

# EEE NEWSLETTER

## ELIMINATING ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

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## ELIMINATING ECONOMIC EXCLUSION IN HERTFORDSHIRE AND BEYOND

We face a social inequity crisis in our schools in Hertfordshire. Our children from economically disadvantaged families are currently not progressing at the rate, nor achieving at the levels, that we would want them to as educators. This depressed attainment limits their options in higher education and narrows their subsequent career choices. It hinders their opportunity to thrive in a world post school (see analysis in Hertfordshire Gap Data feature on page 2).

And that's what this termly newsletter is all about - supporting settings and schools to eliminate economic exclusion. Each edition will contain articles, features and links to great initiatives happening across the county and beyond. We will share top tips from school leaders, answer commonly posed questions and update you on key events that you might like to attend.

We hope that you will find the EEE newsletter interesting, informative and impactful. We welcome your feedback via [rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org](mailto:rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org)

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## HERTFORDSHIRE GAP DATA

As the nation faces record levels of inflation and families contend with unprecedented levels of economic stress, we are seeing increasing numbers of children living in real poverty. The Department for Work and Pensions estimated that in 2021 3.9 million children were living in poverty (27% of all children). That number is growing.

Research tells us that there are a number of ways in which schools, trusts and settings can effectively address the 'disadvantaged gap'. High quality, adaptive teaching is key; as is the smart use of interventions, tutoring, pre and post teaching to address gaps and remove learning barriers.

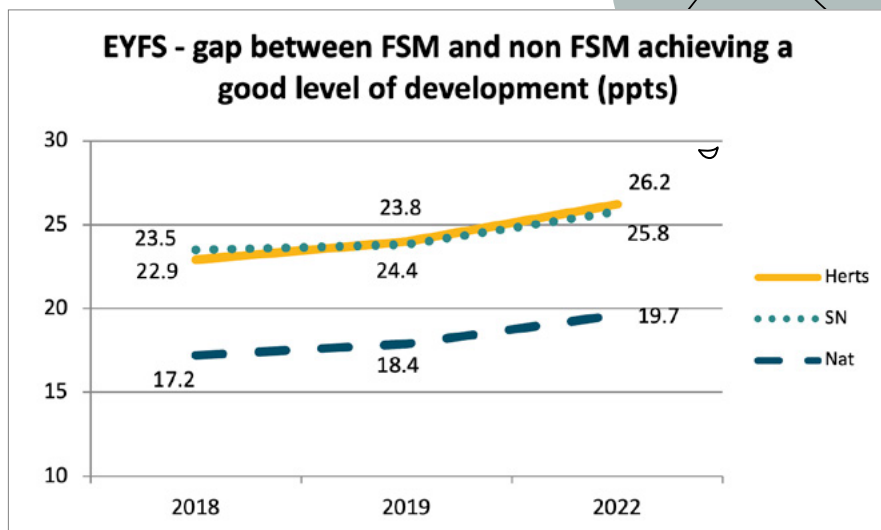
But of equal importance is establishing a culture of high expectations of all, an inclusive ethos in which every learner feels a sense of status and belonging, and every educator is focused on Eliminating Economic Exclusion (EEE).

The gap between the outcomes of those children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (not a perfect proxy for poverty but the best measure that we have) and their more advantaged peers has been greater in Hertfordshire than the national gap from many years and is widening. In 2022 it was amongst the largest in the country at all key stages:

### RECEPTION

Only 41% of FSM eligible in Herts children reached GLD, compared to 68% of non FSM eligible. (National figures were 49% FSM v 69% non FSM).

**This placed us 133rd of 152 LAs nationally.**



Yellow line = Hertfordshire

Teal dotted line = our statistical neighbours (LAs with similar features)

Dark teal dashed line = national



## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY OUR EEE AGONY AUNT



**1. My school runs a ski trip each year to Canada. The students who go on it have a life changing time and learn so many vital skills. Some of our SLT are saying that we shouldn't run this anymore as it is so expensive, but I don't want to deny the families that can afford it the chance for their children to access this brilliant experience and it's in the holidays after all. What's your advice?**

The first point to raise is that you and your team are having a conscious discussion about this issue which is great practice. Many of the messages we communicate to our children in school are done inadvertently or unwittingly. It is brilliant that you are having this discussion.

