

EMBARGOED 0001 MONDAY 17 DECEMBER 2018

A distressing new reality: child poverty at Christmas

December 2018

1,026 members of the National Education Union responded to the poll, which was conducted between 23-26 November 2018. Around three quarters of respondents were secondary school teachers and a quarter were primary.

Key findings about trends

- 1.1. 53% of respondents believe there are children or young people in their school who will go hungry over Christmas. 39% did not know.
- 1.2. 74% of respondents who said this was an issue believe that up to 20% of children or young people in their school will experience holiday hunger over Christmas. 16% believe that between 20% and 30% of their children will experience hunger over this period. (Figure 1)

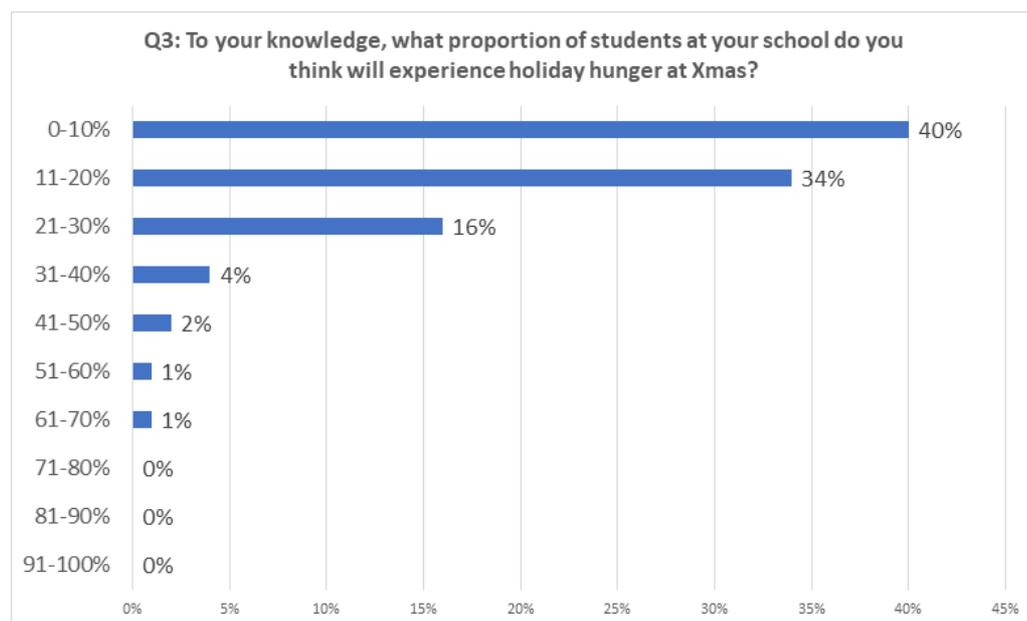


Figure 1

- 1.3. 46% say that holiday hunger has got worse compared to three years ago and only 2% said it had got better. 23% said the problems with holiday hunger remain the same. (Figure 2, over)

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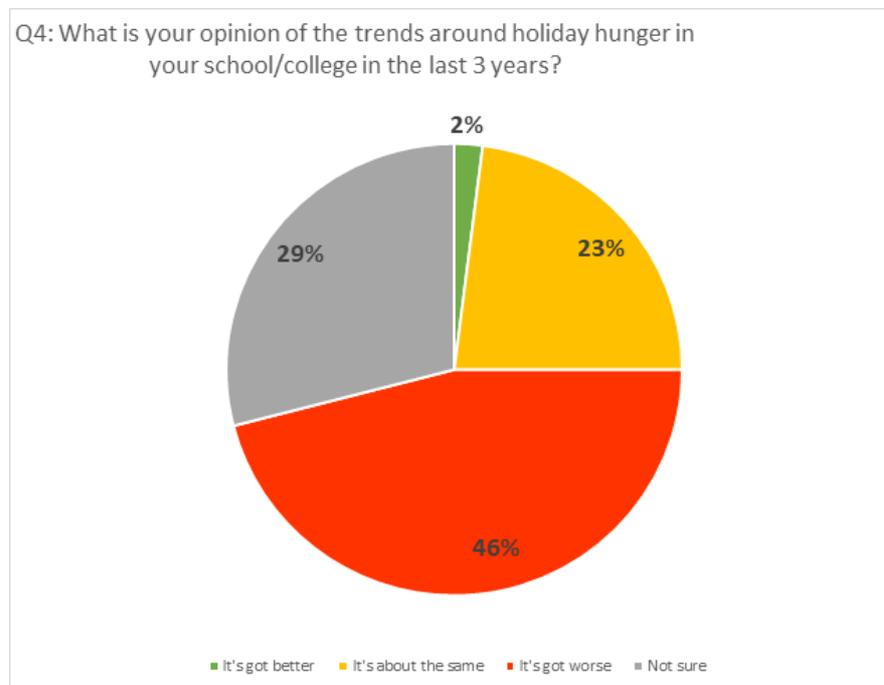


