

# JUST CHANGE CAMPAIGN

TYNE & WEAR  
**CITIZENS**

&

**CITIZENS** UK

**A pupil-led investigation into the £65 million  
missing from the pockets of children on  
Free School Meals**

[www.citizensuk.org/just-change](http://www.citizensuk.org/just-change)

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Poverty holds children back.  
Giving them access to their  
school meal change would  
help unlock their potential.

# Foreword

Tyne and Wear Citizens established the Just Change campaign following our listening campaign in 2017, which saw us speak to thousands of people in Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham.

It didn't come as a surprise that poverty – driven by low wages, insecure work and cutbacks to public services – was one of the main issues putting pressure on members of our community and their families. The North East has the most frequently used food bank, the highest number of zero hours contracts in the whole country and has some of the worst levels of child poverty in the UK.

Listening campaigns, however, can unveil hidden injustices. By speaking to local people about what concerned them, Tyne & Wear Citizens uncovered the stigma felt by children who are short-changed by the Free School Meals system. The inability to access their unused school dinner change left them feeling stigmatised, disadvantaged and - most worryingly - hungry.

All children, regardless of their background, deserve a chance to thrive. Yet, poverty at home is the strongest statistical predictor of how well a child will perform at school. It's simply not right that these children are being further disadvantaged because they cannot access their school meal change.

After hearing testimony from children affected by this injustice, seeing the evidence gathered by charity Children North East, and understand the impact this damaging distortion of the Free School Meals system has on children's lives, we felt compelled to act.

Our alliance of schools, universities, faith organisations and the charity and community sector has teamed up with pupils affected to ask for a simple change that all schools can make - make sure your catering providers return the money to the children who need it most and level the playing field between children on Free School Meals and all other pupils.

While our campaign has started in Tyne and Wear, our hope is that this report will resonate with fellow community leaders, teachers, parents and decision-makers across the country. After all, there are ca. 745,000 secondary school pupils on Free School Meals in the UK and all of them are likely to be affected. What's more - the system can and is being fixed. Three schools have already fixed their systems and are giving the change back to children who need it most. Three others and one local authority (North Tyneside) are also looking at ways they could make the change in the near future.



Pupils from 6 North East schools back the campaign

Now we need your help to ensure every school does the same.

**Sheila, Steve, Katie, Kath, Samira, Joanne, Suzanne**

On behalf of the Tyne and Wear Citizens' Just Change Action Team.

# Section 1: Just Change - Tackling school hunger and inequality

When groups of school pupils entitled to Free School Meals spoke to Tyne and Wear Citizens leaders as part of their listening campaign in 2017, questions about how the system works were raised.

In these conversations, pupils explained that the way Free School Meals are run is holding them back and setting them apart from their peers. They asked why funding intended to provide them with lunch is taken away from them if they do not use their full allowance on a specific day.

The Just Change campaign gives pupils a chance to tell policy makers how an injustice in a system that could easily be fixed is holding them back. By asserting control over funding intended to feed them, pupils can reduce hunger at school, achieve equality with their peers and get the opportunity to reach their potential.

It was thanks to the work of these pupils that the central injustice highlighted in this report - up to £65 million earmarked for the poorest children being taken away from them - has been revealed.

**£65m** of Free School Meal money is being diverted from the poorest secondary school children

*“This campaign is important to us because it allows us to express how we are being treated differently to people who pay for their school meals. If you have change, or if you are off one day, your change won’t add on. Some of our friends said that if they could keep the change they would buy extra food for the mornings for example, if they can’t get breakfast at home. But because they can’t keep the change they can never do that.”*

**- Year 8 pupil from Kenton School, Newcastle**

Eating @ PARK VIEW

Park View School, Durham, students get involved in the campaign



# Hunger in the classroom

For more than 75 years, British schools have been a place where students have been entitled to a school lunch, reflecting a shared value that no matter your income, every young person must be guaranteed a nutritious meal and an equal chance of learning<sup>1</sup>.

