

EDUCATION SPECIAL

CPAG launches education campaign at party conferences

CPAG joined with the National Union of Teachers (NUT) for a series of party conference meetings titled *Education: closing or increasing the poverty gap?*

CPAG used the meetings to launch our new campaign to close the educational attainment gap that means children from poor families do progressively worse at each stage of their schooling compared to other pupils. This leaves the poorest children much less likely to leave school with the skills and qualifications that will help them attain well paid work. CPAG is campaigning to break this link that means childhood poverty continues into adult life and onto the next generation.

Key speakers were the Schools Minister, Jim Knight MP; the Shadow Secretary of State for Children Schools and Families, Michael Gove MP; and Lib Dem Shadow Minister for Schools, Stephen Williams MP. Also speaking were CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green; NUT's Secretary General, Steve Sinnott; and Jack Lewars, Ben Bilverstone and Laura Davies from the English Secondary Students Association (ESSA).

All three meetings were very well attended. A packed room questioned Schools Minister, Jim Knight, who highlighted the difficulty of getting resources to deprived children who are not in areas of concentrated deprivation. The Minister showed interest in successful international models of school provision and is soon to visit schools in Finland, a country notable also for its low levels of child poverty and inequality. At the Lib



L-R, Ben Bilverstone, Steve Sinnott, Fiona Millar, Kate Green and Jim Knight MP at the CPAG/NUT Labour conference fringe meeting.

Dem and Conservative conference meetings, support was shown for a 'pupil premium' that would raise funding for the most disadvantaged pupils to match the amount spent on pupils in private sector education.

Kate Green highlighted findings from CPAG's new report, *Chicken and egg: child poverty and educational inequality* (see p2) that show the attainment gap between the wealthiest and most disadvantaged children widening at each stage of schooling. She argued that while extra support within schools is vital for disadvantaged students, education strategy must also consider children's home life situations to address the barriers that impede learning both in school and outside the school gates. Central to this is improving family incomes and lifting more children out of poverty.

Kate Green said: 'We are delighted that so much interest has been shown by politicians and delegates from all three parties in response to our conference campaigning on the links between education and poverty. Unless we improve educational outcomes for the poorest children, our national goal of ending child poverty by 2020 will not be met.'

The meetings marked the start of an important new strand of policy work and campaigning by CPAG, focussed on the links between child poverty and education. This work will include a major new publication and public facing campaign in 2008. We will also be undertaking further joint campaigning work with NUT, ESSA and other education sector organisations representing teachers, parents and students.



In the House

Parliament returned from recess on 8 October. Key business for the session is expected to be Bills on **Children in Care**, to give looked after children more stability and support their performance at school; **Education and Skills**, which will include raising the school leaving age to 18 and implement recommendations from the Leitch Review; and **Employment Simplification**, which the Prime Minister said will deliver a simpler and fairer enforcement of the minimum wage.

CPAG report reveals schools poverty gap

In September CPAG published the policy report *Chicken and egg: child poverty and educational inequalities* by Donald Hirsch. It charts how the gap in education performance between poor children and their more affluent peers steadily increases as they progress through the education system. This leads to severe disadvantages in later life, such as difficulty finding work without good qualifications.

By age three, disadvantaged children are already developmentally nine months behind. At each stage of schooling the gap grows so that by 14 disadvantaged children are nearly two years behind. Children performing just below average from wealthy backgrounds are more likely to catch up in secondary school, while those just below average from poor backgrounds are more likely to become the worst performers in secondary school.

The report concludes that education cannot on its own overcome the effects of economic inequality. It can play an important role, but strategies to narrow the gap in education outcomes by social background are needed.

CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green, said: 'Children whose families cannot afford decent childcare, a quiet place to study at home with books and a computer, school outings and after school activities, and who may spend time caring for a disabled parent or younger siblings, will not have all their problems solved at school. Unless such inequalities are addressed too, the poorest pupils will continue to come through the school gates with barriers to learning.'

Over the next year, CPAG will undertake policy and research work on the relationship between education, inequality and poverty and will be publishing a major edited report on educational inequalities in 2008. The report will adopt a life chances approach to educational inequalities, considering how schools can do more to compensate children for early disadvantage and asking if the right balance is being struck between expenditure on school-based initiatives and measures protecting children and families from falling into poverty and disadvantage that damages educational outcomes.

Chicken and egg: child poverty and educational inequalities, by Donald Hirsch can be downloaded by following the education link in the campaigns section of the CPAG website: www.cpag.org.uk.

We are grateful to The Network for Social Change whose support has made this publication possible.

