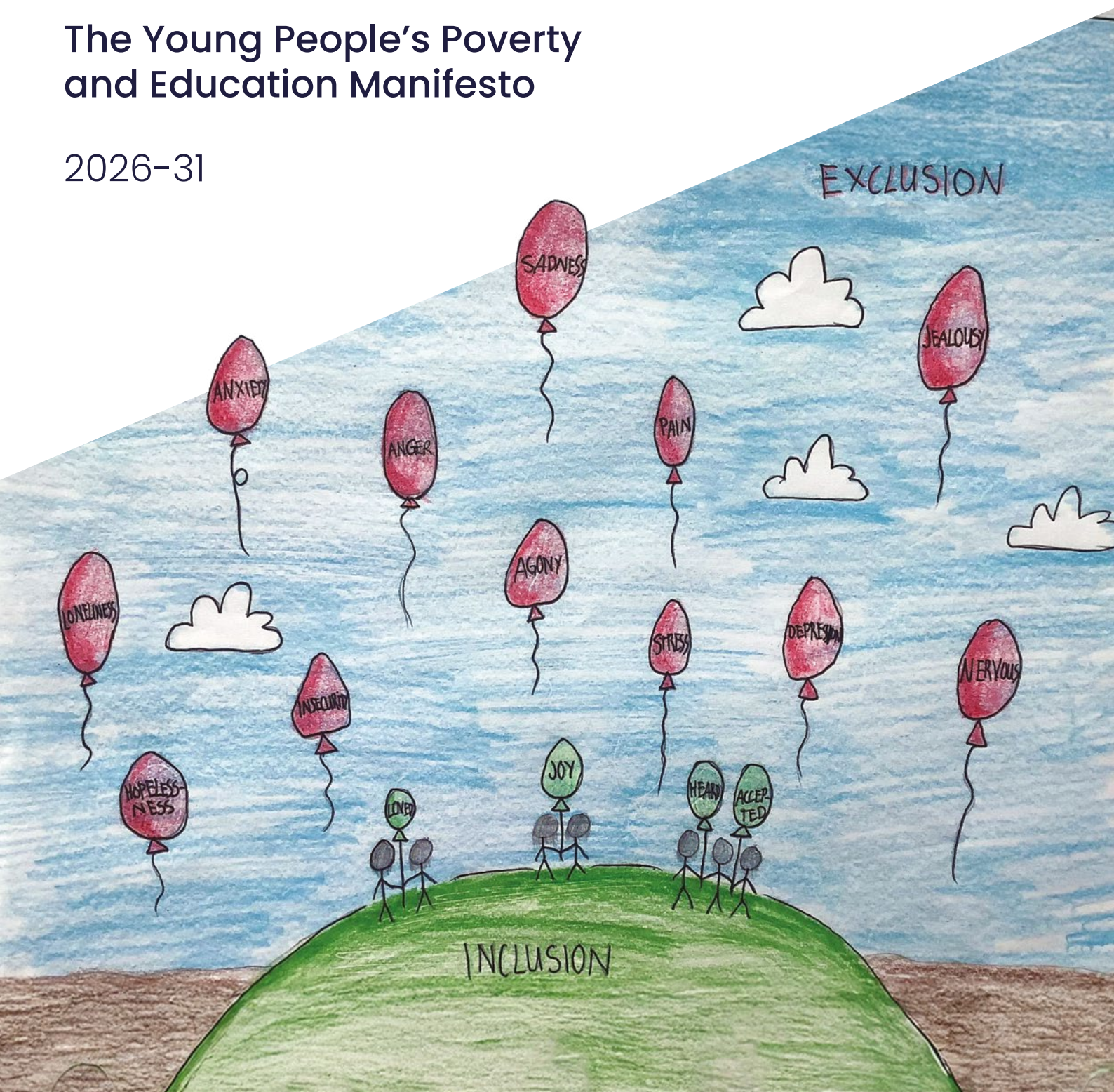


School Shouldn't Cost



The Young People's Poverty
and Education Manifesto

2026-31



“Every child deserves an education; it shouldn’t only be if you can afford it.”

St Joseph’s Primary, Argyll and Bute

“Why do we have families in Scotland that can’t afford to buy the basic things they need for school?”

Craigie High School (now Greenfield Academy), Dundee

“Why is it taking so long to help children and teens struggling with the cost of the school day, when it’s been happening for years?”

Trinity High School, South Lanarkshire

“We need more support for anything that costs.”