Figure 2

1.4. 63% of respondents say that more families are unable to afford adequate shoes or clothing this winter compared to three years ago. 16% said there was no change and only 1% said families were more able to afford these necessities. (Figure 3)

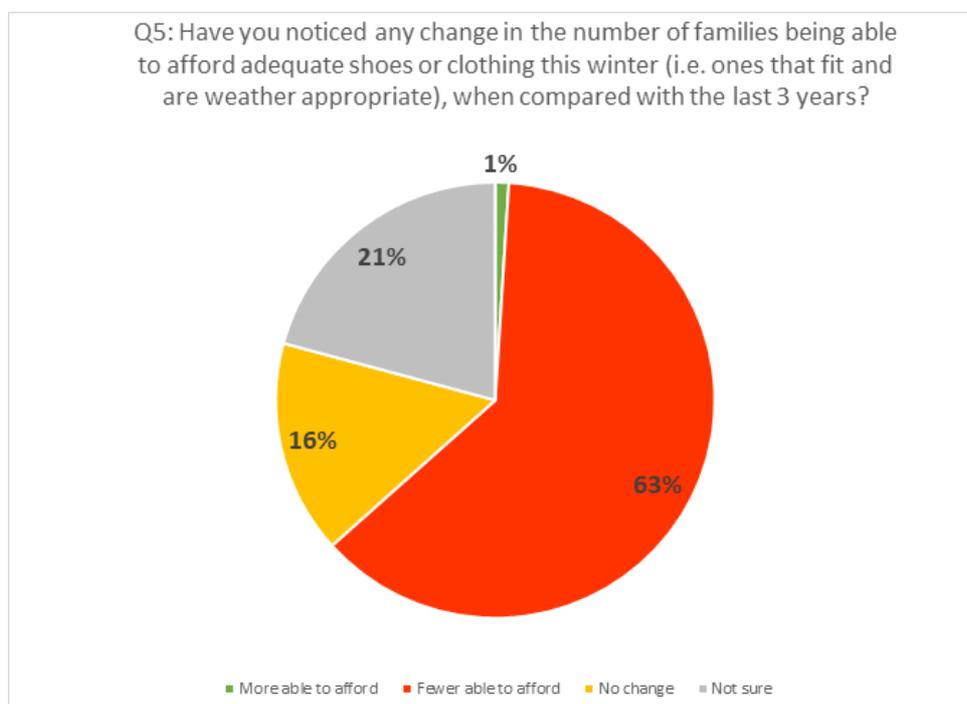


Figure 3

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- 1.5. 46% of teachers believe that, compared with three years ago, there are more housing issues (poor quality, insecure, overcrowded or temporary accommodation) impacting upon the education of children and young people. (Figure 4)