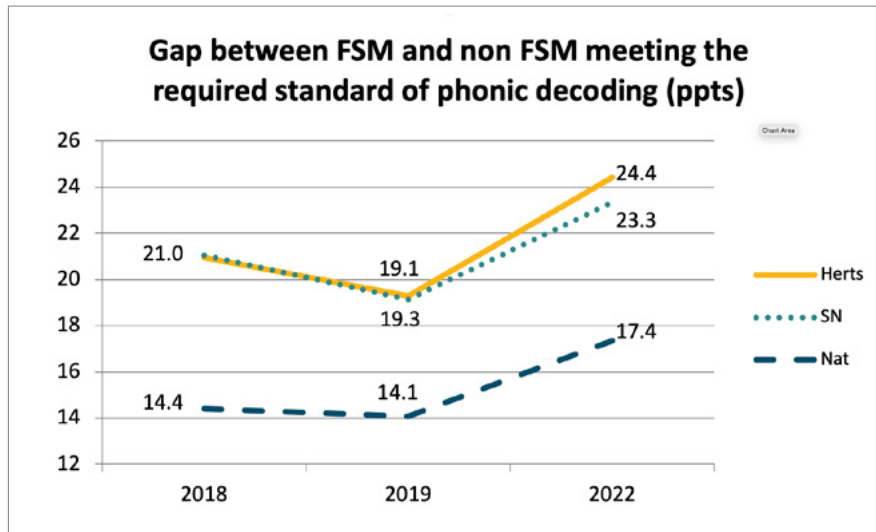
One lens through which to consider this issue is the mantra from our friends and colleagues at Children North East: *'No activity or planned activity in schools should identify, exclude or treat differently or make assumptions about those children whose household income or resources are lower than others.'*

Other questions to ask might be: Does the ski trip mean that children who can't afford to go feel like they don't belong in your school? Is there a culture around the ski trip which means that those staff and students form a type of club from which others are excluded? Do young people

## YEAR 1 PHONICS

Only 43% of FSM eligible in Herts children passed the phonics screening test, compared to 73% of non FSM eligible. (National figures were 51% FSM v 72% non FSM).

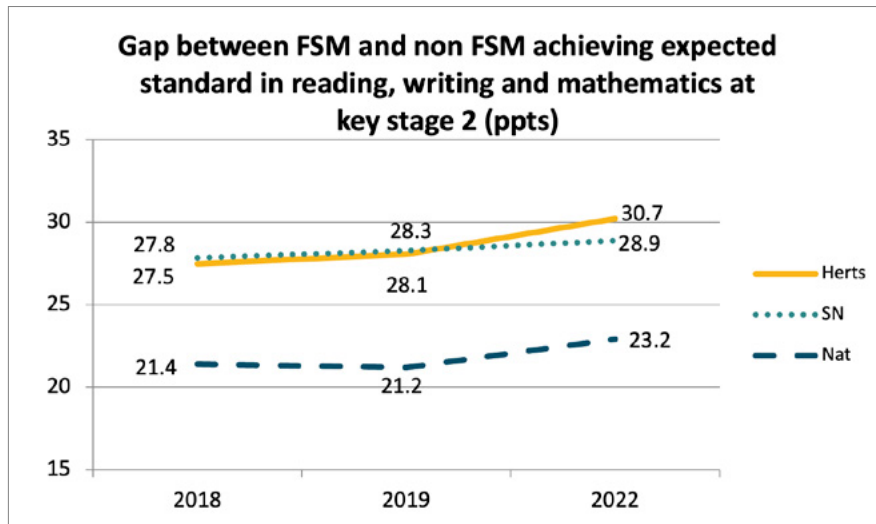
This placed us 138th of 152 LAs nationally.



## KS2

Only 34% of FSM eligible in Herts children reached ARE in Reading, Writing and Maths in Year 6, compared to 65% of non FSM eligible. (National figures were 41% FSM v 65% non FSM).

This placed us 140th of 152 LAs nationally.



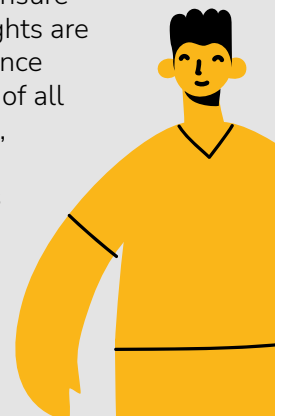
who go on the trip feel like they get better access to senior staff? If the answer is yes can this be mitigated in other ways?

