

**Ten priorities for a new
Government to boost
children and young
people's life chances**

**CENTRE
FOR
YOUNG
LIVES**

An introduction from Anne Longfield CBE Executive Chair of the Centre for Young Lives

In over four decades of working and campaigning to improve support and help for children and families, I can't remember a less impressive Parliament than the one which has just dissolved. Half-hearted reforms to services and sticking plaster investment have failed to meet the scale of the challenges brought about by austerity, the Covid pandemic, and the cost of living crisis.

The Government is not entirely to blame – some events were way beyond its control – but Covid shone a harsh light on both the deep-seated generational problems holding back millions of children and the low priority status given to children and young people in our political system.

As I told the Covid-19 Inquiry last year, children's interests and needs must never again be overlooked in this way.

While most of our children do OK, millions do not, and whoever wins the forthcoming General Election will find an in-tray stacked with serious problems.

Our levels of child poverty are shocking and shameful. We should be mortified that a country as wealthy as ours has so many schools with food banks and clothes banks.

There is a school attendance crisis. A fifth of children are still leaving school without even basic qualifications. Our education system is often far from inclusive.

There is a children's mental health epidemic affecting one in five children and young people. The impact of social media remains largely unknown, and policy is often motivated by headlines not evidence.

Special Educational Needs provision can be poor, slow to arrive, and mired in bureaucracy and stress.



Millions of children are growing up in families where there is domestic abuse, addiction, and/or serious mental health problems, on the edge of statutory services but not receiving any real help.

The children's social care system is on the brink and the Government has not implemented enough of its own independent review's recommendations.

And hardly a month passes without a teenager being killed on our streets. Earlier this month two twelve-year-olds were found guilty of murder. Something is going badly wrong in our society, and everyone knows it.

Many of these challenges existed before the last Parliament, but in my view, the huge long-term impact of the pandemic on the development, progress, and life chances of some children remains greatly underappreciated.

Without a change of direction, widespread disadvantage and vulnerability, and inadequate and unreformed systems of support will not improve by themselves. This is bad for us all, socially and economically.

Too many of our children are falling through the gaps.

The cost in lost life chances and to the taxpayer and stretched services will continue to be high for as long as Government refuses to take bold steps.

A new Government, whoever is elected, offers the chance of a reset and a new approach to boosting opportunities for all children, wherever they grow up and whatever their background. Greater ambition would bring hope and provide extra purpose and energy to those who work to deliver change.

Today, we are setting out ten policy proposals for the next Government, whichever party forms it, to help them on their way.



In our experience, a party election manifesto is only one slice of a policy offer over the course of a Parliament, and we have focused on suggestions that mostly fall outside those already published.

Tackling these issues - and there are many more that could have been added to the list – is a vital and urgent task for our country's future prosperity.

Few of these challenges have been talked about in any detail by politicians since the election was called, but none of them can be ignored by whoever is entrusted with the keys to No10.

I am always optimistic that with the right amount of political will and a clear sense of purpose that Government can pull down the barriers that hold back many of our children and begin to turn around their lives.

These ten proposals are a good place for them to start.





Anne Longfield CBE
June 2024



Our ten priorities for the next Government

1. Introduce a one-off £1bn children and young people's mental health recovery programme, part-financed by a levy on social media companies and mobile phone providers. Ensure every school has access to a mental health support team by 2027.
2. Launch a one-year Government-commissioned independent review into the impact of smart phones and social media on children's health and development to provide the strongest evidence base for an updated Online Safety Act.
3. Abolish the two-child benefit cap alongside the establishment of a No10 Poverty Unit tasked with halving child poverty by 2029.
4. Expand Free School Meals to all children with families in receipt of Universal Credit, extending FSM to all primary school children by the end of the Parliament.
5. Reform Ofsted inspections and develop and introduce an inclusion measurement which rewards schools that ensure all their children and young people have access to high quality education, regardless of background and need. Introduce a register of children not in school.
6. Extend Pupil Premium funding to disadvantaged young people aged 16-to-18 and extend Pupil Premium Plus funding to children in kinship care.
7. Enable all schools to offer dawn until dusk support and safe places to play and take part in activities, including during holidays and weekends, financed by National Lottery Community Funding.
8. Reduce autism assessment waiting lists by running autism and SEN assessments in primary schools.



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9. Introduce a windfall tax on children's social care private providers to fund a five-year programme of early intervention and expanded kinship care support, reducing the number of children entering care by 30% by 2029. Make Care Experience a protected characteristic.

 10. Allocate £1bn from the Government's Levelling Up Fund to expand the number of Children's and Family Hubs to all disadvantaged areas by 2029 alongside a roll out of Youth Hubs in those areas most affected by serious violence and knife crime. Launch a review to develop a refreshed Sure Start model for future expansion.

Centre for Young Lives June 2024.

