

The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education

A view from the
classroom

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Shelter

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CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year Shelter commissioned research among teachers, to collect evidence on the prevalence and impacts of the housing crisis on children at their schools. Shelter also conducted a review of the literature and existing evidence base. The aim of the research was to link the existing evidence base with the recent experiences of teachers working with homeless or poorly housed children so we could understand the implications of the housing crisis on children's education. Shelter subsequently ran a further survey with teachers to take some account of the pandemic and how it has added to the challenge of homelessness.

The scale of the problem

In the last ten years, the number of families with children living in a private rented home has almost doubled; there are now more than 1.6 million families with children living in a private rented home and a quarter (24%) of all families in England now rent privately. Families can have little choice but to live in private rental accommodation because of the shortage of social housing and the high costs associated with getting on the property ladder.

Poor conditions are more prevalent in private rented housing, with a greater proportion of homes being classed as non-decent compared to other tenures.¹ Households are most likely to be living in a private rented home when they apply for homelessness assistance and the ending of a private rented tenancy is still a leading trigger of homelessness. Presently there are over two million (2,078,000) children living in non-decent private rented housing in England.

Number of children living in non-decent housing and or living with serious condensation and damp



Source: Shelter analysis of English Housing Survey

The number of households with children who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation in England has increased by 61% in the last decade. The number of homeless children living in temporary accommodation increased by 72% over the same time period.

Teacher's understanding of the housing crisis at their school

Teachers are generally aware of the housing situations in their area; we asked teachers if they agreed that a housing crisis existed in their local area; two-fifths (42%) agreed this was the case. Teachers responses matched with their personal experience of working with homeless children; the number of teachers identifying a housing crisis in their area rose to over half (54%) if they had taught or interacted with children that were homeless or living in bad housing in preceding year.

Teachers were asked to consider the provision of social housing in their school's local areas. Around half (49%) of all teachers agreed there is not enough social housing in their areas for those that need it. Less than a quarter (23%) of teachers thought there was currently enough social housing for everyone that needs it.

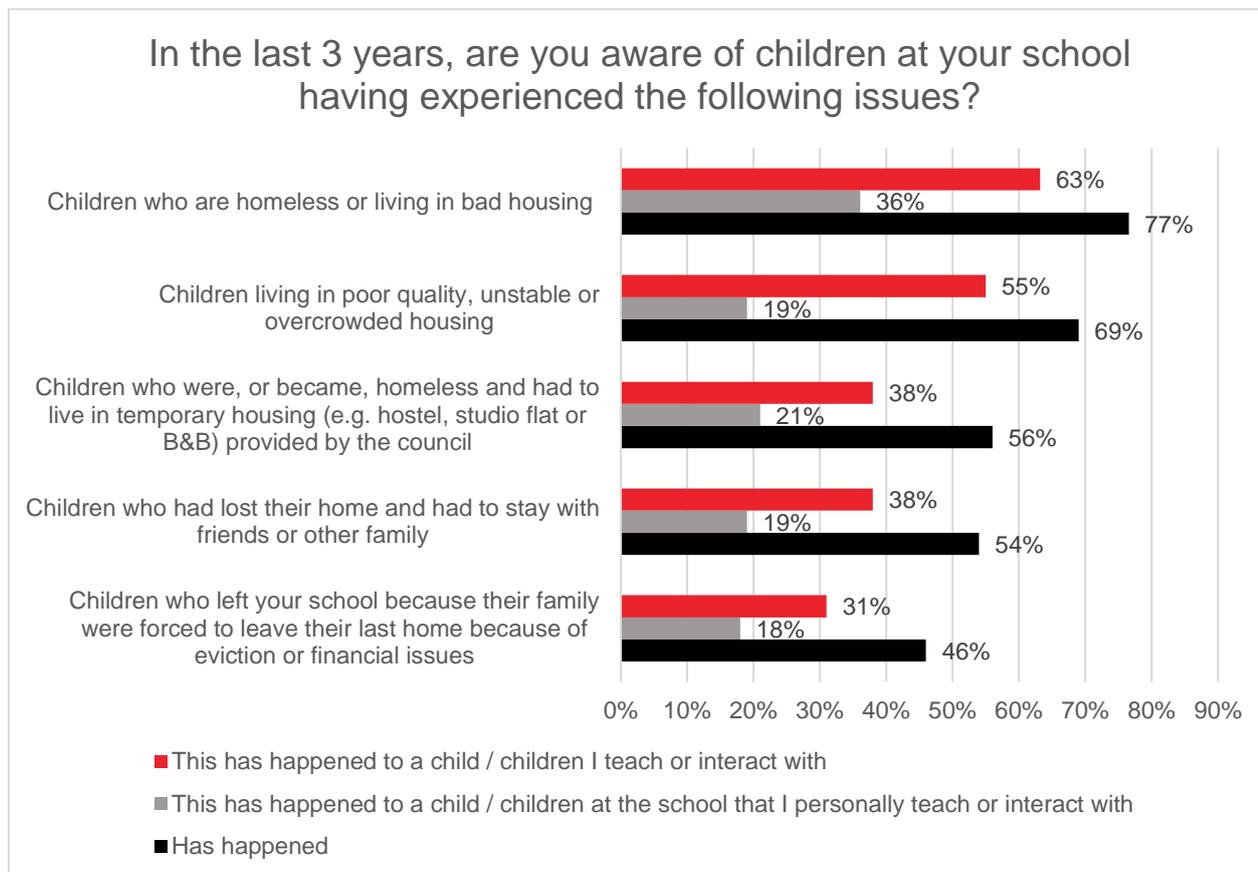
The scale of homelessness among school children

Overall, more than three-quarters (77%) of teachers surveyed had seen children who were homeless or living in bad housing at their school in the last three years. Most teachers had direct experience from having taught these children (63% of teachers), while a smaller proportion (36%) were aware of children at their school experiencing these issues.

Seven out of every ten teachers (69%) had seen children that were living in overcrowded, unstable or poor quality housing and three in five (61%) teachers had seen this issue in the past twelve months.

Experience of this issue increases to 89% and 83% of teachers (past three years or twelve months, respectively) who work in schools with at least 35% of their students receiving free school meals.

Teachers' perception of the prevalence of housing issues among students in the last 3 years



Source: YouGov survey, Base: All teachers 1,507

Over half (56%) of teachers (in the last three years) have children at their school who have moved into temporary accommodation because they had been accepted as homeless; 47% of teachers had seen this in the previous twelve months. Equally common were children that were hidden homeless (not officially recorded as homeless by a local authority but had living situations that are legally classed as homeless). 54% of teachers had seen this in the last three years and 46% in the last twelve months. As a secondary school teacher in the South East suggested,

"Most of the time in the examples of homelessness that I've been involved directly with some of my students, they have had a home per say, as in a roof over their head, but they were in temporary hostels or moved from their families... A lot of people live with other people in temporary shelters and that sort of thing."

Children often experience more than one housing issue. For example, they may be homeless and living in temporary accommodation, and be living in poor quality or overcrowded housing.

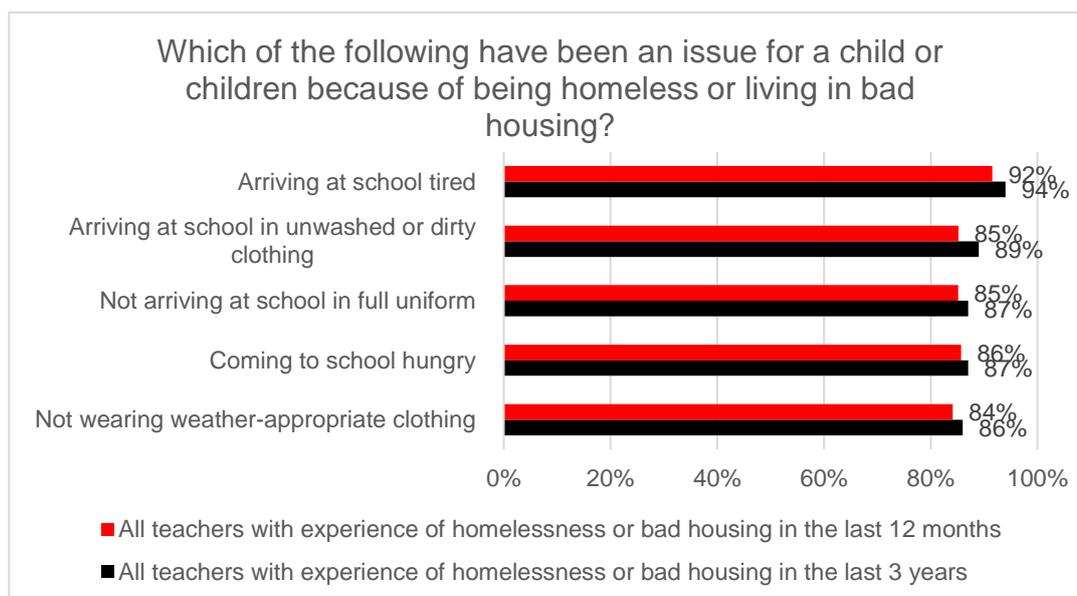
We asked teachers if they believed these housing issues had increased or decreased at their school. A significant proportion said they had witnessed an

increase in these issues. Two-fifths (41%) of teachers suggested that the number of children living in poor quality, unstable or overcrowded housing had increased over the last three years. Three in ten (30%) teachers indicated that the number of children who were homeless and living in temporary accommodation, or staying with friends or other family, had increased over the same time period.

The effects and impacts of poor housing

More than 9 in 10 (91%) teachers say that they have seen the impact of homelessness and bad housing on children’s ability to arrive to school or classes on time in the last 3 years (90% of teachers have seen this over the last 12 months). Similarly, high proportions of teachers have seen homelessness and bad housing contribute to children missing classes or days of school in the last 3 years (88%) and 12 months (86%). Being absent from school can lower educational attainment, with research connecting higher levels of absenteeism with reduced performance on tests and in the classroom.

Impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children arriving at school ready to learn



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers)*

Absenteeism among homeless or poorly housed children can in part be explained by the difficulty that students can face travelling to school if they have lost their home. Seven out of every ten (70%) teachers say they have seen the impact of students losing their home on their journey to school in the last 3 years. Longer journeys can increase tiredness, lateness and anxiety and reduce the time they have at home, as well as children’s capacity to maintain relationships with peers and teachers.

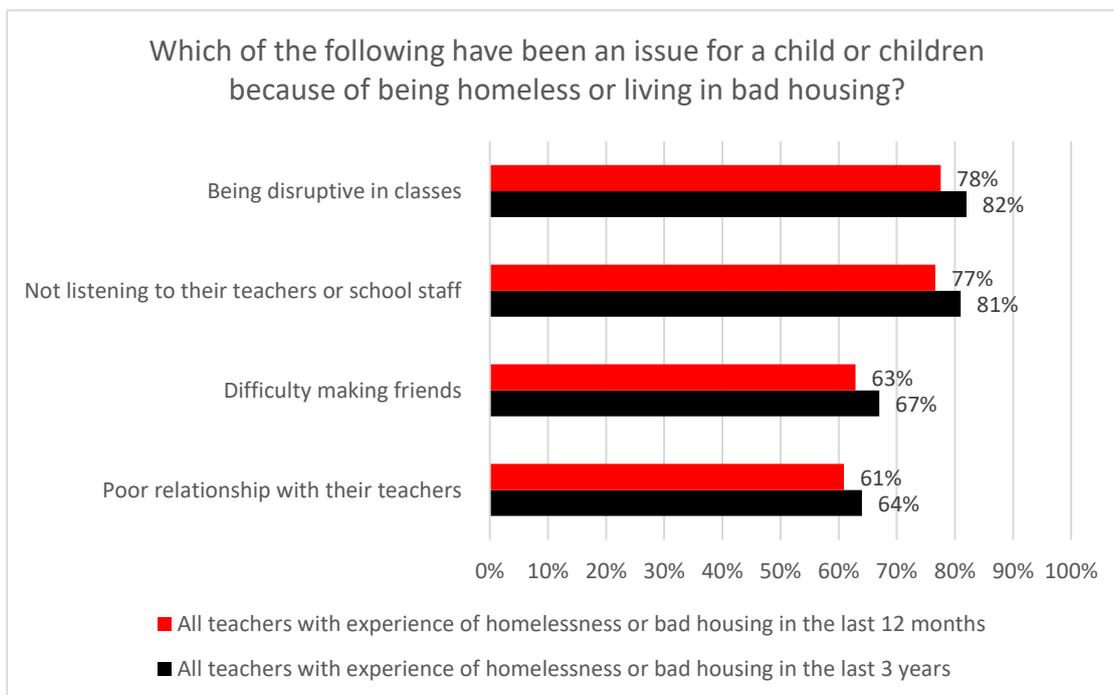
“Most of the time when students have gone into temporary housing, they just stop coming to school entirely...I have actually two students right now who are in a situation where they're with their parent but in temporary accommodation, they've had to move, and they just can't get to school anymore.”

Arriving at school tired impacts on a children energy levels and motivation in classes. Indeed, 89% of teachers say they have seen the negative impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s energy levels throughout the day, and 87% of teachers have seen a negative impact on children’s motivation at school.

“I have a 10 year old boy in my class sharing a bedsit with his father. It is not right for a 10 year old to sleep in the same bed as a parent. ...His dad obviously does not go to sleep at the same time a child should, so the boy has to sleep with his dad still up”

Arriving at school in unwashed or dirty clothing was another common impact of homelessness or bad housing (89% of teachers in the last 3 years), as well as coming to school hungry (87% of teachers) and not arriving at school in full school uniform (87% of teachers). Families can struggle to wash and dry clothing for example if they are living in temporary accommodation with limited facilities, with insufficient space or in damp and mouldy conditions. Housing costs can contribute to food poverty, and breakfasts may be missed when children have a long journey to school or they living in accommodation with poor facilities for preparing food.

Impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children’s social interactions



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers)

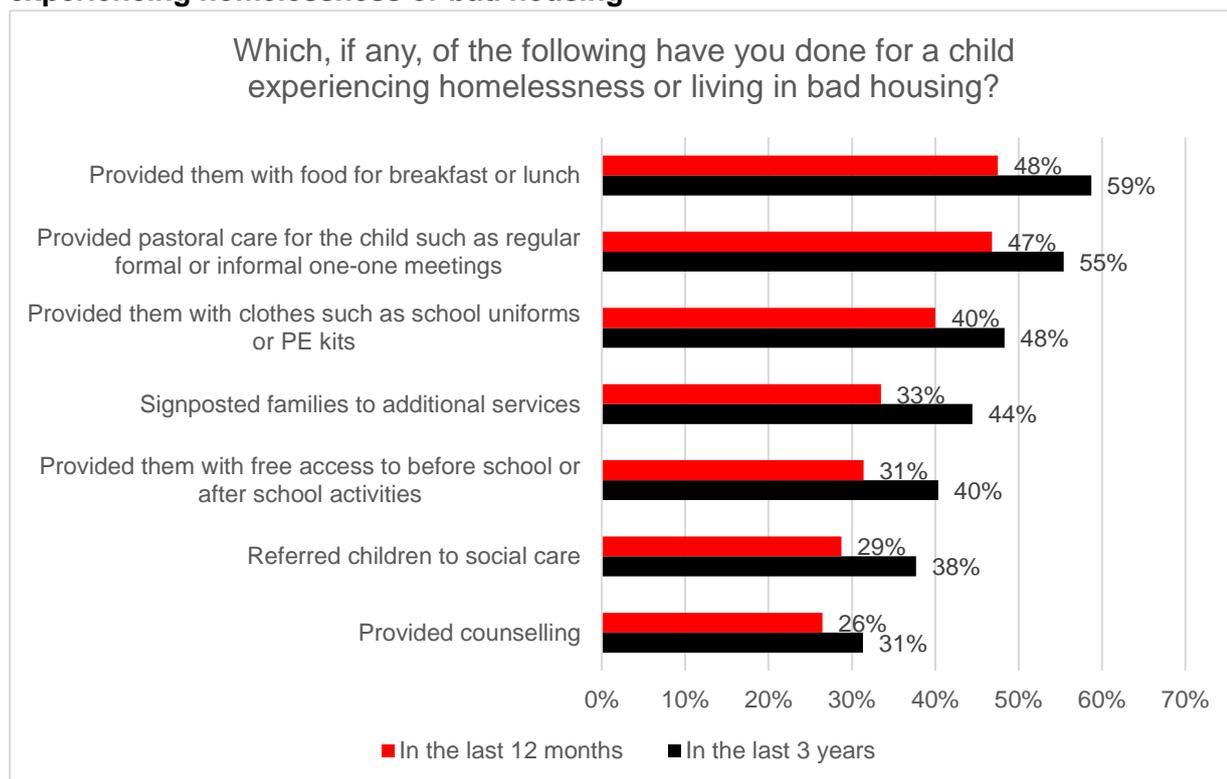
Being homeless or living in bad housing can impact on children’s behaviour in class, with 82% of teachers saying that this has led to children being disruptive in class in the last 3 years (78% in the last 12 months). Not listening to teachers or school staff is another common issue, with 81% of teachers saying they have seen this impact. Being homeless or living in bad housing can also affect children’s relationships with their peers, with two-thirds (67%) of teachers saying they have witnessed this impact in the last 3 years.

Most teachers had seen the negative effects of these unsatisfactory living situations impact on children’s mental health (89% of teachers saw this negative impact on a child at their school), confidence (87%), their persistence with difficult work (85%), and their physical health too (80%).