Another consideration might be the wider programme of trips at your school. If all of the trips are abroad and aspirational with a big price tag and there are no free or very low cost trips in your programme then this might be something else to consider.

School trips can be enriching and offer so much to young people in terms of developing their independence and cultural capital but they don't need to cost the earth.

**2. We have heard that 17th October is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. What is this and do you have any ideas of what we might do to mark it in a non-tokenistic way?**

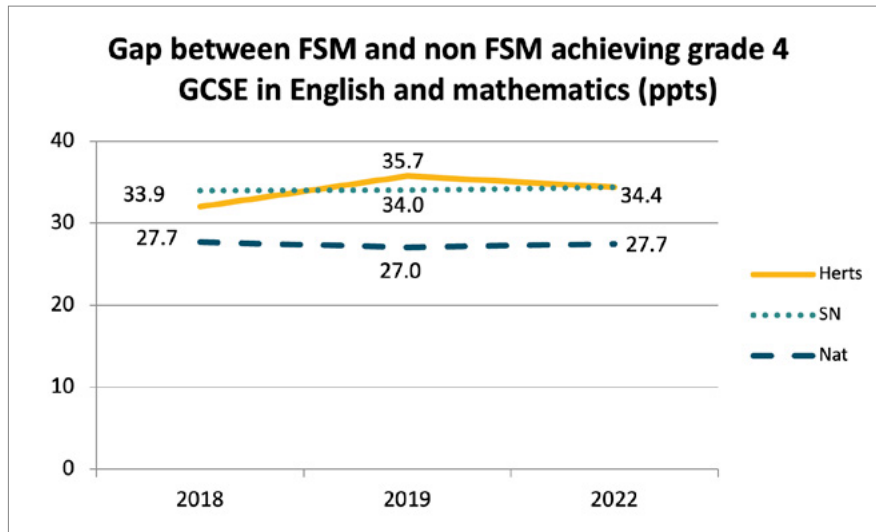
It's great to be thinking ahead. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is a UNESCO event. On their website it says: 'The observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can be traced back to 17 October 1987. On that day, over a hundred thousand people gathered at the Trocadéro in Paris, where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, to honour the victims of extreme poverty, violence and hunger. They proclaimed that poverty is a violation of human rights and affirmed the need to come together to ensure that these rights are respected. Since then, people of all backgrounds, beliefs and social origins have gathered every year on



## KS4

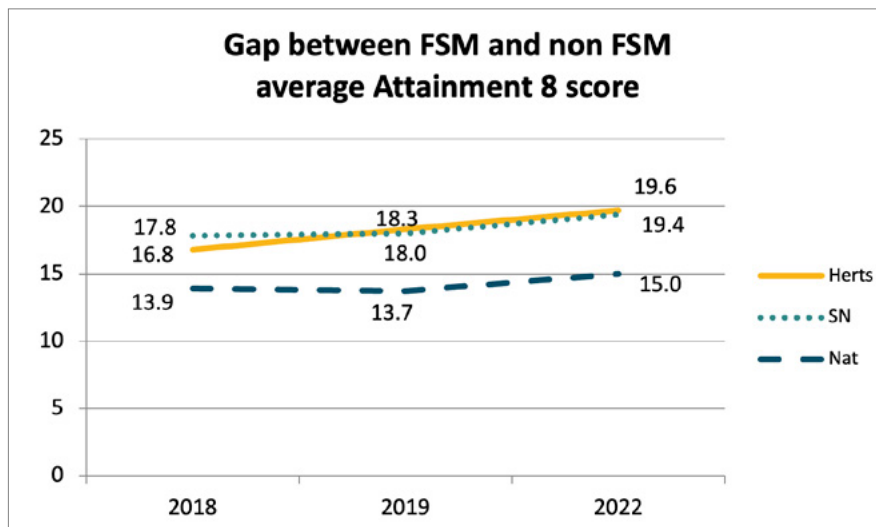
Only 45% of FSM eligible in Herts children achieved a grade 4 or better in English and Maths GCSE in Year 11, compared to 80% of non FSM eligible. (National figures were 47% FSM v 75% non FSM).

