

**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY IN ENGLAND: PUPILS' PERSPECTIVES

March 2022



**THE COST OF
THE SCHOOL DAY**

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Schools have an important role in our communities; they are universally available and accessed by almost all children. As a key part of childhood, schools are not only places of learning but also play a central role in the development and growth of all children. Time at school is a significantly formative period for children, where they develop skills and knowledge that will provide the foundation for their transition into adulthood.

Schools are usually thought of as centres of equity, where the potential of all children is nurtured. While this is almost always the intention of schools, we know that many of the barriers that children and young people from low-income families experience can go unrecognised and overlooked in schools.

Putting the voice of children and young people at the heart of our understanding of the school day allows us to shine a spotlight on the many ways that poverty has an impact on children's experience of education.

Missing out on trips and music lessons; not having educational resources such as revision guides and calculators; avoiding non-uniform days and fun events such as school fairs, proms and cake sales... Children growing up in poverty have told us that their whole educational experience is affected by not having enough money. Poverty makes it harder for children to learn, achieve, and be happy at school.

Although pupils talked about a wide range of issues in our research, this report looks in detail at four key themes that were most commonly reported as posing challenges for pupils without much money. These are: costs related to [curriculum and learning](#), challenges around [stigma at school](#), [school fun](#) and [school food](#). Our methodology for working with pupils, parents and whole-school communities can be found at the end of the report.

**THE COST OF
THE SCHOOL DAY**

Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East's UK Cost of the School Day project is working with schools and local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales to ensure that all children, regardless of financial background, can take part and be happy at school.

This report focuses on our research so far in England. It highlights some of the positive work being carried out by schools to ensure that opportunities are affordable and inclusive, while also drawing attention to the multitude of ways that pupils from low-income families face exclusion and stigma.

This report demonstrates that the school day is not always equally accessible to all pupils and parts of education are out of reach for some children. That is not to say that all of the issues identified occur in all schools, but the Poverty Proofing methodology used within this project has illuminated a clear and stark picture that cannot be ignored: poverty has a detrimental impact on education.

Pupil voice is at the centre of the UK Cost of the School Day project, and the children's own words have been included in this report alongside those of families to provide a comprehensive picture of life at school. We hope that this report will enable school staff, policymakers and other interested stakeholders to better understand how poverty limits the opportunities of children in schools in England. It also serves as a call to action because *it doesn't have to be this way*.

We hope that by listening to the issues identified by children, readers of this report will take action to bring about greater equity of experience and opportunity within our education system.

This page sets out the key findings from our research Poverty Proofing© 18 schools in England and speaking in depth with over 4,500 pupils.

Curriculum and learning

- Families are often expected to own learning resources including stationery, textbooks and IT equipment for use both at home and at school.
- Pupils experiencing poverty in England are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities, including PE, music, swimming and art and design.
- Costs associated with resources and equipment can be a factor in pupils' subject choices in secondary school, with food technology and art and design reported as having significant costs.

Stigma

- Day-to-day practices in English schools often unintentionally draw attention to family incomes and make children feel embarrassed and different. These include expensive uniform policies, non-uniform days and requests from schools to bring in material possessions like pencil cases.

"It's a 'free education', but it's not really free." (Pupil)



School fun

- Many fun and special events at school, which other children look forward to, including trips, fundraising activities, celebrations and community events, are often out of reach for children in poverty. They can also cause great anxiety and financial and social pressures.
- Families are borrowing money to pay for school activities like school trips, not wanting children to lose out on these valuable learning opportunities.

School food

- Many children in low-income households are missing out on the benefits of a school lunch due to the restrictive eligibility criteria for free school meals, the cost of school lunches, and issues with payment procedures including the resolution of lunch money debt.
- Challenges with school food systems and policies mean that not all children get a sufficient and balanced meal during the school day, leaving them feeling hungry and worrying about food.
- Policies and practices relating to food in school often mean that children experiencing poverty don't have the same options as their peers at lunchtime.

For government

As an overarching aim, we are calling on the UK government and Department for Education to recognise the impact that school-related costs have on children's ability to learn. We implore them to prioritise funding schools properly so they can offer a truly free and inclusive education, where every pupil can fully participate in school activities without cost barriers. Urgent steps towards this include:

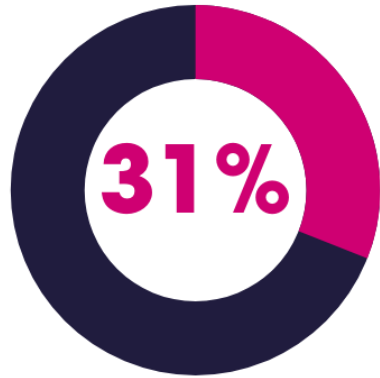
1. Provide adequate funding to schools to ensure all curriculum-related costs are removed for pupils. This must include investment that guarantees all children have the resources and tools they need to fully participate in school activities both at home and at school e.g., revision guides and laptops.
2. Provide local authorities with additional funding and a statutory responsibility to help families with school costs through targeted initiatives such as school clothing grants and subsidies for trips. Initiatives like this already exist in all other UK nations.
3. Provide universal free school meals to school-aged children in England so that all pupils have equitable access to food while at school.
4. Provide a statutory framework, strategy and additional ring-fenced funding so schools in England can provide programmes, activities and services that go beyond the core function of classroom education, such as breakfast and after-school clubs.

For schools

Schools can take important action to ensure that children from low-income households have an equitable experience of the school day. To ensure that policies and practices in school are inclusive for low-income families, schools should:

1. Plan all teaching, events and activities with affordability and accessibility in mind. Wherever possible, remove or minimise charging for school-related activities.
2. Explore and review current school costs. Take a holistic view of the school year and determine the cost of full participation in school life.
3. Ensure that all staff, including non-teaching staff, are aware of the nature, causes, extent and impact of poverty and how to reduce the stigma that children can face in school.
4. Provide meaningful opportunities for pupils and families to give feedback on their experience of school with a focus on school costs.

A full list of recommendations for the government and schools can be found on pages 45 –49.



**of children in
England are growing
up in poverty.**



**That's 9 children in an average
class of 30 pupils.**

Child poverty is not inevitable. During the late 1990s progress was made through a combination of policies to reduce child poverty and by 2010/11, 1.1 million fewer children were living in poverty than in 1996/97.¹ However, in recent years we have seen child poverty levels rise again, with 4.3 million children in the UK living in poverty prior to the pandemic.² A primary cause of this is families facing a number of real-terms cuts to benefits over the last decade and while the £20 a week increase to UC and working tax credits temporarily restored some of the value, its recent removal has put out-of-work benefits at their lowest level in 30 years.³ What's more, for too many families, work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty with 75 per cent of children currently growing up in poverty living in a household with at least one working adult.⁴

Increasing family incomes is key to reducing child poverty, so it cannot be solved solely within the school gates. However, as key institutions in our society, **schools have an important role to play in protecting children from the restrictive effects that poverty can have on them.** Schools can and, more importantly, do make a difference. They should be places of equity where children from low-income households can readily access the same opportunities and experiences as their peers.