Putting this value into practice has never been more needed, with a drastic rise in child poverty allowing hunger to claim a place in our country's classrooms.

According to the Social Metrics Commission, 4.5 million children in the UK are locked in poverty, in families without adequate income to meet their costs<sup>2</sup>. UNICEF reports that as many as one in five children are food insecure - meaning they are forced to reduce portions or skip meals - and 1 in 10 'severely' so<sup>3</sup>. These are one of the highest rates in the European Union.

With food bank use rising, and many children not guaranteed adequate food at home, Britain's hunger problem is such that in November 2018 the UN's global expert on poverty highlighted how schools are scrambling to fill the gap.

“ Children are showing up at school with empty stomachs, and schools are collecting food on an ad hoc basis and sending it home because teachers know that their students will otherwise go hungry. ”

UN special rapporteur on poverty, Philip Alston, November 2018.<sup>4</sup>



Parents suffer too - research by the Young Women's Trust has shown that nearly half of mothers under the age of 25 regularly miss meals in order to provide for their children<sup>5</sup>.

Hungry students may also struggle to learn, and research shows that poor nutrition is directly linked to lower academic performance, worse health outcomes and feelings of stigma and shame<sup>6</sup>. That experience of school hunger, and sense of injustice, is no stranger to pupils in the North East driving the Just Change campaign.

<sup>1</sup> The 1944 Education Act allowed the Minister of Health to require local education authorities (LEAs) to provide milk, meals and other refreshment for pupils in attendance at schools in their area.

<sup>2</sup> Social Metrics Commission, A New Way of Measuring Poverty, September 2018.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, 'Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries', June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Statement on the Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, 16 November 2018.

<sup>5</sup> A poll of 300 young mums carried out by Survation for Young Women's Trust, 28 March 2017.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity among Children across the Globe, June 2017.

**“ It’s simply not right. A hungry child can’t concentrate...  
A child who can’t concentrate can’t learn, and a child who can’t learn  
can’t reach their full potential... And isn’t that what we all want? ”**

Kath Wade, RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, Just Change action team, Tyne and Wear Citizens

Not all children living in poverty or experiencing hunger are entitled to Free School Meals. Many children from low-income families do not meet the government’s criteria<sup>7</sup>, while others whose family’s immigration status does not allow them recourse to public funds are also not supported.

## Communities organising for change

Tyne & Wear Citizens, schools and pupils wanted to challenge the unfairness they experienced and saw around them. It wasn’t just about hunger – it was also about equality, dignity and a response led by young people. A common concern of pupils on Free School Meals – and a key reason why some do not take them up – is that the way they are delivered can set them apart from their peers, stigmatising them for being poor.

**“ The message here is simple: kids shouldn’t be treated any differently because they’re on Free School Meals. This practice is taking away their choice to keep their change and use it for extra food ”**

- Steve Forster, Development Worker, Churches Together Newcastle and leader with Tyne and Wear Citizens



Young leaders from Tyne and Wear Citizens speak out at a public Assembly

Pupils involved in the Just Change campaign specifically highlighted being treated differently from their peers in the way they may be limited to the most basic meal options and unable to use their ‘change’ on subsequent days, for example to buy breakfast. This is a longstanding injustice which needs addressing urgently.

The proposal made by young people launching the Just Change campaign is one measure proposed by Children North East’s ‘Poverty Proofing the School Day’ programme which allows schools to ensure they offer a positive experience for all students, no matter their income.

<sup>7</sup> Criteria for eligibility for free school meals can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

<sup>8</sup> Exposing the impact of poverty on school life, The Children’s Society: [www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/At\\_What\\_Cost\\_Exposing\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_poverty\\_on\\_school\\_life-report\\_%20summary.pdf](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/At_What_Cost_Exposing_the_impact_of_poverty_on_school_life-report_%20summary.pdf)

# A national problem

While the Just Change campaign was launched by Tyne and Wear Citizens after pupils identified the problem in their own schools, it affects pupils eligible for Free School Meals across the UK.

