



Homelessness in the Classroom

December 2025

'Their focus now isn't on school, it's on survival and what will happen to them. They are scared and upset and this is clear in their behaviour and wellbeing.'

'They feel unsafe. They cannot trust adults, they cannot trust their home, they cannot relax.'

'The biggest issue is they stop believing in themselves and think they are worthless.'

Selected quotes from teachers in England, talking about children who are homeless

Summary

One in 78 schoolchildren in England is homeless in temporary accommodation. This report looks at the effects that being homeless has on their health, wellbeing, education and relationships, as seen through the eyes of their teachers.

We find that:

- over half of all teachers in state schools in England work at a school where at least one child is homeless, or has been homeless in the past 12 months
- over eight in ten (83%) teachers who work with children who are homeless say that they have missed days of school, and 87% say that they are often late. It can be very challenging for parents to get children to school while living in temporary accommodation, as they can be placed far away from their local area and are often moved from place to place at very short notice
- three-quarters (76%) of teachers said that being homeless had led to children performing poorly in assessments or exams. Teachers reported that children are often tired and/or distracted in the classroom, which makes it hard for them to participate fully in the classroom
- three-quarters (75%) of teachers said that homelessness has had a significant impact on the mental health of the children they teach. Teachers reported plummeting levels of self-esteem among children who are homeless in temporary accommodation, and observed that many become either withdrawn and disengaged, or otherwise angry and prone to lashing out

Living in temporary accommodation is holding thousands of children back from a happy, healthy childhood and the chance to reach their potential. This must change.

Building more genuinely affordable social homes is the only lasting solution. To do this, the government must set a clear target for the number of social rent homes it wants to see built and must ramp up to delivering 90,000 homes a year for ten years if we're to end the housing emergency for good.

But immediate action is also essential to help those children and families currently stuck in temporary accommodation. The government must restore local housing allowance rates to cover at least the cheapest 30% of private rents. This would help the record numbers of families in temporary accommodation access private rented homes until more social homes are available.

Homelessness in the classroom

Introduction

This briefing summarises research with teachers in England, exploring their experiences of working with children who are homeless.

In England today there are 172,420 children who are homeless in temporary accommodation with their families. This is a record-breaking number – the highest since records began in 2004¹.

One in 78

**schoolchildren is
homeless in temporary
accommodation in
England**

Of these, 115,631 are of primary or secondary school age². This means that one in every 78 schoolchildren is homeless in temporary accommodation in England³.

From Shelter's groundbreaking survey of people who are homeless in temporary accommodation, we know that homelessness is bad for children's health, including their mental health. We also know that neurodivergent children can be particularly affected by the disruption associated with staying in temporary accommodation:

- almost six in ten (57%) parents report that temporary accommodation has had a negative impact on their children's physical or mental health
- one in four (26%) parents reports that their child is often unhappy or depressed as a result of temporary accommodation
- more than four in ten (44%) parents of children who are neurodivergent or who have a learning disability report that temporary accommodation has aggravated existing issues related to their behaviour⁴

¹ [MHCLG statutory homelessness statistics, June 2025, table TA1](#)

² [MHCLG statutory homelessness statistics, June 2025, table TA8](#), total children aged 4-16 in temporary accommodation

³ Shelter calculations, based on [Office for National Statistics 2024 mid-year population estimates](#)

⁴ All statistics from Garvie D, Pennington J, Rich H and Schofield M (2023) [Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end - Shelter England](#)

We also know that staying in temporary accommodation can affect children's education:

- almost half (47%) of children in temporary accommodation have had to move schools
- more than half (52%) of parents report that their children have missed days of school. Of these, more than one in three (37%) has missed more than one month
- one in four (26%) parents says their children are unable to keep up or have performed poorly as a result of living in temporary accommodation

This research sought to highlight the ways in which homelessness can affect a child's education, health, and social and emotional wellbeing, as seen through the eyes of their teachers. In this way, it adds an additional dimension to understanding homelessness among schoolchildren and its potential long-term effects on the wellbeing of the next generation.

We present data on the extent of homelessness in the classroom, as well as reflections from teachers on the changes that they observe.

Methods

This project included two separate data-gathering exercises:

- **To understand the extent of homelessness in schools in England**, we carried out a survey, working with Teacher Tapp. Teacher Tapp is a daily survey app that asks over 11,000 teachers questions each day and reweights the results to make them representative.
- **To understand the effects of homelessness on children and on schools**, we worked with NASUWT, the Teachers' Union, to circulate a questionnaire to its members. Data was collected between 9 – 31 October 2025. Valid responses were received from a total of 263 teachers in England who have worked with children who are homeless.