What's more, prices are now rising at the fastest rate in 30 years, and energy bills alone will rise by more than 50 per cent in April. **As living costs go up, we must ensure that the cost of the school day does not contribute to the challenges low-income children and families face.**

The impact of poverty on educational attainment is widely recognised.⁵ Pupil Premium was introduced in 2011 to provide schools with additional funding to reduce and eradicate the attainment gap between children from low-income households and their peers. However, the evidence is clear that **children experiencing poverty continue to make less progress than their peers, resulting in stubbornly unequal outcomes.** We know that school-related costs and poverty-related stigma in school can further contribute to and compound these inequalities. Importantly, our report shows that action can be taken to address the cost of the school day, and this has multiple benefits for children and families.

The UK Cost of the School Day project adds to our understanding of the links between poverty and education, as it explores how children living in poverty experience and participate in school activities. Looking broadly and holistically at these children’s experience allows us to examine the unequal outcomes that remain pervasive within the English education system.

UK Cost of the School Day practitioners have worked in partnership with schools in England to:

- Discover the ways in which poverty affects the school day by listening to children, young people and their families;
- Reduce school costs and stigma for all families, and design a more inclusive school day;
- Raise awareness of the realities of child poverty and of the links between child poverty and education.

This report is not exhaustive: the UK Cost of the School Day research in schools is ongoing, and further insights will be shared when the project ends.

THE KEY FINDINGS IN THIS REPORT WERE GATHERED FROM...



10,044
children were reached
in these schools



4,600
children took part in small
question group discussions

WE ALSO INTERVIEWED OR SURVEYED...



840
parents and carers



420
school staff
members

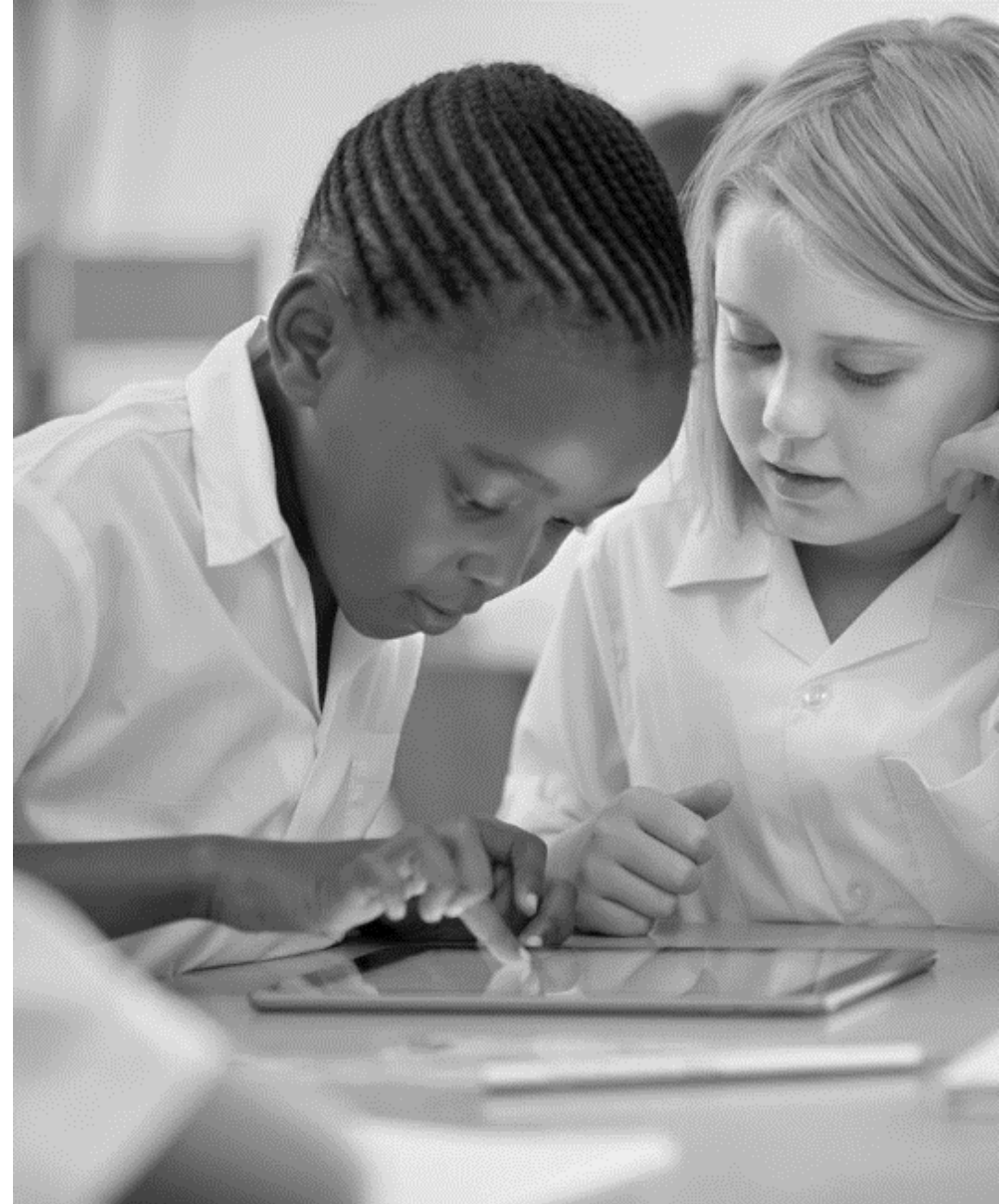


60
governors

School costs affect access to the full curriculum for children in low-income families. Children and families have told us that in schools in England, **those experiencing poverty are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities.** This is because participation requires additional equipment and resources to be provided from home, and these can be difficult, and sometimes impossible, to afford for low-income families.

Examples that children have told us about include pupils missing out on practical PE lessons because they don't have PE kit, not being able to take up instrument lessons because of cost, and having limited options when completing art and design portfolios due to the cost of purchasing materials. Importantly, **young people have told us that these subject costs are a factor when it comes to making decisions about which subjects they will study at secondary school.** Children have also said that their learning is affected by the availability of resources both at home and at school, including revision guides, textbooks and access to the internet. Too many pupils miss out on these resources as family budgets are increasingly stretched.

All schools must offer a broad and balanced curriculum which ensures that all children get access to a wide, rich set of opportunities, including sports, music and arts.⁶ For low-income families who can find it more difficult for their children to take up extra-curricular opportunities, having activities and experiences available through the curriculum is especially important.⁷ Our research shows that **attending school and accessing the curriculum is not cost-free for families in England.** Curriculum access and engagement is not currently universal as a result of the costs associated with purchasing materials, equipment and resources. Children are being locked out of the learning and participation in school life that every child deserves.