Through Poverty Proofing the School Day and research undertaken by Citizens UK, this issue has been identified as affecting up to 750,000 secondary school students across the country.



Over the past three years  
**Poverty Proofing the School Day** has spoken to over  
**65,000** pupils in  
over **180** schools  
across England and issues  
relating to this came up time  
and time again.

## Poverty Proofing the School Day and the work of Children North East

Poverty Proofing the School Day<sup>8</sup> has been developed and delivered by Children North East - a Tyne and Wear Citizens member institution - along with children and teachers, based on the belief that all activity in schools should not identify, exclude, treat differently or make assumptions about those children whose household income or resources are lower than others. The programme enables schools to identify and overcome barriers to learning faced by children and young people from households with fewer financial resources.

Poverty Proofing the School Day involves speaking to every child within the school about the stigma and discrimination pupils face as a consequence of poverty. Children then work with Children North East to develop recommendations and an action plan for the school. Simple measures such as offering students a free drink and snack before exams, improving IT access, introducing breakfast clubs, and changing the ways school meals and uniforms are administered can prevent poorer students being discriminated against during the school day and improve outcomes.

It was through Poverty Proofing the School Day that the issue of Free School Meals change was first identified as a widespread issue. Members of the Children North East staff are now on the Tyne & Wear Citizens leadership team, where they work together with other fellow member institutions - such as schools and faith groups - to form the community's challenge to decision makers to resolve this injustice.

<sup>8</sup> For more information please see [www.povertyproofing.co.uk](http://www.povertyproofing.co.uk)

## Section 2:

# How are pupils receiving Free School Meals being short changed?

Schools in the UK are given money by the government to make sure they are able to provide free meals to pupils who are eligible because their parents are on low incomes and/or in receipt of benefits.

The way the funding is provided, and who is entitled to a free meal, differs across the UK. In England, for example, each school is given £440 per year - roughly £2.30 per academic day - for each student eligible and claiming Free School Meals.<sup>10</sup> In most schools this provides at least a hot lunch and often a 'meal deal'. In some schools, more expensive options are also available, but only for pupils who are able to pay extra.

In most schools Free School Meals are administered by providing pupils with a daily allowance usually up to £2.30 on a cashless card that can be used at the school canteen, in the same way that pupils who pay for their meals do.

Yet in almost all schools across the UK, if a student on Free School Meals does not use their allowance by the end of the day - because they are absent from school, attending a lunchtime club, or for any other reason - their credit is deducted and may be retained by the school and/or catering provider. Similarly, if a pupil only uses a part of their daily allowance, they would not be able to use the remainder on subsequent days.<sup>11</sup>

This means that, unlike other students, they are charged for days when they are absent, and cannot spend their unused credit on other days to purchase breakfast or items that they could take home to supplement their other meals.

This disparity of treatment has been one of the most common complaints pupils have raised during the formation of the Just Change campaign, forming a clear demand that they should be treated the same as their classmates, and not discriminated against because of their family income.

“ ***It is unfair because groups like the council take our money. Even if someone is on Free School Meals the money should build up on the account. It means that each student would get an equal amount of money.*** ” **Pupil in Year 10**

Further, in a context where pupils may not be eating well at home, and may not be guaranteed a nutritious breakfast or dinner, the flexibility to use the Free School Meal allowance intended for them has been identified by pupils themselves as an essential way to help them ensure that they can eat well and study without hunger.

<sup>10</sup> Department for Education, The national funding formula for schools and high needs, September 2017.

<sup>11</sup> In many schools, £2.30 will get some sort of 'meal deal' of a hot lunch and a drink, sometimes with a dessert. In some schools, the price can be slightly lower, though pupils receiving daily allowances would not be able to carry over any change for the following day.



