedented times.

We welcomed the conversation you started this summer about life chances for disadvantaged children and what Coronavirus means for these students and their access to learning. The health pandemic has shone a light on the barriers for students living in low income and poor families, such as the digital divide – so we think now is the time to attack the ways in which poverty holds students back.

This week's figures by the *End Child Poverty* coalition show that more than half of children living in some constituencies are growing up poor when housing costs are factored in. The Midlands and northern cities have seen the sharpest increase in child poverty. The latest IPPR research indicates that an additional 200,000 children will be pushed into poverty by Christmas.

We know you are considering Government's options for how to counter the devastating impact of Coronavirus on families living in or on the brink of poverty. Thousands of families have been pushed into poverty – some for the first time – through wage cuts and job losses; the overall increased cost of keeping children at home during the national lockdown has played a role.

Poverty creates concrete barriers to learning, academic progress and accessing school life. This is why we are writing to you today with the five policy recommendations below. Investing in young people's ability to access learning is a sensible and measured investment. It saves taxpayer spending

in other departments, such as exclusion and youth justice. Remote learning will remain a major feature of the landscape this year and so we need to step up action to counter the digital divide. Education staff and head teachers are taking their professional responsibilities immensely seriously during the pandemic and are working very flexibly and doggedly to support families and student welfare. This applies particularly in schools in high poverty areas. However, schools cannot alleviate the hardship created by Coronavirus.

As winter approaches, one million families are going into debt in order to cover the cost of a suitable school uniform. 480,000 children await the digital devices promised by the Government; thousands more have no access to the internet or online learning at home. 1.5 million children from households eligible for Universal Credit payments do not have access to Free School Meals (FSM), and the fast approaching October half term brings with it the threat of holiday hunger to over a million more.

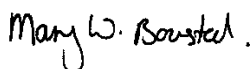
We believe action in these 5 areas is urgent. We must think about the experiences of children growing up in low income families and use the evidence that we have about what can be transformative in terms of success in school.

We ask that you act urgently to:

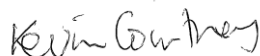
1. Expand the Free School Meal scheme to include every child from a household in receipt of Universal Credit, or equivalent benefits.
2. Eradicate holiday hunger by extending FSM provision of at least £15 per child per week during all school holidays.
3. Reform all school uniform policies to ensure uniform options are affordable for families in the local community.
4. Provide free household internet access for children and young people in households on Universal Credit.
5. Establish a new, dedicated technology budget for all schools to combat the digital divide.

These five actions would help make your Government's levelling up agenda a reality for many families across the country. These are the first step in the National Education Union's campaign to ensure that no child left is behind.

Yours sincerely



**Mary Boustead**  
**Joint General Secretary**



**Kevin Courtney**  
**Joint General Secretary**