Physical activity through PE is a compulsory part of every stage of the national curriculum. Through school sports, children can try new and varied activities, take part in competitive sports, and learn new skills. However, children are being excluded from taking part in valuable sporting experiences and opportunities at school because of PE kit and clothing costs. Primary and secondary school pupils have told us that they have had to watch practical PE and swimming lessons from the sidelines, because they didn't have the clothing needed to take part. The consequences of this exclusion from full participation in lessons is clear, with research listing PE as one of the most 'inegalitarian subjects' at GCSE with a large participation and attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.⁸



"Oh you don't do PE if you don't have your kit. With any single teacher you have to sit out." (Year 5 pupil)

"You just have to sit out by the window." (Year 3 pupil)



"If you don't have a towel or something, you can sit and watch." (Year 5 pupil)



Pupil recommendations

"I'd make it so every child who found it difficult to bring their kit could leave it in school for all the time so they had it. Maybe school could help wash it." (Year 5 pupil)



"Maybe the school could buy some spare kits for each class." (Year 5 pupil)



Case study

Willenhall Community Primary School, Coventry

Willenhall Community Primary School ensures that children do not miss out on sporting opportunities. The school has:

- Provided lots of equipment for pupils to use to encourage physical activity at playtimes, including balls, skittles and skipping ropes.
- Set up free multi-sports clubs led by PE staff at lunchtimes so that all pupils are able to join a club, including pupils who can't access after-school clubs.
- Monitored attendance at extra-curricular sporting opportunities to ensure that all children get involved. Pupils who have opted not to take part are encouraged to attend through individual conversations with PE staff.
- Provided all equipment and kits for sports teams, and paid for transport for school teams to attend sporting fixtures.
- Ensured that spare PE kit is available for all pupils without stigma or sanctions so that missing out on practical lessons never occurs.
- Sourced spare swimming kit, including towels, so that pupils are always able to take part in swimming lessons.

Music is another subject that creates additional costs for families when their children want to participate fully. Children in both primary and secondary schools have told us that instrument tuition usually comes with an additional cost for families: not only the cost of the tuition itself, but also the purchase or hire of an instrument so children can practise outside of their dedicated lesson time.

Learning an instrument is not only valuable as an optional extracurricular activity: it is also an integral part of the music curriculum. Research from the Education Policy Institute has shown that disadvantaged pupils are much less likely to take music as a GCSE option than their peers. Moreover, when they do opt for this subject, their attainment is significantly more than a grade lower than pupils from more affluent households.⁹

The cost of participating fully in musical opportunities at school is preventing pupils in low-income families from flourishing. Limited and stretched household incomes are directly having an impact on engagement and achievement in music for young people in England.

"I want to learn guitar in this school but I can't because my mum has a little bit of money." (Year 2 pupil)



"My child was interested in music lessons but a group lesson lasting 15 minutes per week for a term costs over £50." (Parent)



"I used to do drum kit, but I quit cos it's too expensive. I felt quite sad because I liked doing the drums and it was a bit sad that I had to stop." (Year 6 pupil)



Pupil recommendations

"They could provide free lessons because some people don't have the money to pay for lessons. They could make it cheaper, so it was easier for people to pay for." (Year 6 pupil)



"There should be more opportunities for students who aren't able to afford it but still want to take lessons." (Year 9 pupil)



Families face costs for their children to complete coursework and take part in lessons that are part of the school day. Specifically, secondary school pupils in some schools are asked to make a financial contribution towards or buy materials for art and design subjects including photography, textiles, art, and design technology.

These costs are an additional burden for low-income families, and create difficult choices for families about how to spend their limited budgets while ensuring their children have everything they need to reach their full potential at school.

In instances where families are unable to meet these costs or purchase resources, some pupils reported facing discouraging and punitive policies, such as not being allowed to keep their finished projects. When pupils only have access to what is available at school, their creativity will be limited compared to those who can afford to buy additional resources.

"We have to buy our own materials and sketchbook from a shop."
(Year 10 pupil)



"If you don't pay, you're not allowed to take home the stuff you make... it's unfair, you spend all that time making it and some people just can't afford to pay it." (Pupil)



"You don't know they will have a cost when you choose your GCSEs."
(Year 10 pupil)



"You have to buy your own material to make your final piece." (Year 10 pupil)



Similarly, families are often asked to purchase or make a contribution towards the cost of ingredients for practical food technology lessons. Pupils explained that if their families are unable to meet these costs, they are not able to take part in practical lessons in the same way as their peers. Examples of this include students only being able to use a more limited range of ingredients or not taking part in practical sessions at all. As a consequence, pupils are missing out on developing practical skills that are important to progress and achieve in food technology.

Pupils also indicated that they are aware of the impact of school-related costs on their family finances when choosing options. We found that cost can be a factor for pupils when making subject choices, with other pupils reporting they would have chosen differently had they been aware of all the associated costs.

"If I'd known how much it would cost to do food tech, it would have affected my decision... it makes me not want to do the subject." (Year 10 pupil)



"I wouldn't have done it if I'd known the cost. We buy lots of food stuff. I don't think it's fair." (Year 10 pupil)



"You need a container for food tech... if you don't have a container, you throw it in the bin." (Year 8 pupil)



As well as subject-specific resources, families and children have also talked about the impact of more general school-related costs of taking part in a wide range of curriculum subjects. In secondary schools in England, across both compulsory and optional subjects, there is often an unacknowledged expectation that families will purchase learning resources for their children's use at school including stationery, calculators, revision guides and textbooks. Without these resources, children's potential to learn is hindered and in some instances they face sanctions at school. Even without taking part in any 'optional' extras, attending school and accessing learning is not cost free.



"To school you have to bring a pencil case, planner, calculator, pen, pencil, sharpener, ruler, rubber, highlighter... if you don't have something the teacher gives you a warning or a detention." (Secondary school pupil)

"You have to get a specific calculator for maths, it's £25-£30 and you need it for your exam... they have a couple [of] spares but not enough." (Sixth form pupil)



"They are very expensive... I do triple science and the books are £25 each. It's £75. It should be provided." (Year 11 pupil)



"They say get CGP revision guides. They tell parents at parents evening or email. It's £40 for all subjects." (Year 7 pupil)



Pupil recommendations

"I would buy revision guides second-hand if we could... it would be cheaper." (Year 10 pupil)



Case study

Finham Park 2 school, Coventry

Finham Park 2 has introduced initiatives to support all pupils to access textbooks and revision guides. The school has:

- Introduced a deposit system for textbooks and revision guides so that pupils can take out resources on loan rather than needing to purchase them.
- Promoted online and e-textbooks which students can access free of charge.
- Ensured that the school library has a good stock of all course-related books available for all students to borrow.

Access to the internet and electronic devices was highlighted as an issue when schools were closed because of the pandemic.¹⁰ But for children in low-income families, digital exclusion has long been an issue that affects their education, even prior to the pandemic, and it continues to affect them despite the reopening of schools.¹¹

Secondary schools are increasingly making use of a wide range of educational apps in classrooms to support and enhance learning. These are often used for learning quizzes, self-assessments, interactive activities and revision. Children without digital access are excluded from participating in these in-school learning activities. The use of mobile phones in school as part of lessons also draws attention to pupils who have limited data, older phone models, or no phones at all.

"We use our phone in lessons for research, but not everyone has data, so they have to use their friends'." (Pupil)



"My mum has had to double both mine and my brother's mobile data tariffs to accommodate school online learning resources such as Quizlet and Kahoot!" (Pupil)



Pupil recommendations

"The only issue I would say is using phones in classes, many people do not have access to phones and if they do then they may not have access to apps that require Wi-Fi, so rather than make families use up more data, have a Wi-Fi system that is only accessible to classes that need it at the time." (Pupil)



Not having sufficient income to purchase educational and school resources also affects children's learning at home with significant numbers of pupils now being asked to complete and submit homework online. Highlighted during the pandemic, the digital divide persists and continues to compound learning inequalities. Children in households without digital access are excluded from taking part in learning activities at home and are missing out on additional learning opportunities, with some facing sanctions at school as a result.



