

## Submission to the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee inquiry into poverty and attainment

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland - 22 March 2018

*CPAG works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. Our vision is of a society free of child poverty, where all children can enjoy a childhood free of financial hardship and have a fair chance in life to reach their full potential.*

### Context

Between 2014 and 2017, one in four children in Scotland were officially recognised as living in poverty,<sup>1</sup> with forecasts projecting significant increases by 2020.<sup>2</sup> There is clear evidence that growing up in poverty undermines children's attainment.<sup>3</sup> The primary goal of policy makers must be to end the poverty that prevents children attaining to their potential. The 2017 Child Poverty (Scotland) Act is extremely welcome in setting statutory targets toward the eradication of child poverty, and creating a planning and accountability framework that requires national and local government to set out and report on the actions taken toward meeting those targets. It is now vital that the Scottish Parliament ensures priority and resources across government are directed at increasing family incomes (through improved employment and enhanced social security) as well as reducing the costs that families face (including childcare and housing costs.) *Preventing* the attainment gap by ending child poverty must be the primary goal. However, there are significant actions that can be taken at school to reduce barriers to learning, relieve pressure on family budgets and help reduce the attainment gap.

### Poverty limits what children and young people can do and take part in at school.

Since 2014, CPAG's [Cost of the School Day](#) project has been working with children, parents and staff in schools across Scotland to identify actions which help tackle financial barriers to children's participation, learning and wellbeing throughout the school day.

From uniform, travel and trips to learning resources, lunch and clubs, we have gathered a wealth of evidence on the multiple costs that exist at school and the impact on children's participation, learning and wellbeing of being unable to meet them. We also have evidence of actions to tackle these costs which increase access to opportunities and improve pupil wellbeing.

Investigating school costs with children, parents/carers and staff and taking action to address identified problems and barriers can help

- ensure equal access to opportunities at school and remove barriers to learning and participation for children and young people from low income households
- minimise opportunities for poverty stigma and exclusion amongst young people
- reduce the pressures which school costs place on low family incomes and support families to access financial entitlements and maximise their incomes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/03/3017/0>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/10028>

<sup>3</sup> E.g. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/education-scotland>

- ensure that Pupil Equity Funding is accurately used to remove financial barriers at school for children and young people from low income households.

Cost of the School Day approaches are an integral part of closing the poverty attainment gap. Children can't learn when they can't participate or when they are unhappy. Action to address school costs helps to clear the way of the barriers which stop some children benefiting from teaching strategies proven to raise attainment. The Cost of the School Day project is recommended as an [Intervention for Equity](#) in the Pupil Equity Fund National Operational Guidance and a priority in the Scottish Government's [Fairer Scotland Action Plan](#).

### **How do school costs impact on the education of children and young people in poverty?**

A range of school costs are difficult for low income families. This affects children's experiences at school – what they can do, what they can participate in, how they feel and how they learn.

#### ***Reduced and unequal access to opportunities at school***

- Difficulty paying travel costs can affect attendance. Accessing after school activities and supported study is difficult in schools with school buses because staying on requires paying extra to get home later
- Difficulties managing costs for subjects like Home Economics, Technical, Drama and Art and Design limit access to the curriculum and affect subject choices at certificate level
- School staff are aware of hungry children in their schools. Hunger affects children's concentration and learning

*"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."* (Teacher)

- Lack of access to ICT and unsuitable home learning environments require additional resourcefulness and effort to complete homework

*"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."* (Learner, S5)

- Some children are unable to attend and benefit from school trips. Effort is required from school staff to fund subsidies in schools where parents are less likely to be able to pay
- Entry costs, equipment and travel can stop children participating in the full range of school clubs and wider achievement initiatives
- Not bringing money for fun events may mean not getting to take part

*"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."* (Learner, P5)

#### ***Poverty shame and stigma affecting wellbeing***

Inability to participate in the same activities as their peers can leave children feeling different and embarrassed. Children speak about being keenly aware of income differences and about feeling left out or deliberately self-excluding from opportunities.

*“Well I think if all of your friends or people you know go to the after-school clubs, school trips, that kind of isolates you from them. You're singled out, you're not with them, just a spare person.”* (Learner, S5)

- Insufficient, unkempt or unfashionable uniform can be picked on by other children. Non uniform days can place pressure on children to buy new outfits and they noticeably affect attendance
- Children can be sanctioned for having incorrect uniform or not having resources in the classroom, e.g. loss of Golden Time or detention

*“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.”* (Teacher)

- Children can feel embarrassed about asking for financial help and may not ask at all.