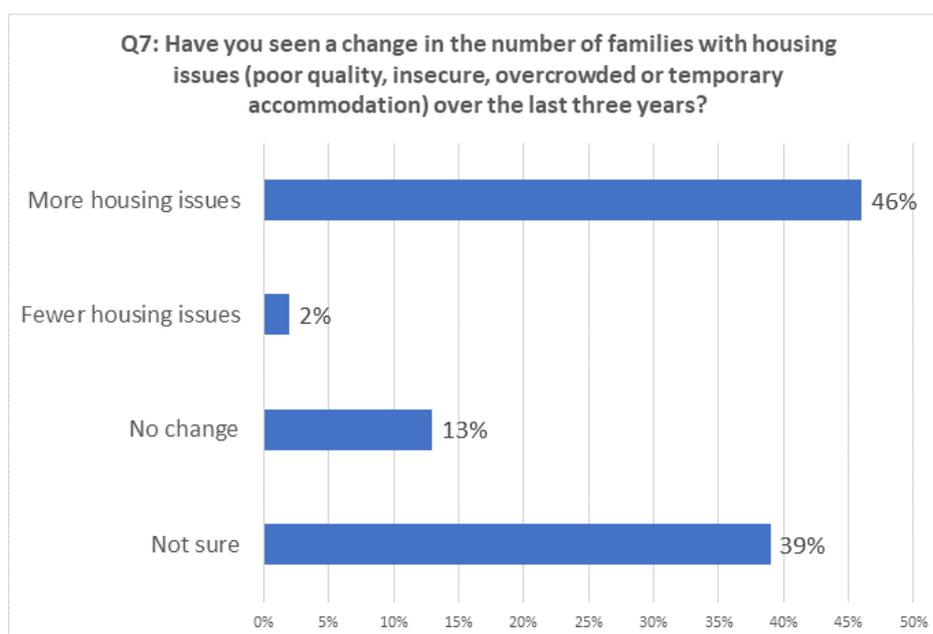


Figure 4

- 1.6. 40% of respondents say that they or their school has needed to start providing extra items for their children and young people and their families this winter because of poverty. 42% of teachers weren't sure whether their school had needed to start providing extra items linked to poverty, but only 18% were confident that their school hadn't needed to do this.

- 1.7. In terms of the impact of poverty on the education of children, teachers identified:

- 85% behavioural issues
- 83% absences from school
- 81% lack of concentration
- 79% lateness to school
- 59% impacts on children's health
- only 3% have observed none of these consequences

(Table 1, over)

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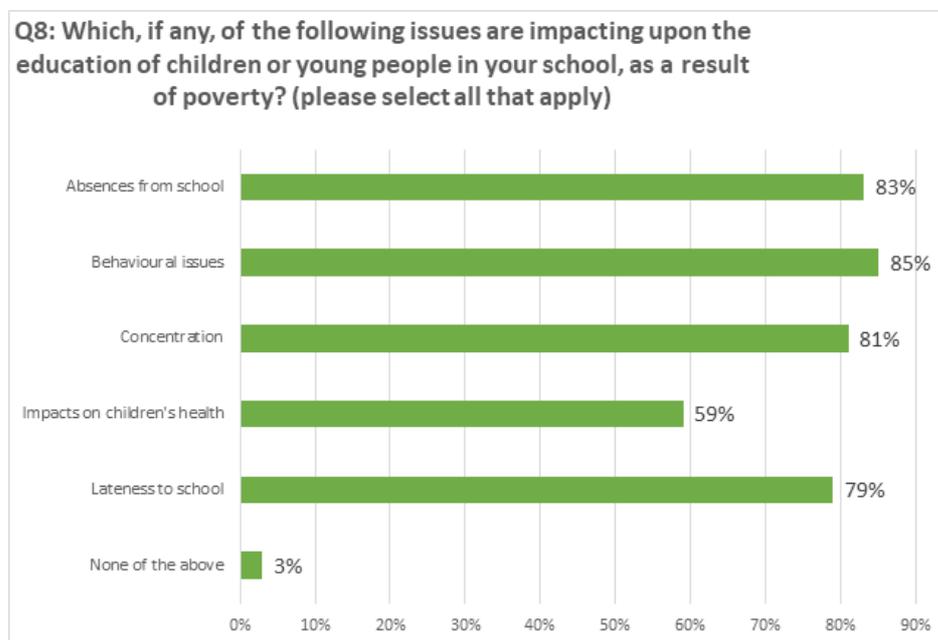


Table 1

Quotes from respondents

1. Inadequate winter clothing

A large number of teachers told us that children and young people are going to school without shoes and clothing that are appropriate for winter weather, that are ill-fitting, old and in bad condition and unwashed.

