

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY



COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY STORIES

The quotes used in the stories below are all from children and young people in Scottish schools, their teachers and their parents/ carers. These stories can be used to prompt discussion and to reflect on practice.

Key questions:

- Would this happen in our school? How do we know?
- What measures would help to make sure that children in these situations are supported appropriately?

Aisha is in S1. Her mum made sure that she had the correct uniform at the start of the school year but she's grown out of her shoes and lost a few things. Her mum won't have any money for new uniform until the end of the month.

“It's way different, in primary it didn't matter as much but now in high school it's different. You get some nice kids but lots of bullies. Teachers are like 'where's your tie?' especially after assembly. You get told you have to get one for the next day. Some people get paid monthly... but they expect it the next day.”

Jenna is in S4 and has just moved outwith the school catchment to live with her gran. She used to walk to school but now has to get two buses every day.

“I have to get a bus into town that's £4 then another bus in that's £2.80 so it's costing me 6 or 7 pounds every day. A bus pass is like £30 a month. But it's my school whether it's my catchment school or not.”

Jenna's friend Chelsea gets the school bus home which leaves right after the bell.

“I'm doing the school play so you've got to stay back after school and you've got to stay back to work on projects and all that. So it means I can't get the school bus home. I've got to pay for public transport afterwards.”

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Layla is 14 and has four brothers and sisters. Her mum has told her that there's no way she can afford to go on the school skiing trip.

“My mum felt guilty that I couldn't go. Why do we have costly trips then? It puts people under pressure and it makes people embarrassed and disappointed if they can't go. Last trip I missed it was just me in my class and that was rubbish, the majority of people were away on the trip. I'd rather just stay off - cos if I'm not doing anything on activity weeks I just don't come in because there's no point, you just sit on a class and see a movie when you could just sit in your house.”

Gohar is 12. His mum works part time in a shop and cares for his grandmother. His dad has just started a new job as a security guard. Gohar is not eligible for free school meals but his family struggle to pay for lunch every day.

“I think free meals should be for everyone because even if there is two parents it doesn't mean they're going to have more money. My dad had to get kicked out of his job because they couldn't afford to pay the workers. He got redundant in October, November and he's only just starting his new job this month.”

Gohar's head teacher knows that there are many children in his situation

“We have families who cannot claim for free school meals and they are breadline families. The parents are so proud and they go off to work but their children often come in hungry in morning.”

Lewis is 12. He receives free school meals but only occasionally eats lunch in school.

“If your pals are going out at lunch you'll be a loner. It puts you out the group because they're going out and then you're sitting there on your own with a free meal. You have to stay here and have your free school meal or you could go with them and just watch them while you're starving.”

Tess is in P5. Her family are managing on a very tight budget and don't always have the small amounts of money needed for fun days and fundraising events.

“There's nothing to do at the summer fair if you don't have money. Even throwing a sponge at the teacher costs about £1. Sometimes you just have to sit in class if you don't have any money, that's happened to me. You get made fun of.”

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Tess's mum is frustrated by the small but frequent charges requested by school

“Not only does their school require specific pieces of equipment such as calculators, glue sticks, certain expensive pencils and pens, rulers to name a few, but they run so many events during school hours which cost money. If the parents cannot pay, the children have to sit out. An example being yet another fundraising event, a talent show during school hours, costing £1 each to go (or take part) plus money for refreshments and tuck. The children get reprimanded for not bringing in the essential stationery kit, they lose golden time at the end of class - once again singled out because we can't afford it.”

Ewan is in S4. He quite likes cooking but didn't take Home Economics this year.

“I didnae want to pay 50 pence on Home Eccies. I didn't want to pay that because I couldn't be bothered because then that takes money off my lunch money, and I was like, nah.”

Ewan's teacher is aware that subject costs are difficult for young people who aren't always able to pay

“Children have the embarrassment of us saying 'do you have your money? You can't cook today'. If you're collecting money there are other things you're not doing. Course fees are just really unfair. It's not a free curriculum.”

Paul is in S5. He is taking Higher English and Modern Studies and National 5 Economics, French and Geography. He doesn't have a computer at home. His school library is open for 40 minutes at lunchtime and for an hour after school each day.

“It's difficult in any subject that requires an essay - all the teachers ask for it to be emailed to them, they don't like getting it in paper form. One teacher wouldn't accept my homework 'cause it was handwritten. I've got to go to the library because we don't have a computer at home and I've had to hand in homework late or rush it and it hasn't been the best because I've only been able to get there at lunch or break and sometimes I've got to skip lunch to make sure I get the work done. If it's to be in on the Monday and it's Friday there's not much you could do.”

Mark is a single parent with two girls in primary school.

“I struggle to keep up with charges on what seems a non-stop basis. They think I can pay but I struggle putting food on the table for both of us and pay my bills. I've already had to stop their swimming lessons at the weekend. I have nothing more I can cut back on. Life is already hard enough without school making it even harder and risking kids being labelled or bullied because their parents can't afford to keep up.”