Teachers stepping in

Many teachers told us about the ways they tried to provide extra support to homeless or poorly housed children, to help the child and improve the learning environment within the school.

The most common types of support teachers have provided to children experiencing homelessness or bad housing



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers)

“...and there's the impact on the children in that if they're not being fed they're hungry, their behaviour then-, that can often be a reason for poor behaviour, which means that they disrupt lessons”

The indication is that allowing children to struggle with the effects of precarious housing was likely to also mean disruptions to the education of other children; as emotionally wounded children 'acting up' in class can make learning harder for everyone. While most teachers feel they can make a difference, when working with homeless children (85%), they also report feeling despondent (56%) and that their work is futile (61%).

“His situation was such a mental strain on him that he just couldn't handle being at college anymore, so he dropped out in the end. So, he had such a horrible time of things and, despite all support that we possibly could provide, it's just not enough from the student's perspective.”

What's to be done?

The experiences that teachers reported is very concerning when considered alongside government statistics that shows the growth of housing issues among families with children. We know the housing system is not delivering housing that is affordable to those on the lowest incomes but the fact that teachers are so acutely aware of this – because they frequently deal with the impacts – indicates clearly that homelessness among children is not something that can be thought of as a discrete social ill. While it is certainly a damaging situation for a child, the impacts spread through a child's future.

The impacts of homelessness and poor housing are not limited to the children who are affected. These children's need for enhanced support creates an additional burden on teachers, creating stress and extra workload.. If teachers are unable to fully ameliorate these challenges, homeless children can cause disruptions in class and reduce the amount of time teachers have with other pupils. And of course the practical support that was mentioned by many teachers also means devoting resources that could otherwise be used elsewhere in their school. In conclusion, children that are held back by housing problems are missing out on education and this will impact on their future and, in all likelihood, their earning potential. Even if government is unconcerned by rising child homelessness, they should at least understand that affected children will contribute less to society than they otherwise could do and so will potentially contribute less towards society, in terms of their skills and tax contribution. We should also remember that a homeless child's peers may also have their education affected by the disruptions caused when trying to support a homeless child. And disruptions are potentially more likely to occur in schools already struggling with poverty (as indicated by the use of free school meals in a school).

Describing the wider implications of child homelessness may seem like we are overlooking the personal tragedies which each child faces. However, understanding the wider implications of what is at heart a policy decision

(underinvestment in social housing and a limited response to the housing crisis) shows how short sighted and self-defeating such a stance is likely to be.

Ignoring the disadvantage that homelessness causes to a child – and at times their fellow pupils – is a failure to invest in the future.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

When a child begins their school career, it is one of their first steps towards personal independence – and educational attainment - and the beginning of a long road towards adulthood. A good education is critical to a person's future, providing them with personal agency and more options for their future. And to thrive in school, children need to arrive at school each day ready to engage and learn. However, for too many children, the shadow cast by their housing situation has a profound impact on their education.

From being forced to change schools due to homelessness or the instability of expensive private renting to the struggle to find study space in an overcrowded flat, housing presents very real challenges to children's ability to participate in education. In more subtle ways, a lack of stability arising from bad housing can affect social and emotional development. Poor educational and emotional development at a young age can go on to cause long term damage as young people progress through their adult lives.

The educational outcomes for homeless children are consistently shown to be poor. Homelessness can contribute to absenteeism, increased need for special education services and poor performances in tests¹. Homeless children suffer specific physical, psychological and emotional damage due to the circumstances that generally accompany homelessness, impacting on their health, development and education². Even when compared to low-income households that are not homeless, young homeless children have lower academic achievement³, for example a study of homeless children in New York found that homelessness was associated with lower levels of achievement in standard academic tests⁴.

Shelter commissioned YouGov to conduct an online survey of 1,507 teachers across Great Britain (26th February - 8th March 2020), on the prevalence and impacts of the housing crisis on children at their schools, alongside eight qualitative interviews with teachers that responded to the survey. The survey was carried out online using the YouGov panel and weighted to be representative of all state school teachers in Great Britain, by school type, region, age and gender.

The aim of the research was to link the existing evidence base with the recent experiences of teachers working with homeless or poorly housed children so we could understand the practical impacts of the housing crisis on children's education. The survey and qualitative interviews were designed to explore

¹ Hong, Saahoon, and Piescher, Kristy, *The role of supportive housing in homeless children's well-being: An investigation of child welfare and educational outcomes*, Children and Youth Services Review, 34 (8), 1440-1447, 2012.

² M. Molner, Janice, R.Rath, William and Klein, Tovah P, *Constantly Compromised: The Impact of Homelessness on Children*, Journal of Social Issues, 46 (4), 109-124, 1990

³ Fantuzzoe, John W et al, *The unique and combined effects of homelessness and school mobility on the educational outcomes of young children*, Educational Researcher, 41 (9), 393-402, 2012

⁴ Rafferty, Yvonne, Shinn, Marybeth, and Weitzman, Beth C, *Academic achievement among formerly homeless adolescents and their continuously housed peers*, Journal of School Psychology, 42 (3), 2004

teachers' perceptions of the housing emergency, including their perceptions of the impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children in their classrooms and wider school.

Shelter also conducted a review of the literature and existing evidence base, with the aim of understanding the impact that poor housing and inadequate support for children that are homeless is having on children while in school. Shelter subsequently ran a further survey among teachers with the aim of collecting additional evidence on the impact of homelessness and poor housing on children as the pandemic causes extra disruptions to everyday life. This involved surveying 1,072 teachers in the UK (15th – 25th October 2020) online using the YouGov panel. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the teaching profession by phase, region, age and gender.

The following report presents the results of our research alongside the evidence from the literature.

- In the first section we present evidence on the prevalence of housing issues amongst children
- In the second section we describe the direct impacts and the knock-on effects of bad housing on children
- In section three we look at the impacts the housing emergency is having on schools and teachers
- Finally, we close the research report with a discussion of the results and their implications as observed by teachers

CHAPTER 3: THE PREVALENCE OF HOUSING ISSUES AMONG CHILDREN

A growing issue of homelessness and bad housing

In the last ten years, the number of families with children living in a private rented home has almost doubled, increasing by 84%. There are now more than 1.6 million families with children living in a private rented home and a quarter (24%) of all families in England now rent privately.⁵ Families frequently have no choice but to live in the private rented sector due to the chronic shortage of social housing and the high costs associated with getting on the property ladder.

The increase in the number of families living in a private rented home is troubling for two key reasons. Firstly, we know that poor conditions are more prevalent in private rented housing, with a greater proportion of homes being classed as non-decent compared to other tenures.⁶ Secondly, we know that households are most likely to be living in a private rented home when they apply for homelessness assistance and the ending of a private rented tenancy remains a leading trigger of homelessness.⁷ This is in part because private renting is the most insecure type of housing, with the continued existence of Section 21 'no fault' eviction notices, which leaves many private renters under the constant threat of eviction. Private renting also remains the most unaffordable housing tenure, with private renters spending on average 40% of their income on rent.⁸ It is not uncommon for families who lose a private rented home to struggle to find another they can afford within their local area.

The growth in the number of families living in a private rented home inevitably has knock-on effects on children's experiences of the housing emergency. As families struggle to find an affordable place to live, or are unable to move within the social rented sector, they are forced to accept housing that isn't suitable for the needs of them and their children. The higher proportion of non-decent homes in the private rented sector results in over two million (2,078,000) children living in non-decent housing in England.⁹ Of the two million children living in non-decent homes, 233,000 are also living with serious condensation in one or more rooms

⁵ MHCLG, [English Housing Survey headline report 2018 to 2019](#), Annex Table 1.5

⁶ 25% of private rented homes are classed as non-decent, compared with 17% of owner-occupied homes and 12% of social homes. MHCLG, [English Housing Survey headline report 2018 to 2019](#), Annex Table 2.2

⁷ 25% of households owed a homelessness duty were living in a private rented home when they applied for homelessness assistance. This is the most common type of accommodation. MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table A4

⁸ This is more than those buying with a mortgage (19%) and social renters (30%). MHCLG, [English Housing Survey headline report 2018 to 2019](#), Annex Table 1.13

⁹ Shelter analysis of the English Housing Survey 2016-17 SPSS file, MHCLG, 2018

in their home. A further 100,000 are living in a property that has damp problems in more than one room but hasn't reached the level of serious condensation.¹⁰ Poor conditions are not unique to the private rented sector, but they are more likely to exist in private rented properties.

Figure 1: Number of children living in non-decent housing, including those living with serious condensation and damp



Source: Shelter analysis of English Housing Survey

Private rented homes are also more likely to be overcrowded compared to the national average. Overcrowding in the private rental sector has doubled in the past 20 years, reaching 6% of all households. Overall, overcrowding in England is 3.4%.¹¹ Shelter's analysis of the English Housing Survey 2017-18 shows that there are at least two million children across England that are living in overcrowded conditions.¹² Government assesses overcrowding based on the number of bedrooms in a home and who might have to share. Presently around one in 30 households (3%) are overcrowded.

Worryingly, there are now 136,000 homeless children in Britain, including over 127,000 homeless children in England.¹³ The number of families with children who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation in England has increased by 65% in the last decade. The number of homeless children living in temporary accommodation has also increased, by 75% in this instance, over the last ten years. These are children that are homeless and have been found accommodation by their local council, including hostels and bed and breakfast

¹⁰ Shelter analysis of the English Housing Survey 2016-17 SPSS file, MHCLG, 2018

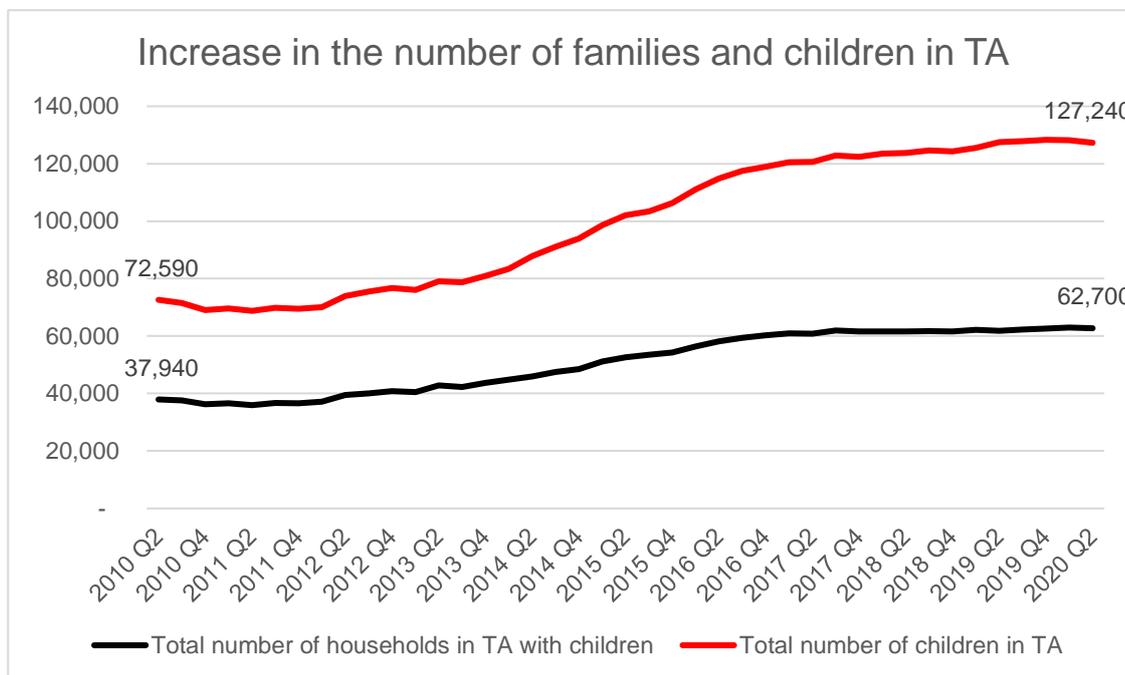
¹¹ MHCLG, [English Housing Survey 2018 to 2019: headline report](#), Annex Table 1.21

¹² Shelter analysis of the English Housing Survey 2017-18 SPSS File, MHCLG, 2019

¹³ The number of homeless children in Britain is the number of homeless children living in temporary accommodation in England, Scotland and Wales. See Appendix I for the full methodology.

accommodation, many of which have shared facilities and require family members to share rooms and even beds.

Figure 2: Increase in the number of families with children and children living in temporary accommodation in England



Source: MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, *Statutory homelessness live tables*, Table TA1

This section will explore the experiences of children who are living in some of these housing situations. We will look at this through the eyes of teachers and their perceptions of these children, and also draw on existing evidence and research which explores the impact that homelessness and bad housing can have on children’s development and educational attainment.

Awareness of the housing emergency

Teachers are generally aware of the housing emergency in their area. To better understand the circumstances our teachers faced we asked if teachers if there was a housing crisis in their school’s local area and two-fifths (42%) agreed this was the case. The level of agreement increases to 54% of teachers who had had taught or interacted with children who were homeless or living in bad housing in the last twelve months. It rose to over half (55%) for teachers at schools with the greatest proportions of children receiving free school meals (schools with 35% of students, or more, receiving free school meals). A secondary school teacher from Scotland talked about the experiences of children receiving free school meals:

“there is still a lot of pupils who live under the poverty line and get free school meals... a pupil should just be concentrating on their personal development and

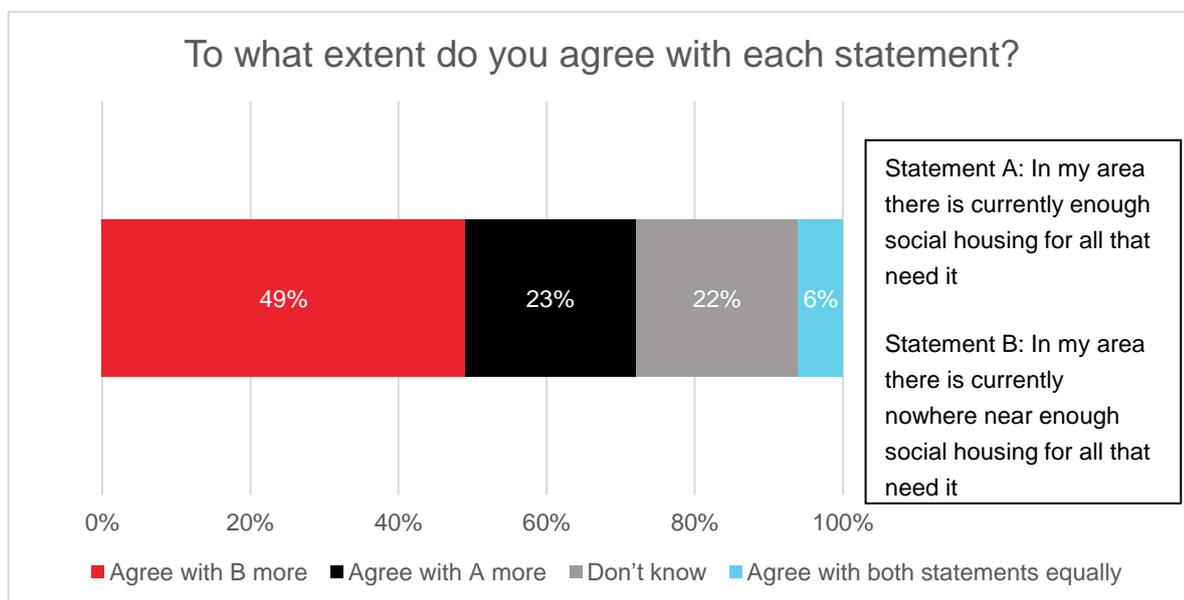
not concentrating on whether or not their parents are going to be able to afford heating, gas and food”¹⁴

Teachers appeared to see the housing crisis as an issue of affordability, or so it would seem from the regional breakdown of results. With those in the *traditionally* more unaffordable parts of the country more likely to report a housing crisis in their area. Teachers living in London (68%) or the South East (47%) were particularly likely to report this, whilst those living in Yorkshire and the Humber (33%), Wales (32%) and Scotland (31%) were the least likely to.

We also asked teachers to consider the provision of social housing in their areas, showing them two contrasting statements on social housing and asking them which one they agreed with most. Half (49%) of all teachers agreed there is currently nowhere near enough social housing in their areas for those that need it. Less than a quarter (23%) of teachers thought there was currently enough social housing for everyone that needs it.

Teachers at schools that have the highest proportion of children receiving free school meals are more likely than average to say there is insufficient stock of social housing in their area. For example, for schools with 35% or more Free School Meal eligibility, six in ten (61%) teachers agree that there is not enough social housing in their area. This compares with 46% of teachers in schools with the smallest proportion of children receiving free school meals (up to 9%).

Figure 3: Teachers’ perceptions of whether there is enough social housing in their area for all that need it



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers 1,507

¹⁴ YouGov Qualitative interview; Support Teacher, secondary school, Scotland.

This finding was echoed by the teachers we spoke to as part of the qualitative research, several of whom mentioned the lack of social housing as a key driver of the housing emergency. As a secondary school teacher in the North East told us:

"I don't think there's as much accessible housing as what people would like in terms of council properties."