Young person attending Cost of the School Day Summit

Dear Party Leaders

We feel strongly that money shouldn’t affect our educational experiences and that school costs are something that no child or their family should worry about.

In this manifesto are things that we and lots of other young people from across Scotland want you to promise to do if you win the next election.

We think these are the things that will help everyone take part, learn and feel included at school, and that will ensure young people get an equal start, no matter how much money is at home.

There are great things happening in lots of our schools to help with costs and support us. But poverty is still affecting our education in so many ways. Poverty can affect how ready we feel to learn, what equipment we have for classes, basics like uniform and food and access to school trips that spark passion for subjects. Poverty can have a detrimental effect on our learning and can hold us back.

The cost of the school day is such an important matter that we think it needs to be fixed everywhere for everyone as soon as possible.

It’s important that you listen to the calls we are making because your decisions affect our lives. This can help us have equal opportunities and equal chances and a better future.

This is your chance to remove cost barriers to education once and for all and improve children’s lives. Show us that you care about our future.

Yours sincerely,

Skye, Struan, Daisy, Mollie, Hollie, Chloe, Liv, Brooke and Evie on behalf of the Cost of the School Day Voice Network



Image © Ava McElwaine
Holyrood Secondary School, Glasgow

How the manifesto was made

The calls in this manifesto and the quotations used throughout are based on engagement with thousands of young people in schools across Scotland.

Thank you to all young people who told us how school can be better for children and families on low incomes, and all the teachers and other school staff who support them to have their voices heard.

The Cost of the School Day project at Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland has been working since 2014 to help schools and local authorities reduce financial barriers to learning. Our Cost of the School Day Voice Network of over 350 schools supports children and young people to take anti-poverty action in their settings and have their voices heard nationally on poverty and education policy.

5000

respondents to the
Cost of the School Day
Big Question

400

young people taking
part in Challenge
Poverty Week
consultations

40

young people taking
part in Tackling Child
Poverty Delivery Plan
focus groups

350

schools in the Cost
of the School Day
Voice network

The manifesto title 'School Shouldn't Cost' comes from a St John Ogilvie High School poster campaign highlighting support available with costs. Thank you to young people from their Cost of the School Day committee for permission to use it!

80

young people attending
the Cost of the School
Day Young People's
Summit 2025

90

group online
manifesto
responses

School Shouldn't Cost:

Our Poverty and Education Calls

This is what we want all parties to commit to in their manifestos for the 2026 Scottish elections, and the next government to take action on:

1 End child poverty. Make sure our families have what they need so we can come to school ready to learn

Increase support for families on low incomes and make sure families know about and access school-related financial help.

2 Fund every school to fully remove cost pressures from our families and help us overcome poverty-related barriers to learning

Keep working to reduce poverty's impact on education, make sure every school can fully and consistently remove school costs and invest in the staff members who support our learning and wellbeing.

3 Help us with the basics we need to learn, take part and feel included at school

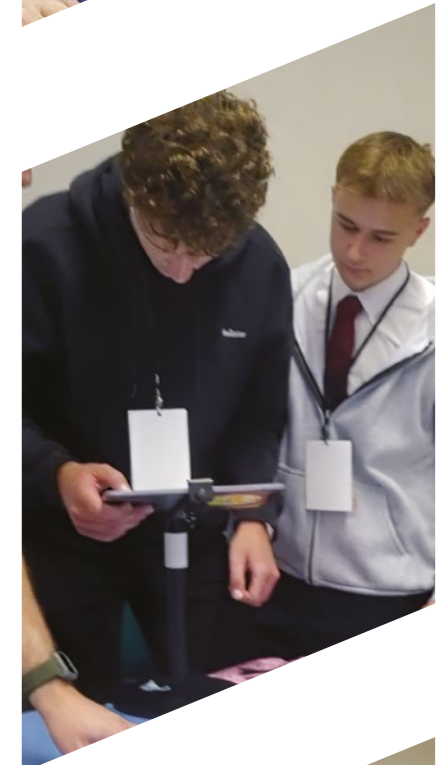
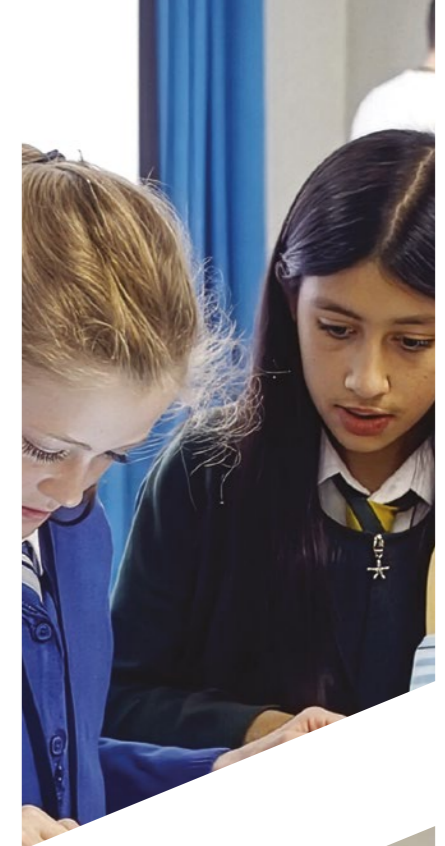
Free School Meals for all Primary and Secondary pupils, keep uniform costs low and extend clothing grants, provide 1:1 devices and connectivity across Scotland and ensure equal access to resources and support for curriculum costs.