"Most of the homework you have to have a computer." (Year 7 pupil)



"It happens a lot that people get detentions for not printing their homework, it depends on the teachers, some are helpful but some teachers say it's not my problem." (Year 9 pupil)



"Written homework I can do, but online homework I just can't do it, I can't access where everything is, your homework, your record, your attendance." (Year 9 pupil)

Pupil recommendations

"It would be helpful for the people without a laptop at home if they could borrow it because you could learn more about the topic you're learning." (Year 10 pupil)



"It would be good if we could borrow laptops, because some people don't have laptops at home... they deserve a good education." (Year 9 pupil)



"They could let you borrow the iPad or let you do it in school, if you don't have a device at home." (Year 4 pupil)



"I think the school needs to provide student Wi-Fi so that they can do online learning contact free in school from their mobile phone with no extra cost to them." (Pupil)



As well as online homework, children in low-income families can find it difficult to complete other types of homework which require resources. Children have talked about missing out on creative homework tasks such as model-making that have required them to have arts and craft supplies. Consequently, children in low-income families cannot take part in all creative tasks at home – a further example of how subjects and activities that require more resources and are more expensive are out of reach for too many children.



"It's not fair because some people don't have the money for materials." (Year 5 pupil)



"If you don't have the stuff at home, you can't do it." (Year 6 pupil)

Pupil recommendations

"I think the school could let them borrow the supplies for a certain period of time." (Year 6 pupil)



For children and young people, friendships and fitting in with peers are important parts of life at school. Schools in England often bring together children and families from different backgrounds, and provide opportunities for children to meet and socialise with a wide range of peers from their broader community.

However, poverty also affects children's friendships at school with children growing up in poverty more likely to play alone, fall out with their friends and less likely to talk to their friends about their worries.¹² One of the issues that children from low-income families face at school is that **many common school practices unintentionally draw attention to differences in family incomes: unnecessarily expensive uniform policies, non-uniform days, and children having to bring in material possessions** such as pencil cases from home.

For children growing up in poverty, these practices in school make them feel different and left out, and cause them to face stigma from their peers.



Effective uniform policies can reduce the stigma that children face in relation to branded clothing and accessories, and help young people experiencing poverty fit in with their peers when at school. However, in some schools, unnecessarily costly uniform policies conversely add to the pressures and stigma that families, children and young people face.¹³ Rather than alleviating stress, unaffordable uniform requirements can pose a barrier to learning for students who sometimes receive sanctions and miss time in lessons for incorrect uniform.



"If you have a few times not with the right uniform you get a detention." (Year 8 pupil)



"They either get a note from their head of house, or if it's continuous they might get detentions." (Year 9 pupil)

"The teacher checks everyone's uniform every day. If I didn't have my tie, they said they'd call my parents to take me home."
(Year 11 pupil)



Pupil recommendations

"The school can help families by charging less for school uniform." (Year 5 pupil)



Case studies

Alderwood Primary School, Greenwich, London

Each year, Alderwood holds a pre-loved uniform sale. Staff found that there was some reluctance to make use of pre-loved uniform so created a discreet form parents could use to request specific items.

Staff emphasise the environmental benefits as a further strategy to de-stigmatise buying pre-loved uniform: **“We sell it as ‘it’s better for the environment’... we don’t make it about cost, because I still think there’s a big stigma.”** (Member of staff)

Deansfield Primary School, Greenwich, London

The school does not insist that families purchase uniform with the school logo, meaning that families can purchase unbranded items from a wide range of uniform suppliers.

Deansfield Primary School has also established an Eco Council which organises the school’s pre-loved uniform provision, which is available to all families and appreciated by parents and pupils. **“I think it’s good because not everyone can afford new uniform and it can help them. Not everyone can afford to buy full price uniform... I know some people can struggle with their money.”** (Pupil)

Non-uniform days are another part of the school calendar that children growing up in poverty may miss out on or feel anxious about. They can draw attention to differences in families' financial circumstances. On non-uniform days, children said that they have witnessed bullying and stigmatisation directed at children who cannot afford appropriately-themed costumes or branded clothing. These comments can make children feel embarrassed and pressured about the clothing that they wear, or make them worried about not having appropriate costumes for charity fundraising and awareness days.



"Some students don't like wearing their own clothes, they come in their uniform." (Year 11 pupil)



"On non-uniform days, people come after other people... they'd make fun of your shoes, if you had Puma not Nike " (Year 10 pupil)



"Some people have laughed at them and said like your clothes are from a charity shop." (Year 6 pupil)

"People make fun of your shoes, 'oh, you're so poor'. Some people are so snobby, 'you're so poor, I'm richer than you'!" (Year 6 pupil)



"I heard it once... I heard someone saying your clothes are really rubbish and I bet you got them from Primark..." (Year 4 pupil)



Pupil and family recommendations

"Could design a t-shirt or jumper in school instead." (Year 5 pupil)



"I would change like all the non-uniform days because people get asked if that's the only clothes they have. It makes them feel upset and disappointed." (Year 6 pupil)



"Not so many dress-up days which means parents need to go and buy a costume or specific outfit." (Parent)



Fitting in with peers is important for young people. Items children take in to school from home, including clothing, resources and accessories, can show financial differences and make poverty visible to others. Primary school children have told us about feeling under pressure to have the same type of pencil case or stationery as their friends. Others have mentioned not being able to fully participate in activities such as 'show and tell' because they are worried about what other children will think and say about items they bring in from home. Whenever there are opportunities for items and objects from home to be brought in to school, it creates the possibility that comparisons between children are made, which in turn makes children feel under increased pressure to be the same as their peers.

"You can tell if someone has less money." (Year 8 pupil)



"I don't want to make my mum feel bad cos she can't buy loads of stuff, so I don't ask her." (Year 4 pupil)



"I beg my mum to get new things, but I know how stressed she is, then I get stressed." (Year 6 pupil)



Household income has an impact on the leisure and social activities accessible to families. Low-income families are excluded from the opportunities that families with more money can more easily access. As a direct result of poverty, some children are excluded from a wider range of experiences such as joining extra-curricular clubs, going on holidays and having days out.¹⁴ In school, children have told us that these differences in family circumstance and experiences can be unintentionally highlighted during whole-class discussions. Conversations and activities around what they have done at home during the holidays or over the weekend are isolating and stigmatising for those who may not have had the same experiences as their friends.

"They hear everyone saying they're going to exciting places and if they haven't had any fun it makes them sad." (Year 6 pupil)



"You sometimes feel weird about it cos you've stayed at home and watched TV and they've done fun stuff, so you have to make it up." (Year 4 pupil)



When speaking to children and young people about the impact of poverty on the school day, stories of children missing out on fun and special activities and events because of the associated costs have been a regular theme. School trips, fundraising activities, celebrations and community events are some of the most special and fondly-remembered parts of the school experience, but they are also activities which typically cost money. Rather than being a time of joy and fun, these days and events can become a time of anxiety, exclusion and missing out.

Often considered additional 'extras', the reality is that fun and special events are woven into school calendars, and opting out means very visibly missing out.

