THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY

TOOLKIT

Resources to promote equity and reduce financial barriers to participation at school

THE SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE
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CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP IN SCOTLAND

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY

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INTRODUCTION

Living in poverty impacts negatively on children's social, physical, emotional and cognitive outcomes and subjects families to increased levels of stress and worry. If we are to reduce child poverty and the impact that it has on children's lives in Scotland, action is needed across all sectors to reduce cost pressures on families.

This toolkit provides a range of resources to support schools, local authorities and their partners to identify and address financial barriers to participation and learning. As one young person explained:

> "Education is free but a lot of school things are not."
> (Member of the Children's Parliament, age 11)

At the heart of Cost of the School Day is the involvement of children, parents and staff in identifying which 'school things' result in additional financial burden for families and risk children and young people experiencing stigma or feeling excluded. All children and young people can play a part in helping to make their school more inclusive and the best solutions will come from them as experts in their own school experience. Some solutions will come directly from children and families who have first-hand experience of living in poverty, so be encouraged to work with the expertise that comes with experience.

Tackling cost barriers may not always cost money but may simply mean doing things differently. Children, young people and parents tell us that even small changes can make a big difference. The experience of schools and local authorities already taking a Cost of the School Day approach shows how it can support equity for children and families. An **independent Cost of the School Day evaluation** found that it contributed to following outcomes:

- Changes in the understanding of the drivers and consequences of child poverty and school costs among school staff and some parent councils
- New school policies and practices that are more poverty sensitive
- Reduced or removed cost barriers and increased participation in school and after-school activities
- Supported school or parent councils to secure and use available funding to lessen child poverty within their setting
- Reduced school-related financial pressures for families
- Promotion of entitlements and financial supports available to parents, and increased uptake of entitlements

In every school in Scotland, more and more parents, carers and families are struggling on low incomes meaning that many of our children are locked out of opportunities to participate, learn and thrive. Given the seismic changes brought about by Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis, this situation is even more critical than before. We can, and must, support all of our children to take full and equal advantage of opportunities in school and consider how to reduce the extra costs for parents and carers. The resources in this toolkit are here to help with this.

TOOLKIT BACKGROUND

About this toolkit resource

This toolkit is designed to help schools investigate cost barriers and poverty related challenges with children, parents, carers and staff. Taking action can help:

- ensure equal access to opportunities at school and remove barriers to participation and learning for children and young people from low income households
- minimise income stigma and exclusion amongst children and young people
- reduce the pressures which school costs place on family incomes
- support families to access financial entitlements and maximise their incomes
- ensure that Pupil Equity Funding is effectively used to remove the financial barriers which stand in the way of children and young people's participation and learning.

The Cost of the School Day Toolkit contains tried and tested resources to support schools in identifying and tackling financial barriers to participation and learning for children and young people.

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit sets out the steps schools can take to address cost barriers and achieve greater equity:

STEP ONE DO THE GROUNDWORK

STEP TWO INVOLVE YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

STEP THREE WHAT DID YOU FIND OUT? IDENTIFY ACTIONS

STEP FOUR PUT COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY ACTIONS IN PLACE

STEP FIVE REGULARLY REVISIT YOUR ACTION PLAN

You'll find information, guidance and resources to support you as you work through each step, including background information, surveys, audit tools, action plans, case studies and practice ideas. The process is designed to be flexible and we invite you to dip in and out of this resource as needed throughout the school year.

Cost of the School Day is an ongoing process, not a one-off event, and to ensure it works well should be embedded in school improvement planning. We also recommend that you revisit your plans regularly. There are two reasons for this – one is that circumstances can change, which will have a knock-on effect on the needs of families in your school community. Another reason for revisiting your Cost of the School Day plan is that it allows you to establish which changes worked well, and which did not and need to be tweaked or changed altogether.

Parts of this toolkit are printable to be used, for example with focus groups or during events like parents' evenings or Parent Council meetings. The next page, a **Cost of the School Day How to Guide** offers a straightforward summary of the process. You can use this to help track your progress.

Helping to reduce and remove the financial barriers to education doesn't need to be complicated, but it is much better if everyone in your school community gets involved. This quick 'how to' guide to the Cost of the School Day process should get you up and running. If you've already put in place Cost of the School Day actions or measures, this guide can help you to refresh and enhance what you are doing.

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STEP ONE DO THE GROUNDWORK

Through **awareness raising** and **professional learning**, make sure that your **staff team is aware of poverty, its impact, and links to wider policy**.

Form a **Cost of the School Day Working Group** to lead, implement and monitor the work. This can involve staff, families and pupils. This group can help to **raise awareness throughout the school community and get people involved.**

STEP TWO INVOLVE YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

If you include pupils, families and all staff you are more likely to identify the right issues and bring people along with you on your Cost of the School Day journey. The Cost of the School Day Toolkit can help with this.

- **Audit costs** across the school year to understand what families are being asked for and when.
- **Ask pupils** about cost barriers across the school day and the solutions to overcoming them.
- **Ask parents and carers** about cost pressures. Parent Councils are perfect partners to support this.
- **Ask school staff** about costs, their impact and how they can be overcome.

STEP THREE WHAT DID YOU FIND OUT? IDENTIFY ACTIONS

What were the main issues? What possible solutions came up? What should you focus on now to ensure poverty sensitive policies and practices? To tackle the cost barriers you've found, what can you do?

- Develop an **action plan**.
- Consider how you are going to measure effectiveness. What will a successful outcome look like?

STEP FOUR PUT COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY ACTIONS IN PLACE

- Reviewing uniform policy, increasing free meal uptake, financial calendars, resource provision, breakfast clubs, inclusive fundraising - **schools across Scotland are working hard to reduce financial pressures** and include all children and young people.
- This is a good time to reinforce earlier awareness raising, **reminding your school community about the positive changes you are trying to achieve together and why**. Effective communication means that Cost of the School Day actions are more likely to be understood, well received and successful.

STEP FIVE REGULARLY REVISIT YOUR ACTION PLAN

Cost of the School Day is an ongoing process, not a one off event, and should be embedded in school improvement planning.

- Ensure that your working group meets at agreed points to review progress towards outcomes in.
- Things change, and new challenges arise for families. **Keep communicating** with your school community and **seeking their views, experiences and solutions**.