

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

By email

29 August 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Breaking down barriers to opportunity must start with abolishing the two-child limit

As a group of school leaders, governors, teachers and those working in education across England, we have so far been encouraged to see the government's commitment to a child poverty strategy, the announcement of a Child Poverty Taskforce and, as Secretary of State, your clear leadership and ambition on this issue. We also share the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity. However, we fear that this mission will be undermined with child poverty levels rising year on year while the two-child limit remains in place. We are writing to share our concerns and to ask you to commit to abolishing this poverty-producing policy in the forthcoming autumn Budget.

The two-child limit is the biggest driver of rising child poverty in the UK today and scrapping it is the most cost-effective way to stop the number of children in poverty increasing. Removing it would lift 300,000 children out of poverty overnight and mean 700,000 children are in less deep poverty.¹ This single policy change would transform the life chances of the almost 1.6 million children affected by the policy across the UK, helping to tackle educational disparities and in turn support schools.

As educators we are privileged to work with children and young people every day. And we are focused on trying to ensure that every pupil has the foundation they need to get on in life and thrive. But to bring about real transformative change for children, we need urgent government action to lift families out of poverty. Together we *can* break down barriers to opportunity, but this must start with tackling family hardship at its root.

Our classrooms are filled with children who are hungry, tired, and lacking the resources and equipment they need to succeed in their education.² They're also anxious and distracted by money worries at home as pressures on household budgets endure.³ For too long now we have seen the ways in which child poverty is having a detrimental effect on the wellbeing,^{4 5} attainment⁶ and attendance⁷ of children and young people, and it is becoming ever more

¹ Child Poverty Action Group, [Things can only get worse](#), 2024

² Education Anti-Poverty Coalition, ['There is only so much we can do' – school staff in England](#), 2023

³ Barnardo's, Cost-of-living report: impact on children and young, 2022

⁴ DfE, [State of the Nation 2022: children and young people's wellbeing](#), 2023

⁵ UCL Centre for Education Policy & Equalising Opportunities and the Sutton Trust, [Attainment and Assessment. COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study \(COSMO\)](#), 2023

⁶ FEA, [FEA Report Card - 2022](#), 2022

⁷ DfE, [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 23/24](#), 2024

impossible for schools to mitigate this. Pupils and families have been let down by policy makers and it's time to put this right.

As school staff and education professionals, we need assurance that you will start to lift the heavy burden of poverty from our children and our classrooms this autumn. One in nine children is now affected by the two-child limit.⁸ Without action, more than 60 per cent of children in families with three or more children will be affected by the policy by the time it is fully rolled out⁹ and our school system will be stretched beyond repair. This policy harms children's lives now, but it also limits their future prospects.

We look forward to working with you to fully break down barriers to opportunity by tackling child poverty and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Taskforce.

Yours sincerely,

Pepe Di'Iasio, General Secretary, **Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)**

Leigh Elliott, CEO, **Children North East**

Alison Garnham, CEO, **Child Poverty Action Group**

Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, **National Education Union (NEU)**

Sam Henson, Deputy Chief Executive, **National Governance Association (NGA)**

Nick Harrison, CEO, **The Sutton Trust**

Baz Ramaiah, Head of Policy, **The Centre for Education and Youth**

Please note: this letter has been supplied to the media for publication and the organisations involved will be publicising this letter.

⁸ Child Poverty Action Group, [Things can only get worse](#), 2024

⁹ Resolution Foundation, [Almost two-in-five large families are not affected by the two-child limit](#), 2024