Teachers are aware of homelessness amongst their pupils

The majority of teachers had experience of children in their class or school that had to deal with homelessness or bad housing. Overall, more than three-quarters (77%) of teachers surveyed had been aware of children who were dealing with some form of homelessness or living in bad housing in the last three years. Almost two-third of teachers (63%) had direct experience from having taught these children in the last three years; a smaller proportion (36%) were aware of children at their school experiencing these issues. When assessing these results by whether the local area has a housing crisis (as assessed by the teacher themselves), teacher from areas with no housing crisis were aware of children who were homeless or living in bad housing at their schools.

The most commonly observed issue was general housing issues, such as overcrowded, unstable or poor-quality housing. In total seven in ten (69%) teachers had seen this issue in the past three years, and three in five (61%) teachers had seen this in the past twelve months. Awareness increases to 89% and 83% of teachers – in the last three years and 12 months respectively – who work in schools with at least 35% of their students receiving free school meals. This further demonstrates the relationship between the prevalence of housing issues and low-income households. Several of the teachers we spoke to referred to the prevalence of poor conditions and overcrowding among students in their school. As a primary school teacher in Scotland told us:

"I would say quite a lot of them [my pupils] live in very cramped conditions with not enough bedrooms for the number of people who are living in the house."

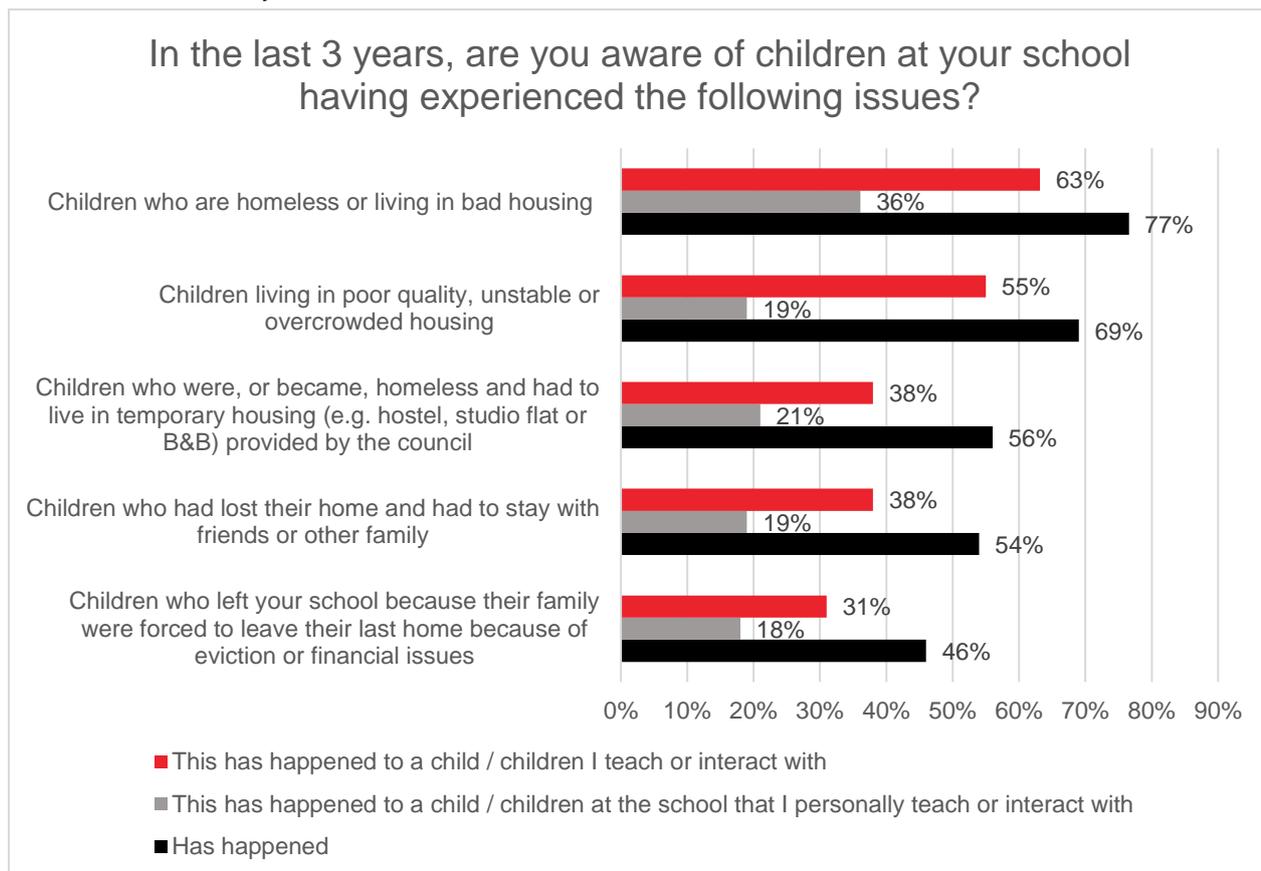
More worrying was the proportion of teachers that had experienced children at their schools having to move into temporary accommodation because they were officially homeless. More than half (56%) of teachers had seen this in the last three years and 47% of teachers had seen this in the last twelve months. It was equally common for teachers to have seen children that were hidden homeless; sofa surfing or living with family or friends (not recorded as homeless by a local authority but had living situations where they have no legal rights to remain).¹⁵

¹⁵ Hidden homelessness is a broad term that is used to refer to people who are not recorded by official statistics. This means that they have not approached their local authority for homelessness assistance. This includes people who become homeless but find a temporary solution by staying with friends or family or living in other insecure accommodation.

Again, more than half (54%) of teachers had seen this in the last three years and 46% of teachers had seen this in the last twelve months.

More than three-quarters (78%) of teachers at schools with over 35% of pupils receiving free school meals had experience of children being homeless and living in temporary accommodation in the last three years. Similarly, 77% of teachers working at these schools say they had witnessed hidden homelessness among students in the last three years.

Figure 4: Teachers' perception of the prevalence of housing issues among students in the last 3 years



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers 1,507

Both these issues are more prevalent among secondary school students, with 60% of secondary school teachers saying they have seen children who were homeless and living in temporary accommodation in the last three years, compared with 52% of primary school teachers. Losing your home and staying with friends or family is also more common among secondary school students, with 57% of secondary school teachers saying they are aware of students having to sofa surf over the last three years compared to 51% of primary school teachers. This was echoed by the teachers we spoke to who told us about their students who were living in temporary accommodation or sofa surfing, some of whom were living away from their families. As a secondary school teacher in the South East suggested:

"Most of the time in the examples of homelessness that I've been involved directly with some of my students, they have had a home per say, as in a roof over their head, but they were in temporary hostels or moved from their families... A lot of people live with other people in temporary shelters and that sort of thing."

The least prevalent issue was children that had left school because of housing issues requiring them to move home. Two in five teachers had experience of children leaving school because their family had to leave their home because of evictions or financial issues. Although this was the least common housing issue that teachers had witnessed, it remains an important issue. As one secondary school teacher in the South East poignantly expressed:

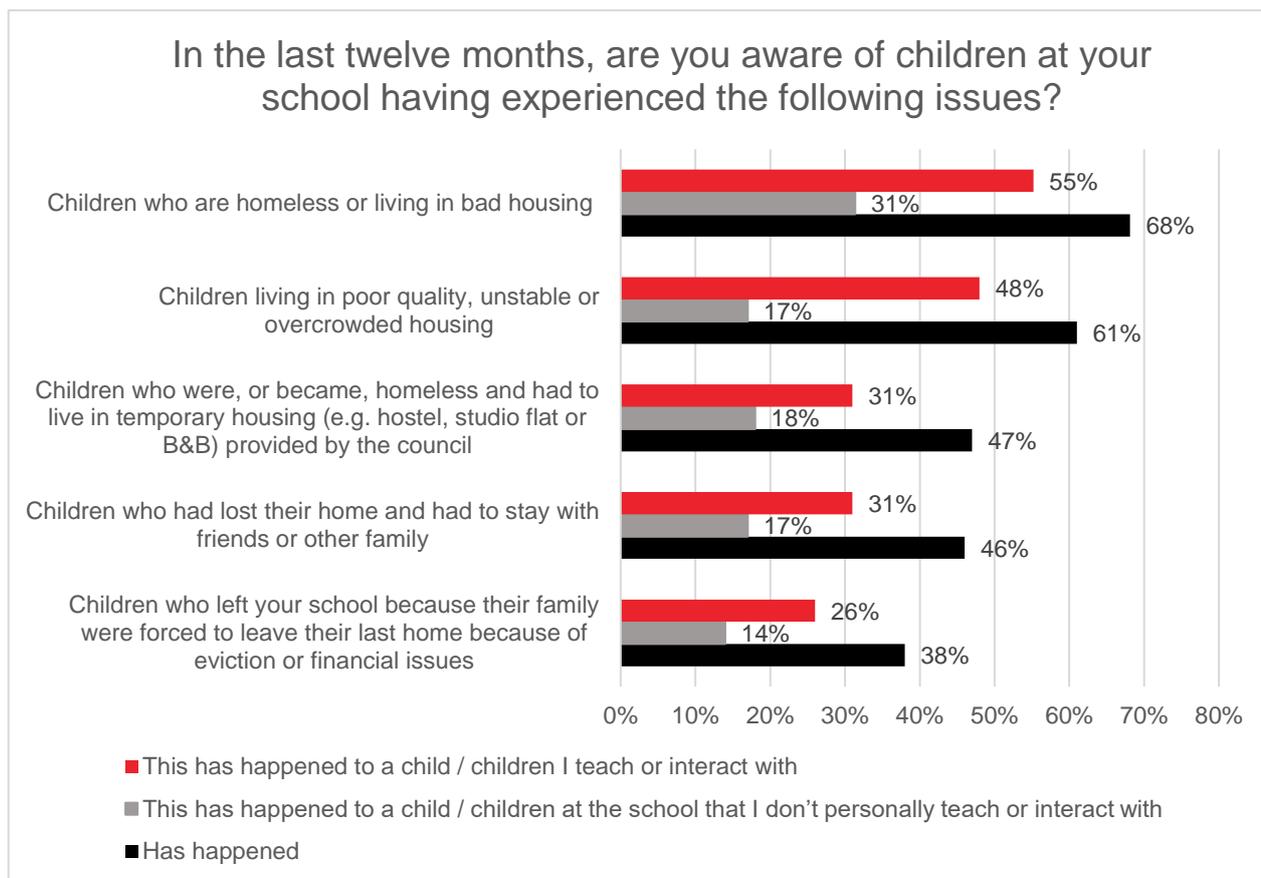
"There's a lot of missing children, is probably the best way of putting it. We've had in the past, and we've seen it in other schools as well, where we'll return after a summer holiday and there'll be two or three children every year that just disappear."

Since the beginning of the century, the number of homeless households being placed in out of area temporary accommodation by local authorities is more than four times higher (371% or from 5,870 to 27,650)¹⁶. More than a quarter (28%) of all homeless households in temporary accommodation are placed in another local authority area.

We can expect that some students will experience more than one of these housing issues. For example, they may be homeless and living in temporary accommodation, and be living in poor quality or overcrowded housing. Temporary accommodation is often in poor condition, overcrowded or both.

¹⁶ Out of area placement are where local authorities have placed homeless households in temporary accommodation that is in another local authority area. This is available at: MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1.

Figure 5: Teachers' perception of the prevalence of housing issues among students in the last 12 months

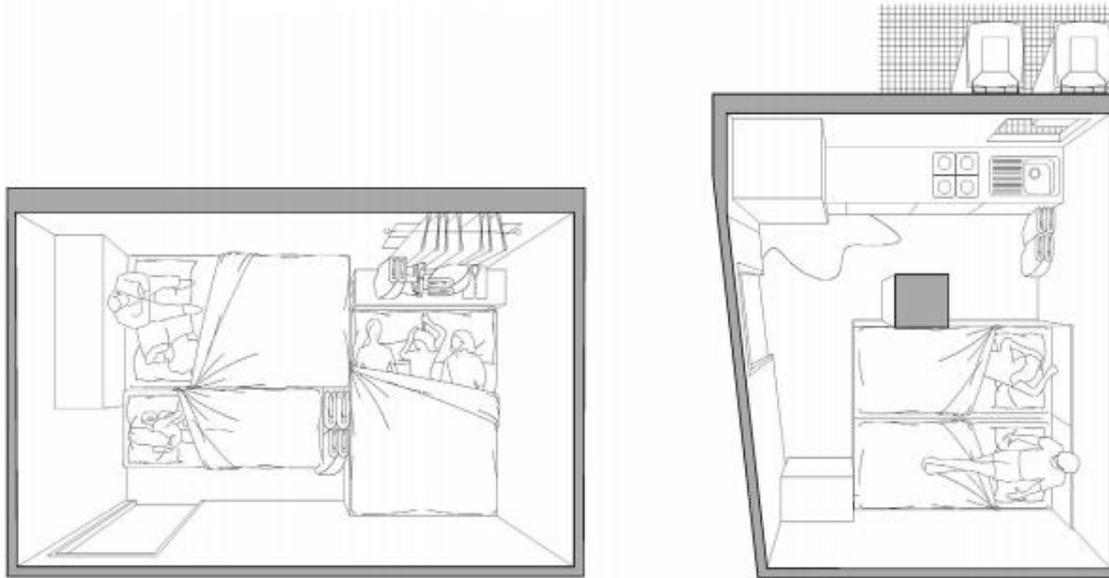


Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers 1,507

Homeless children staying in hostels or B&Bs often face the worst overcrowded conditions, sometimes for months on end. Shelter investigated these conditions as part of our 2016 Green Book report with architects producing shocking drawings showing the way that two of the families we visited were living.¹⁷ On the left a family were in a room measuring 12 feet by 8 feet. They had very little space to store possessions, let alone for children to play, have any personal space or study. On the right, a mother and her son shared a bed in a basement room with no natural light. To make matters worse one night the room was flooded from above, damaging their possessions.

¹⁷ Shelter, [Green Book: 50 Years on, The reality of homelessness for families today](#), Shelter, 2016

Figure 6: Architect's drawing showing the way that two families were living in temporary accommodation



Source: Shelter, *Green Book: 50 Years on, The reality of homelessness for families today*, Shelter, 2016

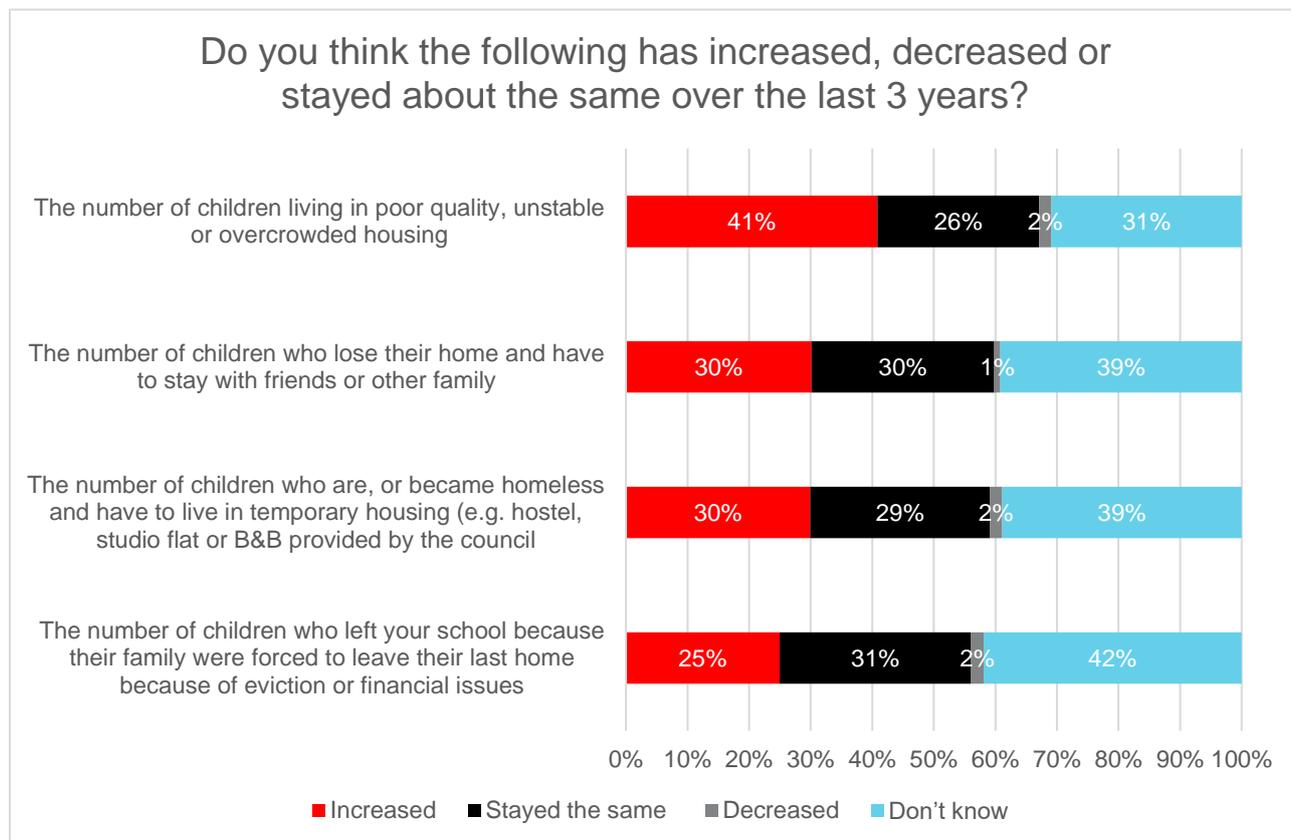
The impact of being homeless, living in bad housing or moving home on children's learning, social interactions and wellbeing will be explored in further detail in the following section.