4 Opportunities for all. Help all of us benefit from life changing school trips and from activities in our communities

Fund equal access to 'rite of passage' residentials and Secondary trips, tackle trip transport costs, especially for rural and island schools, and guarantee opportunities in and out of school, wherever we live and however much money we have at home.

5 Involve us! We can help make our schools and Scotland better

Be ambitious about youth voice. Build systems to engage with us on all aspects of school life with a clear route for our views to influence poverty and education policy.



1

End child poverty. Make sure our families have what they need so we can come to school ready to learn

Young people need sleep, warm homes and full tummies to feel ready to learn at school. They want to feel clean and prepared with the right uniform and resources. They want to feel free from worry or stress, supported and able to get to school on time. Not having enough money at home can get in the way of all these things.

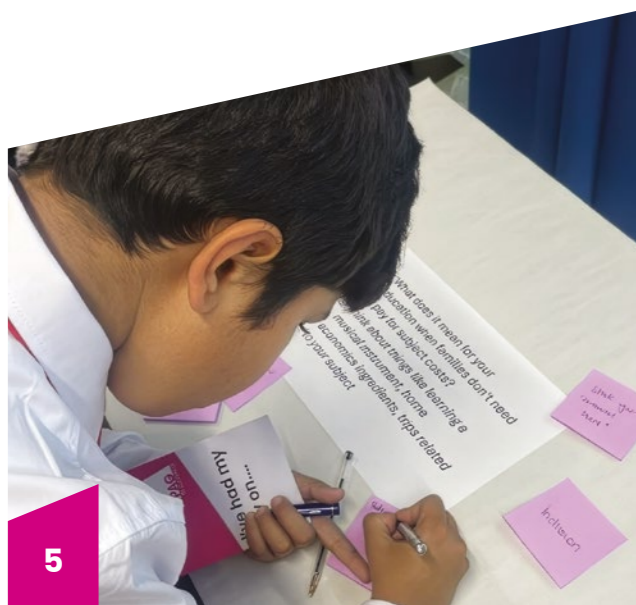
Too many children in Scotland are still living in poverty. If we want to improve educational outcomes, we need to tackle the poverty in the poverty related attainment gap.

"Why do families not have enough money to live on and need to use food banks?"

**Our Lady & St Patrick's High School,
West Dunbartonshire**

"Despite Scotland being a developed country, some children are still living in terrible poverty, why is this?"

Dunlop Primary School, East Ayrshire



5

Increase support for families on low incomes

"We have the right to a nice home and food but we need money to have it."

St Mary's Primary School, West Lothian

Young people want the next government to make sure all families in Scotland can afford the essentials they need to live good lives.

"Lack of money means you can't buy as many things. That can take a toll on a household. The stress gets to you, especially from concerns with bills and all of that and it takes a big blow into someone's pride."

Young person

Young people want more money to go to families that need it. They want more safe, warm homes and well-paying jobs with free childcare so families can go to work without worrying.

"Help people have enough money to live."

Young person

Opportunity

Speak out!

"I think the government should provide money to families who need it so that they know that it's with them and they're safe."

Young person

"If the government gives more money then families can choose what is important to them to meet their own needs."

Polkemmet Primary School, West Lothian

"Increase the Scottish child payment from 27 pounds to more."

Young person



Make sure families know about and access school-related financial support

"I think there should be more knowledge about what people are entitled to and how to receive this help."

Young person

Young people say it's important that they and their families know about financial help available for school costs through free school meals, the school clothing grant, Education Maintenance Allowance and Best Start Grants.

"Some families don't know that school lunches are free and so they need to make it more widespread and let more people know about that and the opportunities that they have."