The data collected was both quantitative *and* qualitative, which allows us to gather deep insights into teachers' experiences. Answers to open-ended questions were coded and analysed to identify recurrent themes, and selected extracts are also included in this report.

Data has not been weighted and findings may not be representative of all teachers.

The next section explores the main findings from the data, with extracts in teachers' own words.

Analysis

What is the extent of homelessness among schools in England?

52%

of teachers work at a school with children who have been homeless in temporary accommodation in the past 12 months

The results illustrate how pervasive homelessness is in schools across England.

Over half of teachers at state schools in England (52%) work at a school with children who are homeless, or who have been homeless in temporary accommodation in the past 12 months.

This is consistent across primary and secondary schools:

- 50% of state **primary school** teachers, and 54% of state secondary school teachers, have worked with children who have been homeless in temporary accommodation in the past 12 months

Homelessness is particularly common within schools with a higher intake of families on low incomes:

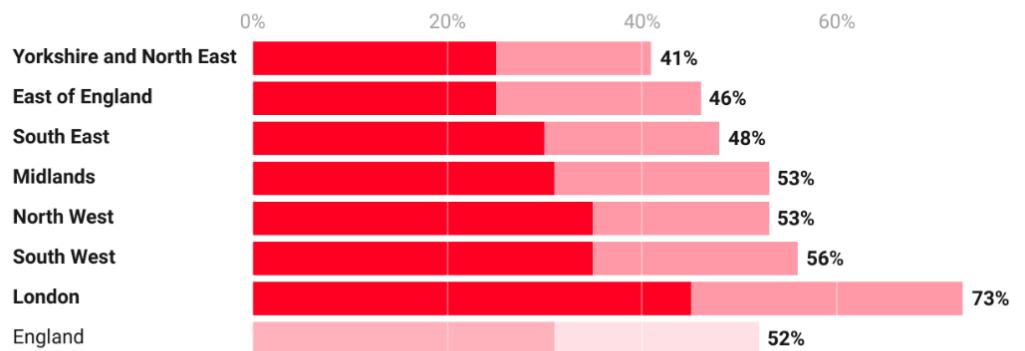
- 72% of teachers in schools that have the highest proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)⁵ work with children who have been homeless in temporary accommodation in the past 12 months

Teachers in London are more likely than in any other region to be working with children who are homeless (see chart below), with 73% saying that they are aware that at least one child is homeless in their school. Outside of the capital, the proportion is highest in the South West (56%), North West (53%) and the Midlands (53%).

⁵ Top quartile for FSM eligibility

Are you aware of any children at your school who were homeless with their family in temporary accommodation in the past 12 months?

- Yes - a child or children I teach or interact with
- Yes - a child or children at my school I don't personally teach or interact with



Source: Base: 7,127 state school teachers in England. Fieldwork by TeacherTapp for Shelter, 2025 • Created with Datawrapper

89%

of teachers who work with children who are homeless have observed a significant negative effect on their wellbeing

What are the effects of homelessness on schoolchildren?

We surveyed over 250 teachers who are members of NASUWT to dig deeper into how they perceive the effects of homelessness on the children that they work with.

The vast majority of respondents told us that homelessness has significant negative effects on the health and wellbeing of children that they work with, and on their ability to participate fully in school. 89% reported that they have 'very much' seen a negative effect on children that they work with because of homelessness.

The experiences they shared covered three main themes:

- school readiness
- academic performance
- mental health and self-esteem

Each is explored below, followed by an exploration of how homelessness affects neurodivergent children.

[We have] primary school children travelling for 2.5 hours to get to school every day and 2.5 hours to get back after. They [are] exhausted.'

Primary school teacher, Birmingham

School readiness

Almost all respondents told us that homelessness strongly affects children's ability to arrive at school on time and ready to learn.

Many teachers highlighted the long distances that pupils in temporary accommodation often have to travel to school.

Many families in temporary accommodation are accommodated far from their local area⁶. Not only does this mean that people can end up far from their wider families and other support networks, but it can result in children having to travel significant distances to get to school.

This, in turn, can be a factor in increased absences from school.

- four in five (83%) teachers who work with children who are homeless say that they have **missed additional days of school** because of homelessness

Teachers also reported many children arriving at school late and tired. This may be caused by long travel times, which necessitate early starts in the morning. But also, children in temporary accommodation may have to share beds with other family members, or may be unsettled, anxious or frightened in the night, all of which may also disrupt their sleep.

- nine in ten (87%) teachers say that children who are homeless have arrived at school **late**
- nine in ten (92%) say that children who are homeless have arrived at school **tired**

Tiredness, compounded by practical issues associated with temporary accommodation, may also lead to children arriving at school without the things they need.

For example, temporary accommodation may lack proper facilities to store, clean and dry clothes, meaning that children may come into school

⁶ 31% of households in temporary accommodation have been placed in a different local authority to the one where they applied for support. This figure is significantly higher (46%) for London.