Teachers are seeing an increase in housing issues amongst children

We asked teachers if they believed the prevalence of these housing issues had increased or decreased among children at their school. Although some teachers couldn't say whether specific housing issues had increased at their school, a significant proportion said they had witnessed an increase. Two-fifths (41%) of teachers suggested that the number of children living in poor quality, unstable or overcrowded housing had increased over the last three years.

Similarly, three in ten (30%) teachers indicated that the number of children who were homeless and living in temporary accommodation provided by the council or staying with friends or other family had increased over this time period. This is perhaps unsurprising, but no less concerning, given the national increase in the number of homeless children living in temporary accommodation.

Figure 7: Teachers' perceived increase in the prevalence of housing issues among their students



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers 1,507

Overall, 46% of teachers reported an increase in the prevalence of any form of housing issue amongst their pupils.¹⁸ Again, where teachers have reported a housing crisis in their area, they are more likely to have seen an increase in any of the four issues than teachers that do not believe there is local housing crisis. Unfortunately, even in areas where teachers say there isn't a housing crisis, the majority view is that housing issues are becoming more common, rather than less, as Table 1 shows.

Alongside MHCLG statistics that shows housing issues are once again on the rise, the evidence from teachers should be even more concerning. It suggests that problems with housing are very visible at school, rather than being something easily hid by pupils and their parents.

¹⁸ 700 teachers that indicated at least one of the four *housing issues* had increased a little/a lot from 1507 respondents; Shelter's own analysis of YouGov survey Feb-March 2020 raw data

Table 1: Trend for housing issue prevalence in areas with/ without a housing crisis

		Agree (net) there is a local housing crisis	Disagree (net) there is a local housing crisis
The number of children living in poor quality, unstable or overcrowded housing	has increased	61%	23%
	has decreased	1%	4%
The number of children who are, or became, homeless and have to live in temporary housing (e.g. hostel, studio flat or B&B) provided by the council	has increased	46%	16%
	has decreased	1%	5%
The number of children who lose their home and have to stay with friends or other family	has increased	47%	15%
	has decreased	1%	4%
The number of children who left your school because their family were forced to leave their last home because of eviction or financial issues	has increased	41%	12%
	has decreased	1%	5%

Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers 1,507

Most of the research included in this report was carried out in February and March 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic began. However, we recently carried out additional research with teachers in the UK (from various school types) to explore their perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on children who are homeless or living in bad housing.¹⁹ This research also highlighted the scale of housing issues during this time. Seven in ten (71%) teachers were aware of children at their school who were homeless or living in bad housing since the Covid-19 public health restrictions began in March 2020²⁰. This is higher than the 68% of teachers who were aware of children experiencing these issues in the year up to February to March 2020, suggesting that the prevalence of homeless and bad housing among children possibly has slightly increased during the pandemic (or teachers have observed children's home circumstance because of remote learning)

¹⁹ YouGov, survey of 1,072 teaching professionals in the UK, online, weighted, 15th Oct-25th Oct

²⁰ Teachers were asked if they had provided support to homeless children at their school, with the first option being 'Not applicable - I am not aware of any children at my school living in poor quality housing or that are homeless'. Teachers were also able to select 'None of the above - I have not had to provide extra support to any children experiencing homelessness or bad housing since the Covid-19 restrictions

In the next section we look at what being homeless or living in bad housing means for the experiences of children and the teachers supporting them to try and develop and achieve a good education.

CHAPTER 4: THE IMPACTS OF HOMELESSNESS AND BAD HOUSING

Thinking back to our own experiences of school, we can all no doubt remember the challenges we faced, day to day, in trying to navigate school life. We struggled to remain concentrated and focused on the learning we had to do, and outside of the classes themselves we learned to navigate social interactions with others. It is easy to understand how those challenges might increase for children experiencing housing issues is harder if you personally have not experienced similar stresses. Existing research highlights a number of issues related to a lack of privacy and space, poor amenities, and the health and wellbeing impacts of homelessness and bad housing on a child's schooling and development.

Evidence suggests that the impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children are significant. Attendance at school, socialising with peers, development of socio-emotional skills and educational attainment are some of the key elements of a child's development that can be affected by becoming homeless or living in bad housing. The educational outcomes for homeless children are consistently shown to be poor. Even when compared to low-income households who are not homeless, young homeless children have lower academic achievement.²¹ Poor housing also impacts on children's education. Issues such as poor conditions and overcrowding can affect children's educational achievement and impact on their development due to the stress of living in such conditions. Poor conditions and overcrowding can also create practical issues around completing schoolwork and being prepared for school.

Children's ability to learn at school is dependent on whether they arrive at school on time, well rested and fed, having had the environment to complete school work at home. Children who miss school, arrive to lessons late and come to school hungry, are likely to struggle with social interactions and find it difficult to keep up with the curriculum. Being present and able to concentrate at school is critical for all children's development and attainment. As we will also see, housing disruptions of this kind go hand in hand with disruptions to wellbeing and health too.

In this section we look at the direct and indirect impacts of poor housing on the children that have been identified by teachers as experiencing either homelessness or bad housing. We present the results for teachers' observations over three years and the last 12 months – and as the charts show, the impacts of homelessness and bad housing remain concerningly common.

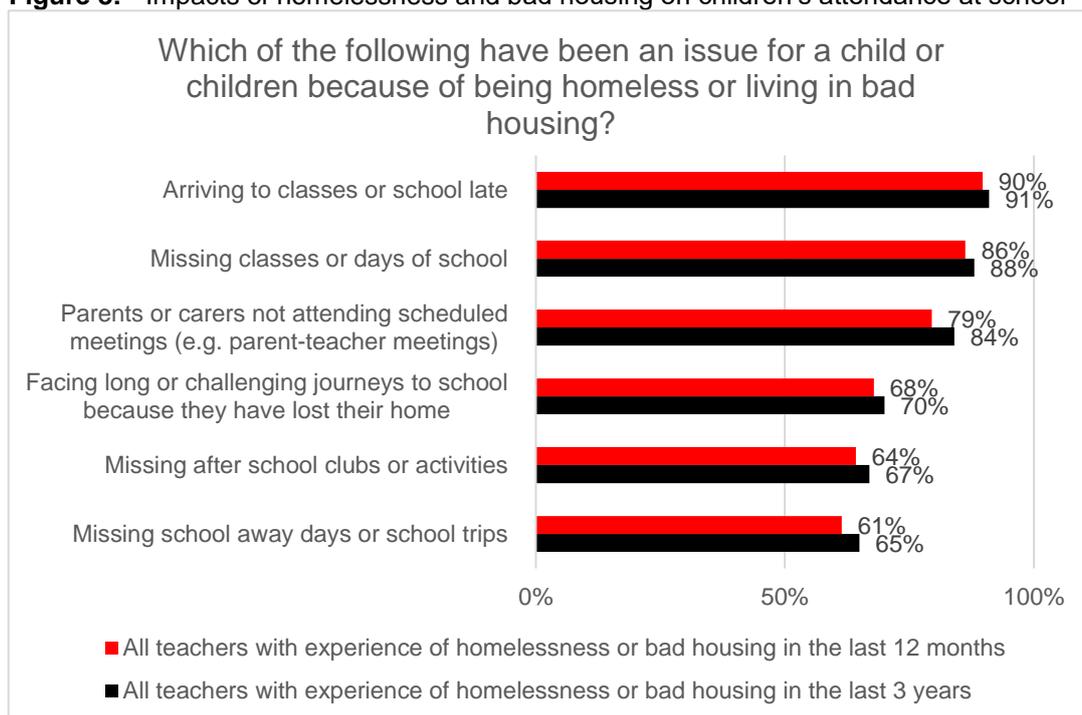
²¹ Fantuzzoe, John W et al, *The unique and combined effects of homelessness and school mobility on the educational outcomes of young children*, Educational Researcher, 41 (9), 393-402, 2012

The impact on children's attendance

Arriving at school on time and attending lessons is a necessary first step to doing well at school. Unfortunately, the vast majority (91%) of teachers say that the ability to arrive to school or classes on time has been an issue for a child or children because of living in bad housing or experiencing homelessness in the last 3 years (90% of teachers have seen this over the last 12 months). Similarly, 88% and 86% of teachers have seen the impact of homelessness and bad housing on children missing classes or days of school in the last 3 years and 12 months, respectively. Being absent from school can decrease educational attainment, with research connecting higher levels of absenteeism with reduced performance on tests and in the classroom.²²

This high level of absenteeism could be explained, at least in part, by the difficulty that students can face travelling to school if they have lost their home. Seven in ten (70%) of teachers with experience in the last three years say that their students who have lost their home are facing long or challenging journeys to and from school. Longer journeys can increase tiredness, lateness and anxiety and reduce the time they have at home, as well as children's capacity to maintain relationships with peers and teachers.²³

Figure 8: Impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children's attendance at school



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers*

²² Moonie, Sheniz et al, *The relationship between school absence, academic performance, and asthma status*, Journal of School Health, 78 (3), 140-148, 2008

²³ Kantar, [Research: Impact of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#), Shelter, 2017

The distance from school could be an indicator of the compromises that parents must make when trying to find accommodation that is affordable to them. It could also indicate examples of families being moved to temporary accommodation that is out of area. In areas with high levels of homelessness, local authorities are increasingly placing homeless households in temporary accommodation that is located in a different local authority area. This is often due to the significant pressures that local authorities are under to find temporary accommodation for homeless households. More than a quarter (28%) of households are placed in temporary accommodation in another local authority.²⁴ Shelter estimates that there were 41,000 homeless children housed out of area at the end of June 2020.²⁵

At Shelter we see the devastating impacts on these households and children. This was evidenced in the 2004 Shelter survey of people living in temporary accommodation where two in five parents (43%) confirmed that their children had missed school because of to their housing situation. On average, children had missed 55 school days, equivalent to quarter of the school year.²⁶ Homeless children are also up to three times more likely to be absent from school than other children because of the disruption caused by moving into and between temporary accommodation.²⁷ The teachers we spoke to expressed a similar concern, with one secondary school teacher in the South East telling us about the impact on two of their current students:

"Most of the time when students have gone into temporary housing, they just stop coming to school entirely. Whether it's because the temporary housing is too far away or they just don't see the point of it anymore... I have actually two students right now who are in a situation where they're with their parent but in temporary accommodation, they've had to move, and they just can't get to school anymore."

Moving home may also result in children moving schools which can disrupt and impact on the continuity of a child's learning as they are forced to adapt to new classrooms, curriculum and teachers.²⁸ Moving may also create the need to catch up with different lesson plans and curriculum progression.²⁹

²⁴ MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1, 2020 Q1

²⁵ Shelter analysis of homelessness statistics as of Q1 2020. Shelter used Freedom of Information requests to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government to estimate the total number of children housed in homeless accommodation outside of their local authority. MHCLG holds this information for c.35% of out of district placements. For the 8,160 households of which information is held there was an average of 1.49 children. Shelter has applied this multiplier to the total number of households placed out of district to estimate the total number of children placed out of area as of the end of June 2020.

²⁶ Mitchell, Fiona, [Living in Limbo – Survey of Homeless Households Living in Temporary Accommodation](#), Shelter, 2004

²⁷ Harker, Lisa, *Chance of a lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives*, Shelter, 2006

²⁸ Rumberger, R, *The causes and consequences of student mobility*, The Journal of Negro Education, 72, 6-21, 2003

²⁹ IBID

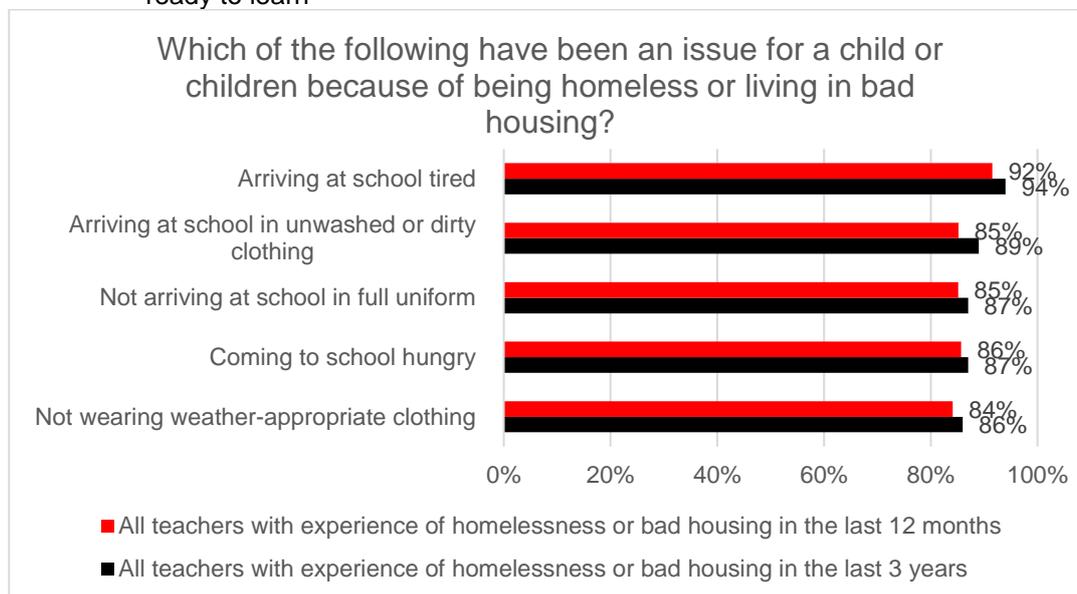
The impact on children’s ability to learn

Being homeless or living in bad housing can also affect whether children arrive at school in a state in which they are ready to learn. The most common issue identified by teachers was arriving at school tired. 94% of teachers said they had seen the impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s levels of tiredness in the last 3 years (92% of teachers had seen this impact in the last 12 months). Arriving at school tired can have an impact on children’s energy levels and motivation at school. Indeed, 89% of teachers say they have seen the negative impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s energy levels throughout the day, and 87% of teachers have seen a negative impact on children’s motivation at school.³⁰

“I have a 10-year-old boy in my class sharing a bed sit with his father. It is not right for a 10-year-old to sleep in the same bed as a parent. ...His dad obviously does not go to sleep at the same time a child should, so the boy has to sleep with his dad still up”³¹

Arriving at school in unwashed or dirty clothing was another common impact of homelessness or bad housing (89% of teachers in the last 3 years), as well as coming to school hungry (87% of teachers) and not arriving at school in full school uniform (87% of teachers).

Figure 9: Impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children arriving at school ready to learn



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers)*

³⁰ Thinking generally across your experience to what extent, if at all, have these living situations had an impact on the following for this child or children? Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: All teachers with experience in the last 3 years (1,135 teachers)*

³¹ Open ended response from YouGov 26th February - 8th March 2020 survey

Arriving at school poorly dressed can be an indicator of housing issues, and it can have a direct impact on a child's social development. Homeless children may struggle to keep track of possessions and their uniform and have limited access to bathroom or laundry facilities, making it harder for them to access full, clean uniform.³²

"[the] children moved to a hostel after being made homeless had to travel a long way to school... Sometimes children's clothes smell of damp, as they have nowhere to dry them."³³

Arriving at school hungry can also affect children's ability to learn as it can have a direct impact on their behaviour and social interactions with others. As a secondary school teacher in Yorkshire and the Humber told us:

"There's the impact on the children in that if they're not being fed, they're hungry... that can often be a reason for poor behaviour, which means that they disrupt lessons."

The impact on children's social interactions

The impact of bad housing and homelessness on social interactions with others is another key finding of the research. Indeed, almost three-quarters (73%) of teachers say that homelessness or bad housing has had a negative impact on children's social interactions with their friends or classmates.³⁴

Being homeless or living in bad housing can impact on children's behaviour in class, with 82% of teachers saying that this has led to children being disruptive in class in the last 3 years (78% in the last 12 months). Not listening to teachers or school staff is another common issue, with 81% of teachers saying they have seen this impact. Being homeless or living in bad housing can also result in difficulty making friends, with two-thirds (67%) of teachers saying they have witnessed this impact in the last 3 years.

