# Schools are increasingly filling societal gaps amid funding shortfalls



The burden on school and college leaders and teachers in the UK has reached unprecedented levels, with educators increasingly stepping beyond their traditional roles to fill the gaps left by under-funded public services. According to a report by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), schools are now managing activities such as running food banks and supporting families facing housing crises—responsibilities that fall well outside the core remit of education. The ASCL warns that while these services are vital, they should not be the ongoing responsibility of education professionals.

Julie McCulloch, director of strategy and policy at ASCL, highlighted that expectations on schools have expanded far beyond teaching and learning, driven by the lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, high child poverty rates, and the erosion of wider public services. “Schools and colleges are left to pick up the pieces,” she said, citing examples including parental dispute mediation, resolving parking issues, and managing pupil behaviour on social media outside school hours. The union stresses that these are important matters but cannot be indefinitely shouldered by educators without adequate support.

The ASCL report clarifies the boundaries of reasonable school responsibilities, recommending that services such as dental checks, family health support, and out-of-hours pupil behaviour management remain with other agencies. However, it suggests schools might be expected to take on roles like providing pupils with technology, supporting personal hygiene, ensuring compliance with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and helping reduce youth violence—but only if sufficiently funded to do so.

This growing pressure on schools is underscored by research from the University of Bristol, which found that around one in five schools in England now operates a food bank, making schools the largest source of charitable food aid in the country. Dr William Baker from the university pointed to a significant policy gap, noting how schools have stepped in to provide essential household aid amid rising living costs and financial hardship affecting many families. This rise in school food banks reflects wider socio-economic challenges, particularly the cost-of-living crisis, and the increasing number of low-income households relying on such support.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), reinforced these concerns, noting that teachers often use their own money to help provide food and clothing for struggling pupils. While schools strive to mitigate the effects of poverty, Whiteman underlined that they cannot replace the social care system or tackle the root causes of child disadvantage.

The ASCL is calling on the government to provide a clear long-term strategy for education similar to the NHS plan, outlining which agencies are responsible for various services at the local level. The union also insists that schools must receive adequate funding to fulfil their core educational duties, while the wider children's services require significant investment to address underlying issues such as poverty effectively. The government's forthcoming child poverty strategy, expected this autumn, will be closely watched.

A spokesperson from the Department for Education emphasised ongoing government efforts to tackle educational inequality and support vulnerable children. They cited initiatives such as expanding eligibility for free school meals, limiting branded uniform costs, rolling out free breakfast clubs, and the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which aims to overhaul children’s social care. The spokesperson also acknowledged the need to improve teacher retention by addressing challenges such as poor pupil behaviour, workload, and wellbeing.

Nevertheless, school leaders insist it is time to reconsider the expectations placed on them and to ensure adequate resources and clear responsibilities are in place so that education professionals are not expected to shoulder societal problems alone. The situation exposes a wider policy challenge: addressing child poverty and deteriorating public services comprehensively to prevent further displacement of social support duties onto schools.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/articles/cpdgxejy8p9o), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/england-research-schools-university-of-bristol-naht-b2529882.html), [[5]](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/research/impact/social-sciences-law/soe/feeding-hungry-families-food-banks-in-schools/), [[6]](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/food-banks-schools/), [[7]](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/schools-now-biggest-source-charitable-29009307)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/articles/cpdgxejy8p9o), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/england-research-schools-university-of-bristol-naht-b2529882.html), [[7]](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/schools-now-biggest-source-charitable-29009307)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/burden-placed-on-teachers-has-never-been-higher-union-warns-RKD2VIDL2JJFTM2BSA7B4XWQTQ/> - The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) has highlighted the escalating pressures on educators, noting that schools are increasingly managing food banks and assisting families with housing due to the deterioration of public services. Julie McCulloch, ASCL's director of strategy and policy, stated that the expectations on schools have expanded beyond teaching to include various societal responsibilities, a trend exacerbated by the pandemic and high child poverty rates. The ASCL advocates for a clear delineation of responsibilities between schools and other agencies, urging the government to invest adequately in children's services and address child poverty effectively.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/articles/cpdgxejy8p9o> - A BBC report reveals that schools have become the primary source of charitable food aid in England, with over 4,000 school-based food banks operating across primary and secondary schools. Dr. William Baker from the University of Bristol highlighted the lack of national support and oversight for these initiatives. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) general secretary, Paul Whiteman, noted that teachers are increasingly using personal funds to assist families with food and clothing, underscoring the urgent need for policy reform to address the growing issue of food insecurity.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/england-research-schools-university-of-bristol-naht-b2529882.html> - Research from the University of Bristol indicates that schools are now operating more food banks than traditional charitable organisations in England. Dr. William Baker emphasised the policy vacuum surrounding charitable food aid in schools and the pressing issue of children experiencing hunger at home due to rising food costs and other financial pressures. Paul Whiteman of the NAHT highlighted that while schools are doing their best to mitigate the effects of disadvantage, they cannot replace a fully functioning social care system or address the root causes of poverty.
5. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/research/impact/social-sciences-law/soe/feeding-hungry-families-food-banks-in-schools/> - A University of Bristol study reveals that schools are increasingly providing charitable food aid to families, especially in areas with high socio-economic disadvantage. The research highlights that schools are often compelled to support families when other services fail, with one teacher noting the financial strain on families leading to schools 'picking up the brunt of what parents can’t do.' The study calls for greater awareness among policymakers and effective strategies to address child food insecurity in England.
6. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/food-banks-schools/> - A University of Bristol policy brief discusses the rapid rise of food banks in schools, noting that 21% of primary and secondary schools in England operate a food bank, amounting to over 4,000 school-based food banks. The brief highlights that food banks are more prevalent in schools with high numbers of low-income families and attributes the increase to the cost-of-living crisis and poverty. It recommends better data collection, guidance for schools, and a 'Cash First' approach to food insecurity.
7. <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/schools-now-biggest-source-charitable-29009307> - An article from Wales Online reports that schools have become the largest source of charitable food aid in the UK, with many setting up food banks to support struggling families. Dr. William Baker from the University of Bristol highlighted the lack of national support and oversight for these initiatives. Paul Whiteman of the NAHT noted that teachers are increasingly using personal funds to assist families with food and clothing, underscoring the need for policy reform to address the growing issue of food insecurity.