Young person

"Ensure schools have a welfare rights officer in order to support young people and families to access the support they are entitled to."

Teacher

6

Fund every school to fully remove cost pressures from our families and help us overcome poverty-related barriers to learning

Keep working together to reduce the impact of poverty on education

Scotland's focus on poverty awareness and mitigation at school is making a real difference. Young people say they value the adults in their schools who are kind, enthusiastic, and understanding. The ones who listen when they're upset or have something to say, who know about their individual backgrounds, understand the barriers they face, and make sure everyone can take part in school life with no cost.

"Adults should know about the struggles young people face surrounding poverty."

Young person

Across Scotland, school communities are working to reduce costs, mitigate challenges and support young people.

While children are still living in poverty and while financial barriers to education remain, we can't afford to shift focus and lose ground.

"There is increased awareness today of the impact of poverty on children and young people. We need to build on this, ensuring a shared, consistent understanding of needs and how to address them."

Teacher

"Cost of the School Day local authority liaison officers for every school."

Teacher

Funding to consistently remove cost pressures

In recent years, the Attainment Scotland Fund has helped schools remove a wide range of financial barriers and improve access to opportunities and experiences. Ongoing additional equity funding is crucial in supporting children and young people affected by poverty.

"Keep giving schools PEF [Pupil Equity Fund] money. We use PEF for trips and to fund a Pupil Support Worker to take after school clubs for all children."

St Mary's Primary School, West Lothian

Funding must be sufficient to meet needs in every school community. Many schools currently seek out additional grant funding and rely on fundraising to top up and fully fund equity initiatives and staff roles, leading to inconsistent levels of support.

Young people recognise that support with costs varies between their schools and between local authorities. They want consistent support and resource for the cost of the school day across Scotland.

"I've seen some schools where like every pupil has iPads whereas some schools can't afford pencils and jotters. It should just be like the same quality for everyone. Doesn't matter what school you go to."

Young person

"Standardise what resources are available to all schools in terms of free school meals, breakfast clubs, uniforms/transport and access to educational visits."

Young person

Invest in staff who support us to overcome barriers

From teachers, counsellors, nurture and guidance staff to family link workers, pupil support assistants, ASN specialists, youth workers, and careers advisors — the right support makes a big difference. Young people say it helps them feel more confident, valued, and encouraged. It helps them feel happier and less worried and stressed. This kind of support, often made possible through equity funding, is vital in making school a more positive place for young people.

"You look forward to school and more confident knowing you have help. It makes you want to be there and more willing to learn."

Young person

"We have a youth support worker who encourages opportunities for students that may be at a disadvantage to getting them. It means that there's extra support for things that might not be originally thought about in other people's jobs."

Young person

The next government must ensure sufficient ongoing investment across Scotland in the many important roles which help young people overcome poverty-related barriers to learning and reach their potential.

"More teachers and more staffing would allow us to better support young people and remove barriers more effectively as we would have more time to actually meet with the young people and their families and put systems in place that could help."

Teacher



Help us with the basics we need to learn, take part and feel included at school

Free school meals for all primary and secondary pupils

In the [Cost of the School Day Big Question](#), 97% of young people said that food is very or quite important in feeling ready to learn at school.

Young people say that free school meal expansion isn't going fast enough or far enough.

They want to see urgent progress towards universal provision at all stages to make sure everybody has enough food at school to concentrate, learn, feel well and included.

"Can school meals be free for all children and young people across Scotland – not just up to P5?"

Fintry Primary School, Dundee

"Young people in our school are saying lunch prices are difficult to afford. We are taking part in a pilot where more pupils access free school meals – can this be rolled out to all schools please?"

Trinity High School, South Lanarkshire

Young people say universal provision makes things equal for everyone, means nobody misses out and gets rid of stigma around needing help.

Alongside free school meal expansion, young people say the next government should take action on factors that will help it to succeed, like bigger portions for older children, greater choice and better environments.

"What are you doing to support Breakfast Clubs in secondary schools in Scotland? We are in an area of extreme deprivation, and this is a vital support."

St Matthew's Academy, North Ayrshire

Keep uniform costs down and extend clothing grants

Young people want the next government to make sure all families can afford the school clothing they need.

Flexibility, no exclusive suppliers and no need for blazers and logos are some of the things young people say help make school uniform affordable. These are all included in the Scottish Government's School Uniform and Clothing Guidance, published in 2024 on a non-statutory basis. Making sure uniform policy guidance is being used effectively across Scotland will ensure uniform costs come down and stay down for families.