ParkView School students and staff enact a film scene on the subject

## Section 3: The missing millions

“ I think it’s wrong for companies, councils and schools to be taking our money without telling us. It’s practically stealing. Imagine all the other things you could afford to buy with all the money that’s being taken away from us. It’s almost as if they’re the real school bullies. They’re taking money we need to buy food to stay active for the rest of the day. ”

Year 8 pupil at Kenton School

Citizens UK has estimated that around £65 million of funding intended for secondary school pupils on Free School Meals across the UK may end up being unused by these pupils, and instead taken back or retained by schools and/or catering providers.

Every year, this works out as an average of



that a pupil on Free School Meals cannot use to buy food at the school canteen.

That’s **£65 million** lost by children to catering providers

This calculation is based on the following assumptions:

- There are approximately



**750,000**

secondary school pupils in the UK registered for Free School Meals.<sup>12</sup>

- In England, schools receive £440 per year for each pupil claiming Free School Meals - using this figure to estimate funding levels across the UK, this suggests that approximately £328 million is provided for this purpose.<sup>13</sup>
- However, government data shows that about 20% of Free School Meal pupils do not take up their free meal on any given day<sup>14</sup>, meaning that over the course of the year approximately £65.6 million may have been retained by catering providers, rather than kept as credit for pupils to use on other items. This does not include savings made when a pupil only spends a part of their daily allowance, meaning the figure could be higher still.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, Schools, pupils and their characteristics, January 2018; Scottish Government, School Meals Dataset, June 2018; Stats Wales, Provision of Meals and Milk, January 2018; Northern Ireland Department for Education, Statistical Bulletin 3/2018, School Meals in Northern Ireland 2017/18, April 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Funding formulas are different in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but we use England’s formula as the most widely used and the simplest basis to calculate a UK-wide estimation.

<sup>14</sup> Department for Education, Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Local authority and regional tables, Tables 8a, 8b and 8c, January 2017

# What happens to the missing money?

The fragmented nature of the school system means there is a number of different catering providers for both local authority-run and academy schools, and a wide array of types of contracts and service agreements between schools and catering providers.



Venerable Bede Academy students film a campaign video

Since 1988, with the introduction of the Local Government Act (1988) and 'Compulsory Competitive Tendering', local authorities have been obliged to put school meals services out to tender, leading to a growth in private provision of school catering.

According to data from a schools survey in 2013/14, approximately 60% of schools use a catering service run by their local authority, and 12% provide in-house catering. 30% - and up to 35% in academy schools - contract out their catering to a private company.<sup>15</sup> Some of the largest private companies providing school meals nationwide include Caterlink, Chartwells, ISS Education and Sodexo, in addition to a large range of smaller private providers operating locally.

The practice of not allowing students to carry forward unused allowances as credit for the school canteen seems to be commonplace, if not universal, in all types of different providers - whether public or private. Through the Poverty Proofing programme run in schools UK wide, Children North East were unable to find a single school where the practice of keeping pupils change wasn't found.

While in some cases the money taken by the local authority and in-house catering providers may be reinvested in schools or local services (albeit at the expense of students on Free School Meals) in other cases it will depend on the exact nature of the contract with private providers on whether it is used to cross-subsidise other meals, contributes to profits, or is reinvested back in schools.<sup>16</sup> Either way, the money is not returned directly to the children who are meant to benefit from Free School Meals.

“ ***It is clear from responses to our questions from private catering providers that substantial sums of money intended for children's Free School Meals are going to these private providers, caught up in the wider catering contract arrangements.***  
Rev Canon Sheila Bamber, Diocese of Durham and leader with Tyne and Wear Citizens ”

<sup>15</sup> Department for Education, School Lunch Take-Up Survey 2013-14, January 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Tyne and Wear Citizens wrote to Caterlink, Chartwells, ISS Education and Sodexo asking for details of their contracts and how they handle unused free school meal funding. At the time of publication, only Sodexo and Chartwells had responded in any detail.