“Children wearing small clothes or torn shoes. Only having a total of one pair of shoes. Not having a warm coat. Hand me downs in a bad condition.”

“Holes in shoes, no outside coat (90%) trousers far too short, holes in clothes, still wearing sandals/unsuitable footwear in November (on very cold days) 80% of girls.”

“More children having to wear their PE pumps in school or borrowing some from Lost Property (outdoor shoes have holes in). This is BEFORE Universal Credit is rolled out across Sheffield...”

“Unable to buy new clothing once damaged so come in their old clothing with holes, etc. Shoes are often falling apart trainers which have holes in and all different colours.”

“Uniform is either too big to last the year or small as it’s last years. Girls have cheap shoes that let the water in. Boys’ shoes have the sole hanging off. I don’t see many coats!!”

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"I see children with dirty clothes. Wearing canvas shoes in wet and cold weather, not having a decent winter coat, wearing clothes that clearly aren't theirs and being bought shoes that are too big for them so they will last longer.

"Children with only one set of uniform so if it is wet or dirty they have nothing to wear the next day."

"Kids come in without winter coats even in the coldest weather, or with shoes held together by tape."

"Good shoes are too expensive so students are coming to school in cheap shoes that lasts a few weeks at most. I often have students asking me if I can glue their shoes back together because the sole has fallen off. Some students smell as they are in the same shirt/ uniform all week!"

"Summer shoes still being worn. Shoes with elastic bands to keep them together. Holes in shoes."

"I found out last week that a third of my class sleep in their uniforms as they don't have pyjamas. Some children turn up for forest school in totally inappropriate clothing e.g. dress and flimsy shoes but may be all they have."

"Siblings in different year groups sharing PE kit."

2. Impact of poverty on children and young people

Teachers told us of the shame and distress that children and young people feel because of poverty and hunger. The lack of basic clothing and sanitary items is also resulting in absence from school.

"Mute students going cold, making excuses, feeling ashamed."

"Broken shoes and children afraid to tell their parents."

"Requests for repairs to be done in school. Distress at holes in clothes e.g. knees on trousers from children. Friday clothes on Mondays as clothes are not washed due to cost of this. Taking of others' property if it is not named. Certain families resorting to taking and cutting out the other child's name in clothes."

"Kids pretend they are just not wearing a coat because they don't feel the cold."

"One student wore his trousers backwards as he didn't want anyone to know he had holes in the knees."

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“We are also having more incidents of food being stolen from lunch boxes - I have to keep them in my classroom now to stop this happening.”

“Period poverty causing absence. We now have a box from Red Box project and the impact was almost instant for a small number of girls.”

“Our school experienced whole school attendance of 86% after heavy rain because students shoes/damaged and many had only no change/extra pair.”

“Many are off on 'non uniform' days as they either can't afford the £1 or they don't have suitable clothes.”

3. Schools and teachers are stepping in to clothe children and young people in poverty

Schools and individual teachers are buying clothes and shoes for children and young people, as well as washing and repairing them.

“We are buying more school uniform and appropriate shoes/boots for pupils.”

“My school has funded new shoes and uniform for pupils as well as directing them to the food bank.”

“Lots of students with cheap shoes not suitable for weather. My academy supplies dozens of pairs of shoes every term.”

“Increase in number of students we are requesting additional Family Support for. I personally have heard more families tell me that they are regularly going to food banks and clothing banks. We are also discreetly buying uniform and school shoes for more students than before.”

“Summer dresses, ankle socks, poor quality shoes, we have a ‘help yourself to clothes’ rail and the stuff flies off every week.”

“Children are wearing last year's clothes and shoes. Staff are bringing in old clothes from family members to ensure they are warm at playtimes and during PE.”

“Having to buy tights for pupils, help with money for shoes.”

“Regularly washing children's clothes, supplying jumpers, hats and gloves.”

“School has to provide shoes, uniform and coats as, if one item gets lost, damaged or too small, then no replacements are afforded. Even shoe laces etc are an issue.”

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“More students are wearing cheap shoes that leave their feet wet and unsupported. I have found I am washing and sewing more uniforms (in the tech department). Students don't have bags or coats.”

