

News links from May 2021

Two Steps Forward

We are delighted to report that the energetic campaigning by the [APPG on a Fit and Healthy Childhood](#) and the [Children First Alliance](#), their members and supporters and others delivered real political advances in May.

The appointment by Labour of a [Shadow Secretary of State for Child Poverty Strategy](#) is important recognition that the health and wellbeing public health emergency requires Cabinet-level intervention. Of course, it's not everything we need but with poverty such a significant factor in the crisis it's a very welcome appointment.

Even more helpful is the [new Government money](#) to support mental health in schools. Again, it's not everything we want but it is a genuine step forward.

We will, of course, continue to campaign for our target Cabinet Minister responsible for the health and wellbeing of children and young people but these announcements are real stepping stones on the way to eventual success.

Abuse in Schools

Following the recent revelations on the [Everyone's Invited](#) website, set up to counter the normalisation of sexual violence, the DfE and NSPCC launched a telephone helpline (0800 136663). This has received 353 calls since opening. At the same time many teachers, responding to a [survey](#), reported witnessing peer-on-peer harassment or abuse and said they struggled, through lack of training, to deal with it. As we know, Ofsted is undertaking a review into safeguarding policies in both state and independent schools in England, although [concerns have been raised](#) over how impartial this review can be.

Poverty and Inequality

Poverty continues to appal and challenge us all. There was news from the [National Child Mortality Database](#) that one or more deprivation factors featured in 8% of child deaths in 2019/2020. [Read the Report](#)

There were debates on [Support for Children on Free School Meals](#) and, as a result of an e-petition, on [Child Food Poverty](#). The House of Commons Library provided [information](#) on household food insecurity and food bank usage, and the Work and Pensions Committee continued to look at [Child Poverty Measurement and Targets](#). Part of that investigation was to consider “joint working”, including the merits of having a cross-government child poverty strategy, a solution that can’t come too soon as far as we at Children First are concerned. As mentioned above, we were very pleased to hear of the new Labour post of [Shadow Secretary of State for Child Poverty Strategy](#).

Various suggestions arose in May: The [Child Poverty Action Group](#) is calling for the statutory formalisation of an [extended school day](#) in every school, to provide crucial services before and after core school hours. The [End Child Poverty Coalition](#) says the Government owe it to our children to come up with [a credible plan to tackle poverty](#), as figures show a dramatic rise. Meanwhile, more exercise might help poorer children as [a long-term analysis](#) of the links between physical activity, self regulation and academic achievement found that active children are more likely to have stronger self-control, which helps their education.

Online Safety

The long-awaited draft Online Safety Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech in May. It will help safeguard children and young people and clamp down on racist abuse while at the same time protecting democratic debate and free speech. Previously known as the Online Harms Bill, it will now be scrutinised by a joint committee before a final version is formally introduced to Parliament. Read reactions

In related news, the controversial plans of social media companies to extend end-to-end encryption across all messaging platforms continued to attract criticism globally because of the potential to hamper detection of child abuse and grooming.

Age verification for pornography sites was also in the news in May with campaigners disappointed that it was not included in the Online Safety Bill. Some, including age verification campaigner Baroness Benjamin, remain hopeful that it will be included at a later stage. Earlier in May a judicial review was instigated over allegations that the Government has failed to stop children watching online pornography. Brought by joint claimants (a student activist and a father), the action is on the basis that children are being harmed by the lack of age verification, in direct breach of the government's legal duty to protect them.

Childhood Nutrition and Obesity

A [report](#) in May revealed that many (55%) pre-school children eat two or fewer portions of fruit and vegetables a day, while an [American longitudinal study](#) of 2000 children over 31 years has found links between childhood obesity and poor midlife cognitive performance. Obesity is worsening, with over a million hospital admissions for obesity-related treatment in the year leading up to the pandemic, [according to the BBC](#). MPs [debated the implementation of the Obesity Strategy](#) last week and heard arguments on both sides of the calorie-labelling argument among other, wide-ranging, discussions. As we know, the Queen's speech included [calorie labelling in restaurants](#) as well as the controversial [ban on online advertising](#) of foods high in fat sugar or salt (HFSS) that had been widely predicted to be scrapped. The House of Commons Library published [a briefing paper](#) covering the Government's efforts to prevent and reduce obesity, which in recent years has greatly focussed on reducing obesity in children.

Welsh Plan for Future Generations

Wales's Future Generations Commissioner, Sophie Howe, proposes a "Fit for the Future" Programme of Government for Wales that embraces long-term thinking. The Commissioner is calling for *"a brave and progressive approach to policy making and long-term thinking that puts diversity, the well-being economy, tackling emissions and biodiversity loss, and life-long learning at the forefront of our minds."*

[Read more here.](#)

Parental Conflict

DWP's Reducing Parental Conflict Programme, which encourages English local authorities to integrate approaches addressing parental conflict into their provision for families, published three reports in May that will be of interest to practitioners working with families

- [Early Implementation](#) - insight on the implementation phase of the programme
- [Parental conflict and substance misuse](#) - literature review examining the links between parental conflict and substance misuse and the impacts on children's outcomes.
- [Learning from the first phase](#) - Analysis of the first phase projects set up to test what works

Education

A [report by the Education Policy Institute](#) found that £13.5bn will be needed to reverse the damage to pupils' learning during the pandemic. Recommendations included extended school hours, additional Pupil Premium funding, summer wellbeing programmes, more incentives for teachers working in “challenging areas”, further mental health support in schools and an option for some pupils to retake the year.

The [Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition](#) wrote to Secretary of State Gavin Williamson urging the Government to end punitive approaches to behaviour in schools. The coalition is formed of charities dedicated to the mental health of children and young people.

[Read the Letter](#)

The DfE provided information about this year's expanded Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF): [Read more here](#)

Play

A [survey](#) by the Sutton Trust of parents of 2-4 year old children found that many parents felt that not being able to play with peers had adversely affected their child in terms of physical development and language, but mainly in terms of social and emotional development. The Trust calls on the Government to increase funding in the Early Years sector. As for school-age children, some schools are cutting playtimes in their eagerness to compensate for “lost learning”, according to a [TES blog](#), and this ignores the capacity of play to enhance all the outcomes that educators aim to deliver. Underlining the benefits of play, a campaign calling for a “[Summer of Play](#)” for children was launched in mid-May.

No Child Left Behind Campaign

The NEU's **No Child Left Behind** Campaign, calling on the Government to eradicate child poverty, has a [useful postcode finder facility](#) that reveals the level of child poverty for any postcode entered, and whether the local MP has pledged to do all they can to help further this cause. A staggering 4.3 million UK children (31%) are trapped in poverty.