



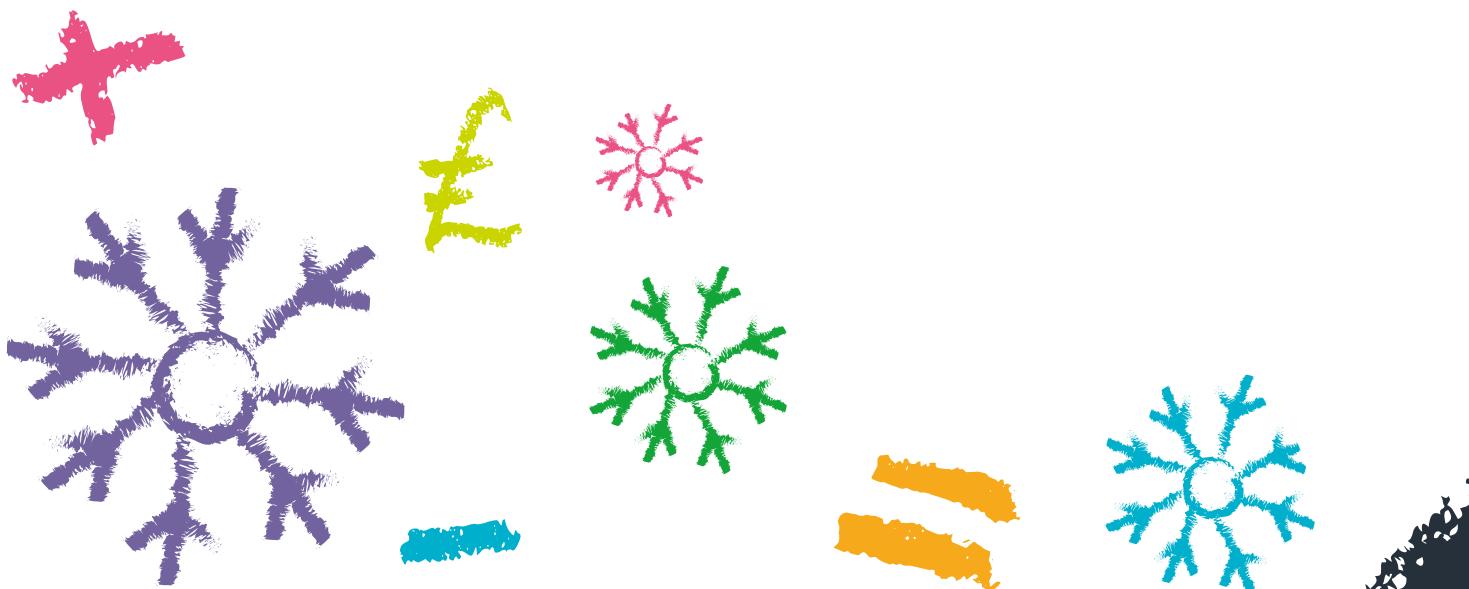
# A festive season for all

Reflecting on the impact of poverty  
and how to build inclusion

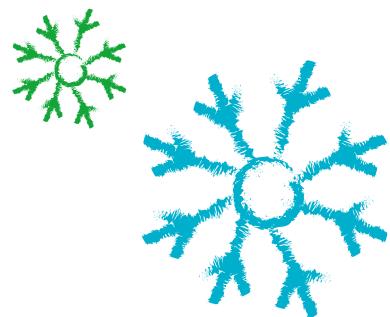


# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Reducing costs and financial pressure</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Clothing and costumes</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Crafting and resources</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Including the school community in activities</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Food</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6. Gift giving</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7. Language, Conversations and Emotional Wellbeing</b>	<b>10</b>



# Introduction



Christmas and the winter period can be a magical time in schools, but it can also be tough for children growing up in families without much money. On average, nine children in a class of 30 are growing up in poverty. During the autumn term, several activities with cost implications can come together at an already expensive time of year. This puts stretched family budgets under additional pressure and can mean that children miss out on opportunities at school.

There's lots that schools can do to make sure that all children can share in the joy that wintertime in school brings. This checklist is a practical reflection tool for educators looking to make sure that inclusion is at the heart of their planning for the festive season.

Schools should think about upcoming activities such as performances, winter fayres, parties and discos, non-uniform days, gift and card exchanges, secret Santa activities, festive lunches and seasonal trips. Staff can reflect on the questions below to look at ways to reduce costs and increase inclusivity.