“Shoes where the soles have holes in and parents can't afford to replace them. School regularly had to loan shoes or buy shoes for students with parents then paying us back when they can. Increasingly students are coming to school in cold wet weather without a coat.”

“We are buying them coats on a scale never seen before.”

“Our school now has to supply school uniform every morning for tens of students who turn up without full uniform or shoes.”

4. Meals and other provision offered by schools to children and families in poverty

Many schools are now offering free breakfast clubs for children. Schools are also running foodbanks, giving hampers to families and providing meals during the holidays. In addition, schools and teachers are providing children and young people with sanitary items, Christmas presents, paying for school trips and travel to and from school, and providing school equipment. Some schools are providing household items, such as beds, bed linen and curtains.

“Coats, food parcels and sanitary products like sanitary towels and tampons. Also toiletries.”

“I know of three students whom the school has bought uniform for. Two who've had food delivered to their home by the welfare team.”

“Our school provides breakfast clubs as more and more students are coming to school not having had a decent meal since the previous day in school. I am spending approximately £100 per month on equipment to give to students as they are coming un-equipped to school.”

“We make up packages so families who are struggling get food packages, clothing and Christmas presents over the festive period. After Christmas, we are starting a breakfast for every child right through school.”

“Dinner money, pens, bus/train fare.”

“Christmas meal before we break up, Boxing Day food/shelter day.”

“We provide hampers for Christmas to most disadvantaged family. Every staff in school will donate.”

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“We have employed a family liaison officer to help families in need.”

“Curtains and bedsheets appeal.”

“We have teamed up with an organisation that collects food from supermarkets that is overstocked or just near its best before and we offer it on a stall outside school with an honesty box if people can afford to donate a little to keep the service going.”

“We run our own food bank sourced by students and staff within the school. We have had to provide laundry facilities for some students to wash their uniform.”

“In my previous school (same city) they have now set up holiday meals 3 x a week during holidays with a food bank for the other days provided for all families showing up. Full uniform provided by school. Children collected from home if unable to get in due to distance and lack of funds for transport.”

“There are schools near me that open throughout the holidays to serve a meal to children who otherwise wouldn’t have a meal during the day. One school opened on a snow day when everywhere else shut purely to ensure some pupils would have a meal that day.”

5. Causes of poverty amongst children and young people in schools

Teachers mentioned a range of factors that are causing poverty amongst the children and young people they work with. These include housing issues such as high rents, homelessness and insecurity. Teachers also mention in-work poverty, Universal Credit, and cuts to wider public services and benefits. School funding cuts are restricting the help that can be given.

“I work in a school that serves one of the most deprived estates in England. I only started in September so don’t know how trends have changed but we were taken around the estate by a local youth worker and what really struck me were the astronomical rents paid with lower benefits and the subsequent housing insecurity – rent arrears leading to moving frequently.”

“Some students whose families have been placed in temporary accommodation are having to travel huge distances across London and in one case a 2-hour journey to school in the morning and the same distance back in the afternoon. The increase in mental health issues in families directly related to poverty is another one of the pastoral issues which are taking up vast amounts of time and resources at the same time that budget pressures are forcing both in-house and external support to be cut to the bone. It is only going to get worse when Universal Credit is rolled out into the borough in January. The system is at breaking point.”

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“Families are trying in impossible situations.”

“I see students not having the correct length trousers or with ill-fitting shoes, especially boys that are having growing spurts. Some of them have two working parents and living in working poverty.”

“We give free school dinners to children who don't qualify for FSM [free school meals] because their parents work but have contacted us to say they have no money that day.”

“The school endeavours to provide social and emotional support to those students who are struggling with poverty, neglect, abuse and housing difficulties but this is becoming increasingly difficult. Our under-staffed pastoral team are being overwhelmed dealing with student issues as a result of ongoing social welfare cuts.”

“Breakfast club, snacks in my drawer, bus fares for pupils whose parents hit by universal credit, tights for pupil in temporary accommodation.”

“Our community cohesion officer is inundated with homeless issues to liaise with the local authority.”

“Our school used to provide food for families in poverty but because of cuts to our budget we are no longer able to do so.”