**This placed us 135th of 152 LAs nationally.**



FSM eligible in Herts children achieved an average Attainment 8 score of 36 (average GCSE grade 3.6), compared to 56 (average GCSE grade of 5.6) for non FSM eligible. (National figures were 37 FSM v 52 non FSM).

**This placed us 138th of 152 LAs nationally.**



October 17th to renew their commitment and show their solidarity with the poor.'

Why not spend some time with staff in advance of the day considering what you collectively understand by the term poverty and constructing an agreed definition that you will use as a school? This could lead to an assembly and/or discussion activities that staff could engage in with pupils.

You could support learners to research UNESCO's work around the world to eradicate poverty. You could support students to write to their MP (or invite them into school) to discuss what the UK government is doing to help to eradicate poverty.

**3. One of the children in my Reception class is coming into school in the same top each day. It is really grimy round the collar and cuffs. In the hot weather it is noticeable that he is starting to get smelly and I can see some of the other children backing away from him on the carpet and not wanting to sit too close to him. This is additionally difficult as his mum is one of our TAs in KS2. What would you advise me to do?**

Thank you for your email.

I don't know from your email whether this has been a change in circumstances for the child or this is an ongoing situation. In reality, most people have experienced a broken-down washing machine and the impact that can have



# POVERTY PROOFING<sup>®</sup> AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EEE IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Some years ago, the charity Children North East (CNE) asked children to take a photo of the locations where they felt most excluded because of poverty. In the photographs that came back there was an overwhelming number of images of schools. Appalled by this result, CNE set about trying to help schools address the often unseen inequalities within their activities by giving students an opportunity to express their views on a wide range of subjects from food to uniform to student leadership. CNE calls this process *Poverty Proofing<sup>®</sup> the School Day*.

In July 2022 leaders from five Hertfordshire schools, alongside four colleagues from HFL Education, teamed up to be trained by CNE in the art of *Poverty Proofing<sup>®</sup> the School Day* and uncover the stories in Hertfordshire schools. CNE provided powerful training for us as researchers and boosted our confidence to ask really difficult questions about money. Together we undertook research in the five schools which spanned the primary, secondary and special sectors.



Our research involved speaking to all children in the primary and special schools. In the secondary school we used an online survey as well as training a formidable Sixth Form team to ensure that we heard as many student voices as possible. We also spoke to catering managers, business managers, librarians, teachers, leaders and parents to get as clear a picture as we could of the situation in every school.

Our very special thanks go out to our five pilot schools:

- Central School
- Parkgate Juniors
- Bushey Primary Education Federation
- The Valley School
- The Priory School

for being willing to let us look deeply into their school culture and for their humility and responsiveness in the light of our recommendations.

We learned many things from the pilot:

- how to Poverty Proof<sup>®</sup>
- that there are lots of people in education in Hertfordshire who really care about creating a more equitable society
- the joy of working together across phase to create meaningful change
- and that through purposeful leadership schools can create a microcosm of the type of society that we would like to live in rather than simply reflecting the status quo.



on laundry for a family for a short period of time. I have also had experience of a child that did not want to wash or change their clothes, despite the best efforts of parents/carers. The current financial crisis could also be a contributing factor, and empathy not sympathy is how you can support the child and their family.

The relationship that you have as a Key Person with children in your class and their parents/carers will support you to make the best decision for this child. Very young children are aware of non-verbal body language, so he will begin to realise that his peers are backing away from him, which will have a negative impact on his self-esteem and self-worth.

I would suggest that you:

1. In the first instance, offer the child a change of top, ensuring that the clothing/uniform you offer is presented in a positive way.
2. The Early Years Educational Programme for Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) states that 'Through adult modelling and guidance, they will learn how to look after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently'. Model to all children through child-initiated learning or an adult led session, how to manage their personal hygiene. There are some lovely books available to

## HFL EEE REVIEWS

Building on our learning from the Children NE Poverty Proofing Pilot, HFL has designed its own audit tool called the Eliminating Economic Exclusion Review. A team of HFL advisers (EY, primary, secondary and special) has been trained up to deliver these reviews in schools.

An EEE review typically involves\*:

- a pre-visit analysis of the school's website to audit hidden costs of the school day (uniform, meals, trips and visits, charity days etc.) and to assess messaging to economically vulnerable families
- analysis of surveys completed by parents and staff about poverty proofing
- a phone meeting with the leader of the school to agree the specific activities for the visit
- a day in school observing lunch arrangements, having meetings with groups of pupils, staff and parents to discuss the experience of economically disadvantaged learners, meeting with senior leaders and the PP lead to discuss findings and explore strategies for eliminating economic exclusion

\*However, the activities can be adjusted to make the review bespoke to an individual school and its needs.