# 1. Reducing costs and financial pressure

## Consider:

- Are any of your festive activities unintentionally creating costs or pressure for families?
- Are children or families asked to contribute money?
- How much does it cost for children to take part?
- What happens if families are unable to make a contribution or pay?

## Good Practice:

- Where possible, offer free or low-cost participation as standard. Use school or PTA funds to cover costs where possible (e.g. subsidising the fayre or performances). Or seek external support with costs, e.g., local theatres may put on performances at reduced rates.
- In instances where financial contributions are needed from parents, replace paid tickets with a donation or a pay-as-you-feel box. Ensure that families know that donations are optional. Enable donations to be given discretely and privately so attention is not drawn to those who are unable to contribute.
- For activities such as parties, discos and concerts, consider including refreshments with the cost of the ticket so that pupils do not need to bring any additional money into school with them to fully take part.



## 2. Clothing and costumes

### Consider:

- Do any planned activities rely on children wearing themed clothing or costumes: are they culturally inclusive, financially accessible and environmentally friendly?
- Might children feel left out or stigmatised if they don't have something or bring in the "wrong" thing?

### Good Practice:

- Keep expectations simple and ensure children know that not having something won't mean missing out. Encourage upcycling rather than purchasing costumes and outfits.
- Offer creative, inclusive alternatives so that all children can take part, for example, provide plain T-shirts and materials to decorate them instead of requiring Christmas jumpers to be worn.
- Have a stock of spare items available for anyone who needs them on non-uniform days (e.g. staff/ school community can donate pre-loved jumpers to the school).
- Offer school-made costumes or props for the play, which can be planned and made in lessons such as DT.
- Promote the recycling of winter clothing such as coats, hats and gloves to make sure that children have all that they need over the colder months, consider hosting a winter swap shop, where those with spares bring in items.



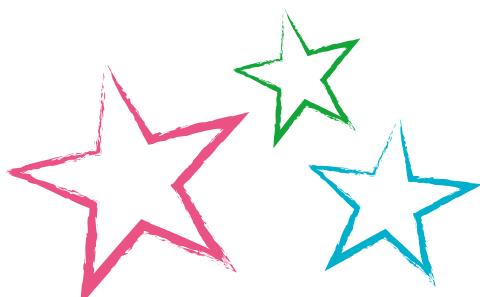
## 3. Crafting and resources

### Consider:

- Do any planned activities rely on children bringing in art and craft resources, or having access to resources and equipment at home?
- Do all children have access to the materials they need for festive creative activities?

### Good Practice:

- Incorporate festive crafting into your DT curriculum so that all children have an opportunity to take part in winter crafts as part of their lesson time.
- Make sure children can access everything they need for making crafts or cards in class. Promote sustainability and recycling/ upcycling: this could be asking for donations of reuseable materials and teaching children how to remodel these as festive items.
- If learning or projects are required to be done at home, provide children with basic equipment such as paper and pencils. This could be discreetly added to individual children's home learning packs, or by providing an arts and crafts station in the school where children and families can take items from if needed. Alternatively, run family craft sessions in school time with parents invited in to make use of school resources.
- Offer examples of a range of greetings, themes or designs for cards that are inclusive of those who do not celebrate Christmas.
- If children craft things to sell at events or are taking part in any festive enterprise activities such as making items to be sold at fayres, ensure there are enough made so that they can all take a finished product home without having to buy one.
- Decorate the classroom together with school-provided/class-made materials.



## 4. Including the school community in activities

### Consider:

- Are all children and families able to take part in festive events confidently and comfortably?
- Do events require out-of-school time, money, or additional resources, like special outfits?
- Do you know which children and families miss out on events and is this something that is monitored?
- How can you support children to take part in events in school if their parents/carers are unable to attend?
- Are events inclusive of the range of cultures and beliefs in the school community?

### Good Practice:

- Make sure that families get lots of notice for scheduled events and activities and via a range of communication methods, rather than solely emails or paper letters given to children. (e.g. on noticeboards, posters on school gates, and other channels the school may use such as parent apps or text systems).
- Don't assume families can attend; record or livestream events where possible and practical so that nobody misses out.
- Use school hours for rehearsals and practices so that all children get an opportunity to take part and don't face barriers such as the cost of transport or caring responsibilities, which may make it more difficult for them to attend activities outside of school time.
- Consult with your school community to identify the best times to host events to improve access for families. This could include scheduling events to coincide with pick-up or drop-off times or holding performances during school hours or straight after-school.
- Acknowledge and recognise that some families face barriers to attending school events or participating in activities, and that all members of the community are appreciated.
- Make sure that pupils don't miss out on activities during school time if their parents are unable to attend. This could include school staff accompanying pupils whose parents/carers can't attend events, such as fayres.
- PTAs often support the organisation of festive events: share this checklist with them to inform their planning.