"Give families money and make uniform cheaper."

Young person

Young people also want the school clothing grant to reach everyone who needs it and for everyone to know about it. At the moment, not every family on a low income is eligible for the school clothing grant.

"Some families are struggling to pay for basic things so they need the most help."

Strath of Appin Primary School, Argyll and Bute

"I think we need more advertised help and support. Very few people know the actual support that's there for them."

Teacher

1:1 devices and connectivity for all

1:1 personal digital devices and connectivity are essential for homework but provision across the country is inconsistent with some young people missing out.

In a manifesto poll, 100 pupils were asked whether all young people they knew could access a digital device and get online to learn. 55% said yes - but over a quarter, 26%, said no with 17% unsure.

Young people want to see provision of 1:1 devices and connectivity across the country.

"We need more devices so that everyone feels included during research activities."

Young person

"Some schools have given out iPads but not everyone at home has Wi-Fi so they can't use it."

Young person

Continued support with curriculum costs

Funding to remove curriculum costs must continue and be adequate to deliver quality learning experiences. Young people say removing these costs has a powerful effect on the choices they make and how they feel at school.

"It helps your family feel less stressed about paying for the stuff and we feel more included."

Young person

"People are able to find their passions and explore subjects without the worry of money."

Young person

In addition, young people say access to learning resources helps everyone start on an equal footing. From toys, waterproofs and PE equipment to calculators and art supplies, young people want the next government to ensure free and consistent access to resources.

97%

of young people said food is important in feeling ready to learn at school.



Opportunities for all. Help all of us benefit from life changing school trips and activities in our communities

Fund equal access to 'rite of passage' residentials and Secondary trips

"Going on a school residential should be open to all. It shouldn't be if the pupil can afford it or the school can afford to subsidise it."

St Joseph's Primary, Argyll and Bute

"Trips make you want to engage with subjects and do well. It's important to get people excited about things. If you miss out because you can't afford it, you could miss out on something you're really passionate about, something that you want to do later on in life."

Auchenharvie Academy, North Ayrshire

Young people want to feel the same as their peers and take part in everything their schools have to offer. Most schools try hard to fund trips for families unable to afford them, but costs still stand in the way of vital learning experiences. This is particularly important for young people who can't experience these things with their families.

48%

of children said they didn't think everyone would be able to attend a big school trip

"Transport costs are continuing to increase and with a small budget, we have to charge parents additional money. If there was a pocket of money to support this, children would not be limited in their experiences."

Teacher

48% of Primary children responding to the Big Question said they didn't think or weren't sure that everyone in their school would be able to attend a big 'rite of passage' trip like the P7 residential.

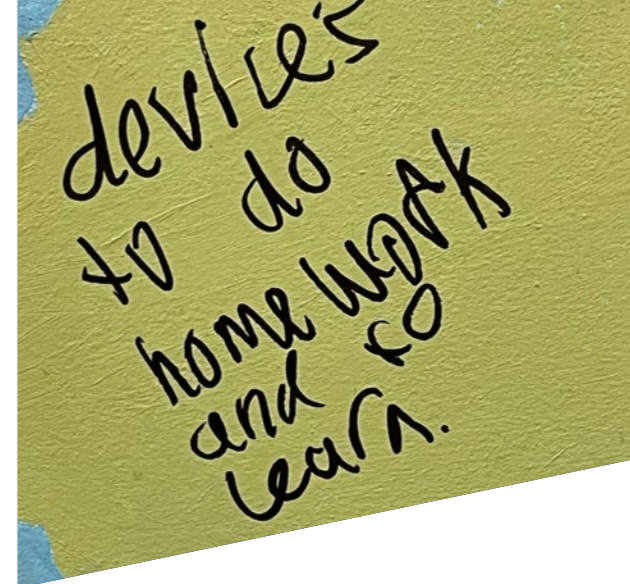
With ideas like specific school trip funding to grants for families and cheaper entry fees, young people want to see investment in school trips for more equal and consistent access for all.

"Provide more funding to allow more educational and fun trips without the school thinking they can't run trips as they're too expensive for families."

Young person

"I think the Scottish government should provide a fund for every school to be able to fund it so no students miss out."

Young person



Action on trip travel costs, especially for rural and island schools

Transport costs stand in the way of school trips for all. Even with free entry to venues, coach costs can make trips unaffordable or discourage schools from organising them at all. If we want to extend the benefits of school trips to all then support for travel costs is needed. This is especially important for rural and island schools who often face even higher costs.

