



FOOD FOR LEARNING

Background

The UK Youth Parliament, in collaboration with Child Poverty Action Group, is campaigning for universal free school meals for all school-aged children. In February 2022, over 430,000 11-18 year olds took part in Make Your Mark, and at the same time hundreds of Members of Youth Parliament were elected into their positions. Make Your Mark gave nearly half a million young people a voice across the UK, with over 780 schools, colleges and youth groups registered to take part in the consultation.

The outcome was the prioritisation of Health and Wellbeing as the biggest issue affecting 11-18 year olds. This was also the top issue for Southend young people, the full report can be accessed on the [Smart Southend website](#). Following this, Members of Youth Parliament ran 190 focus groups across the UK, speaking to 2858 young people throughout the summer. These focus groups took place in formal education settings, as well as informal settings such as youth clubs. Members of Youth Parliament ensured that seldom heard voices such as those from LGBTQ+, special educational needs and disabilities, home educated, and children in care were captured.

Young people's responses in these focus groups were analysed in order to rank the top 5 Health and Wellbeing related issues, which were then debated in the annual House of Commons sitting in November 2022. **The top issue was voted on as the cost of living crisis and its impact on the health and wellbeing of young people.** Members of Youth Parliament were then elected onto a Social Action Group, who formed the Food for Learning campaign to tackle the problem of children going hungry in schools.

Why now?

There are 800,000 children in poverty in England alone who do not qualify for school meals, and around 190,000 of them going through key exams May - June in Years 6, 11 and 13 will not have the nutritious food they need (Bite Back 2030).

Southend Free School Meals 2023

FSM Uptake	Primary School	Secondary School	Special School	Alternative Provision/Pru
Total Pupils	15799	14834	645	58
FSM Eligible	4049	2742	331	37
Number of FSM taken	3133	1403	166	0
% of eligible FSM taken on census day	77.4%	51.2%	50.2%	0.0%

Spill the tea

On the 29 September 2023 Madi, Member of Youth Parliament for Southend hosted a 'Spill the tea' event in Southchurch High School to discuss why free school meals for everyone is so vital and invited decision makers to attend.

Our asks to you!

Under 18's can often face a disadvantage, because we do not have a direct voice in electing who represents us. Some possible ideas are listed below.

- Are you able to request a Council/ Westminster Hall debate on the topic of free school meals in Southend/ Nationally? Could you ask Questions about how we can move towards universal free school meals to those who can act upon it?
- We would like for you to spread awareness about the issues surrounding free school meals currently (especially about disparity across schools.) We have some images/suggested text we can share with you. Please use #FoodForLearning
- Issue press release about actions you hope to take to support this campaign.
- Encourage schools to listen to YP when choosing catering for a balanced meal also encouraging a more universal amount for free school meal allowances and food prices across schools to prevent the inequality across schools.
- Push for the support for electively home educated young people with free school meals for example a voucher for food within term times to support those who currently receive no help under the current FSM system.
- Continue to meet with young people in your area to get their thoughts and opinions and see how the issues affect them.
- Encourage in school food banks as seen in Earls Hall Primary School (picture below) where students, staff and school all donate what they can to an in school food bank so that struggling families and staff can access this food bank if they need food at home and cant afford to buy it.



Thank you!