## 5. Food

### Consider:

- Do events and activities require families to bring in or buy food items?
- Are children expected to bring food or treats for parties, film afternoons or trips to the theatre?
- Are there any dietary requirements which need to be considered e.g. halal, vegan, gluten free, allergies?
- Are discussions about charity, e.g. donations to food banks, sensitive to the fact that some children could be accessing support through charities?

### Good Practice:

- At events, ensure no child misses out on party food because they didn't bring anything. Explore if it's possible for the school kitchen or PTA to provide food for parties or events.
- Provide a hot, festive meal free of charge for every pupil at the end of term.
- Avoid competitions or discussions about food which could accentuate disparities between children's experiences.
- Ensure the range of food provided at festive events and activities meets the dietary needs of the pupils, for example, halal, vegan, gluten free, nut free etc.
- If organising food bank collections or similar, frame conversations about charity around ways in which we support each other and our communities.
- Make sure families know what support is available, such as free school meals. Especially families who may face additional barriers to accessing support, including those who are new to the area or country and/or have English as an additional language.



## 6. Gift giving

### Consider:

- Are expectations around giving and receiving gifts inclusive, consistent and manageable for all families?
- Are families feeling pressured to send in gifts for peers/ staff or participate in gift exchanges?
- Is there a consistent approach to staff providing gifts to children?

### Good Practice:

- Make explicitly clear that gifts for staff are not expected or necessary.
- If families and pupils are keen to take part in card or gift giving, consider alternative ways to organise this. This could include providing a class card for pupils to fill in to give to each staff member instead of individual gifts.
- Explore alternatives to Secret Santa gift exchanges with pupils. Provide opportunities and resources for making cards or crafts in lessons so that all children can take part.



# 7. Language, Conversations and Emotional Wellbeing

## Consider:

- Are festive conversations and classroom activities sensitive to different experiences, including from a range of cultures and beliefs?
- Do discussions prompt comparisons of gifts, meals, or family traditions?
- Are discussions about experiences at home and during the holidays, including holiday meals likely to highlight inequality? How will these be managed?

## Good Practice:

- Encourage activities about school values and experiences that all pupils have had in school rather than reflecting on presents or holidays.
- Consider how you will manage disparities in experiences and sensitive topics. Avoid show-and-tell sessions about gifts or "what I got for Christmas" stories.
- Avoid asking pupils to recount what they did or got during the school holidays. You could ask children how their holidays were, to recount something new they learnt over the holiday, or about people they spent time with.
- Remember that for some children time at home over the holidays can be challenging, and that pupils aren't always looking forward to the winter break.
- Recognise that families are under increased financial pressure, which students are often aware of, and this has an impact on their wellbeing.
- Make sure that families and pupils know about any support that is available with school costs, how to access it and who they should speak to if they are worried about resources or missing out.
- Offer support or a quiet space for children who may find this time of year difficult. Liaise with your pastoral team about what support can be provided and which families may be more likely to benefit from it.
- Find out what support is available in your local community such as from charities, religious organisations and businesses, and signpost families to places of support.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to explore winter festivals across different cultures and traditions, especially those reflected in the school community. This could include empowering individual children, groups of children, staff or families to share, e.g., in assemblies or form class time.

## About the NEU

The National Education Union brings together the voices of 500,000 teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders working in maintained and independent schools and colleges across the UK, to form the largest education union in Europe. [neu.org.uk](http://neu.org.uk)



## About CPAG

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. 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 work in partnership with young people, families, and schools to understand the impact that poverty has on pupils' experiences at school, and what is needed to build a more inclusive and affordable education system. [cpag.org.uk](http://cpag.org.uk).

## Other resources

For a practical guide to tackle the impact of poverty on pupil learning throughout the school day, see *Turning the Page on Poverty*: [neu.org.uk/latest/library/turning-page-poverty](http://neu.org.uk/latest/library/turning-page-poverty)

For more ideas on how to develop inclusive approaches to celebrations take a look at CPAG's *The Cost of Having Fun at School*: [cpag.org.uk/news/cost-having-fun-school](http://cpag.org.uk/news/cost-having-fun-school)



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