- a staff meeting to explore attitudes towards poverty, the hidden costs of the school day and strategies for poverty proofing the school
- co-construction of some recommended actions with senior leaders
- a follow up visit (approximately two hours) one or one and a half terms later to review progress against and impact of the agreed recommendations.

Through the Commissioned School Visits programme, 46 Hertfordshire maintained schools will have an EEE review between April 2023 and March 2024. In addition, five secondary academies to date have requested an EEE as a traded activity in the coming months.

If you would like to find out more about the HFL EEEs or to book a review, please contact Rachel Macfarlane:

[rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org](mailto:rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org)

start conversations with young children around personal hygiene. 'Wash, Scrub, Brush' and 'Wiffy Wilson the Wolf Who Wouldn't Wash' are texts that I have read in class.

3. Depending on the relationship that you have with the parent and how long this has been an issue for the child, consider speaking to his mum asking if she would welcome some additional spare school uniform – it could be that the washing machine is not working.

4. You could also sensitively broach the issue and offer financial support to purchase laundry products or direct the family to local services that could support. If you do not feel comfortable having this conversation with a colleague, you could speak to a member of the school's leadership team who would speak to the member of staff.

5. Alternatively, it may be that the family needs some advice around how to encourage the child to change clothes regularly, dress and undress, place dirty clothes in the laundry basket. You could provide a simple visual timetable to guide the child through this sequence.

*Do you have a question for our agony aunt? If so, please send it in to [rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org](mailto:rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org) and we will pass it on to her!*



# FINDINGS FROM EEEs CONDUCTED TO DATE

There are some common themes emerging from the reviews undertaken in the summer term:

## UNIFORM

In some schools there is confusion about whether or not pupils are expected to wear branded items; leaders might say that it is fine to purchase a school shirt or jumper from the high street but parents and children are under the impression that their uniform must be branded. In some primary/ infant/junior schools with more rare uniform colours (purple, yellow, turquoise, maroon), the staff are happy for parents to purchase items in supermarkets but this is not a realistic option as the colours are not available. Paying for school shoes is a challenge for families on a tight budget. Secondary school uniforms, particularly PE kit, are prohibitively expensive for some families.



**NB: In 2021, statutory guidance came into force to ensure that school uniform costs are 'reasonable' and represent the best 'value for money'. The key points are:**

- Parents should not have to think about the cost of a school uniform when choosing which school(s) to apply for. Therefore, schools need to ensure that their uniform is affordable.

## SPOTLIGHT ON GREAT PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

### Leavesden Green Primary School

We've initiated a sustainability project called the 'Us Project' (**Uniform Surrender Project**). It's a project in which the whole community donates old but good uniform and it gets resold for 50p per item. Our strap line is 'Supporting the Community and the Environment'.

We're changing the mindset of second-hand uniform from only buying it if you're short of money to doing it because it's good for the world - we're taking the stigma out of second hand.

Today we had our first sale. So much of the stock went and a wide group of parents bought the uniform from a range of circumstances and backgrounds. We have had so much feedback that this is a great idea! Everyone can buy cheap uniform at a fraction of the price and then re-donate it if it's not at end of its life when the children grow.

We're going to keep the Us Project going as a rolling programme. Parents can donate throughout the year and we're going to create a permanent shop.



- In considering cost, schools will need to think about the total cost of school uniforms, taking into account all items of uniform or clothing parents will need to provide while their child is at the school.
- Schools should keep the use of branded items to a minimum.
- A school's uniform policy should be published on the school's website, be available for all parents, including parents of prospective pupils, and be easily understood.
- Schools should ensure that their uniform supplier arrangements give the highest priority to cost and value for money (including the quality and durability of the garment).
- Single supplier contracts should be avoided unless regular

tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and where the best value for money is secured. This contract should be retendered at least every five years.

- Schools should ensure that second-hand uniforms are available for parents to acquire. Information on second-hand uniforms should be clear for parents of current and prospective pupils and published on the school's website.
- Schools should engage with parents and pupils when they are developing their school uniform policy.

