

School meal debt is **shameful.**

Let's **#EndSchoolMealDebt**



To end school meal debt we are calling for:

- The School Meal Debt Fund to be made permanent.
- Free school meals to be extended to all low income families.

School Meal Debt

Aberlour Children's Charity has campaigned to see an end to school meal debt in Scotland.

That children should ever be burdened with debt or could be denied a meal at school because of that debt goes against everything that seems fair and just.

School meal debt is a symptom of families not having enough money to provide for their children. Tackling child poverty must include ending school meal debt and hidden school hunger.

Aberlour's research has shown that school meal debt has been on the rise year on year as ever more families struggle to feed their children at home let alone at school.

- In 2023, **more than 30,000 children** across Scotland had school meal debt, totalling **£1.8 million**.
- By 2024, local authorities reported that school meal debt had increased to **£2.8 million**.

At Aberlour we see families every day who rely on foodbanks because they can't afford to feed their families. We see parents going without so that their children can eat. We see children arrive at school having had no breakfast.

Aberlour's campaign to **#EndSchoolMealDebt** successfully persuaded the Scottish Government to write off nearly £3 million of school meal debt through the introduction of the School Meal Debt Fund.

We welcomed this clear action to tackle school meal debt.

However, to end school meal debt and hidden school hunger for good, we must extend free school meal eligibility to all low-income families in Scotland—starting with all families receiving the Scottish Child Payment.

Free School Meals

Currently, all children in Primary 1–5 receive universal free school meals. In Primary 6 & 7, children from families receiving the Scottish Child Payment also qualify for free school meals. For all other children in Primary 6 and beyond, free school meal eligibility depends on household income:

- Families receiving Universal Credit or both Child Tax Credits & Working Tax Credits must earn **£9,552 or less** per year.
- Families receiving only Child Tax Credits must earn **£19,995 or less** per year.

Income thresholds for free school meals were set by the UK Government in 2002 to reflect the introduction of tax credit thresholds. These income thresholds have been revised and uprated only intermittently since. In Scotland, free school meal thresholds have been increased beyond UK Government set income thresholds in recent years. However, income thresholds across the UK have failed to keep pace with inflation in that time. This

means that far fewer low-income families are now eligible for free school meals than when those income thresholds were first introduced, despite a rise in child poverty and consequent food insecurity in that time.

Free school meal income thresholds must be reviewed and updated to ensure more low-income families can also benefit from free school meals.

In 2002, free school meal income thresholds were set at 67% of the UK median income. By 2024, free school meal income thresholds had dropped to only 43% of UK median income in England and Wales and 53% in Scotland.

Children’s Right to Food

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees children’s right to food. UNCRC insists that government must uphold this right by making sure all children have access to healthy and nutritious food, whether this is at home or at school. The right to food is directly linked to children’s right to education as hungry children can’t be ready to learn. The stress of families’ financial insecurity can impact children’s learning and education.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is clear that to uphold children’s right to food the Scottish Government must ensure all children can access nutritious foods, expand free school meals eligibility to all low-income families, and address the root causes of food insecurity, including poverty.

Realising children’s right to food means ending school meal debt and hidden school hunger for good.

“In my friend group, I’d say about half of them can’t eat food when we go out, so you see people buying food for their friends. They come to lunch with me even though they’re not getting anything. We go to Greggs and, because I’ve got like £3 or £3.50 to spend, I’ll get two Yum Yums and a sausage roll and I’ll give them the Yum Yums, just because they don’t get any food anyway.”

- Young Person supported by Aberlour

£2.8 million

is owed in school meal debt by families across Scotland.

 30,000+

children and their families have school meal debt.



More than 1 in 4 children (26%) in Scotland live in poverty, with some areas experiencing rates higher than 1 in 3.

Aberlour Children’s Charity
Kintail House, Forthside Way, Stirling
FK8 1QZ

www.aberlour.org.uk
Scottish Charity no: SC007991

For more information, please contact:
Martin Canavan (Head of Policy and Participation)

Email: Martin.Canavan@aberlour.org.uk
Phone: 07714 271700