In their letter, Sodexo explain that “for the majority of our secondary school contracts, Sodexo does not retain any unused FSM funds. For the 14% of our contracts where we charge the fixed FSM rate per pupil rather than the value of the meal bought, the schools receive a set amount or percentage of our revenue per year as part of our contract with them, so we effectively reinvest this money back into the schools. However, in no circumstances do we retain FSM funds from pupils who are not in school.”

In their letter, Chartwells wrote that “The cost of providing meals for FSM pupils is typically agreed in advance by schools so falls within the overall scope of the contract.” They added that while it was “not appropriate” for them to provide more information about their contracts, they would pass on the letter and details to the schools in the North East that they work with.

## Section 4:

# How schools and councils are embracing the Just Change campaign

Pupils leading the Just Change campaign have not only identified the problem they face, they have been working with Tyne and Wear Citizens on the solution too. Through simple changes to the way Free School Meals are administered, schools can ensure that pupils are given more control and flexibility over their allowances, helping them avoid school hunger and providing equality with their classmates.

**Pupils have proposed that rather than deducting unused daily allowances each day from their cashless cards, schools change the system to ensure they can keep this credit and be allowed to use it on other items from the school canteen in the following days.**



Kenton School pupils film a video on the importance of this campaign

In practice this would mean that rather than starting each day with £2.30 (or whatever amount a school provides), each pupil would have a rolling credit that they could spend flexibly on items from the school canteen. This would allow them, for example, to use unused lunch credit to buy breakfast items, or food to take home with them, from the school canteen. This would not allow students to take out any cash to be used for other purposes. At the end of each term or year, any remaining credit could be returned to the school or catering provider.

## Change is coming

The simple and effective idea is already catching on. The next few pages outline case studies of schools and a local council in the North East that are committed to changing their Free School Meals payments system. Meanwhile, Citizens UK, the national community organising alliance supporting Tyne and Wear Citizens, has adopted the campaign as a national priority and members are now raising the problem with schools in London, Birmingham and parts of Wales.

# Just Change pioneers: Carmel Education Trust, Darlington

In March 2018, Carmel College, part of the Carmel Education Trust, became the first school to back Citizens UK's campaign, and ensure that pupils entitled to Free School Meals were able to use their allowances flexibly.

After a meeting with a representative of Tyne and Wear Citizens, Maura Regan, CEO of Carmel Education Trust Darlington, agreed to investigate how the retention of unused allowances was affecting pupils on Free School Meals. She reported being "shocked" by the "major impact" of what she saw. "In truth we were blissfully ignorant of what was an unintended consequence [of the system]. I felt there was a moral imperative to act. It appeared that we were supporting children with Free School Meals, but in reality we were stifling them and creating difficulties. Once you become aware of something like that it has to become a catalyst for change".

She highlighted in particular how pupils on Free School Meals were disadvantaged when it came to participating in lunchtime activities.

“ *If a child on Free School Meals goes to do sport or drama or music, and they don't have time to have lunch on that particular day, the money gets lost again. It wasn't just that the system was depriving them of having independence of spending, it was penalising them for getting involved in school activities.* ”

**Maura Regan OBE, CEO at Carmel Education Trust**



Carmel Education Trust CEO Maura Regan OBE at a Darlington school

School meals at Carmel College are provided by an in-house catering service, and use a cashless biometric system where credit is added onto cards by parents, or by the school in the case of pupils on free meals. While most students could use their allowances at the canteen as they wished, including at a breakfast club or during break times, those on Free School Meals were in practice restricted to buying a meal at lunchtime. And if they did not do so, their unused credit was deducted at the end of the day. Following her investigations, Ms Regan asked her IT team to change the system, and ensure that unused credit could be kept by all pupils. The impact was clear.

