

Schools urgently need funding to support disadvantaged children as "harrowing" numbers of people face destitution by Christmas, Archbishop Justin Welby and Bishop Paul Butler said today.



- **Trussell Trust predict 46,000 food parcels will be needed this autumn, with 670,00 set to become destitute by the end of the year**
- **Archbishop Justin Welby and Bishop Paul Butler urge Government to fund schools to meet basic needs of vulnerable children**
- **They call for extended free school meals, holiday meal provision and a ‘Nature Premium’ to support children’s physical and mental health**
- **Vital for the most disadvantaged children that schools remain open, say the pair**

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Durham have urged the Government to extend free school meals as they highlight the “harrowing” number of families who could be destitute by Christmas.

Writing in TES today, Archbishop Justin Welby and Bishop Paul Butler called on the Government to provide free school meals to every child whose family is on universal credit, and expand holiday provision to all children on free school meals.

According to food bank charity the Trussell Trust, 46,000 food parcels will need to be provided by their network to people in crisis between October and December 2020 – an increase of 61% on last year.

They estimate an additional 670,000 people will be destitute by the end of the year, a prediction Archbishop Justin and Bishop Paul describe as

“harrowing”.

The Archbishop and Bishop said it will be “vital for those most disadvantaged” that schools in their communities stay open, but that teachers “can only do so much on their own” and need appropriate funding to help tackle child hunger and poverty.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, the Archbishop and Bishop said churches, schools, clergy and teachers have “gone above and beyond to support the people in their communities, many of them places of serious deprivation.”

Praising the almost five thousand Church of England schools nationwide, which are attended by approximately 1 million children, they said: “Their care for those they look after in the most difficult and stressful circumstances is inspiring and humbling.”

They cited examples such as St Mark’s secondary school in Bath, where 20% of students attend a breakfast club, and Baltonsburgh VC Primary school, which has been coordinating food vouchers for those most in need.

These are examples of schools “truly fulfilling Christ’s call to love our neighbour”, they said, but stressed that “exhausted” teachers “can only do so much on their own”.

Appealing to the Government, they said: “All schools must have the appropriate resources to be able to address issues of child hunger and poverty and expand their role as places of security for children who are at risk, whilst maintaining safety at school.

“This includes the expansion of free school meals to every child whose family is on universal credit, and the expansion of holiday provision to all children on free school meals.

“A Nature Premium would also be a valuable development. Outdoor play, exercise and access to nature are vital to healthy learning. Helping schools ensure outside activities continue will aid mental as well as physical health.”

They continued: “This can’t just be plucked out of thin air; schools and their staff are already at their limits when it comes to time and funding. Our teachers are doing their best for us, and we need to do our best for them.

“We call on the Government to make the necessary funding available to all schools; funding that is generous enough for all school sponsors of every sort to recruit enough oversight and train and oversee enough suitable volunteers to meet these basic needs; safety and feeding for all children and young people;extra educational support and tuition where that is required for pupils who have missed out.”

In their article the Archbishop and Bishop also praised the “many heroes” who have come forward to look after young people, from Marcus Rashford’s free school meals campaign to Norwich Diocese’s ‘Filling the Gap’ Project, which provided 128 families with a staggering 26,082 meals over six weeks.

Read the article by Archbishop Justin Welby and Bishop Paul Butler on the TES website [here](#).

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