Dare to Care: make time to end child poverty

The Campaign to End Child Poverty has joined forces with CSV (Community Service Volunteers) to launch *Dare to Care: make time to end child poverty*.

New research released for the launch of *Dare to Care* reveals young people's views on what poverty means in Britain today. Not having the correct school uniform and not affording school trips were given as the most telling indicators. End Child Poverty's Director, Hilary Fisher, said: 'It is interesting that for children it seems the visible indicators of poverty are the ones that they are most sensitive about. Not being able to afford to go on school trips or the correct uniform leads to uncomfortable questions from their peers and in some cases can lead to bullying.'

Children from the poorest families miss out on many opportunities and may need extra help with their education or other support to fulfil their potential. As a member of End Child Poverty, CPAG is encouraging people to volunteer their time for *Dare to Care*. Everyone can help somehow – by sharing skills, helping organise activities, or helping with extra education support like reading with children. Volunteering helps campaigners break down social barriers, improve public perceptions of poverty and increase public support for politicians to take the actions necessary to end child poverty.

Visit www.daretocarecampaign.org.uk to learn more about volunteering for *Dare to Care*.

End Child Poverty update

The Campaign's Month of Action runs from 17 October to 21 November. Key events that you can support include:

2 November – Visit your MP Day

On this day, or as close as possible, please request a meeting or surgery appointment to lobby your MP on child poverty. A toolkit with information to prepare for your meeting can be found at www.endchildpoverty.org.uk.

10.30am, 7 November – Rally outside Treasury

We need as many child poverty campaigners as possible to give the Government a clear sign of strength of support. Email campaigns@savethechildren.org.uk for details.



The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, spoke and answered campaigners questions at the End Child Poverty Reception at the Labour Party Conference.

JRF research backs CPAG's incomes for education call

It is the social and economic circumstances that most effect children's achievement in education, not the quality of their school. This finding, from the first set of projects to be published in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Poverty and Education programme, challenges the conventional political debate on education standards.

Politicians remain focussed on school management structures and statutory targets and curriculum requirements to drive up standards. However, CPAG is campaigning for recognition that, even in the best performing schools, the poorest children face major barriers to learning. The Foundation's research gives important support to CPAG's campaign, finding that just 14 per cent of the incidence of low achievement can be attributed to school quality. The most important factors associated with educational outcomes are the social and economic circumstances of children. The main indicators uncovered by the study include:

- eligibility for free school meals;
- the neighbourhood employment rate;
- percentage of single parent households; and
- the proportion of intake parents with poor qualifications.

The study concludes that policy makers must expand their focus beyond school quality. The learning environment outside the school gates receives particular attention. Pre-school education, parenting help, support for family incomes and policies to improve the home environment for disadvantaged children all have major parts to play. Barriers associated with the curriculum and the student-teacher relationship are also identified.

The Foundation's research is the most extensive study of the links between poverty and education for many years. CPAG will draw strongly on the important evidence base the Foundation's education project is providing in our new strand of campaigning work on education.

Cost of 'free' schooling up to £1,000

CPAG and its partners in the Schools Costs Coalition have published new research highlighting the high additional costs that children and their families face in accessing 'free' state education.

A survey conducted by Coalition member Citizens Advice found that three-quarters of secondary school parents and two-thirds of primary school parents who responded find it difficult to meet the costs of uniforms and school trips. The total extra costs are in some cases as high as £1,000.

Other school costs that families found hard to meet included school photographs, non-uniform days, equipment for some lessons, school plays and music lessons. Many families found budgeting difficult as payment requests tend to be made at short notice. Only around a quarter of families thought their schools made it clear that low-income families could be exempt from some costs, such as for school trips.

The impact of costs on children and families goes beyond preventing children purchasing uniforms and joining in many activities. Some respondents reported their children have been disciplined because they could not afford the correct uniform. Some have been bullied by peers for incorrect uniform or not being able to afford to participate in activities and trips.

The Coalition believes that stronger enforcement responsibilities need to be placed on statutory bodies to ensure that children from low income families are not disadvantaged in school. These responsibilities include a model charging policy for schools for trips and other costs to ensure families are informed about help with costs and it is clear when costs are voluntary. The Coalition is also calling on the new Department for Children, Schools and Families to introduce a statutory duty on local authorities, backed up by earmarked funding, to provide school uniform grants for children whose families are in receipt of maximum child tax credit.

Campaigning plans are being agreed by Coalition members to highlight the survey's findings and lobby for its recommendations to be adopted.

CPAG's welfare reform conference a sell-out success

The hot topic of welfare reform was the theme for CPAG's Annual Conference in London, which took place on 6 October. Led by the CPAG's Welfare Rights Workers, *Welfare reform: whatever next?* challenged the Government's emphasis on greater personal responsibility without protecting the welfare rights of individuals and families.