This underscores previous evidence that shows that finding social interactions challenging and exhibiting behavioural problems are more common among homeless children.³⁵ Teachers say this can manifest in class as a lack of focus and engagement with learning, with some children becoming oppositional with

³² Kantar, [Research: Impact of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#), Shelter, 2017

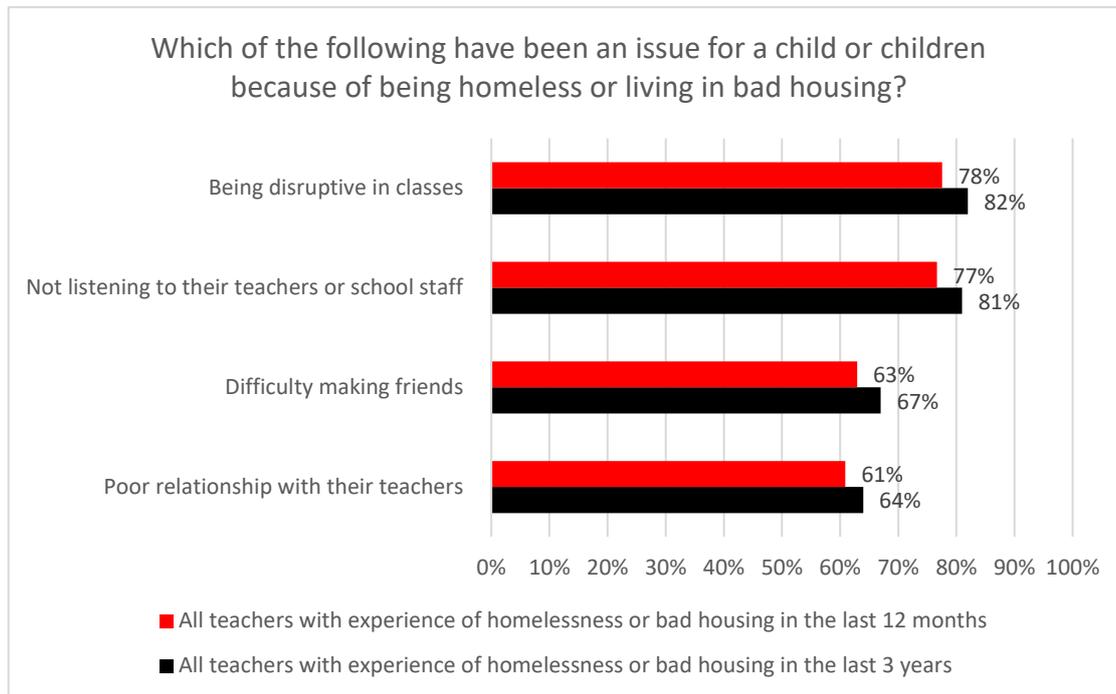
³³ Open ended response from YouGov 26th February - 8th March 2020 survey

³⁴ Thinking generally across your experience to what extent, if at all, have these living situations had an impact on the following for this child or children? Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience in the last 3 years (1,135 teachers)

³⁵ Kantar, [Research: Impact of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#), Shelter, 2017

teachers and peers, lashing out, starting fights or refusing to do any classwork or homework.³⁶

Figure 10: Impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children’s social interactions



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers*)

The teachers we spoke to talked about similar impacts on children’s social interactions with others. A primary school teacher in Scotland highlighted this impact, referring to the role that attendance can play in children’s relationships with classmates:

"I think a lot of children struggle with their friendships because they're away from school for a lot of time. They, kind of, miss bits of social aspects of school. They can often be more defensive about things, quite guarded about what they say about what's going on in their lives, which is obviously quite challenging. I think socially, they miss out on being with their friends, but a lot of them are quite aware of how much they're missing out academically."

This links to the final key impact that teachers saw: the impact of children’s housing situation on their academic attainment.

³⁶ Park, J, Fertig, A, and Allison, P, *Physical and mental health, cognitive development, and health care use by housing status of low-income young children in 20 American cities: a prospective cohort study*, *American Journal of Public Health*, 101 (S1), S255-S261, 2011

The impact on children's education outcomes

Children who are homeless or living in bad housing tend to have lower academic attainment. This is particularly the case for homeless children.³⁷ Homeless children suffer psychological, physical and emotional damage because of the challenges to living that homelessness presents to a child, these issues impact on children's health, development and education³⁸. Even comparing children from low-income households to homeless children shows poorer academic achievement amongst homeless children.³⁹ At its core, homelessness is instability and to become homeless, a child will have lost their previous home; perhaps a long term settled home in private housing or the social housing sector. But for many their route into homelessness will have included a long sequence of housing instability, and many experience repeat homelessness.

Being homeless or living in bad housing can also affect children's ability to complete homework. 90% of teachers say they have seen the impact of a lack of space on students' ability to complete work at home in the last 3 years. Existing evidence shows that homeless children struggle to find quiet places to complete homework, and many will struggle to access a computer to complete work on.⁴⁰

70% of teachers also say they have seen students not speaking up in class as a result of their housing situation. Children could not be speaking up in class for various reasons, including a lack of self-confidence and a lack of motivation. A general lack of enjoyment at school could also play a role.⁴¹

Teachers also witness the impact of homelessness or bad housing on children's attainment. 88% of teachers say they have seen the impact of housing issues on children not being able to keep up with the curriculum (85% of teachers have seen this in the last 12 months). Most worryingly, eight in ten (80%) teachers have seen the impact of homelessness or poor housing on children's performance in assessments or exams. This indicates a child's housing situation can impact on their education outcomes and attainment. As we noted previously, even when compared to low-income households who are not homeless, young homeless children tend to achieve less academically.⁴²

³⁷ Fantuzzoe, John W et al, *The unique and combined effects of homelessness and school mobility on the educational outcomes of young children*, Educational Researcher, 41 (9), 393-402, 2012

³⁸ M. Molner, Janice, R.Rath, William and Klein, Tovah P, *Constantly Compromised: The Impact of Homelessness on Children*, Journal of Social Issues, 46 (4), 109-124, 1990

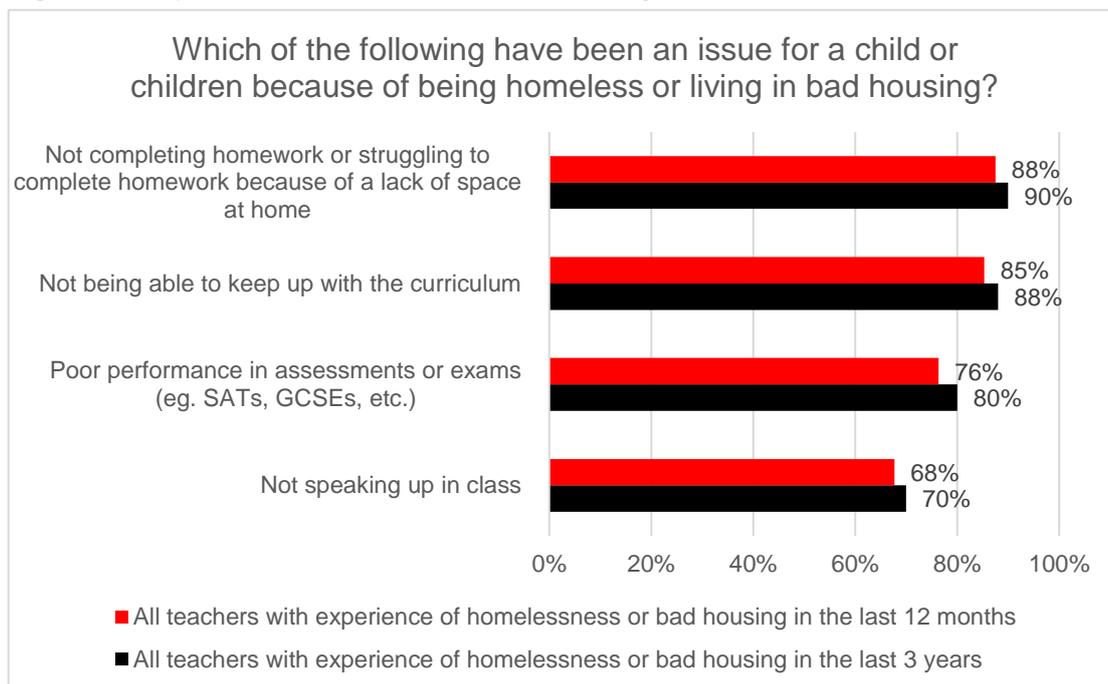
³⁹ Fantuzzoe, John W et al, *The unique and combined effects of homelessness and school mobility on the educational outcomes of young children*, Educational Researcher, 41 (9), 393-402, 2012

⁴⁰ Kantar, [Research: Impact of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#), Shelter, 2017

⁴¹ 70% of teachers have seen the negative impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's enjoyment at school. YouGov, survey of 1507 state school teachers in Great Britain, online, weighted, Feb – March 2020

⁴² Fantuzzoe, John W et al, *The unique and combined effects of homelessness and school mobility on the educational outcomes of young children*, Educational Researcher, 41 (9), 393-402, 2012

Figure 11: Impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children’s education outcomes



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years 1,135 teachers)

There is evidence to explain the connection between bad housing or homelessness and lower educational outcomes. Poor quality housing can cause or exacerbate health problems that result in children being absent from school. For example, respiratory problems triggered by living in poor housing conditions, including wheezing and asthma, can increase absenteeism, even among children whose asthma is mild or moderate.⁴³ And the existing evidence connects higher levels of absenteeism with reduced performance on tests and in the classroom.⁴⁴

“She leaves home at 6 am every morning to get to school because the local authority have no homes so she has been temporarily rehoused [out of area] ... Her mother has just had a baby and the family of four are living in one room at a B&B. Her attendance has dropped severely, she has become ill and she is always tired”⁴⁵

Interventions to improve housing conditions have shown some success in reversing the impacts of absenteeism. A study undertaken in Cornwall found that the installation of central heating into damp, unheated bedrooms alleviated respiratory problems and increased school attendance. Children lost 9.3 days per

⁴³ Moonie, Sheniz et al, *The relationship between school absence, academic performance, and asthma status*, Journal of School Health, 78 (3), 140-148, 2008

⁴⁴ Moonie, Sheniz et al, *The relationship between school absence, academic performance, and asthma status*, Journal of School Health, 78 (3), 140-148, 2008

⁴⁵ Open ended response from YouGov 26th February - 8th March 2020 survey

100 school days because of asthma before the intervention and 2.1 days afterwards.⁴⁶

There is further evidence which demonstrates the relationship between poor housing conditions and poor academic attainment⁴⁷ and even reduced cognitive and socio-emotional development. Indeed, a review of the relationship between housing, and school outcomes and behaviour found that housing quality was the most important of the housing measures they considered in terms of the impact on educational outcomes.⁴⁸ These included worse emotional and behavioural functioning and lower cognitive skills. An assessment of the inequalities that children living in poverty are exposed found that children living in poorer quality housing were more likely to demonstrate cognitive problems.⁴⁹ Research relating housing quality directly to educational attainment found that living in poorer quality housing was associated with lower average reading and math skills among adolescents.⁵⁰

If poor conditions and poor-quality housing were not enough of a challenge, the associated emotional and familial instability associated with housing insecurity can also help to explain the impacts of homelessness on education outcomes. Homelessness has knock-on effects for children's behaviour and emotional wellbeing at school as well as their overall performance.⁵¹ Losing a home is traumatic and often comes at the end of a long process that likely includes hardships and distressing financial events. A recent report by the Children's Society looked at the impact of housing insecurity on children's lives, finding that housing insecurity and the associated emotional, familial and financial instability can have long-term impacts on children's lives.⁵²

The wider impacts of homelessness

It would be wrong to assume that all the challenges faced by children who are homeless or living in bad housing affect them in uniform ways. However, as we have demonstrated so far, there is a great deal of evidence that indicates a consistent picture of disruption as well as stress that add up to disruption in school for children struggling with their housing situation. We asked teachers

⁴⁶ Vostanis P, Grattan E and Cumella S, *Mental health problems of homeless children and families: a longitudinal study*, British Medical Journal, 316, 899- 902, 1998.

⁴⁷ Haurin, D, Parcel, T, and Haurin, R, *Does homeownership affect child outcomes?* Real Estate Economics, 30(4), 635–666, 2002

⁴⁸ Levine Coley, R, Leventhal, T, Lynch, A, and Kull, M, *Relations between housing characteristics and the well-being of low-income children and adolescents*, Developmental Psychology, 49(9), 1775–1789, 2013

⁴⁹ Evans, G, *The Environment of Childhood Poverty*, American Psychologist, 59(2), 77–92, 2004

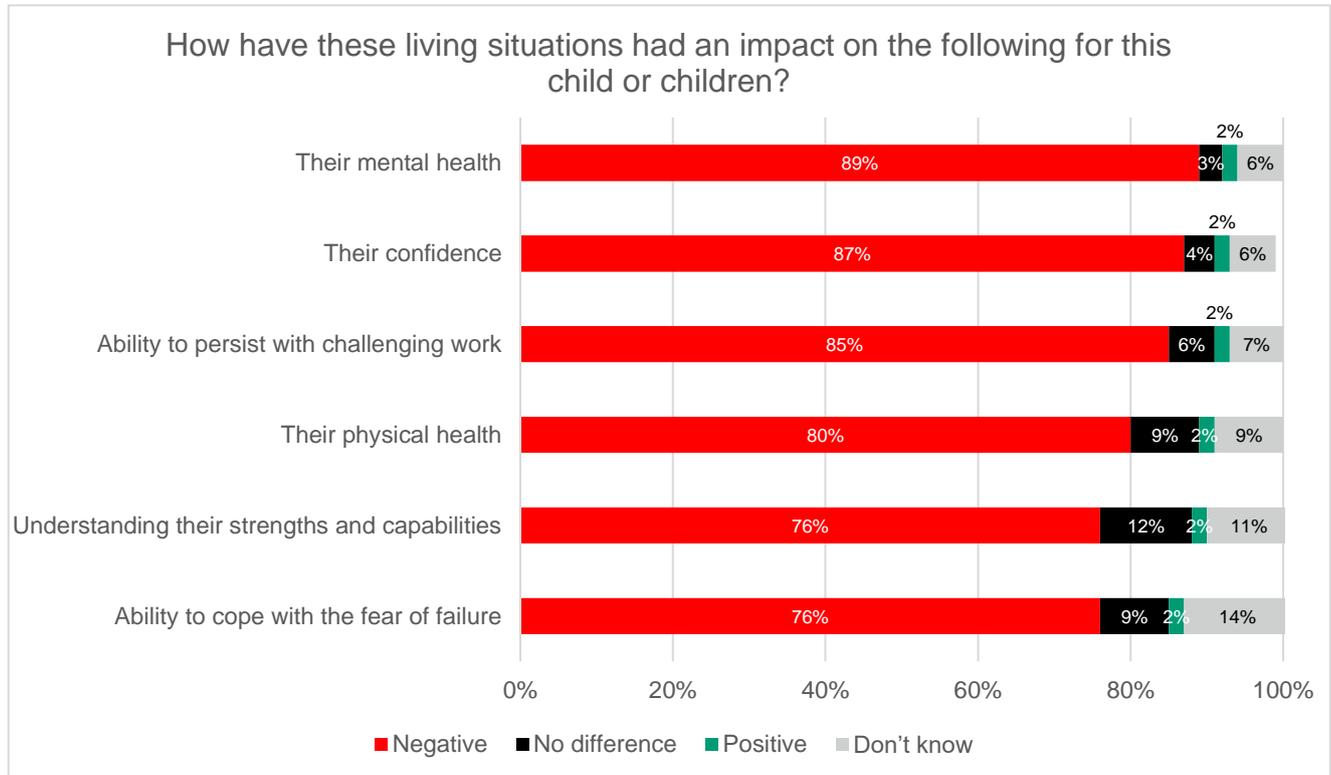
⁵⁰ Levine Coley, R, Leventhal, T, Lynch, A, and Kull, M, *Relations between housing characteristics and the well-being of low-income children and adolescents*, Developmental Psychology, 49(9), 1775–1789, 2013

⁵¹ Astone, N, and McLanagan, S, *Family structure, residential mobility, and school drop out: A research note*, Demography, 31, 575-584, 1994

⁵² [Moving, Always Moving: The normalisation of housing insecurity among children in low income households in England](#), The Children's Society and the University of Bath, 2020

whether, in general, children’s housing situation was having an impact on areas of importance for child development. A large majority of teachers indicated that being homeless or living in bad housing has negative wider impacts on children’s lives as figure 12 below demonstrates.

Figure 12: The wider impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children’s lives



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in the last 3 years (1,135 teachers)

The most common impact that teachers had witnessed is the impact on children’s mental health and emotional wellbeing. The vast majority (89%) teachers with experience of homeless or poorly housed children in their school said they saw the negative impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s mental health in the last three years and 87% of teachers said they saw a negative impact on children’s confidence. A London primary school teacher’s anecdote illustrated how these issues manifest, and cause problems for children:

“One pupil that I have ... can tend to overcompensate in other ways in friendships, which often leads to hurt feelings, anger and just trying to put themselves in the middle of any situation, being too clingy or too aggressive in their friendships, not understanding why that’s not getting the good result.”

Relatedly, teachers, with the experience of homeless children, also saw the impact on children’s resilience, with 85% agreeing that they have seen the negative impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s ability to persist with challenging work. This could be explained, at least in part, by the impact that a child’s housing situation can have on their ability to deal with failure.

Approximately three-quarters (76%) of teachers said that they saw the impact on housing issues on their students' ability to cope with failure.

There is a connection between children's housing situation and the wider impacts this has on their mental health, emotional wellbeing and attainment at school. Homelessness or bad housing can affect children's emotional resilience which can lead to worse performance at school. Shelter's own previous research with teachers shows that it is often the impact of homelessness that drives the change in children's behaviour, their reduced confidence and poorer educational outcomes.⁵³ Homeless children faced with a challenging or new piece of work may become disengaged or lack the confidence to tackle it.⁵⁴ This was echoed in our qualitative research: one teacher talked about the experience of their student whose housing situation had such an extreme impact on his mental health, that he was forced to drop out of school. The secondary school teacher in the South East told us:

"He was in temporary accommodation on his own and just couldn't handle anything. His situation was such a mental strain on him that he just couldn't handle being at college anymore, so he dropped out in the end. So, he had such a horrible time of things and, despite all support that we possibly could provide, it's just not enough from the student's perspective."