Schools are key childhood institutions that provide much more than just learning, but too many children from low-income families are missing out on all that their schools have to offer. **As a direct result of poverty, children and families are being excluded from events and activities that are often sources of great excitement and bring together school communities.**



Charity and fundraising days and activities are common school experiences that children have told us can be affected by their families' financial circumstances. Both primary and secondary school pupils said that they are often able to tell which of their peers make a donation when charitable days are organised because of money collection practices in classrooms. Fundraising events and activities in school make visible who has money and who does not.



"You would know if someone didn't have money. Everyone stands up and the teacher goes round for money and they sit down." (Year 6 pupil)



"[A] record is kept of who has brought in money." (Year 9 pupil)



"It goes into an envelope and then they tick the names off." (Year 10 pupil)

Children have also told us that they are aware of their friends missing out on specific fundraising events and activities in schools such as bake sales if they do not have money to take part. Fundraising events such as cake sales, which punctuate the school year, are one of the hidden costs of participation in school life, unrecognised and unacknowledged. For children from low-income families, they are yet another school activity that they are excluded from taking part in and enjoying.

"If they don't have the money, they can't have a cake." (Year 5 pupil)



"I've seen people sneak their friend cakes. You could feel left out if they don't get a cake." (Year 10 pupil)



"You only get one if you pay." (Sixth form pupil)



The school year is packed with community activities and celebrations, with families required to supply resources and materials for their child to take part. Examples shared by children include being asked to bring in costumes for Christmas nativity plays, materials for Easter egg and bonnet decorating, and party food for end-of-year celebrations.

Pupils also mentioned that they have missed out on school events such as winter, summer and Easter fayres because of the costs of buying refreshments, playing games and purchasing from stalls.



"There is nothing for free. If you can't pay for special occasions, you can't go." (Year 1 pupil)



"At some events, you know people don't have a lot of money because they don't buy stuff." (Year 3 pupil)

Pupil recommendations

"I think we should give a letter out saying what stalls there are and how much they cost." (Year 5 pupil)



"I think instead of paying for things at the fair, we could pay something before and then not pay when we're there." (Year 5 pupil)



Case studies

Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Primary School, Coventry

The school has explored alternative Christmas events, which they are able to provide free of charge for all pupils at their school. They have worked with local community organisations to provide a virtual pantomime for all children while in school, and have secured a donation to provide all children with a 'goody bag' of treats to accompany this virtual experience.

Thinking creatively about ways to provide the same festive experience for all children, without asking families for a contribution and without costing the school money, is a great way of making Christmas events inclusive for all families.

St Thomas A Becket Primary School, Greenwich, London

To reduce the pressure that families can feel on themed dressing up days, the school has thought of ways to make special days in school inclusive for all. On World Book Day, instead of wearing costumes, pupils made potato book characters. Pupils enjoyed this activity commenting: "We used to stand up and show our costumes... now it's better, cos we're not using plastic which is destroying our world." (Year 4 pupil) And: "I think it's good to do potatoes cos some people didn't have money for the costumes... it's a waste of money for one day." (Year 6 pupil)

Some of the most significant school celebrations take place at transition points, as children move from one school to the next, or into the next phase of their education. Pupils from low-income families are often unintentionally excluded from taking part in leavers' celebrations and events at school transition points. The cost of purchasing tickets, outfits and even transport means that some children miss out on these childhood experiences. It is also a time within the school year when there are often additional items available to purchase, such as leavers' books and leavers' hoodies. Some children do not get these mementoes to keep because they present an additional cost to already-stretched family budgets.



"Year book and jumpers I think are really expensive. I'm only allowed one." (Year 11 pupil)

"It's £10 to get into the leavers event and then you can spend £14 on a customised hoodie. There will be a bouncy castle and bungee." (Year 6 pupil)



"I had to pay for my dress, shoes and accessories and everything. I maybe spent about £200 on stuff for prom. It wasn't worth it for the event because it wasn't that great." (Sixth form pupil)



There has been a growing emphasis in schools on 'cultural capital' and the wide, rich set of experiences that all children should have access to while in education, including educational visits. Despite this, the reality is that for many children, these opportunities remain unaffordable and out of reach. The cost of school trips can be an additional burden for low-income families. Our discussions with children provide evidence of families borrowing money to avoid their children missing out on experiences at school, or children being unable to go on school trips because of the cost. Missing out on school trips not only means that children are missing opportunities for fun with their peers, but also that they are being excluded from valuable learning opportunities outside of the classroom. The majority of visits and trips outside of school are curriculum-linked, and support and enhance learning in the classroom. When children cannot take up trip opportunities, it affects their engagement with the curriculum and is another way that their educational experience is different from that of their peers.



"To be honest, most of the students don't go on the trips because they can't afford them." (Sixth form pupil)

"If you don't have the money, you just go to another class." (Year 3 pupil)



"If someone couldn't pay for a trip they would stay at school, it's not fair for them." (Year 9 pupil)



Pupil recommendations

"They should make trips cheaper. It's a lot of money. My mum ended up borrowing money from my aunt to pay for my trip." (Year 4 pupil)



"Maybe have more trips to local places." (Pupil)



"I'd absolutely like more trips... it allows you to interact with the world, seeing it in front of you helps you to learn." (Sixth form pupil)



Families cannot be charged for educational activities and trips that are part of the national curriculum or are needed to complete an exam, however, Department for Education guidance does permit schools to ask families to make a voluntary contribution towards trip costs.¹⁵ Children and families have said that, in reality, many of these requests for money do not feel voluntary, with frequent reminders and prompts being sent until the payment is made.

Classroom practices mean that this pressure to pay is felt not only by parents but also by children themselves. In some schools, frequent in-class reminders about contributions make children aware which of their classmates have not paid, causing embarrassment and worry.



"The teacher reads out a list of people who haven't paid... she asks why you haven't paid and when you're going to pay."
(Year 5 pupil)

"For the trips, the teacher puts on the board showing who's paid and who hasn't." (Year 4 pupil)



"The teacher asked people going on the trip to stand up and people who aren't going stay sitting down. I think most people are going." (Year 6 pupil)



"Everybody had to pay, I remember the teacher in Year 2 saying that if a person doesn't pay, there won't be enough money and everyone has to play a part or we won't be able to go." (Year 4 pupil)



In addition to the cost of trips being prohibitive, families don't always receive enough notice from schools about costs. For low-income families, this makes incorporating these additional costs into their already-stretched budgets an even bigger challenge. Children have also shared that in some schools, places on trips are allocated on a 'first-come, first-served' basis. This means that families who have money readily available can secure places, while those who need time to save and budget miss out.



