Caritas
Diocese of Salford

Child poverty and mental health needs continue to rise:

The findings of our latest survey of Catholic school leaders

We recently asked Catholic school leaders across the Diocese of Salford what they are witnessing in terms of child poverty and mental health challenges in their communities.

The message was clear – poverty and mental health concerns continue to rise, with schools increasingly stepping in to fill the gaps and respond to needs far beyond education. Based on 40 responses, the findings show that the pressures identified in our report (If not us, then who?) published in 2025 have not eased, and in many cases, are becoming more severe.











Child poverty

92 per cent of school leaders reported an increase in the number of pupils living in poverty over the last year, with one in three describing the rise as significant.

Respondents described children arriving at school hungry, without clean, properly fitting uniforms and shoes. They highlighted the continued impact of rising food prices, energy bills and housing costs on family budgets.

School leaders report seeing:

- Housing insecurity, homelessness and unsuitable, overcrowded accommodation.
- Increases in in-work poverty, with parents struggling despite being employed.
- Poor nutrition, health and hygiene.
- Digital exclusion and limited access to resources for learning.
- Reduced participation in activities and trips.

"The cost of living is impacting at such a deep level."



Mental health concerns

89 per cent of school leaders reported an increase in mental health needs among pupils over the last year, with over half saying the increase has been significant.

Respondents described seeing increased experiences of anxiety, low self-esteem, trauma, emotional dysregulation, and emotionally based school avoidance.

Many school leaders highlighted the strong connection between financial hardship and poor mental health, reporting that worries about food, housing and family finances are having a significant impact on parents and their children. They also raised concerns about the effects of social media, online bullying and increased screen time on children's wellbeing.

"Students experience ongoing worry about basic needs such as food, housing, and family finances. This uncertainty can lead to heightened anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and emotional fatigue."





How schools are responding

Schools are going above and beyond to support children and families. Staff are helping families access food, uniforms, hygiene products and emergency support, whilst also responding to safeguarding concerns, housing crises and mental health challenges.

Many school leaders described schools becoming the constant source of support where other services have become overstretched or unavailable.

The impact of the situation is being felt not only by children and families, but also by school staff who report increasing workloads, emotional strain and growing concerns about capacity to meet rising levels of need.

"We feel we are medics, social workers, counsellors and teachers at the moment."

"Schools don't have the spare staff or funding to be able to meet all these needs."



What you can do next

The experiences shared by schools demonstrate why tackling child poverty and supporting children's wellbeing must remain a priority for all of us.

Some ways to take action:

- Share this summary with your local MP and invite them to visit your school to hear directly about the challenges. Caritas Salford would be pleased to support schools in preparing and hosting visits from MPs.
- Share these findings widely to help raise awareness.
- Look out for our campaigning toolkits, launching early 2027, which can be used with Caritas Ambassadors and other pupil groups to plan campaigning activities.
- Find out more about how our school service, a team of social workers and counsellors, can support your school.

Thank you for all you are doing to support children and families in your community. By sharing your experiences, you are helping shine a light on the challenges facing children and families, and Caritas Salford will continue to call for the changes that are urgently needed.

If you would like to discuss ways to take action and how we might be able to support you, please contact Annabeth Taylor at **a.taylor@caritassalford.org.uk**.

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