'The last thing on their mind is learning, they come to school because it's warm and safe.'

Secondary school teacher, Merseyside

with a uniform that is incomplete or dirty – something that seven in ten (71%) respondents to our questionnaire mentioned.

While teachers told us that many schools seem prepared to relax rules around uniforms, or to provide food or clean clothes for families, several also indicated that not having access to clean uniforms made some children experience feelings of shame and low self-esteem:

'Coming to school late, incomplete uniform, without breakfast, clothes being dirty: these things later on affect their behaviour, self-esteem, [participation] in classroom activities and [they] try to remain alone.'

Secondary school teacher, Luton

'Their focus now isn't on school, it's on survival and what will happen to them.'

School teacher, location not given

'They're exhausted and this obviously affects their ability to focus and retain information. They can become secretive because they are embarrassed or have been told not to talk about it at school and that is very stressful for them too.'

Primary school teacher, Essex

School performance

Being homeless can have a profound impact on children's school performance. As well as the distances that pupils may have to travel, temporary accommodation is often very cramped, with little or no space to work at home. Coupled with the stress and anxiety that being homeless can cause, children can understandably find it hard to focus on school when other demands seem more urgent.

Teachers report that being homeless in temporary accommodation can have a significant effect on children's ability to concentrate and engage in the classroom, partly because of tiredness, but also because of the mental strain of homelessness.

- three in five (59%) teachers who have worked with children who are homeless say that they **struggled to participate in school**

Temporary accommodation is frequently cramped and often involves families living in close proximity to other residents. According to the latest government statistics, 6,930 families in temporary accommodation live in hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation, which is usually just one room. One in three households in temporary accommodation reports that internet access is insufficient or non-existent.

- in this context, it is unsurprising that four in five (83%) teachers who work with children who are homeless report that they **struggle to complete homework** because of their living situation

As a consequence, although teachers note that many children are remarkably resilient, many also shared that they have witnessed a negative effect on children's educational attainment.

'They often find themselves taking on greater... responsibility for younger siblings and in some cases parents – this not only distracts them from their education but forces them to grow up faster than they should have to.'

Secondary school teacher, Bromley

- four in five (81%) say that being homeless has meant that children and young people **struggle to keep up with the curriculum**
- three-quarters (76%) of teachers who work with children who are homeless say that being homeless has led to **poor performance in assessments or exams**

School life is more than learning. It is the opportunity to join a community, to bond with other trusted adults, and to spend time with friends at breaktimes. For many children it includes the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, go on school trips, and learn about a special interest. Teachers shared how the joyful aspects of schooling were often also robbed from children experiencing homelessness.

- nine in ten (91%) say that homelessness has **affected children's enjoyment of school**

Mental health and self-esteem

'The biggest issue is they stop believing in themselves and think they are worthless.'

Secondary school teacher, Dudley

'They lack the confidence that comes with security and the happiness that comes with self-esteem.'

Primary school teacher, York

Teachers in our questionnaire almost universally spoke about the huge and ongoing impact of homelessness on pupils' **mental health** and, relatedly, on **their self-esteem**. Living in temporary accommodation was identified as having a significant negative effect on mental health, leading to **increased anxiety and depression**.

- three-quarters (75%) of teachers say that homelessness has had a significant impact on children's **mental health**

This echoes the findings of previous Shelter research with parents in temporary accommodation, which found that one in four (26%) reported their child was often unhappy or depressed as a result of being homeless in temporary accommodation⁷.

In addition, many teachers reported pupils losing **confidence in themselves**. Many children become visibly more shy and withdrawn as a result of becoming homeless, which could be in part due to stigma and shame. Children are also likely to reflect the attitudes and behaviours of their older family members, who are highly likely to suffer poor mental health because of living in temporary accommodation⁸.

- two-thirds (68%) of teachers say that homelessness has had a significant effect on children's **self-esteem**

As children become more insular and ashamed, they may withdraw from friendships and other relationships. Many teachers highlighted the links between homelessness, poor mental health and children's ability to engage both with school and friends:

- over four in ten (44%) teachers say that being homeless has led to children and young people **losing friends**

Teachers also reported that many children who are homeless often struggled to regulate their behaviour, with knock-on effects on class

⁷ Garvie D, Pennington J, Rich H and Schofield M (2023) [Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end - Shelter England](#)

⁸ Two in three (66%) people report temporary accommodation having a negative impact on their physical or mental health: Garvie D, Pennington J, Rich H and Schofield M (2023) [Still Living in Limbo: Why the use of temporary accommodation must end - Shelter England](#)

dynamics. This was especially mentioned in the context of those with special educational needs, but was more broadly seen as a consequence of the often overwhelming stress and anxiety associated with being homeless.