A similarly shocking finding is that bad housing or homelessness is impacting on children's physical health, with eight in ten (80%) teachers saying they have seen the negative impact of children's housing situation on their physical health in the last 3 years. Poor quality housing can impact on children's physical health which, in turn, can reduce attentiveness in class, impacting on behaviour and academic attainment.⁵⁵

There is substantial evidence to show that poor housing conditions have an impact on children's physical health, with one study stating that the strongest links between poor housing and poor physical health are found in evidence on respiratory diseases which can be caused or exacerbated by poor conditions.⁵⁶ This was a finding of our own research from 2013, which found that children living in bad housing were twice as likely to experience sleep problems due to wheezing than children in good housing.⁵⁷ And we know that tiredness is likely to have an impact on children's behaviour and attentiveness.

⁵³ Kantar, [Research: Impact of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#), Shelter, 2017

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ Cunningham, Mary and MacDonald, Graham, *Housing as a platform for improving education outcomes among low-income children*, Urban Institute, 2012

⁵⁶ Winterburn, Mark, [Home improvements: A social justice approach to housing policy](#), The Centre for Social Justice, 2016

⁵⁷ 'Good housing' is defined in the research as 'homes without condensation and without mould or fungus'. Barnes, Matt et al, *People living in bad housing – numbers and health impacts*, NatCen on behalf of Shelter, 2013

Children's education and development continue to be impacted during the pandemic

The pandemic has reminded us how vitally important our homes are as a place of sanctuary and protection – and how so many of us lack this basic necessity. Our more recent research with teachers shows that children's housing situation continues to impact on their education and wider development during the pandemic.

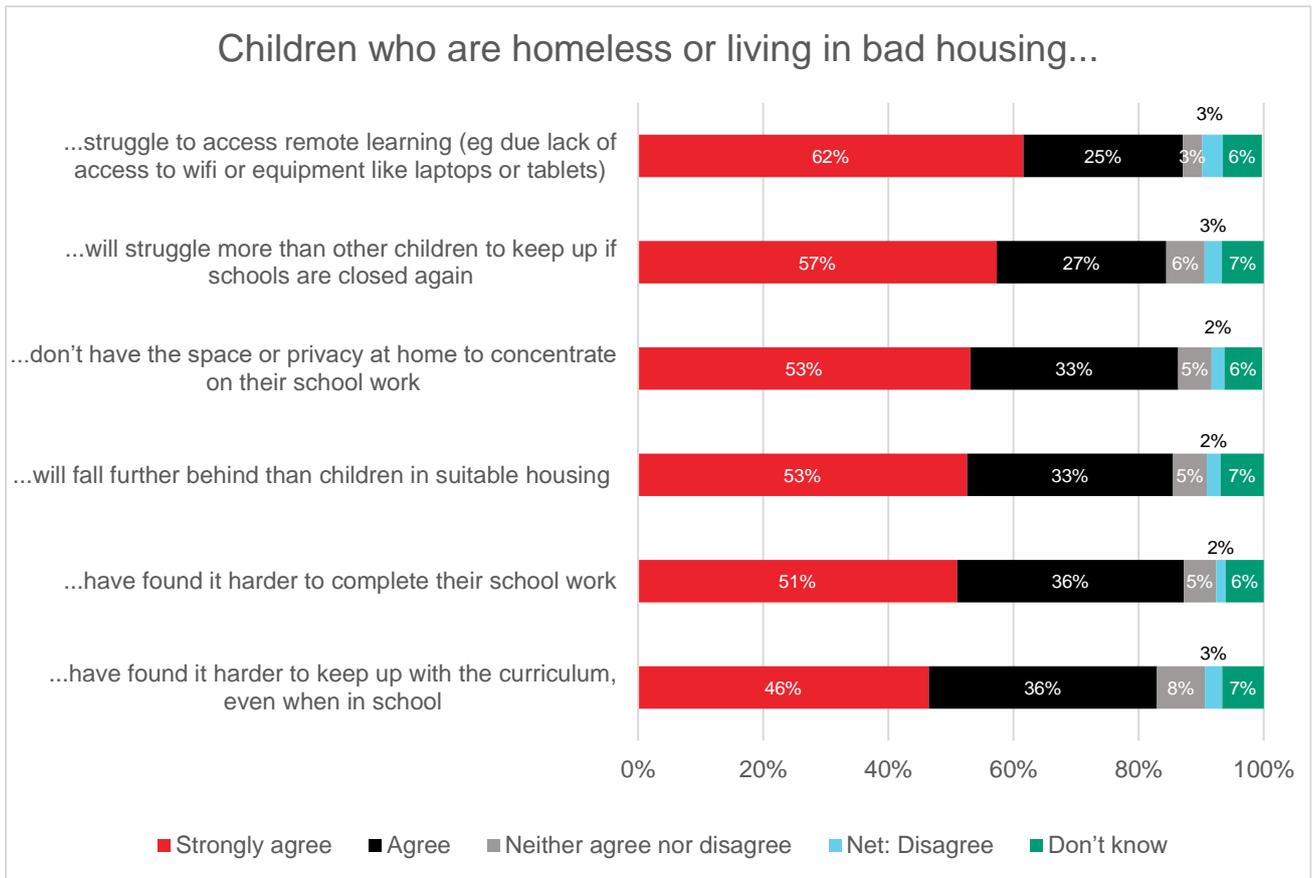
Being homeless or living in bad housing has had an immediate impact on children's ability to complete school work. Our research found that, of the teachers who had experience of homeless or badly housed children⁵⁸, since the Covid-19 restrictions began in March, 87% of teachers agree that they have found it harder to complete their school work, including half (51%) of teachers who strongly agree with this statement. Indeed, 83% think that these children have found it harder to keep up with the curriculum, even when in school.

This is likely to be explained, at least in part, by a lack of space or facilities at home. 86% of teachers with experience of these children in their school agree that they don't have the space or privacy to concentrate on their school work, with over half (53%) of teachers strongly agreeing with this statement. There is a similarly high level of agreement around the impact of access to facilities, with the same proportion (87%) of teachers who have experience of these children in their school agreeing that children who are homeless or living in bad housing struggle to access remote learning, for example due to a lack of access to Wi-Fi or equipment such as laptops. This echoes the findings of the earlier research with teachers.

The difficulty to complete school work and keep up with the curriculum is likely to increase the disparity in educational outcomes. 85% of teachers with experience of children who are homeless or living in bad housing think that these children will fall further behind than children in suitable housing. Shockingly, almost three-quarters (73%) of teachers with experience of these children in their school say that children who are homeless or living in bad housing have had their education more negatively affected when compared to other children at the school. This disparity is likely to increase if there is another closure of schools. Indeed, 84% of teachers with experience of children who are homeless or living in bad housing since March think that these children will struggle more than other children if schools are closed again.

⁵⁸ Teachers were asked if they had provided support to homeless children at their school, with the first option being 'Not applicable - I am not aware of any children at my school living in poor quality housing or that are homeless'. Teachers were also able to select 'None of the above - I have not had to provide extra support to any children experiencing homelessness or bad housing since the Covid-19 restrictions

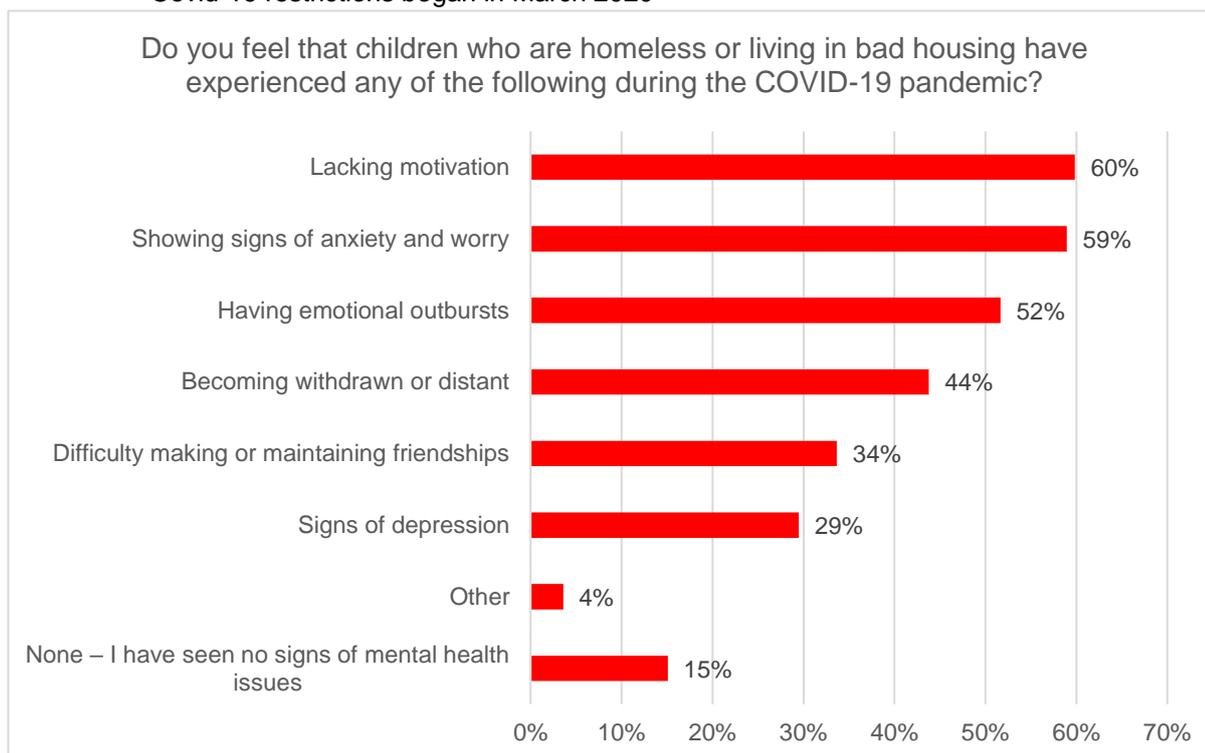
Figure 13: The impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s education since Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020



Source: YouGov survey October 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing since Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020 (763 teachers)

The pandemic is having wider impacts on children’s lives and in particular their mental health. Of the teachers with experience of children who are homeless or living in bad housing since March, more than two-fifths (44%) of teachers feel that these children have experienced becoming withdrawn or distance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 59% have seen signs of anxiety and worry. Half (52%) of these teachers have seen the children who are homeless or living in bad housing having emotional outbursts and three in ten (29%) have seen signs of depression. Significantly, only 15% of teachers say that they have not seen any signs of mental health issues among these children during the pandemic.

Figure 14: The impact of homelessness or bad housing on children’s mental health since Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020



Source: YouGov survey October 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing since Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020 (763 teachers)

The impact of children’s housing situation on their education and mental health during the pandemic is extremely worrying as the public health and economic fallout of the pandemic is likely to persist for months to come.

Additional support provided by teachers

Our research shows that teachers face additional challenges when teaching children who are experiencing housing disadvantage. Teachers have described how extra challenges of providing support for these children made them feel emotionally and physically exhausted and frustrated with the limits to the support they can practically offer. Even if homeless children remain at the same school, and do not have to move, their relationship with teachers can still deteriorate. Stresses at home because of housing insecurity can lead to behavioural issues and class disruptions as a London primary school teacher described to us:

"When some kids have great opportunities and others don't, it can lead to a disruptive behaviour and anger and lashing out."⁵⁹

Similarly, the instability of homelessness is disruptive for children’s peer networks and can lead to diminished social networks and relationships^{60,61}, as has already

⁵⁹ Open ended response from YouGov 26th February - 8th March 2020 survey

been indicated by teachers' accounts of homeless children's behaviours at school. This in turn compounds the harm to educational and personal development.⁶² Children miss out on social activities because of being homeless or living in insecure housing, as parents struggle to pay for activities and living situations leave children feeling ashamed or uncomfortable at the prospect of inviting friends home after school.⁶³ As one vice principal of an academy school in the North told us:

"so they don't invite people back to their homes. They are isolated. They can be isolated in that way. If it [homelessness] reflects poverty, which obviously it does, then there can be isolation in terms of things that other children have, possessions that they have, that they don't fit in."

Teachers respond to the signs of additional needs that arise among their pupils, meaning they often act to ameliorate the damage that bad housing causes. The housing crisis is much more than an isolated challenge to those experiencing bad housing or homelessness, it affects teachers, impacts on school budgets, and has the potential to disrupt schooling for all pupils. We asked teachers what types of support they were having to provide to children experiencing bad housing or homelessness. Nine out of every ten teachers that were aware of a child who was homeless or living in bad housing in their class or school (87% over the three-year reference period) had to provide additional support as a result.

The most common support given has been the provision of food or meals to children. While this could be a consequence of poverty, we know that families living in temporary accommodation can have very limited facilities to store, prepare and cook food. As noted earlier, long journeys to and from school can also make it difficult to find time to prepare or eat food. Teachers were clear that hunger was a very obvious issue for them in school as a Vice Principal told us:

"..and there's the impact on the children in that if they're not being fed they're hungry, their behaviour then-, that can often be a reason for poor behaviour, which means that they disrupt lessons"

In the last year, it was also common for teachers to provide pastoral support to children dealing with poor housing and homelessness (47%) and counselling (26%). Much of the support being provided by teachers and schools is about bridging the gap between a family's income and their material needs; including trying to improve their housing situation. Around one in seven (14%) teachers reporting that they've supported homeless children's parents to write applications for council housing in the preceding 12 months. As a secondary school teacher from the North East told us:

⁶⁰ Haynie, D, South, S and Bose, S, *The company you keep: Adolescent mobility and peer behaviour*, Sociological Inquiry, 76, 397-426, 2006

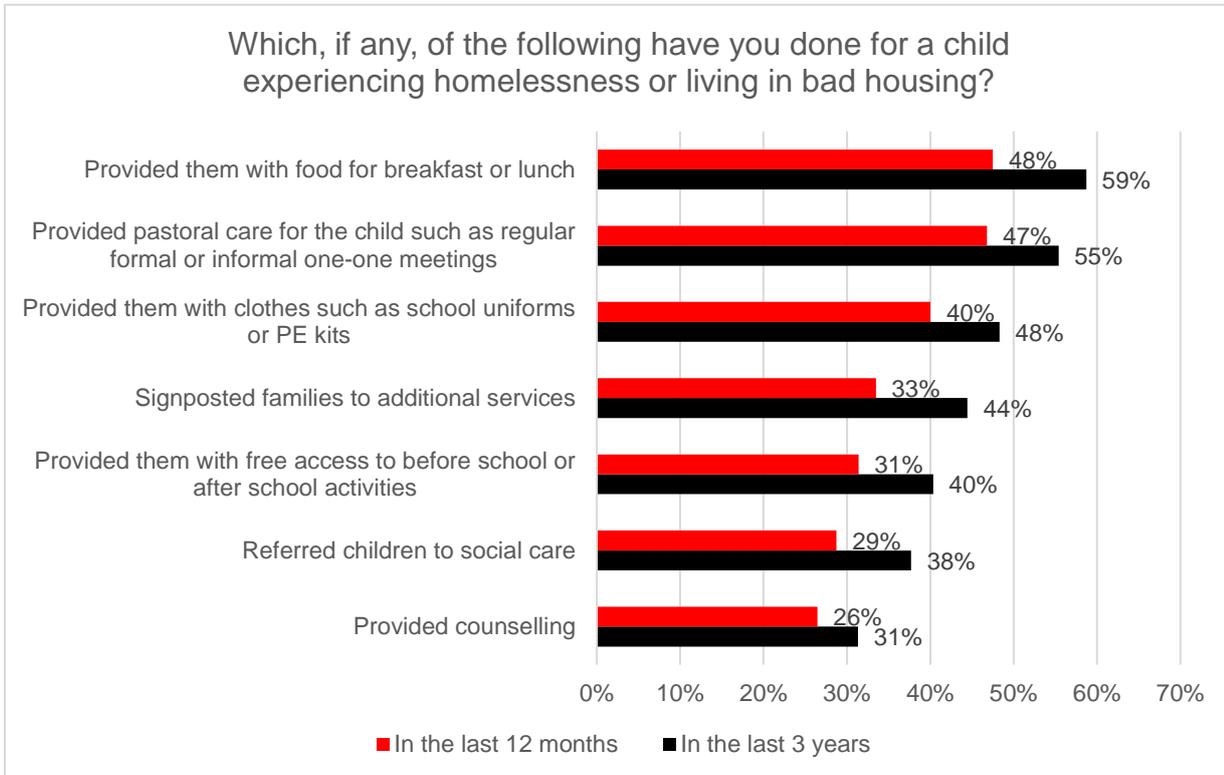
⁶¹ Pribesh, S and Downey, D, *Why are residential and school moves associated with poor school performance?* Demography, 36, 521-534, 1999

⁶² OP.CIT, Haynie, D, South, S and Bose, S, 2006

⁶³ Kantar, [Research: Impact of homelessness on children – research with teachers](#), Shelter, 2017

“..practical things like supporting parents with applications and writing the applications and trying to get the benefit for their housing things that they need and are entitled to.”