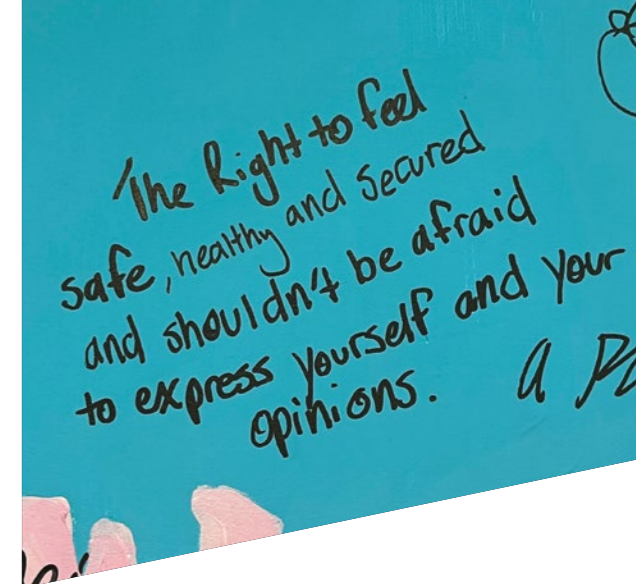
"We would like more support for rural area transport costs so we can have opportunities such as trips to the city to experience opportunities like more central areas."

Dalintober Primary School, Argyll and Bute

Opportunities in and out of school

When young people were asked what should be in their communities they suggested things like cheaper sports activities, more places to play, safe spaces to hang out and access to clubs.

The next government must invest in activities and opportunities both in school and in young people's local communities, limiting the impact that income has on access.



"Our school does Duke of Edinburgh which is £350. The school provides some funding for it, but they can't afford to pay for everybody So somebody is at a bit of a disadvantage if there's not enough money left to be able to pay for them."

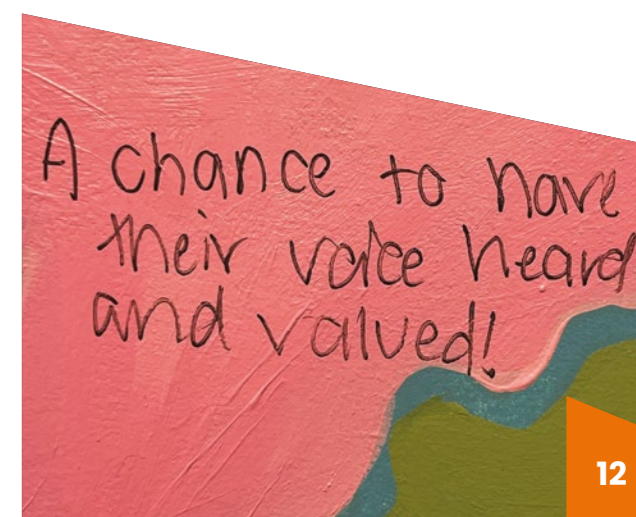
Young person

"I would let children take part in clubs all for free!"

Young person

"Everyone should get to witness a sport like football, our local football club gave us 5 season tickets but I think everyone should get the chance to see things like this."

Young person



Involve us! We can help make our schools and Scotland better

Be ambitious about youth voice. Engage with us and ensure that our views have genuine influence on poverty and education policy

"It's important to ask us because we have our opinions on what we want in school and what we need."

St Peter's Primary School, South Lanarkshire

The calls in this manifesto are the ones most often made by young people, but they have lots of other ideas about how their schools and communities can be better and fairer for all. The outstanding participation and activism seen in the Cost of the School Day Voice network shows us what is possible when young people are given a platform to share their views and influence policy.

Young people across Scotland have views on how our country can be better and are willing to share them

The next government needs to be ambitious about youth voice, building systems to hear from a diverse range of young people throughout Scotland on an ongoing basis about all aspects of school life. There needs to be a clear pipeline from schools to government that means young people's views are genuinely influencing the policies that affect their daily lives.

"We are the ones going and experiencing it. Many people say school is the best days of your life but it's actually really difficult... It's important you hear from us so teachers and the government can improve on things that are affecting people. We might have new ideas you didn't think about."