### **How Cost of the School Day supports school children experiencing poverty.**

Cost of the School Day has worked intensively in Glasgow and Dundee and has provided resources, training and advisory support to over 20 local authorities:

**We have raised practitioner awareness of the cost barriers which limit children's learning and attainment and the impact of these cost barriers on children's wellbeing at school.** Key benefits noted by participants have included enhanced understanding of the impact of poverty, increased knowledge of how to support children affected by poverty, mindfulness of costs when planning day to day in school and greater confidence to take action on costs which limit children's participation.

**We have facilitated and advocated for policy and practice changes which ensure equal access to learning for children and young people.** Schools report that policy and practice changes have removed financial barriers and reduced costs for families.

**We have provided evidence to support authority wide actions** to, for example, increase levels of school clothing grant and automate payment of school clothing grants.

Recent research from the London School of Economics<sup>4</sup> tells us that money, in and of itself, has a causal effect on children's outcomes and that increased family income leads to improvements in children's outcomes, particularly cognitive development and school achievement. Therefore, approaches like Cost of the School Day which help families to maximise their disposable incomes can directly improve children's attainment.

### **Cost of the School Day actions which support attainment and achievement**

There are many examples of schools making a difference to children and young people's participation, learning and wellbeing when they recognise likely cost barriers and pre-emptively act to remove them. Examples from our recent practice survey are listed below with teacher perception of impact.

#### ***Ensuring participation and access to learning***

- A Falkirk Primary School spent PEF money on a supply of clothes which led to *“improved self-esteem and engagement in learning. One pupil is now taking a full part in PE due to having an appropriate and fitting gym kit.”*

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<sup>4</sup> [http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/\\_new/research/money\\_matters/report.asp](http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/_new/research/money_matters/report.asp)

- A Dumfries and Galloway Secondary ensures access to the curriculum by offsetting Home Economics, Technical, Art, and PE costs: *“Pupils do not avoid subjects as a result of curriculum costs. They are able to participate in all subjects without fear of extra costs.”*
- One Glasgow Secondary school in Glasgow says that the provision of resources to access the curriculum has led to *“improved attainment and attendance for some vulnerable children.”* A Moray Primary agrees that resource provision means *“more children can take part and respond in class without stigma of having to say they didn't have a necessary resource that the others would take for granted.”*
- In a Glasgow Secondary, providing bus passes and lunch money led to *increased attendance at an Easter revision programme* by young people previously unlikely to attend.
- Breakfast club and free snacks in an Edinburgh Primary mean that *“Children are able to concentrate better once they have eaten breakfast and their snack, thus having a positive impact on their attainment.”*
- ‘Donation’ only trips in a North Lanarkshire Primary mean that *“children turn up on the trip rather than being kept off due to parental embarrassment at inability to pay for a trip.”*

### **Enhancing wellbeing**

- One Primary School in the Scottish Borders discretely gives out uniform and gym kit where necessary. *“Children who have been given clothing immediately look happier and more settled. One child had been lying about why he was not wearing his uniform. He was embarrassed and his behaviour was disruptive. When given a change of clothing and items to take home his mood immediately improved. He was smiling and his confidence and self-esteem improved.”*
- A North Lanarkshire primary makes sure that fun events are free – as a result there is *“an inclusive ethos where pupils feel valued.”*
- A West Dunbartonshire Primary’s preloved clothing bank *“reduces any potential bullying... we have encouraged a ‘no shame’ approach and many parents and children access these clothes.”*

### **National applicability**

Cost of the School Day approaches have grown rapidly over the last four years and now exist in over 20 local authorities. NHS Health Scotland’s Child Poverty in Schools Practice Network has helped to bring local authority leads together to share practice and potentially develop work further. The action research model used in schools is applicable in any context in Scotland as action is guided by the needs and priorities of participants.

### **Conclusion**

Child poverty rates in Scotland are high and look set to rise further in coming years without substantial policy changes at UK and Scotland level. It is vital that the Scottish Parliament prioritises action to end that poverty. In the meantime, children from low income households can’t achieve at school if barriers created by poverty are not addressed. Cost of the School Day interventions puts money in family pockets and helps schools to remove financial barriers, clearing the way for children to fully participate, learn and achieve.

### **For further information, please contact:**

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