"They ask for money and you have to get it in one week - where's my mum supposed to get £25 in one week? It's ridiculous." (Year 10 pupil)



"It's the first people who get the spaces." (Year 4 pupil)



"When I realised it was first come and first served, I thought just forget it, I'll do it next time." (Year 5 pupil)

Pupil and family recommendations

"I think they should show what trips they're going to do a lot earlier to give people time to make a plan and give them time to pay." (Sixth form pupil)



"It is helpful to know at the beginning of the year an amount that will be needed for trips and other things. It might be easier to budget through the year paying a couple of pounds a week rather than having to pay out large amounts in one go." (Parent)



"Give more notice when it comes to school trips, have a proper programme and kit lists before signing up for trips so parents can budget themselves and children know what activities they will be doing as well as the parents." (Parent)



Case studies

John Shelton School, Coventry

To support families with the cost of trips, the school has:

- Provided families with an events calendar so that they know when trips are scheduled and can budget for any associated costs.
- Allowed families to pay for visits in instalments through payment plans.
- Applied for external funding to reduce trip contributions required from families.
- Ensured that children have not missed out on any trips because of cost, speaking to families on an individual basis if there are any barriers to their attendance and participation.

Haimo Primary School, Greenwich

The school values trips and views them as an opportunity to encourage pupils to develop their curiosity about the world. As such, they work proactively to ensure that experiences do not place families under additional financial pressure by:

- Considering cost when planning school trips, focusing on low-cost and free activities that are available locally.
- Where possible, using public transport to keep costs low and to develop travel confidence for pupils.
- Funding the majority of the cost of the residential visit for pupils in Year 6, with families only asked to contribute towards transport, recognising that it is a valuable experience for all to attend.

As well as the direct impact of school costs on household budgets, for children from low-income families, school costs create worry and anxiety. Children from low-income families miss out on activities and opportunities at school because they are aware of their family's financial circumstances and do not want to add to the challenges that they face by asking their parents or carers for money. Pupils have told us that they avoid taking home letters about trips, clubs and musical instrument lessons, meaning that they miss out. Children growing up in poverty are burdened with worries about not being able to afford school activities and not being able to join in with their peers.

"If [a trip] was expensive, I wouldn't ask my mum – she'd feel embarrassed and then I'd feel bad." (Year 4 pupil)



"I find children can often worry about money and finances from home. They tend to consider the cost of a trip before mentioning this to parents." (Member of staff)



It has been demonstrated that provision of a substantial lunch at school has the potential to be immensely beneficial for all children, improving educational and health outcomes.^{16, 17} We know the free school meals that some low-income families receive can be a highly valuable form of support. However, the current school food system has a number of issues which mean that **too many children experiencing poverty miss out on an adequate, balanced meal during the school day.**

Our research has found that for low-income families not eligible for free school meals, stigmatising procedures and policies around the resolution of lunch money debt add to the stress and anxiety that children face.

We also found that children receiving free school meals sometimes have a more limited range of food options than their peers because of their allowance.

Other children said that they are missing out on lunch at school because of the size and quality of the food provided, and limited options available, with no opportunity for them to give feedback on the range of choices made available.



CPAG's research has shown that many children experiencing poverty are ineligible for free school meals under the current qualifying criteria.¹⁸ For some low-income families who are not eligible for means-tested free school meals, the cost of school meals can be unaffordable. Children have reported that when they get to Year 3 (and no longer have their universal infant free school meal entitlement), they move on to packed lunches because of costs. Children therefore miss out on the benefits of a school lunch because families simply cannot afford them.



"I used to [have] school dinners, but now I have packed lunch... I think it was because you have to pay lots of money for school dinners... they're a bit expensive." (Year 3 pupil)

"I would like to offer a hot dinner to my child daily at school but wouldn't be able to afford it so have to do packed lunch." (Parent)



"I would prefer hot lunch but my mum can't afford it so I bring in food." (Year 9 pupil)



"Not everyone is privileged to pay £2.30 each day... there's people who don't get free school meals who can't pay that." (Sixth form pupil)



"Sometimes people don't have anything to eat and they have to beg their friends for food... they should give one free meal to people who don't have money." (Year 11 pupil)



The way school lunch money debt is dealt with can affect children's experience of the school day. In some instances, children have told us that they are involved in the process of resolving the debt. These policies and practices make children responsible for mediation between home and school to resolve the issue, and also make children more acutely aware of their family's financial situation. When involved in the process of debt resolution, children worry about their peers finding out and face added anxiety about money while at school.



"If you haven't paid, you get a letter in the register, reminding you to pay. The teacher hands it out in class." (Year 5 pupil)

Even more worryingly, lunch money debt approaches in some schools have a direct impact on the food choices and lunchtime experience that pupils have. Children in some primary schools said they are only provided with a sandwich rather than the full range of lunch options if they do not have any money on their lunch account.

Secondary school pupils have said that they have been asked to put food and drink back on the shelves in the dining hall or canteen if they do not have enough money available in electronic payment accounts. In practice, lunch money debt leads children to being singled out in front of their peers, having a reduced range of lunch options, or going without something to eat.

"If you haven't paid you can't get food." (Year 11 pupil)



"I had to have sandwiches because my parents hadn't paid." (Year 5 pupil)



"I've seen some situations where they take it away from you. You have to have the money." (Sixth form pupil)



"You should be allowed a little bit of debt... my friend had a panic attack cos she had nothing to eat." (Year 8 pupil)



For those who do take up their free school meal entitlement, particularly in secondary schools, there are often issues with the way that this money is credited to their lunch payment account, meaning that they do not get to make the most of their full entitlement. In some schools, students receiving free school meals are only able to use their free school meal allowance at lunchtime, and are excluded from using this credit at breakfast or break time. We have also found that if students do not use all of their allowance or are absent, the money is often removed from their account, meaning that they are unable to use it on the following days.

Concerningly, because of the way free school meals are administered and delivered in some schools, not all children take up their full free school meal entitlement. The reasons for this include but are not limited to; pupils being worried about stigmatising systems such as tills which show their free school meal status to others, pupils wanting to join friends who eat lunch outside of school so they don't miss out on social opportunities, and pupils choosing cheaper options to avoid the embarrassment of being turned away at the till if they go over the limit.¹⁹

"If you're free school meals, you get £2.40 a day... you can't carry it over... it's not right you should be able to carry it over." (Year 8 pupil)



"If you don't spend it, you lose it." (Year 10 pupil)



Children in receipt of free school meals said that the way lunchtime is organised and options available can mean that those in receipt of free school meals are unintentionally isolated from their friends during this social part of the school day. Primary school children said that in some dining halls, pupils who are having a packed lunch are not able to sit next to those having hot dinners. This is particularly problematic for children who are having free school meals and are therefore excluded from sitting with friends who have made a different lunch choice. Secondary school pupils explained that their food options are limited by the free school meal allowance, with limitations on when they can spend their lunch money, and some food items and meal deal combinations priced above the allowance that they are provided with.



"I would let people sit near their friends, like a mixture, because some people are on packed lunches and some are on hot dinners but if you let them sit together, they will be happier." (Year 5 pupil)

"If you're free school meals you get a normal meal with water. You can get a dessert but not a juice. You can only get something at lunchtime and not a break time." (Year 11 pupil)



"I was trying to get a drink yesterday but I didn't have enough money in my account, so I couldn't get one." (Year 9 pupil)



"We need more options about what you can buy with your free school meal money. We can't buy enough food with our free school meal [money] and the options are very limited. We can't get anything at break, it's not fair." (Year 10 pupil)



The quality of food and range of options available to pupils in schools in England is variable. In some schools, children have told us they dislike the lunches and options on offer, and as a result they opt to have packed lunches. This is partially because both primary and secondary school pupils often have limited opportunities to give meaningful feedback on their lunchtime experience at school or the food options provided. When menus are designed without input and involvement from children and young people, this can lead to pupils missing out on a hot, balanced meal each day and the many benefits associated with this.