West Calder High School, West Lothian

equity

FAIR

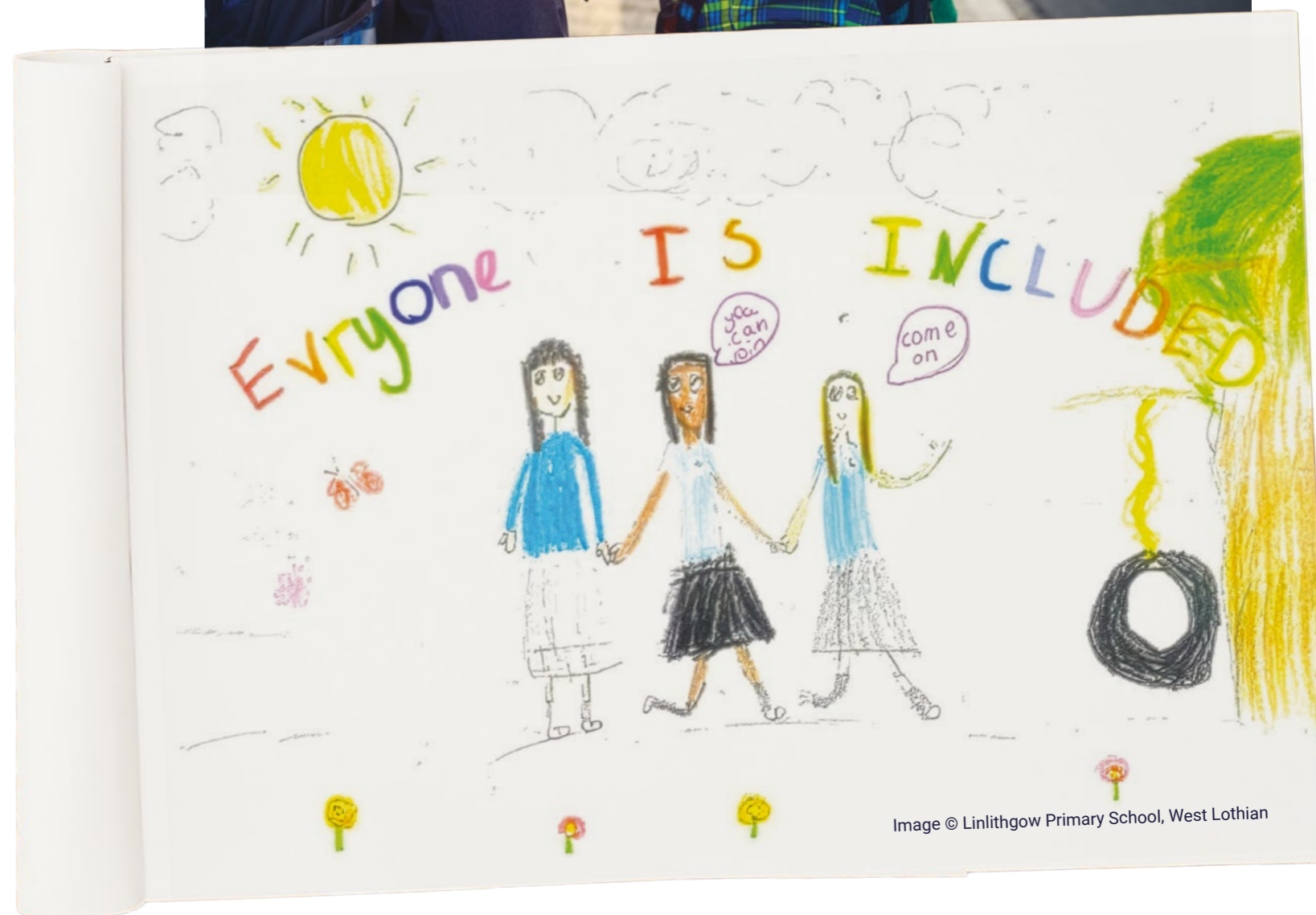


Image © Linlithgow Primary School, West Lothian

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**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**
in Scotland

Thank you to young people and staff from...