- two-thirds (68%) of teachers say that being homeless has led to **behavioural issues** in class

Children with SEND

'Young people with autism especially need routine and order - being homeless shatters this [...] They instantly lose contact with everything they are familiar with.'

Secondary school teacher, location not given

'To remain on [their care pathway] they have to have a GP. But letters get lost and they lose their place [...] It's chaos. No routine.'

Primary school teacher, Birmingham

We asked teachers to describe any additional challenges faced by **children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)** who are homeless. Issues highlighted by teachers included:

- finding it particularly hard to adjust to new surroundings
- struggling to adapt to the disruption to routines and the lack of stability that comes with living in temporary accommodation

The uncertainty and stress associated with being homeless can be especially hard to process for children who already have additional support needs. Children may struggle to adapt to new sensory environments, and some may not fully understand their situation, which can lead to emotional distress for them and their families.

This can have knock-on effects on their ability to participate in school. Teachers reported this can lead to emotional dysregulation among children with SEND, including aggressive behaviour and physical 'lashing out', as well as absence from school and emotional withdrawal. All of this is exacerbated by the tiredness and anxiety caused by their insecure housing situation.

In addition, homelessness can present additional practical barriers for families and carers to access the support that they need for their child, including Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Being moved from place to place can disrupt application processes for educational support; for example, when families have to move local authority area and register with a new school or GP, or when letters get sent to the wrong place.

School support for pupils who are homeless

Teachers provided many examples of how schools are increasingly providing essential support to children and families who are homeless. This includes pastoral and counselling support as well as practical support such as equipment provision or transportation.

- two in five (41%) say that the school has regularly supported a child who is homeless to get to/from school

Many also shared how they provided support that goes far beyond their educational remit, such as support with washing clothes.

- one in four (25%) says that the school has regularly washed clothes or school uniforms

Many schools also link parents up with wider support networks.

- over half (53%) of teachers say that their school has useful working relationships with other organisations that support families who are homeless
- almost half (49%) say that the school regularly refers families who are homeless to a food bank

While a majority of teachers expressed confidence in the support that their school provided, most indicated that stretched budgets often limited the support that they were actually able to offer.

Positively, two-thirds of teachers (68%) say that their school has the knowledge and expertise to support pupils and their families who are homeless, although just under one in five (18%) says their school does not.

Worryingly, but understandably, only 18% say that their school has the financial resources to support pupils and their families who are homeless, while 63% say their school does not.

'We have the will and the expertise to help, but time and resources are a real issue. It is also frustrating to work within a system that doesn't always take account of a child's needs.'

Secondary school teacher, Coventry

Conclusions

This research has highlighted the heartbreakng effects that homelessness can have on children, as seen through the eyes of their teachers.

Living in temporary accommodation has immediate practical effects on pupils' ability to arrive on time at school ready to learn. Long journeys, disrupted sleep and/or the lack of proper washing facilities may mean that children lack the necessities for a normal and productive school day. This naturally makes it much harder for those children to do well in the classroom.

In addition, however, teachers have observed the more insidious effects on children's mental health and self-esteem. Children may feel deep shame and embarrassment about their situation, or may share the stress and frustrations that their families may also feel, with knock-on effects on their relationships with friends. This can create additional pressures on young lives, in addition to the usual ups and downs of life that all children experience.

Schools, and teachers, are supporting children and their families where they can. Many have formalised their support for children who are homeless, reflecting the prevalence of the issue. But this inevitably places strain on budgets and staff capacity. Schools should be able to concentrate on nurturing and educating children, rather than having to pick up the pieces of housing policy failures.

Although children and families are resilient, being stuck in temporary accommodation is holding thousands of young people back from the chance of a happy, healthy childhood, as well as the opportunity to achieve their potential in later life. This must change.

Building more genuinely affordable social homes is the only lasting solution to homelessness. To do this, the government must set a clear target for the number of social rent homes it wants to see built, and must ramp up to delivering 90,000 homes a year for ten years if we're to end the housing emergency for good.

In the meantime, thousands of children and their families are living in temporary accommodation which, as has been explored in this research, can have profoundly negative effects on their wellbeing and their development. That's why immediate action is essential: the government must unfreeze the local housing allowance rates and restore them so that they cover at least the cheapest 30% of private rents. This simple step would help people, including thousands of families stuck in damaging temporary accommodation, to access a private rented home until more social homes are available.

**We exist to defend the right to a
safe home and fight the devastating
impact the housing emergency
has on people and society.**

We do this with campaigns, advice
and support – and we never give up.
We believe that home is everything.

Shelter
88 Old Street
London EC1V 9HU

0300 339 1234
shelter.org.uk