"This is a diverse school, but the food is not. The food has no variety." (Sixth form pupil)

"I wasn't eating much because I didn't really like them." (Year 5 pupil)



"I have packed lunch cos I don't really like the food they make." (Year 4 pupil)



"Sometimes people don't like what there is for an option." (Year 10 pupil)



Pupils of all ages also said that school lunches are sometimes an insufficient portion size and as a result the meals are not filling. Where portion sizes are not adequate and meal options unappealing, children are at risk of being hungry while at school. This is problematic for all children but particularly those in low-income families where money for food is limited and provision of an adequate, balanced lunch at school is important.



"The portions are horrendous, it's tiny, it's not enough." (Sixth form pupil)

"Sometimes the food is nice, but sometimes the portions aren't enough and sometimes I'm still hungry." (Year 6 pupil)



"Sometimes we don't have enough food. Our stomachs decide if we're going to be hungry." (Year 6 pupil)



"We resort to eating outside of school cos school food is not filling you up." (Sixth form pupil)



As well as the cost of a meal at lunchtime, there are often other food-related costs at school. In many schools we have worked with, milk is often provided as an optional extra, and as such comes at an additional cost for families. While children eligible for free school meals are entitled to milk free of charge under school food guidelines, this entitlement is overlooked in some schools, meaning that milk is either not made available to children from Key Stage One onwards or only available for those who pay.

"There is a milk list – you get it if you pay for it." (Year 1 pupil)



"You get milk in Reception but not now." (Year 4 pupil)



Case study

Lyng Hall School, Coventry

Lyng Hall School has developed a range of food policies to encourage up-take and reduce food-related stigma. Approaches and actions taken include:

- Students eligible for free school meals can use their allowance at any time throughout the school day, and any unspent money is rolled over so that students can use this credit on the following day.
- Free food is provided for families on open evenings and parents evenings. This has the double benefit of providing meals to families and creating an opportunity for the catering team at Lyng Hall to speak to families about school meals and encourage take-up.
- Students are regularly asked for feedback on school lunches through informal conversations with students in the dining hall and twice-yearly surveys. As a result, students at Lyng Hall praised both the quality of food and range of lunch options available.
- Any student who attends a before-school club is offered a free breakfast. This is a great way of encouraging more students to attend before-school extracurricular opportunities such as sports clubs, and also ensures that all students have something to eat before sitting exams if they have attended morning revision sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

As an overarching aim, we are calling on the UK government and Department for Education to recognise the impact that school-related costs have on children's ability to learn, and **prioritise funding schools properly so they can offer a truly free and inclusive education**, where every pupil can fully participate in school activities and money is never an issue.

In the interim, there are number of urgent steps outlined on the next page that must be taken by the UK government to improve schooling for pupils from low-income families.



Removing school costs

1. Provide adequate funding to schools to ensure all curriculum-related costs are removed for pupils. This must include investment that guarantees all children have the resources and tools they need to fully participate in school activities both at home and at school e.g., revision guides and laptops.
2. Ensure statutory guidance and accountability mechanisms for schools are robust enough to guarantee that no child has to pay to take part in subjects and curriculum-related activities.
3. Provide local authorities with additional funding and a statutory responsibility to help families with school costs through targeted initiatives such as school clothing grants and subsidies for trips. Initiatives like this already exist in all other UK nations.

School food

4. Provide universal free school meals to all school-aged children so that all pupils have equitable access to food while at school. As an urgent first step towards this universal provision, restore the previous free school meals eligibility threshold (in place prior to April 2018) which included all families in receipt of universal credit. This should also be extended to all those on equivalent benefits.
5. Provide further statutory guidance to schools on how school debts should be dealt with, to ensure that children do not miss out on essentials such as access to school lunches, and that an adequate level of support is given to families struggling with these costs.

An inclusive school system

6. Undertake a full review of the cost of participating in state-funded education in England and seek to make changes so that education can be free for all pupils to access. We recommend this review is carried out by the Education Select Committee and consultation takes place with a wide range of stakeholders.
7. Provide a statutory framework, strategy and additional ring-fenced funding so schools in England can provide programmes, activities and services that go beyond the core function of classroom education, such as breakfast and after-school clubs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

We know that schools alone cannot solve poverty. Poverty is policy-responsive, and this report is a call to action for policymakers to respond to the words and experiences of children and young people.

However, schools can and do make a huge difference to the lives of individual children. Schools across England have already gone to extraordinary lengths to support children and families facing poverty. Addressing poverty in schools is not easy, but it is vitally important and there are a number of practical, cost-neutral actions that schools can take to lessen the impact of poverty on the school day. Working alongside schools, we have listed a number of useful resources and ideas below that are a starting point for schools who want to take action on the cost of the school day.



Understanding cost barriers in your school

1. Calculate and review all current costs in your school. Look across the academic year at all aspects of school life and understand what it costs for pupils to fully take part in school and what can be done to reduce costs.
2. Monitor participation in all parts of school life to identify children who may be missing out on opportunities. Use available data to understand patterns in children's uptake of opportunities.
3. Provide meaningful opportunities for all pupils and families to give feedback on their experience of school with a focus on school costs. As a starting point, template parent surveys are available here: [Cost of the School Day - Survey for parents and carers](#).
4. Develop affordable and inclusive uniform policies, and ensure that pre-loved provision is available to support all families with this school-related cost. More practical ideas on how to achieve this are available here: [The Right Blazer: School uniform guides](#).

Planning your school year with a poverty-sensitive lens

5. Consider how to spread out costs over the course of a school year so that requests for contributions and payments are not concentrated for families. Our [Cost of the School Day calendar](#) is useful in identifying some key dates during the school year that may have associated costs, as well as including suggestions and best practice examples on how to make events and activities more affordable and inclusive.
6. Plan all teaching, events and activities with affordability, accessibility and the needs of children and young people from low-income households in mind. Wherever possible, remove or minimise charging for school-related activities. There are a number of examples of practical actions that schools have taken to address school costs available here: [Cost of the School Day best practice videos](#).
7. Ensure that if there are school costs or contributions, families are given adequate notice to pay, and are signposted to any available support.

Raising awareness of poverty in your school

8. Ensure that all staff, including non-teaching staff, are fully aware of the nature, causes, extent and impact of poverty on children both nationally, locally and within the school. Our [Turning the Page on Poverty toolkit](#) developed with Children North East and the National Education Union is a useful starting point for awareness raising with all staff.
9. Explore universal approaches to reduce school costs that will support all families and pupils, including those who are ineligible for free school meals or have no recourse to public funds.
10. Where payments from families are unavoidable, establish discreet systems and processes for the collection and handling of money in school which do not embarrass young people or families.

Talking about poverty

11. Explicitly discuss poverty with children to raise awareness and address poverty-related stigma. Engage children and young people in helping to destigmatise poverty in the school. The [Turning the Page on Poverty](#) toolkit includes a section on 'How to talk about poverty'.
12. Normalise talking to pupils and families about money whenever schools costs are discussed, and ensure that there is **regular signposting to places of support**.
13. Explore with pupils ways that allow them to tell staff when they are finding costs difficult, discreetly and without embarrassment.

