

The Children's Commission on Poverty
c/o The Children's Society
Edward Rudolf House
Margery Street
London WC1X 0JL

Head Office

City Reach
5 Greenwich View Place
London E14 9NN

Tel: 020 7512 2112
Fax: 020 7512 2010
info@4Children.org.uk
www.4Children.org.uk

Tuesday 29th July 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Children's Commission on Poverty Inquiry into the Costs of School Life

4Children welcomes the opportunity to contribute written evidence to the Children's Commission on Poverty's Inquiry into the Costs of School Life.

4Children is the national charity all about children and families. We have spearheaded a joined-up, integrated approach to children's services and work with a wide range of partners around the country to ensure children and families have access to the services and support they need in their communities. We run Children's Centres as well as family and youth services across Britain. We develop, influence and shape national policy on all aspects of the lives of children, young people and families.

In this brief response, we would like to specifically highlight the impact that poverty can have on school readiness, and the crucial role that high quality early years provision can play in mitigating some of the effects that poverty has on educational attainment and wellbeing. We also offer some thoughts on how such support can be delivered both now and in the future, particularly through Children's Centres. In doing so, we aim to address the last of the Inquiry's key points (which asks about "Anything else on how poverty affects the school experience"), and raise what is, in our view, the key issue of how poverty affects children before they reach school, and the consequential impact this can have.

To begin with, it is important to note that evidence shows that children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds often arrive at school less prepared than their peers. The Department for Education has previously used two particular measures of "school readiness" which demonstrate that children who meet the free school meal qualifying criteria have frequently fallen behind their peers by the time they reach school.

The first of these metrics is the proportion of children achieving a "good level of development" (as defined in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile) by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (i.e. by the end of the academic year in which the child turns five). According to the Department for Education's figures for 2012-13, only 36.2% of

those children eligible for free school meals achieved a “good level of development”, compared to 55.2% of all other pupils.¹

The second measure that has been used by the Department is a child’s performance in the phonics screening check at the beginning of Year 1 – the check comprises a list of 40 words, with a mark of 32 representing the expected standard for this age group. Once again, figures for 2012-13 suggest that the proportion of children eligible for free school meals who met the expected standard (55.8%) was lower than for their peers (72.3%).²

Therefore, it is important to recognise that economic disadvantage and poverty are issues which not only affect children in the years they are at school, but have a tangible impact even before they arrive, with significant implications at every subsequent Key Stage. For instance, latest figures from the Department for Education suggest that the initial attainment gap between children who are eligible for free school meals and other pupils upon entry to primary school appears to persist all the way through to the end of secondary education – GCSE results for 2012-13 show that 69.3% of children who qualified for free school meals achieved the benchmark of 5 A*-C grades, compared to 85.3% of other pupils.³

Consequently, when thinking about how to address the impact of poverty on children at school, due consideration needs to be given to interventions which take place during the pre-school period as well. In particular, the benefits that high quality early years provision can have on a child’s development and performance are well recognised. For example, the “*Effective Provision of Pre-School Education*” (EPPE) study was a longitudinal piece of research conducted between 1997 and 2010 which tracked the impact of pre-school provision on children’s outcomes over the long-term, through both primary and secondary school. EPPE produced a number of significant findings regarding the positive impact of high quality pre-school provision, including on disadvantaged children, such as:

- Pre-school education enhances all-round development in children. The duration of pre-school education is important, with an earlier start (under 3 years) related to better intellectual development.⁴
- **Studies up to age 7 show that disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school provision, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds.**⁵

¹ Department for Education (2013) [EYFSP Impact Indicator 27a](#)

² Department for Education (2013) [EYFSP Impact Indicator 27b](#)

³ Department for Education (2014) [GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England 2012-13](#), p. 7 (Chart 4)

⁴ Professor Kathy Sylva et al (2004) [The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education \(EPPE\) Project – Final Report: A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004](#), p. ii

- The early experience of high-quality pre-school predicted better outcomes for Mathematics and Science at age 14, and pre-school quality predicted better social-behavioural outcomes at age 14 **(even after controlling for background characteristics)**.⁶

Ensuring that high quality early years provision is available for disadvantaged children therefore represents an important aspect of combating the effects of poverty on their performance and wellbeing later on in school. One particularly significant source of support for children during the pre-school period are Children’s Centres, which have the capacity to reach substantial numbers of disadvantaged families. In 4Children’s most recent “*Children’s Centre Census*”, we found that over 1 million families are now using Children’s Centres on a regular basis, and that around two-thirds of “vulnerable” families are registered with their local Centre.⁷

In addition, the “*Census*” also found that 38% of Centres are providing services for children over the age of five,⁸ and moving forward 4Children believes that delivering services for older children can become a central part of Centres’ work, enabling them to go even further and offer additional support to disadvantaged children after they start school.

In our “manifesto” for the future, “*Making Britain Great for Children and Families*”, which was published earlier this year, we put forward a proposal for building on the existing network of Children’s Centres by transforming them into more broadly-based Children and Family Centres. In effect, these would represent multi-purpose community hubs which local families could use to access an extensive range of services, from pregnancy right through to their children’s teenage years, with extra help for those that need it.⁹

Under this model, Children and Family Centres would bring together and co-ordinate services, from midwives and health visitors to childcare, out-of-school clubs and youth support. Universal advice and activities would also be provided, meaning Centres would continue to be there for everyone, but with specialist help on hand for families with greater needs, such as help with parenting, debt and housing and, crucially, support to tackle many of the underlying issues of family crisis including domestic abuse, alcohol and drug addiction and poor mental health.

⁵ Professor Kathy Sylva et al (2004) [*The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education \(EPPE\) Project – Final Report: A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004*](#), p. ii

⁶ Professor Kathy Sylva et al (2010) [*Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project \(EPPSE 3-14\) – Final Report from the Key Stage 3 Phase: Influences on Students’ Development From age 11-14*](#), p. iii

⁷ 4Children (2013) [*Children’s Centre Census*](#), p. 14

⁸ 4Children (2013) [*Children’s Centre Census*](#), p. 26

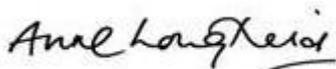
⁹ 4Children (2014) [*Making Britain Great for Children and Families*](#), p. 3

Children and Family Centres would prospectively offer services to children and young people across the 0-19 age range, meaning that they would be able to provide ongoing and co-ordinated support to those from disadvantaged backgrounds not only in the years before they start school, but throughout their entire school career.

In summary, as well as considering how children living in poverty are affected by issues such as access to school uniforms or educational materials whilst at school, we hope that the Commission will also recognise the significant impact that poverty has during the pre-school period and the implications this has for children's subsequent experiences and performance later on. The availability of high quality early years provision is crucial to addressing the impact of poverty in this regard, and in our view Children's Centres have a crucial role to play in providing support both now and in the future.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this response in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Anne Longfield
Chief Executive, 4Children

Tel: 020 7522 6929

Email: anne.longfield@4Children.org.uk