Figure 15: The most common types of support teachers have provided to children experiencing homelessness or bad housing

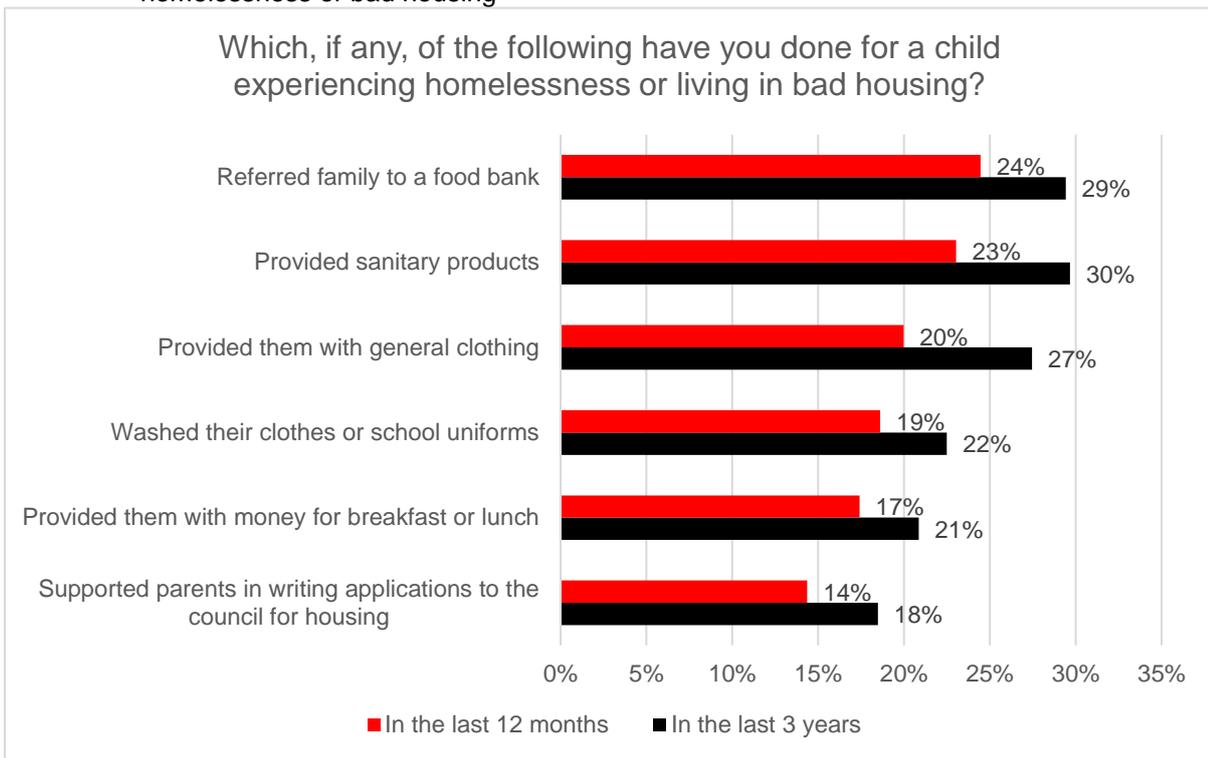


Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years (1,135 teachers)

However, providing support to the family, supplying clothes, and providing access to school clubs and activities for free, is not merely an end in itself. The support is practical, but the intention is to try and minimise the impact of these issues on social and academic development. The Vice Principal from Scotland went on to say:

“.. for those individual children, obviously the fact that they've even come to school we recognise is a positive thing for them, but they also have to fit in. As a school we've got to help them to fit into school, we've got to support them to get them into lessons.”

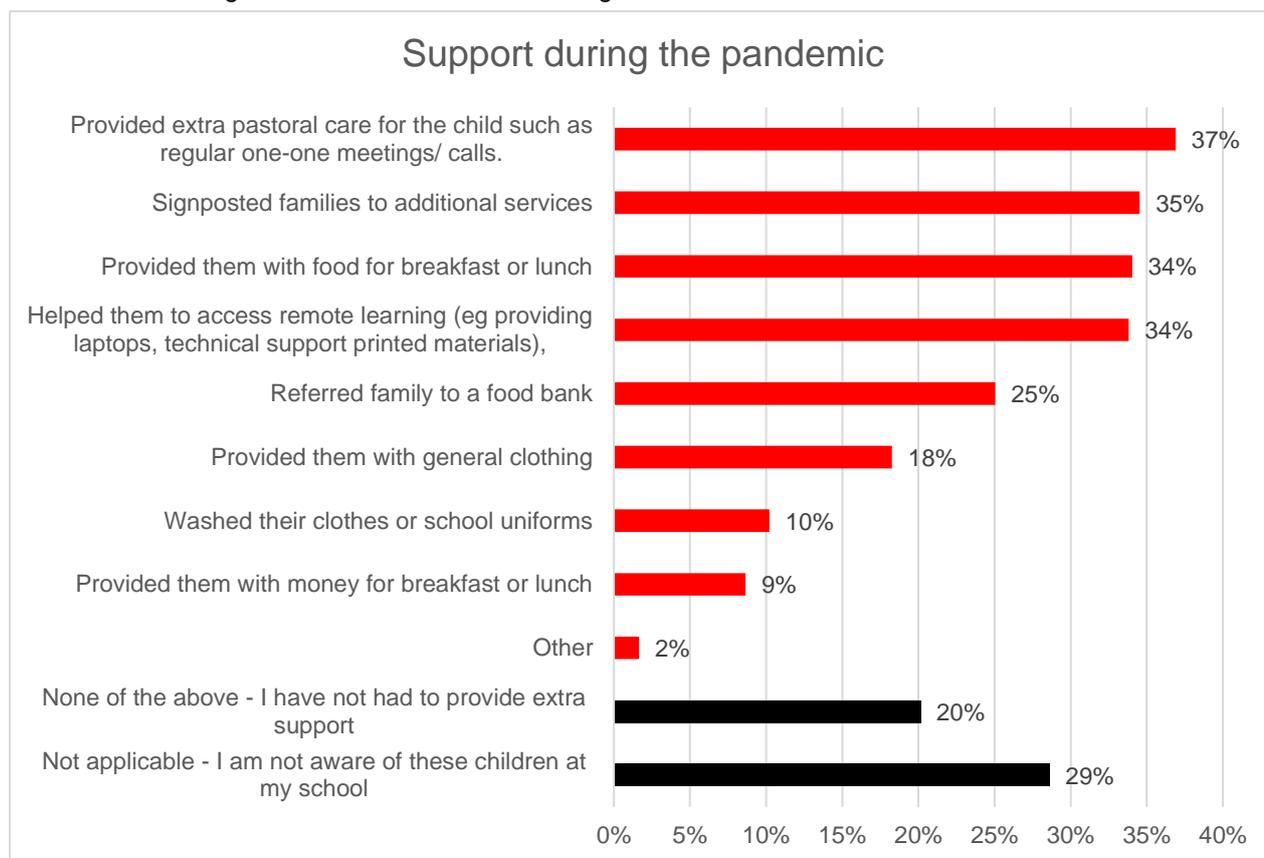
Figure 16: Other forms of support that teachers have provided to children experiencing homelessness or bad housing



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience of homelessness or bad housing in last 12 months (1,011 teachers) and last three years (1,135 teachers)

Teachers continue to provide support to children who are homeless or living in bad housing during the pandemic. Indeed, 37% of teachers have provided extra pastoral support to children who are homeless or living in bad housing since March 2020. A significant proportion of teachers have also signposted families to additional services (35%), provided children with food for breakfast or lunch (34%) and helped them to access remote learning (34%). Worryingly, a quarter (25%) of teachers have referred families who are homeless or living in bad housing to a foodbank.

Figure 17: The support provided to students who were homelessness or living in bad housing since Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020



Source: YouGov survey October 2020, Base: All teachers in Great Britain 1,061

Disruption to peers

While somewhat secondary as an impact, it is also clear that the plight of homeless children has a knock-on effect on their classmates and peers too. A commonly noted issue is the disruptions that can be caused in class by a homeless child *acting up*. Teachers must spend time and energy dealing with problematic behaviour and this can detract from other pupils' education; as we have indicated earlier in this report.

We should also be concerned about the emotional impact that homelessness may have on an *affected* child's peers. Our research did not extend to speaking to children, but teachers indicated that peers may have to deal with the sadness of losing contact with classmates, as this example from a primary school teacher in London shows:

"I got it from their friends, they'd had some kind of communication from them, the child... saying how much they missed our school, and then didn't hear from them again. It was quite depressing, I think, for the child's friends and the class as a whole, to just miss someone who previously had been a very vital member of the class."

The long-term impact of the pandemic

In our subsequent survey of teachers, to update the original survey, we saw that teachers remain concerned for the plight of homeless children during the recent public health disruptions to school life. Four in five teachers (82%) that were currently aware of children who were homeless or living in bad housing at their school agreed that homeless children will suffer greater negative long-term effects from the pandemic than other children in more suitable housing.

These teachers also worry that further public health disruptions will cause an attainment gap between these children, and others in more suitable housing; 84% said they agreed that this would be the case.

CHAPTER 5: THE IMPACT OF THE HOUSING CRISIS ON TEACHERS

The prevalence of housing issues among children at school can have an impact on those teachers having to provide extra support to their children and add to the workload and stresses of the job. Research shows that schools with a high number of children experiencing homelessness or entering or leaving during the school year because of displacement have a higher workload, as these children require a disproportionate share of a teacher's attention and school resources⁶⁴. We asked teachers how working with children in bad housing made them feel.

The challenge to teacher morale

Teachers' responses to our questions on how supporting children that are homeless or in bad housing makes them feel, are somewhat conflicted. A high proportion of teachers (43%) feel they're able to make a difference working with children in bad housing and the same proportion think that it's rewarding. However, many teachers also feel frustrated (85%), despondent (61%) and exhausted (56%). More than half (55%) of teachers also feel futile. This may be an indication of the limits they face in trying to support children with the range of challenges they face. Teachers can feed and help to clothe children in need but affecting change in their housing situation is undoubtedly more challenging. Several teachers conveyed a sense of anger or frustration at the circumstances faced by children they teach, such as this assistant head teacher at a rural primary school:

"it's very distressing at times because we can only do so much, you know, so we do feel, kind of like, powerless. We can only do so much. We can feed them, we can listen to them, but we can only do so much at school"

Similarly, these anecdotes from survey respondents indicate some frustrations with the resources available for teachers.

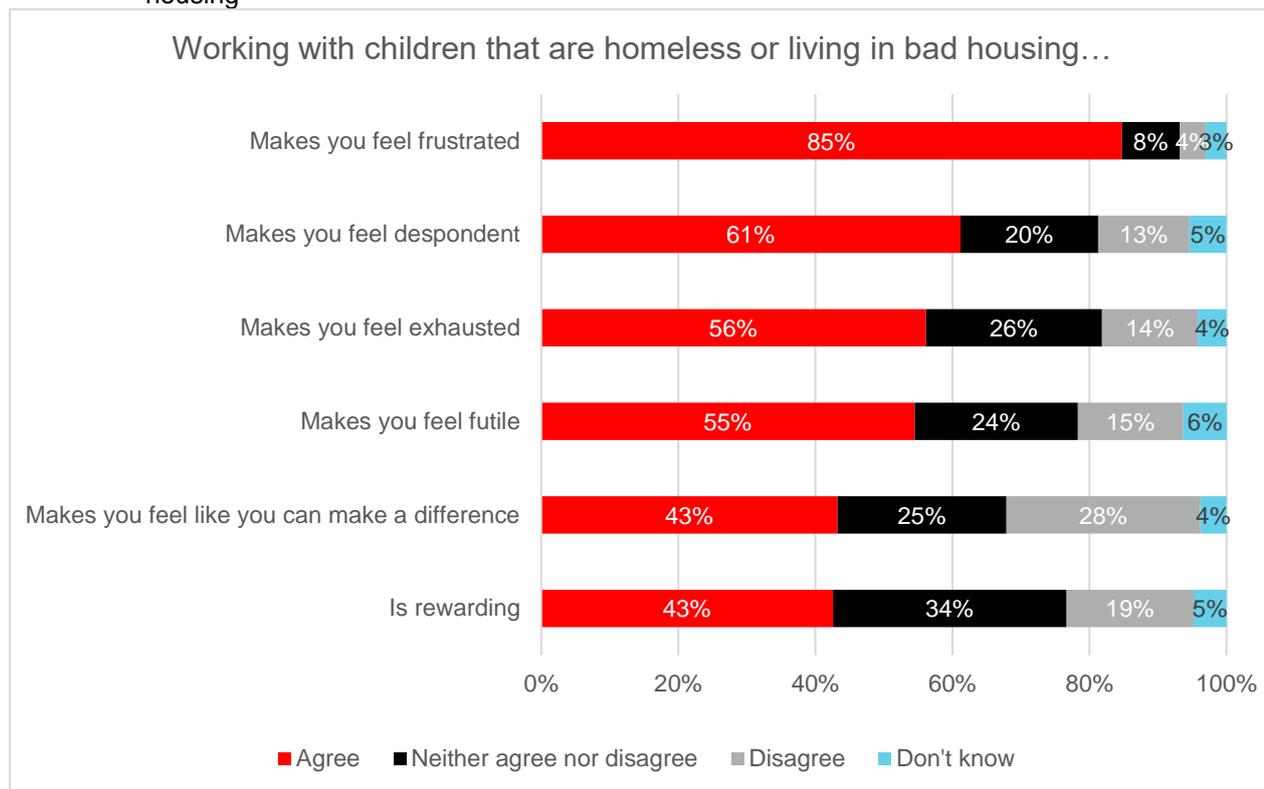
*"[the child is] living in a small cramped flat [witnessing] the stresses of their parents and found this upsetting...it was important to provide wellbeing support. This service in school is threatened by limited funding."*⁶⁵

*"I do my best, we provide clean clothes and wash their others in the home economics room. I give them a basic breakfast if they will accept it and yes, I do pay for this myself."*⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Brennan, Maya, [The impacts of affordable housing on education: A research summary](#), Center for Housing Policy, 2011

⁶⁵ Open ended response from YouGov 26th February - 8th March 2020 survey

Figure 18: How teachers feel about supporting children that are homeless or living in bad housing



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers with experience in the last 3 years (1,135 teachers)

Though many teachers feel that they can make a difference, the majority of teachers are despondent, frustrated and exhausted from working with and supporting children in bad housing situations. However, these feelings are unsurprising given the scale of the challenge.

The impact on recruitment

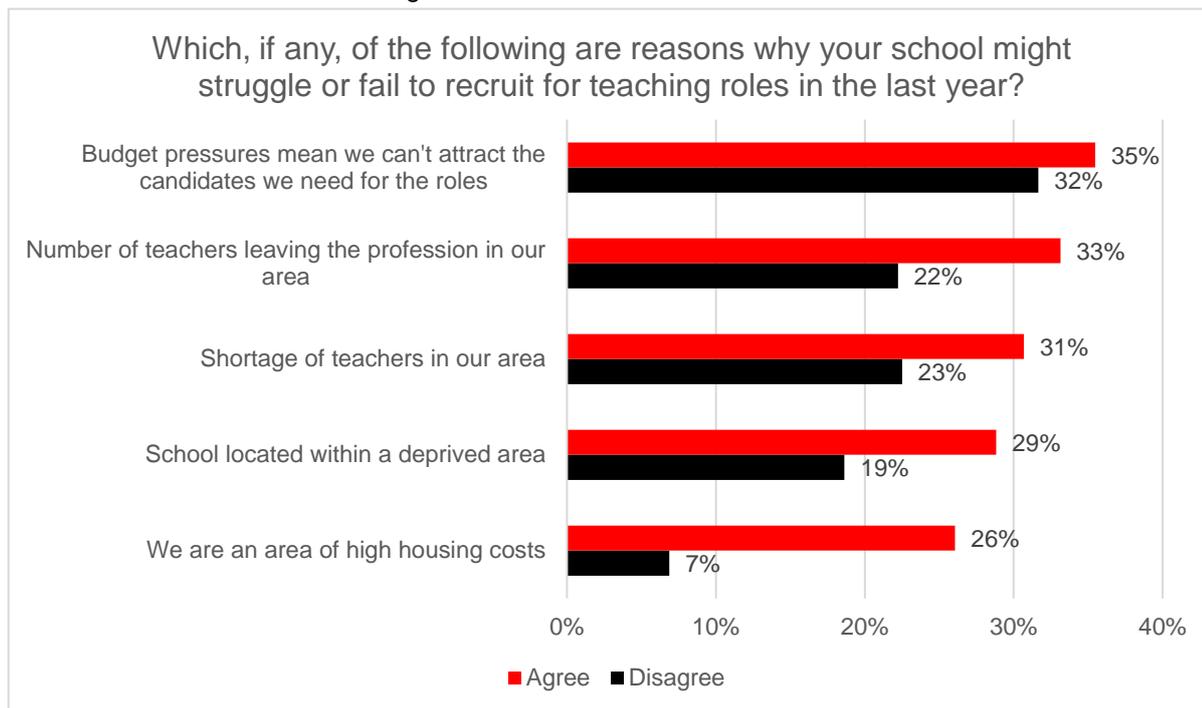
Throughout this report we have noted that teachers are on the frontline of dealing with distressing situations for their students, and research from the National Audit Office suggests workload and the cost of living – including the cost of housing – has been a factor in retaining teachers within the profession. The National Audit Office had previously published a report on recruitment in teaching and had noted that for several years those leaving the profession has outnumbered new entrants⁶⁷. An update to the original report highlights, workload remains a significant problem in retaining teachers in the profession.

Shelter asked teachers to tell us what might make recruiting for their school more challenging. The results suggest that areas with a local housing problem may be struggling more to recruit teachers too.

⁶⁶ Open ended response from YouGov 26th February - 8th March 2020 survey

⁶⁷ Department for Education, [Retaining and developing the teaching workforce](#), National Audit Office, 2017

Figure 19: Teachers’ perceptions of the top 5 barriers to recruitment by whether teachers think there is a housing crisis in their local area



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: Net agree (634 teachers)/disagree (341 teachers)* “...that there is a housing crisis in your school’s local area”

Figure 19 above ranks the barriers teachers identified as making it difficult to recruit in their area, and these have been further split by whether a teacher agrees there is a *housing crisis* in their school’s local area; an asterisk denotes where these two groups – housing crisis in the schools local area – differ, statistically, in their response.