**“ The students themselves feel more confident about going through and being able to spend something... Children feel like they are more responsible and equal to their peers... They can use their allowance before school, at break time, or after school. It also means they can buy something for lunch at breaktime, so they can go to practices, or other activities. ”**

**“ It is a very positive and popular move, and it is just and right. ”**

**Maura Regan OBE, CEO at Carmel Education Trust**

Ms Regan estimates that by implementing this small IT change, about £17,000 was returned to pupils. She believes that not only does this represent money well spent, but also that “the bottom line is quite simply that the money wasn’t ours... The money belongs to the children. It wasn’t ours to recirculate.”

Following the successful roll-out of the system in Carmel College, two other secondary schools in the same trust – St Michael’s Catholic Academy in Billingham and Our Lady and St Bede’s Catholic Academy in Stockton-on-Tees – have also fixed their Free School Meals payments system.



Carmel Education Trust students enjoy a warm lunch at the school canteen

**“ The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle is delighted that some of its schools are taking such a significant lead on the Just Change campaign. This campaign is simply asking that all funds for Free School Meals; money designated to combat child hunger, be used for that sole purpose. ”**

**“ The Diocese encourages others to give their backing to this one step in the battle to fight against the scandal and injustice of child hunger in our country. The promotion of the Common Good is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching and this campaign is seeking just that. ”**

**Bishop Robert Byrne, Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle**

# Change on the horizon: Venerable Bede Academy, Sunderland

The Venerable Bede Academy in Sunderland is another school that has taken the growing issue of school hunger seriously, and responded positively to the Citizens UK campaign.

Noting that children were increasingly coming to school without having eaten properly at home, the school introduced a Breakfast Club that was free to all pupils in the school.

**Michelle Birtwistle, Head of Year Seven, told Citizens UK of the importance of this initiative:**

“We have some children who come from high areas of deprivation, some of their families can’t afford to feed them at home, so for them to come in and know they are getting at least breakfast and a cooked lunch takes away any anxiety they may have around food.

It has a massive impact on concentration, and the fact that it is not just open to Free School Meals pupils means you are not just labelling those children, and it’s a really good social thing. It starts them off on a good footing for the morning.”

The Venerable Bede Academy knows there is more to do, however. “The issue for us is that they have less choice,” adds Mrs Birtwistle. “Even if they get a meal and a drink they don’t get a great deal of choice and they have to be quite careful about how they spend their allocation. We have a break service and if they have something at break, they have to not have something at lunch.”

The issue was first raised with the school during a meeting with a representative of Tyne and Wear Citizens, and Mrs Birtwistle reports that the school leadership has become committed to working with pupils on the School Council to reform the system.

***“This is definitely something we feel strongly about. The more you think about it, and the more you dig into it, you realise it is the child’s allocation - and if they don’t use it or they are not in, they end up losing out, and that is not right.”***

**Michelle Birtwistle, Head of Year Seven**

If they’re in the position of being on the Free School Meals register, they don’t have many options and opportunities anyway, so we shouldn’t limit them further by taking that allowance away from them, especially if it can be put back into school to provide opportunities. That is what we are here for.”

In the coming months staff and students at the Venerable Bede Academy will be working with Tyne and Wear Citizens to reform the system in their school, and support the Just Change campaign to be rolled out elsewhere.

“I think it’s massive for the children in Sunderland, sometimes we kind of get lost. It’s really nice for the children to feel like they are having a massive impact here, and then can roll it out to other schools around the country. It’s really empowering for them.”

## Park View School: Where the campaign started

Park View School in Chester-le-Street was the first school where the issues behind the Just Change campaign were raised, during a meeting with Tyne & Wear Citizens in 2017. Assistant Headteacher Alison Moore described being “shocked and surprised” when she found out about the problems pupils were having with the way the school administered school meals, saying it was “something she hadn’t even thought about or knew was a problem”.



Park View School pupil is filmed

In their meetings, pupils in the school highlighted how their daily allowance could not be carried over, preventing them from using their change to buy food on other days. They also explained how they often under-used their entitlement by choosing the cheapest items because prices were not well advertised and they were embarrassed to ask.