For further details: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms)

## FUNDRAISING

Many parents have raised this as a concern; they feel like they are constantly being asked to make donations for charity events or for internal school fundraising.

## TRIPS

The transport costs for school trips has come up as a challenge on a number of reviews. Parents have fed back that they would appreciate more advanced notice, in order to stagger payments. From talking with pupils, it appears that the majority of pupils who do not attend trips are pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding.

## FOOD GLORIOUS FUEL

One of the focus points for our work in schools through the *Poverty Proofing® the School Day* pilot project and the Eliminating Economic Exclusion Commissioned School Visits has been exploring food in schools.

What became clear was that the quality, portion size and take up of meals is inconsistent across schools. What was evident in all schools visited, however, is that not all pupils eligible for free school meals are eating them.

Hunger has a clear impact on a child's ability to focus and learn in school. Obviously, thinking and learning require calories and there are increasing proportions of pupils in schools across the country who are experiencing food insecurity and hunger. Research from the [Centre for Educational Neuroscience](#) indicates that learning tasks that are mentally demanding and those which involve working memory are most affected by a lack of nutrition. A survey conducted by [Teacher Tapp for the Sutton Trust](#) tells us that 38% of teachers report that pupils are arriving in school hungry and that between 38% and 72% of teachers report that "at least a third of their pupils are

## BOOK REVIEW

Katriona O'Sullivan is an award-winning lecturer at Maynooth University, with a PhD from Trinity College Dublin. But she came from a background of dire poverty.

Both her parents were addicted to heroin and alcohol and she was subjected to heart-breaking abuse as a child. Pregnant at 15, Katriona was 'saved' at key points in her childhood by remarkable teachers who saw beyond her poverty and insecurities, showed her care and kindness and demonstrated a belief in her potential to thrive. This gritty autobiography is both tragic and uplifting. It speaks to the power of relationships between the underserved and educators. It forces the reader to question their own unconscious biases and behaviours.



facing financial pressures that are affecting their ability to succeed in school". Surveys suggest that up to one third of pupils in UK schools are not eating breakfast and that, for a high proportion of these pupils, the reason for skipping this meal is cost.

We have spoken to a number of parents, staff members and pupils about their views on food in schools. Parents have told us that they are concerned about the cost and quality of school meals, sharing the following statements with us:

*"The meals themselves are not filling for the children. My daughter comes out every single day hungry and I have to buy extra snacks for her to have on the way home."*

*"School meals are a big struggle and my child is not eligible for a free school meal."*

*"I can't afford school lunches anymore. My daughter used to have a treat one day a week - BUT NO MORE."*

*"We are worried about being able to afford school dinners next year, once they are no longer free. We think we may need to ask for family help to cover the cost."*

*"My cost of food for school is high as my child won't eat the school dinners. They're rather poor."*



**Numerous school staff have also raised concerns about food, sharing the following comments:**

*"Children are coming into school more often without breakfast."*

*"Some children will tell you if they had breakfast. Others will say they can't afford it. When some children brag about what they got you can see disappointment in others' eyes."*

*"They shy away from adults at lunchtime so that their lunchbox does not get checked to see what is inside and what they have eaten."*

**Children's views about school dinners vary. Some tell us that they enjoy the food; others are less keen. Pupils often tell us that the atmosphere, noise and waiting in the dining room/canteen is a disincentive to eating school meals. Some pupils in secondary school who miss breakfast spend their FSM allocation at breaktime and can therefore not afford to eat lunch as well. Pupils shared the following comments with us:**

*"Sometimes, other students make up rumours about the food and water and this puts me off eating and drinking in the canteen."*

*"It is good to have a free breakfast and anyone can attend –it's good for people who get in early and it's good on a cold day."*

*"I used to go all day without eating anything -I would have breakfast at home then nothing until I got home again."*

*"It's not healthy and it's sometimes undercooked/bland. The healthy stuff is more expensive than the unhealthy stuff."*

*"The desserts are the best thing – even the fruit is delicious!"*

*"I don't like fruit so I don't eat at breaktime; I am sometimes really hungry at lunchtime – sometimes my tummy rumbles."*

*"I've seen what the school dinners look like; I would rather have nothing!"*

*"My mum says I won't be having school dinner any more in Year 3 because it is too expensive."*

*"The food is tasty, not bad at all. Especially Wednesday because it's roast chicken!"*



### **SCHOOL MEALS: IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS**

One of the benefits of the EEE reviews has been learning what schools are doing well.

