



CHILDHOOD IN CRISIS

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NEWSLETTER

The Children First Alliance's Parliamentary Briefing [September 2020](#)

***News links from  
August 2020***

## **The Children's Society's Good Childhood 2020 Report**

The Children's Society is calling on Government to put children's wellbeing at the heart of our national recovery, following their findings (from research involving 2000+ children in April-June) that the UK's 10-15 year olds were experiencing a continued decrease in happiness, and when compared with their foreign counterparts they were the saddest and least satisfied in Europe. The report estimates that a quarter of a million children are unhappy with their lives, with factors like friends, school and appearance all playing a role.

Chief Executive Mark Russell, speaking on Radio 4, made the following points:

- *During the pandemic the needs of children have been virtually ignored*
- *That there are many other equally important determinants of a 'good childhood' apart from academic success: children's mental health and wellbeing, for example. Both suffered tremendously during the pandemic and the future costs may be immense for society*
- *The Government Spending Review will soon be upon us and it is vital that a fair proportion of this spend should go into making up the shortfall on children. Over the past decade children's services have been starved and even their playing spaces have been cut and restricted*
- *It is now paramount that the Government factors in wellbeing as a key element in all its policies and policymaking, and that the needs of children should be regarded as a completely cross-departmental issue. It is imperative – and real energy needs to go into it at all levels of public and political activity.*

One of the main recommendations the Society is pursuing is the introduction of a comprehensive measurement of children's subjective wellbeing that provides localised insight (which already happens for adults).

## *Inequality*

The previously narrowing attainment gap (between poor and wealthier pupils) has reversed for the first time in over 10 years, according to a study carried out by the [Education Policy Institute](#) into attainment by English schoolchildren. And this was even before the pandemic. Key findings:

- The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has stopped closing for the first time in a decade.
- Disadvantaged pupils in England are 18.1 months of learning behind their peers by the time they finish their GCSEs – the same gap as five years ago.
- The gap at primary school increased for the first time since 2007 – which may signal that the gap is set to widen in the future.
- Researchers have identified the increasing proportion of disadvantaged children in persistent poverty as a contributory cause of the lack of progress with narrowing the disadvantage gap.

[Read the Report](#)

## ***Babies in Lockdown***

A report - jointly produced by **Best Beginnings, Home-Start UK** and the **Parent-Infant Foundation**, revealed the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on those pregnant, giving birth or at home with a baby or toddler. No other group of parents in recent history has had to navigate pregnancy, birth and beyond under such extraordinary circumstances. Over 200,000 babies were born between 23rd March and 4th July and the survey suggests that the impact of COVID-19 on these babies could be severe and may be long-lasting.

[Read the Report](#)

## ***The Importance of Touch***

[The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood](#)

has published a report entitled “Wellbeing and Nurture: Physical and Emotional Security in Childhood”. Sponsored by Liverpool John Moores University, the report cites emergent neuro-scientific evidence showing that nurturing touch is an essential prerequisite of the physical and emotional security that children need in order to grow and flourish. There are many practical recommendations for policy-makers, professionals and practitioners.

[Read the Report](#)

## ***Marcus Rashford's Food Poverty Taskforce***

Here at the Children First Alliance we were delighted to see the media coverage for Marcus Rashford's latest initiative. Working in partnership with FareShare and the Food Foundation, he is calling for implementation of 3 key policy recommendations from the [national food strategy](#): the expansion of free school meals to every child whose family is on universal credit; an expansion of holiday provision to all children on free school meals; and a significant boost to the value of Healthy Start vouchers for families with young children. A high-profile figure with personal experience of the issues has the dual advantage of adding credibility and extensive coverage. We'll be following his progress with enthusiastic interest.

## **[NSPCC - Teenagers at Greater Risk than Younger Children](#)**

The NSPCC's report "[How Safe are our Children 2020?](#)" has revealed the scale of abuse against teenagers, and highlights their heightened risk of experiencing abuse offences compared to younger children.