Approaches to school food

14. Identify and address any existing policies or practices that either prevent pupils taking up their free school meal entitlement or further disadvantage them.
15. Ensure that pupils eligible for free school meals have parity of lunchtime experience with their peers. [The Cost of Missing Lunchtime](#) includes a number of best practice examples for schools to consider.

CONCLUSION

It really doesn't have to be this way. All children in England have the right to a free education, but in reality, additional, often hidden and unacknowledged costs mean that children in low-income families are excluded from taking part in all opportunities that are on offer within our education system. The cost of the school day has an impact on children's learning, achievement and happiness at school, and this isn't right.

Schools alone cannot solve poverty in England. However, there are a number of practical steps that can be taken by schools to respond to the voice of pupils and their experiences to bring about a cost-free and more inclusive school day. As a starting point, schools can take a more detailed consideration and exploration of what school feels and looks like through the eyes of a child growing up in poverty, As the number of families struggling financially continues to increase. It is time to look across the full spectrum of costs associated with the school day and consider how attending school can be a fairer and more equitable experience for all. We can and should redesign the school day with inclusion at the centre and equity of experience as the overarching aim.

The English education system is filled with brilliant schools and offers so many opportunities, which too many children are currently inadvertently and unintentionally excluded from accessing because of family financial circumstances. For policymakers, making sure every child gets a good start in life is the right thing to do, and this includes ensuring that education is an equitable experience for all. It must be acknowledged that too many children are missing out on realising their full potential because costs prevent them from developing their artistic, sporting and academic talents. We must make it a priority to ensure that education is truly free for all pupils, and that money is never an issue.

"Things at school cost money, like food and uniform. People in poverty might not have the money for that" (Year 6 pupil)



About us

About Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group 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. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need. We also carry out high-profile legal work to establish and protect families' rights. cpag.org.uk

About Children North East

Children North East exists because growing up can be hard. We create life-changing differences for babies, children and young people in their families, schools and communities. We offer support at those times when a little help can make a big difference for a child and their future. Ultimately, our purpose is that all North East babies, children and young people grow up to be healthy and happy, regardless of background or family circumstance. Whether it is in their family, at school or in their local community, we are here to support children, young people and their parents in the North East and beyond. children-ne.org.uk

About UK Cost of the School Day

The Cost of the School Day project was started by CPAG in Scotland in 2014 with the aim of reducing the financial barriers that prevent pupils from fully participating in the school day. The Cost of the School Day approach involves working with whole-school communities (pupils, parents, teachers and school staff) to identify and reduce cost barriers faced by pupils from low-income backgrounds. Following the success of this project in Glasgow and Dundee, CPAG has partnered with Children North East and expanded the project to local authorities in England, Wales and new parts of Scotland. This project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Pears Foundation, Orbit Housing Association, Coventry City Council and the Royal Borough of Greenwich who we thank for their ongoing support. cpag.org.uk/CoSD

About Poverty Proofing© the School Day

Poverty Proofing© the School Day is a project developed by Children North East. The project provides a toolkit to poverty proof the school day, to reduce stigma and remove barriers to learning and to assist schools in exploring the most effective way to spend school funding provided for those eligible for free school meals. Poverty Proofing© the School Day consists of an audit for each individual school, questioning pupils, staff, parents and governors. The result is an action plan tailored to each individual school to address any stigmatising policies or practices. There is then the opportunity to be awarded an accreditation following a review visit. We also offer training to staff and governors on poverty and its impact on education. povertyproofing.co.uk

Endnotes

- ¹ [*Ending child poverty by 2020: progress made and lessons learned*](#), Child Poverty Action Group, June 2012
- ² [*Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2019/20*](#), Department for Work and Pensions, 2021
- ³ [*Social Insecurity*](#), Centre for Economic Performance and the Resolution Foundation, January 2022
- ⁴ [*Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2019/20, Table 4.3db*](#), Department for Work and Pensions, 2021
- ⁵ [*Covid-19 and Disadvantage gaps in England 2020*](#), Education Policy Institute, February 2022
- ⁶ Local authority maintained schools follow the national curriculum, set out by government, which stipulates that children should get access to a wide, rich set of opportunities. Although academies do not have to follow the national curriculum, they do have to offer pupils a broad and balanced curriculum.
- ⁷ [*Parent Power 2018*](#), Sutton Trust, September 2018
- ⁸ See note 5
- ⁹ See note 5
- ¹⁰ [*The Cost of Learning in Lockdown*](#), Child Poverty Action Group, June 2020
- ¹¹ [*Children without internet access during lockdown*](#), Children's Commissioner for England, August 2020

- ¹² [*Poverty and children's personal and social relationships*](#), National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016
- ¹³ The [*Uniform Act 2021*](#) has introduced new statutory guidance for schools to limit uniform costs.
- ¹⁴ See note 7
- ¹⁵ The Department for Education's [*Charging for school activities*](#) guidance does state that families are not obliged to make voluntary contributions and should not be pressured into paying.
- ¹⁶ J Cohen and others, [*Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review*](#), *Nutrients*, 13(3), 2021
- ¹⁷ [*Impact of the Universal Free School Meal Policy*](#), University of Essex's Institute for Social and Economic Research, November 2020
- ¹⁸ [*Fixing Lunch*](#), Child Poverty Action Group, June 2021
- ¹⁹ [*The Cost of Missing Lunchtime*](#), Child Poverty Action Group, Children North East and the North East Child Poverty Commission, May 2021

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Appendix

Methodology

The methodology used in this project has built on the pioneering work and insights of both Children North East and the Cost of the School Day in Scotland. In each of the 18 schools, a Poverty Proofing© approach was used by practitioners of the UK Cost of the School Day project. Practitioners immersed themselves in the lives of the schools to understand the experience of the school day through the eyes of a child experiencing poverty.

We used explorative focus groups with pupils who were invited to talk to practitioners about issues across the school day. Within these informal consultations, practitioners encouraged pupils to think about alternative ways of doing things in their school that would alleviate pressure on pupils and their families, and these discussions formed the basis for recommendations shared with the school. Practitioners also attended before- and after-school clubs and break times, and ate school lunch with the pupils.

We also provided families in participating schools with opportunities to give feedback on school costs. We distributed paper and online surveys and arranged follow-up interviews for those who opted to provide more detailed feedback. Practitioners also approached families in the school grounds and invited them to partake in an informal interview.

As part of the process, we asked school staff and governors to share their thoughts and experiences via surveys and through semi-structured interviews. All participating schools were offered follow-up staff and governor training sessions to explore the findings of the consultation carried out in their schools, and to work together to consider next steps that could be introduced to address the issues that were identified.

For each individual school we collated feedback from pupils, families, school staff and governors, and identified themes. Then we produced reports, highlighting areas of good practice and highlighting issues for the school to address. We also included in each report bespoke recommendations for the ways in which the school could take action to address the cost of the school day.

From December 2020, with the disruption of the pandemic to schools, we adapted the methodology and practitioners used online video-conferencing technology for the consultations with a range of school stakeholders including focus groups with pupils in school and at home. Since September 2021, we have used a hybrid approach of working both in schools and virtually to collect data, in keeping with national legislation and local guidance.