- One of the schools we have worked with has made the decision to start weighing food waste – they are concerned that pupils are not eating the food provided and are keen to see which days (and food choices) are resulting in higher levels of waste. They will use this to liaise with the catering provider to inform menu choices.
- Elsewhere, another school is working on improving the dining environment, having recognised that a noisy and crowded environment is less conducive to enjoying lunch.

- Some schools are looking into the options for funded breakfast provision through the National School Breakfast Scheme and Magic Breakfast.

- In some schools, school council members have met with the catering providers to discuss the quality and popularity of food provided.

- A few schools tell us that they have linked up with local supermarket chains and that they receive some "near sell by" bakery items free of charge – the amount donated is really quite surprising. This food is used to provide a breaktime snack for both staff and pupils for free.

- In some schools, staff are provided with a funded meal if they eat with pupils. This seems to be a strong incentive for pupils who are reported to believe that: "If the teachers eat it, it can't be that bad!"

Readers may be interested in the following two items to prompt a bit more thinking:

- [Child Poverty Action Group | Twitter](#)

- [Schools in England warn of crisis of 'heartbreaking' rise in hungry children | UK cost of living crisis | The Guardian](#)

We will continue to explore the quality, cost and uptake of school meals because hungry children do not learn well.

### **THE FOOD RESCUE HUB IN WELWYN GARDEN CITY** [www.foodrescuehub.uk](http://www.foodrescuehub.uk)

'Discover our food boutique where unsold food, otherwise destined for destruction, is rescued and diverted from the bin, and instead offered to our community. Uncooked food is recovered from local food-based business and is offered on a pay-as-you-feel (PAYF) basis making it accessible and encouraged to all members of the community. In addition to the provision of rescued food, we provide regular opportunities to learn about limiting food waste in your own home as well as creating a community of like-minded individuals to come together to share and learn from each other.'



# ADVANCE NOTICE: HFL EDUCATION NATIONAL CONFERENCE WEDNESDAY 17TH JANUARY 2024 BETTER SERVING THE UNDERSERVED

As part of our commitment to supporting currently disadvantaged learners across all phases of education, we are hosting a National Disadvantage Conference on Wednesday 17th January 2024, entitled “Better Serving The Underserved”.

Join us as we highlight and explore the significant and growing inequities between the educational experiences, progress and attainment of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more advantaged peers. We'll share practical strategies for leaders and classroom practitioners to better serve underserved learners and to support schools, settings and trusts to close the disadvantage gap.

Our five expert keynote speakers are:-

## Lemn Sissay OBE FRSL

British author and broadcaster and official poet of the 2012 London Olympics. Author of *My Name Is Why*.



## Jean Gross CBE

An education expert who has led many national initiatives aimed at improving the learning, attainment and wellbeing of disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs and disabilities.



## Matt Jones OBE

Principal of ARK Globe All Through Academy.

Contributor to the Timpson Review and founder of The Elephant Group charity, which helps children from disadvantaged backgrounds get into the top UK universities.



## Sufian Sadiq

Director of the Teaching School, Chiltern Learning Trust. Sufian speaks extensively on issues of equity and is committed to alleviating poverty through education and empowerment of communities.



He sits on the Management Board of the Luton Foodbank and Friends of Bright Eyes (a charity supporting learners with disabilities) and is a trustee of Working Options.

## Dr Katriona O’Sullivan

Digital Skills lecturer at Maynooth University, author of *Poor*, a memoir about growing up as the child of drug addicts, abused, neglected and broken.



The conference also features Spotlight Talks - sharing successful strategies for all settings and phases, co-led by HFL colleagues and school leaders – and panel discussions in between sessions to reflect on what has been heard and experienced.

The conference is aimed at headteachers, senior and middle leaders, classroom practitioners, SENCOs, Pupil Premium leads, staff with responsibility for looked after children and safeguarding, trustees and governors, from Early Years to secondary, mainstream and special.

Our full day event will be online from 9am – 4pm and the cost is £149 (excl VAT) for the first delegate per school (with subsequent delegates from the same school charged at £49 (excl VAT)).

We look forward to you joining us. Please see full details and how to book [here](#).



(Lemn Sissay photo credit David Vintiner)