School meals at Park View are provided by an in-house catering service, with pupils using a cashless system and a daily allocation of £2.30 that should be able to buy them a hot meal, pudding and drink. Using an in-house catering provider had meant that previously any unused school meals money stayed in the school, but did not specifically benefit pupils on Free School Meals.

Following the meetings, Park View decided to make changes, allocating unused school meal money to a ‘premium pot’ focused on supporting pupils on Free School Meals, for example for extra tuition, discounts on school trips, help towards uniforms, and other learning resources. They also used some of the funding to employ staff to support those pupils with English and maths skills.

Park View is now working with Tyne and Wear Citizens to see how the change could go back to the pupils, to give them more control of the money intended for them.

## Change on the horizon: North Tyneside Council

Tyne & Wear Citizens has been working closely with North Tyneside Council to understand how the ‘Just Change’ campaign could be rolled out in the secondary school canteens they operate. Leaders from Tyne & Wear Citizens first met the Council in September 2018 and explained the injustice children working with community organisers in schools had identified due to the Free School Meal system and the purpose of the Just Change campaign.

At later meetings the council identified that changing the systems in the school canteens they operate would be slightly less straightforward because, unlike the other schools Tyne & Wear Citizens were working with, North Tyneside operates a cash-based system. North Tyneside Council are remaining cash-based to save on the costs of introducing a new I.T. system.

The council is the first in the country to look at adopting this. As well as hoping to adopt the Just Change system in all the school canteens it runs, it is also looking at ways to monitor and evidence the difference this will make to children’s lives.

# Section 5:

## Conclusion and recommendations

There are few things more likely to trigger a sense of injustice than children going hungry at school, and yet in 2019 this is happening all over the UK. It is a scandal that has multiple causes, and requires a wide range of measures to overcome. Pupils leading the Just Change campaign have highlighted one such measure in particular - asking for control over the money intended to feed them, empowering them to better keep hunger at bay and treating them as equal to their peers.

Adopting the recommendations of the Just Change campaign is clearly possible, not least because some have already done it. A number of schools have now listened to their pupils and pioneered their suggested reforms, and others are following suit. At least one council is investigating doing so across all the schools in the area, and others should follow their lead.

The Just Change issue has been adopted as a national priority by Citizens UK, the alliance of 450 education, faith, charity and trade union institutions which is working with pupils leading the campaign to make the following recommendations:

- 1. AN EQUAL TREATMENT PRINCIPLE:** Pupils with Free School Meals should be entitled to the change from lunch money just like other students, regardless of whether the change is due to absence or unspent. This should happen regardless of whether the meal is provided by a Local Authority, an in-house or a private provider.
- 2. A WRITTEN COMMITMENT FOR ACTION:** All catering providers (schools, local authorities and private companies) should provide a written commitment on their school meal contract to guarantee they will operate a Just Change system.
- 3. RING FENCED FUNDING FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS:** The Department for Education, and devolved administrations across the UK, should develop a national policy to ring fence money thereby ensuring that funds for Free School Meals are spent purely on the flexible provision of school meals for the benefit of eligible children.



Venerable Bede Academy students discuss plans for the Just Change campaign

## What you can do:

These recommendations have been taken up by the members organisations of civil society alliance Citizens UK and the release of this report marks the start of a campaign to get schools, local authorities, catering providers and the Department for Education to change practice and make sure no child on Free School Meals is short changed.

## You can act today:

Find out if schools in your area are short changing children, use our template letter to write to a school, Local Authority or private catering provider

Find out how: [www.citizensuk.org/just-change](http://www.citizensuk.org/just-change)

“ We are asking every school to investigate their own catering arrangements and make sure that children who need the Free School Meals money aren't losing out.

Parents, pupils and teachers can find out who to write to by going to our website:  
[www.citizensuk.org/just-change](http://www.citizensuk.org/just-change) ”

Francis Humble, elected Youth Member of Parliament for Darlington

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