A packed hall heard keynote speaker Roy Sainsbury, of the Social Policy Research Unit in York, make the case for a single working age benefit. Roy argued that long-term reform is needed to simplify a highly complicated system and provide tailored support to address claimants' individual needs, helping them move towards employment when they are ready.

Other speeches and seminars covered the new employment support allowance, local housing allowance, proposals

to move lone parents into the jobseeker's allowance (JSA) system and the recent interest shown by politicians in a single working age benefit. Delegates were encouraged to share their views on recent proposals and the politics driving welfare reform.

CPAG is drawing on delegates' comments in expressing our concerns to Ministers about recent proposals to move lone parents onto JSA. We are working with other organisations and service users to call on Ministers to recognise that the JSA regime cannot meet the employment support needs of lone parents and that JSA sanctions will worsen child poverty. We are providing evidence in support of positive alternatives that will be more successful at meeting the shared objective of helping lone parents find and retain good quality jobs, without causing risk to their families.

The Scottish Parliament's Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee voted last month to recommend the approval of subordinate legislation paving the way for universal free school meal pilots to go ahead in Glasgow, Borders, East Ayrshire, Fife and West Dunbartonshire. Under the trial all children in primary years one to three will be entitled to a healthy free school meal for six months from October 2007. The vote came after submission of written evidence by CPAG and the co-ordination by CPAG of a letter backing the pilots from the Association of Headteachers and Deputies Scotland, the Church of Scotland, Save the Children, Children in Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland and Poverty Alliance and published in *The Herald*.

In response to questions from MSPs, Children's Minister Adam Ingram agreed that the pilots would be judged a success 'if there are no insuperable practical barriers to roll out', and restated the Government's intention, in addition to the pilot, to extend free school meal entitlement across all primary and secondary schools for children in families receiving maximum working tax credit.

Your donations make a difference

Child Poverty Action Group is a charity promoting action for the relief directly or indirectly of poverty among children and families with children. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention;
- bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty;
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty: improving children's lives today and helping to abolish child poverty tomorrow.

Please make a donation

- Send us a **cheque, postal order** or **Charities Aid Foundation** voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
- By **credit card** online at www.cpag.org.uk.
- Set up a **standing order** through your bank to make a regular gift.
- Make a will and leave us a **legacy**.
- Set up **Give As You Earn** (payroll giving) with your employer.

Add Value. Gift Aid It!

Donations to CPAG qualify for tax relief. For every £1 that you donate we can claim an extra 28p. Anyone who pays income tax (on a salary, a pension or investments) or capital gains tax can complete a Gift Aid declaration form.

For more information visit our website www.cpag.org.uk, email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

CPAG in Scotland calls for review of school uniform grants

In response to figures published by Glasgow City Council showing 33,000 children received grants of £47 to help with the costs of school uniform, CPAG in Scotland called for a review of school uniform grants to ensure their adequacy and consistency across Scotland. Research by Susan Robb, a postgraduate student on placement with CPAG in Scotland, found significant variation in the level of grants available, the eligibility criteria for grants and the level of information available to families about uniform grants. Speaking to the BBC John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland, said 'We need a review as there is a clear lack of consistency in terms of eligibility and the level of school uniform grants.'

Poverty inquiry calls successful

Calls by two coalitions involving CPAG (reported in August's *Campaigns Newsletter*) for the Scottish Parliaments Communities Committee to undertake inquiries into child poverty and fuel poverty have been successful. An enquiry into fuel poverty is already underway and CPAG along with Barnardos, Save the Children and others has submitted joint evidence calling on fuel poverty measures to target children and families. The Committee has also said that it shares 'concerns expressed by a number of organisations about child poverty and will also undertake work in this area.'

Communicating UK poverty-research awards

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and Ipsos-Mori have been short-listed for the 2007 MRS Public Policy/Social Research Effectiveness Award for research which explores public attitudes to UK poverty. The research looks at the implications of public attitudes for organisations like CPAG who campaign to increase public support for eradicating poverty in the UK. It suggests that UK poverty needs to be shown in new ways to reflect changed realities and avoid 'compassion fatigue'. The judges of the award said 'This research challenges and redefines the agenda around modern day poverty. It demonstrates a really effective blend of traditional and less-traditional techniques, which together combine into an effective communications platform for influencing and changing thinking.' CPAG is engaging with JRF to find out how the research findings can help us campaign more effectively. For more information on this research please contact Teresa Hanley on teresa_hanley@dsl.pipex.com.