The report also reveals that the NSPCC Helpline received an average of 1,066 contacts a month from April-July from adults with concerns that a child or young person was being physically abused - up 53%.

Compared to younger children, data from the UK nations shows rates of police-recorded offences against teenagers across the UK are:

- *4 times as high for physical abuse offences*
- *9 times as high for online grooming offences*
- *6 times as high for sexual abuse offences.*

Studies have shown the ability of teenagers to look after themselves is often overestimated and there can be a tendency for professionals to focus on teenager's behaviour rather than the causes behind it.

Following the huge impact coronavirus has had on young people, the NSPCC is calling on Government to move with recovery planning and ensure support and services are in place for all children who need them.

Recovery measures should include:

- *Government funding and support packages for schools to ensure they are ready to help all children and young people who need it – particularly those who may have suffered abuse, neglect or other traumatic experiences during the lockdown*
- *Support for teachers so they can confidently help children, including training on child development science and how behavioural problems or difficulties with their emotions can be a sign of trauma.*
- *Government backing for multi-agency partnerships between local authorities, NHS and police to work with schools to review support for vulnerable children.*

**[Read the Full Report](#)**

## ***Child Health - A Whole Society Approach is Needed, say IPPR***

[The Institute for Public Policy Research](#) (IPPR) recommends a “Whole Society” approach in order to “Make a Giant Leap on Child Health”. Long-term conditions require a more preventative approach to health, and the earlier the better. This means childhood health is one of the most important frontiers in modern health policy, but childhood health outcomes in the UK are poor, with rising rates of obesity and mental ill health being particular concerns.

The government will need to address growing levels of ‘health risk’ faced by children. Features of modern life and cuts to services make it harder to have a healthy childhood, and poor or marginalised people face the greatest risks and challenges. In the past, progress against such challenges came through collective action, involving government, communities, individuals, businesses, charities and civil society. The same ambition is needed today.

Any progress would be good for health, business and the economy and the report includes modelling of NHS and wider society costs, which would fall disproportionately on more deprived and urban areas outside the south of England. This makes levelling-up health critical to levelling-up the economy, and should see childhood health put at the heart of our economic recovery from Covid-19.

The IPPR welcomed the obesity strategy announcement and agreed that measures like junk food marketing restrictions and promotion bans will undeniably kick-start progress. They recommend immediate and extensive implementation, while insisting that we go further and faster. [Read the Full Report](#)

## Magic Breakfast Campaign

The school food charity, [Magic Breakfast](#), is campaigning for a “Breakfast Bill” which would ensure Government funding for breakfast for eligible children.

The Charity says: 1.8 million school-age children are currently living in a household experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity. This contributes to an attainment gap, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds more than 19 months behind their wealthier peers by the time they leave school.

An evaluation found that pupils in schools with universal free school breakfast provision made two months additional academic progress, and The University of Leeds found that children who ate breakfast regularly achieved an average of 2 GCSE grades higher than children who rarely ate breakfast. DfE research has found that a child who achieves 1-2 good GCSEs contributes an additional £141,000 to the economy over their lifetime. Teachers also report school breakfasts lead to improvements in children’s behaviour, concentration, social skills, emotional and mental wellbeing and healthy eating habits.

The Bill will give all schools, with significant evidence of need, the support they require to provide a free breakfast to eligible children.

[Read More](#)

## **STOP PRESS: Scottish Law to Enshrine UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Just as this newsletter was being finalised we heard tremendous news from Scotland: that a Bill will soon be introduced to enshrine the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). If passed, the Bill will ensure that the experience of young people and their connections will be consistent across all public services in Scotland.

The convention, which lays out the rights of children throughout their early life, covers the right to play, to be free from violence and to an education, among others.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: “We will – to the maximum extent possible – fully and directly incorporate into Scots law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This will mean public authorities – including the Scottish Government – will be required by law to act in ways compatible with the Convention’s requirements to recognise, respect and be accountable for the rights of children in what we do.” Great news indeed.