The most common reason for challenges in recruiting is budget pressures, followed closely by the number of teachers leaving the profession in the local area (a conclusion of the NAO report in 2016⁶⁸). Teachers that agree their area has a housing crisis are twice as likely to report leavers as a challenge for their school’s recruitment activity. A local housing crisis creates a significant difference in teachers reporting a lack of teachers in the area and local deprivation being a barrier to recruitment.

The issue that elicits the biggest gap however is when local housing costs are mentioned; those in *housing crisis* areas are almost four times as likely to say local housing cost are a barrier to recruiting teachers.

It is less common for teachers to say that salary competition or the school’s recent Ofsted ratings are a challenge; although these two also show significant differences when consideration is given to the local housing situation.

⁶⁸ Department for Education, [Retaining and developing the teaching workforce](#), National Audit Office, 2017

When asked, teachers did indicate that they see social housing as a way to help disadvantaged children that struggle in bad housing. Nine in ten teachers (90%) believe children in bad housing or that are homeless would benefit from more social housing being provided.⁶⁹ And once again, teachers in areas that felt part of the *housing crisis* were more likely to say social housing could benefit poorly housed or homeless children (97% vs 84% respectively).

⁶⁹ 90% of teachers think that children that are homeless or living in bad housing would benefit from more social housing, including 60% who think that they would benefit a lot, and 30% who think they would benefit a fair amount. How much, if at all, do you think children that are homeless or living in bad housing would benefit from more social housing? Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers (1,507)

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The evidence from Shelter's recent tranche of primary research and the desk top review of the existing literature is concerning for many reasons.

Our research shows that homelessness and incidents of poor housing impacting on a child's education is a very common experience among teachers suggesting that housing troubles are particularly conspicuous; this makes sense given the literature on how these issues impact on the affected child. These cases are not isolated incidents of hardship but also have the potential to create lasting damage to children, impacting on their educational attainment and all that means for their futures as adults.

Cataloguing the various issues and impacts of poor-quality housing or the disruptions of homelessness paints a grim but somewhat obvious picture. Children need a sound foundation to be able to achieve their potential, so it is unsurprising to hear that dealing with insecurity at home, crowded conditions and limited amenities impact negatively on the physical and mental wellbeing of children, which impairs their ability to learn. For the individual affected these challenges are a tragic loss of childhood; their time taken up by worry and deprivation rather than enjoying their youth and striving at school to do well.

That these challenges often boil over in school is equally unsurprising. Young people are obviously going to struggle with long commutes, poor diet and a lack of sleep. But these struggles do not only impact on the child themselves. Fellow students will be impacted by the challenges their peers face, potentially as an empathic response to friends that are struggling (or indeed missing from school), and certainly because it can result in their own education being disrupted by homeless children *acting up* in class.

Further impacts are felt by teachers that clearly find it distressing seeing hardships among their students. Teachers reported having to do more in terms of providing extra support for homeless young people; more work trying to maintain their educational progression; and more stress and upset from having to face up to the hardships their pupils face – with limited resources to ameliorate these negative impacts described in this report.

Cumulative impact

The impacts of this *discreet* issue for households and the children they contain are quite substantive when considered as a whole. The ever-decreasing stock of social housing available to households in difficulty, plus the growing use of temporary accommodation to house families with children may be a conscious choice by successive governments looking to reduce budget expenditure; and in

a sector that has a substantial market segment that should be providing the housing that is needed.

Looking at the overall impact of this policy choice, the indication is that current government strategy is a false economy.

- A poorly educated individual creates, in effect, a loss to society (as well as the individual) when this deficit results from not having the opportunity to reach their potential while at school. As an example, the 2019 graduate labour market statistics⁷⁰ show that graduates earn 20% more than non-graduates. This is a loss to society which could be benefiting from a now unrealised talent or ability; and it is a cost to government, because lower wages mean lower income tax receipts.
- The physical and mental health impacts of bad housing puts extra strain on public services, most notably the additional cost to the NHS. In 2014 the Building Research Establishment⁷¹ estimated that the cost of bad housing to the NHS was £1.4bn annually⁷².
- Expenditure on temporary accommodation has been growing in line with its increased use as we have already identified, and the cost to local authorities of dealing with homelessness is also substantial. In the preceding financial year local authorities alone spent nearly a billion pounds on homelessness (£657m) and supporting people with housing welfare (£328m)⁷³

When asked about housing and what top two issues should the government prioritise, social housing and homelessness were the top two priorities. 40% of teachers responding to our survey said homelessness should be a priority for this government, and 35% wanted government to prioritise increasing the supply of houses for rent from councils and housing associations. Again, when teachers were split by their local areas housing status, 47% of teachers that described their area as having a housing crisis, chose increasing the supply of social housing as the top priority.

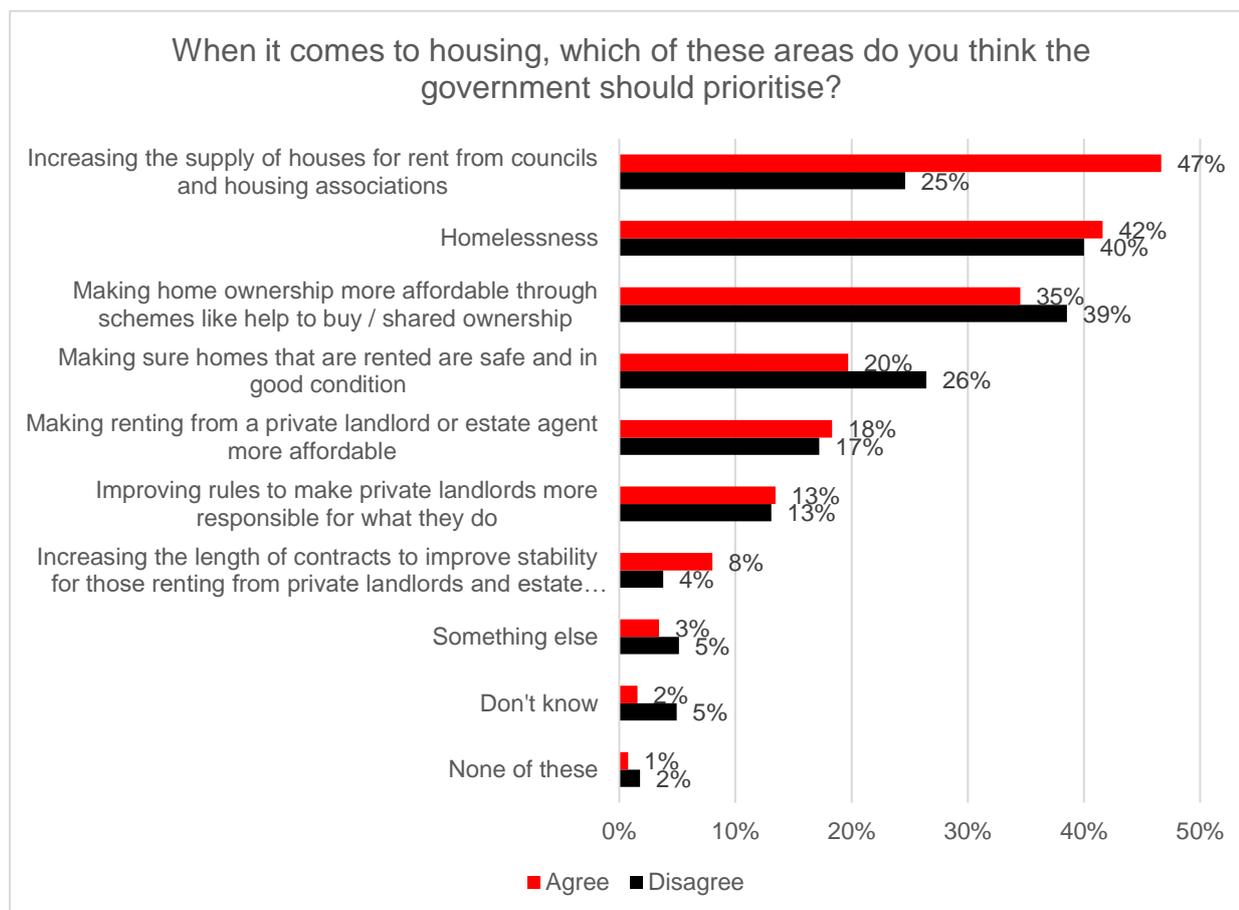
⁷⁰ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-labour-markets>

⁷¹ Nicol, S; Roys, M; Garrett, H; BRE [Briefing Paper: The poor cost of housing to the NHS](#), BRE, 2014

⁷² This is likely to be around 10% higher today with the effects of inflation alone.

⁷³ Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2019 to 2020 budget individual local authority data; Homelessness (440) and Housing Services: Supporting People (475).

Figure 20: Teachers' perceptions of what housing policies government should prioritise by whether teachers think there is a housing crisis in their area



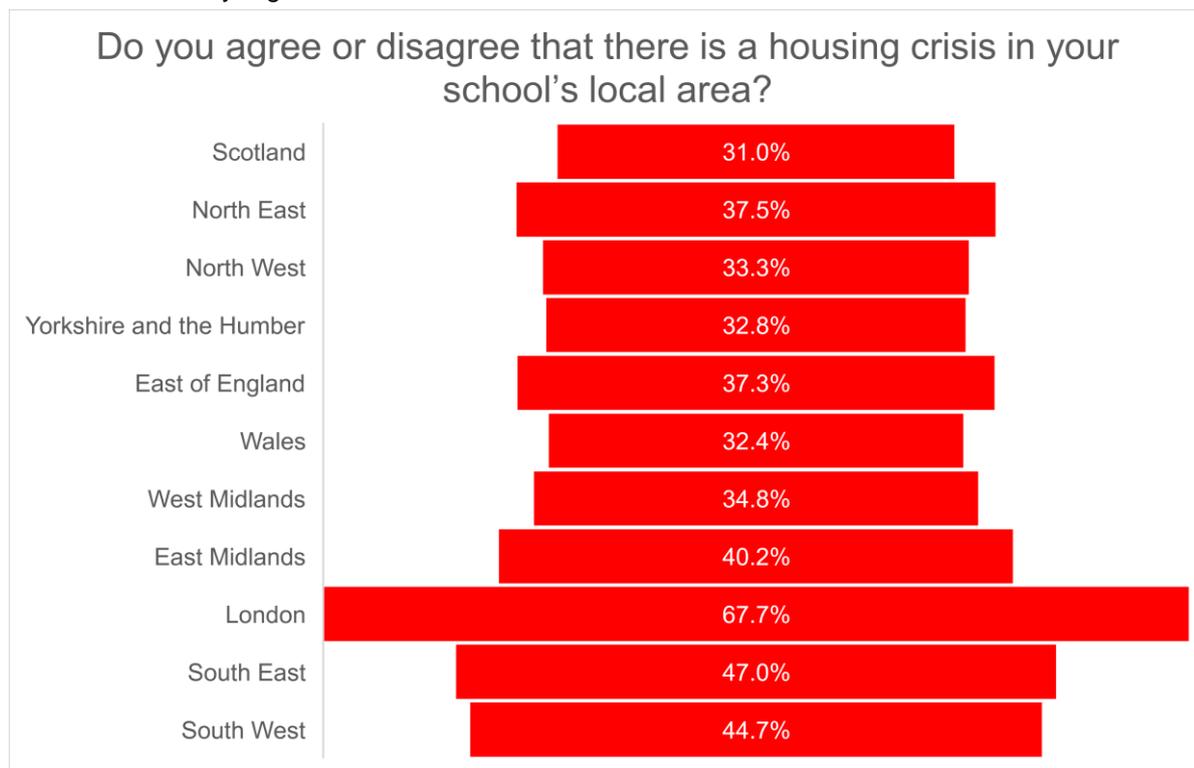
Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, *Base: Net agree (634 teachers)/disagree (341 teachers)* "...that there is a housing crisis in your school's local area"

Investing for the future

The level of hardship being faced by, potentially, hundreds of thousands of children in poor housing, and the 129,000 currently living in temporary accommodation alone suggests the need for much stronger action from government. If it wishes to improve equality and level up those areas that struggle with poor housing, then social housing appears to be a good candidate for investment.

From the vantage point of teachers, housing crises exist across the country. The highest proportion of teachers working within housing crisis areas is London, across the rest of the UK the level is at its lowest still identified by at least three out of every ten teachers. The long-term impacts to those areas arising from failing future generations should be considered.

Figure 21: Teachers' perception of whether there is a housing crisis in their school's local area by region of Great Britain



Source: YouGov survey Feb-March 2020, Base: All teachers 1,507

Add to our housing crisis the impact the global pandemic is having right now on the economy and in particular low income groups, and the need for . As the chief Economist of the Bank of England said in November 2020 when asked about the outlook for equality in Britain;

“at the generational level... there will be a further stretching of the gaps between the incomes of the younger and older generations... and richer and poorer parts of society. I think it's probable, likely even, that we will not see a levelling up but the opposite of that... for me that's why we need to double our efforts.”⁷⁴

This suggests that a narrow government focus on using the Affordable Homes Programme predominantly in high demand areas may be unwise. The evidence shows that all across the country children are being forced to struggle through everyday life because of a lack of good quality and affordable housing.

In our recent policy report, *Building Our Way Out*⁷⁵ we looked at the what is needed to improve the supply of social housing, and how a substantial investment in social housing all across the country can help to recover from the

⁷⁴ From Andy Haldane's interview with Channel 4 news on the 11th October 2020 - <https://www.channel4.com/news/bank-of-englands-chief-economist-warns-of-increased-inequality-in-the-uk-following-the-coronavirus>

⁷⁵ Bibby, J. and Bhakta, T. [*Building our way out: Investing in social housing to boost the economy and level up the country*](#). Shelter, 2020

economic impacts of the pandemic, and help with this Government's levelling up agenda.

1. Government should increase their spending via the Affordable Homes Programme as well as accelerating the next funding round to create a five-year funding commitment £37.8 billion of capital spending.
2. Announce a ten-year Levelling-Up Housing Programme to deliver at least 90,000 social rent homes a year with £12.8 billion annual spend
3. Increase the amount of grant available per social home as well as increase the level of social rent supply to a minimum 80% share of funding.
4. Remove geographical restrictions on eligibility for grant for new social housing
5. Remove Affordable Rent from eligibility for future grant
6. Allow for greater flexibility in grant spending while the economic crisis continues, including funding schemes for purchasing distressed market schemes and converting shared ownership to social rent where it contributes to protecting housebuilding capacity

By improving the availability of truly affordable social rent homes, all across the country and not just in those areas where affordability challenges are most visible, it will be possible to improve the lives and indeed futures of children that are homeless.

And as our evidence clearly indicates, improvements in the housing situations of homeless or poorly housed children can reduce the mental, physical and practical challenges they face now, increasing their ability to succeed now and in the future.

APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

Research with teachers

In February we commissioned YouGov to carry out a survey with 1,507 state school teachers in Great Britain. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26th February and 8th March 2020. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all state school teachers in Great Britain, by school type, region, age and gender. This survey was carried out at the beginning of the year prior to the onset of the pandemic and public health measures and so very much before we realised as a nation how important housing would become.

The aim of the survey was to explore teachers' perceptions of the housing emergency, including their perceptions of the prevalence of homelessness and bad housing among children in their classrooms and wider school. We also asked teachers about the impacts of homelessness and bad housing on children's education and wider development, including their attendance, social interactions and education outcomes. Finally, we asked teachers about the support they have provided to these children and the impact of the housing emergency on their own lives, including their experience of teaching.

The quantitative survey was complemented by qualitative interviews with eight teachers to explore the themes of the survey in more detail. This research enabled us to find out about examples of children who are homeless or living in bad housing, and the impact this has on their education and wider development.

In October 2020 we commissioned YouGov to carry out an additional survey of teachers. We surveyed 1,072 teachers from across the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 15th October and 25th October. The results have been weighted and are representative of the teaching profession by phase, region, age and gender. The results in this report relate to the 1,061 teachers in Great Britain.

The aim of this survey was to explore teachers' experiences of the pandemic, including their perceptions of the challenges that children who are homeless or living in bad housing have experienced with their education and mental health, and the support that teachers have provided to these children. Another aim of the survey was to find out whether teachers feel that children who are homeless or living in bad housing have been more negatively affected by the pandemic than other children at their school.

Number of homeless children in Britain

The number of homeless children in Britain is the number of homeless children living in temporary accommodation (TA) in England, Wales and Scotland. There

are 127,240 homeless children living in TA in England. This is correct as at 30th June 2020.⁷⁶ There are 7,280 homeless children living in TA in Scotland. This is correct as at 31st March 2020.⁷⁷ The number of homeless children living in TA in Wales is estimated by taking the number of families with children figure and using a multiplier of 1.75 children per family with children, which is the average for families in Wales from the 2011 Census. There are 849 families with children living in TA in Wales. This is correct as at 31st March 2020.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ MHCLG, Live tables on homelessness, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table TA1

⁷⁷ Scottish government, [Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020](#), Table 31

⁷⁸ Welsh Government, StatsWales, Homelessness, [Households in Temporary Accommodation](#), Households accommodated temporarily by accommodation type and household type (Post 2015-16)

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

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