Addiewell Primary, West Lothian
Airdrie Academy, North Lanarkshire
All Saints RC Secondary, Glasgow
Allans Primary, Stirling
Alva Primary, Clackmannanshire
Ardler Primary, Dundee
Ardross Primary, Highland
Ardrossan Academy, North Ayrshire
Ashley Road School, Aberdeen
Auchenharvie Academy, North Ayrshire
Auchmuty High School, Fife
Baljaffray Primary, East Dunbartonshire
Balwearie High School, Fife
Bannockburn High School, Stirling
Bannockburn Primary, Stirling
Beith Primary, North Ayrshire
Bellahouston Academy, Glasgow
Bellsbank Primary, East Ayrshire
Bertha Park High School,
Perth and Kinross
Blackburn Primary, West Lothian
Boclair Academy, East Dunbartonshire
Boghall Primary, West Lothian
Braes High School, Falkirk
Bridgend Primary, Highland
Broxburn Primary, West Lothian
Buckie Community High School, Moray
Cairns Primary, South Lanarkshire
Calderwood Primary, West Lothian
Caledonia Primary, North Ayrshire
Carluke High School, South Lanarkshire
Carstairs Junction Primary,
South Lanarkshire
Chirnsyde Primary, Glasgow City
Clobber Primary, East Dunbartonshire
Clydebank High School,
West Dunbartonshire
Craigie High School, Dundee
Crawforddyke Primary,
South Lanarkshire
Crookston Castle Primary, Glasgow
Cross Arthurlie Primary,
East Renfrewshire
Crosshouse Primary, South Lanarkshire
Culter Primary, Aberdeen
Dalintober Primary, Argyll and Bute
Dalkeith High School, Midlothian
Dalmellington Primary, East Ayrshire
David Livingstone Memorial
Primary, South Lanarkshire
Deans Primary, West Lothian

Dedridge Primary, West Lothian
Dens Road Primary, Dundee
Dunlop Primary, East Ayrshire
East Calder Primary, West Lothian
Falkirk High School, Falkirk
Falla Hill Primary, West Lothian
Fintry Primary, Dundee
Fintry Primary, Stirling
Glasgow Gàidhlig School
Glenrothes High School, Fife
Haddington Primary, East Lothian
Halyrude Primary, Scottish Borders
Harestanes Primary, East Dunbartonshire
Harlaw Academy, Aberdeen
Holy Family Primary, West Lothian
Holyrood RC Secondary, Glasgow
Innellan Primary, Argyll and Bute
Irvine Royal Academy, North Ayrshire
James Gillespie's High School, Edinburgh
Kilmarnock Academy, East Ayrshire
Kilmaurs Primary, East Ayrshire
Kilwinning Academy, North Ayrshire
Kirkton Primary, South Lanarkshire
Kirktonholme Primary, South Lanarkshire
Knox Academy, East Lothian
Lasswade High School, Midlothian
Leith Academy, Edinburgh
Lesmahagow High School,
South Lanarkshire
Levenmouth Academy, Fife
Libberton Primary, South Lanarkshire
Linlithgow Primary, West Lothian
Lochcarron Primary, Highland
Logan Primary, East Ayrshire
Longridge Primary, West Lothian
Loudon Academy, East Ayrshire
Mauchline Primary, East Ayrshire
Meldrum Primary, West Lothian
Merkinch Primary, Highland
Moorfoot Primary, Inverclyde
Musselburgh Burgh
Primary, East Lothian
Newmore Primary, Highland
Newton Farm Primary, South Lanarkshire
Newton Primary, South Ayrshire
Our Lady & Saint Patrick's High
School, West Dunbartonshire
Our Lady & St Anne's Primary,
South Lanarkshire
Our Lady's RC Primary, Dundee
Parkhead Primary, West Lothian

Patna Primary, East Ayrshire
Peel Primary, West Lothian
Pittencrieff Primary, Fife
Polkemmet Primary, West Lothian
Pumpherstoun and Uphall Station
Community Primary, West Lothian
Ross High School, East Lothian
Rowantree Primary, Dundee
Saint Mark's Primary, South Lanarkshire
Sidlaw View Primary, Dundee
Simpson Primary, West Lothian
South Lodge Primary, Highland
Southdale Primary, West Lothian
Springfield Primary, West Lothian
St Cadoc's Primary, South Lanarkshire
St John Ogilvie High School,
South Lanarkshire
St John's RC High School, Dundee
St Joseph's Primary, Argyll and Bute
St Margaret's Academy, West Lothian
St Martha's Primary, Glasgow
St Mary's Primary, West Lothian
St Mary's RC Primary, Stirling
St Matthew's Academy, North Ayrshire
St Nicholas RC Primary, West Lothian
St Ninian's Primary, West Lothian
St Paul's High School, Dundee
St Peter the Apostle High School,
West Dunbartonshire
St Peters Primary, South Lanarkshire
St Thomas Primary, West Lothian
St. Andrew's Primary, Midlothian
Strath of Appin Primary, Argyll and Bute
Tarradale Primary, Highland
The James Young High
School, West Lothian
Toronto Primary, West Lothian
Toward Primary, Argyll and Bute
Townhill Primary, South Lanarkshire
Trinity High School, South Lanarkshire
Tynecastle High School, Edinburgh
Wallyford Primary, East Lothian
West Calder High School, West Lothian
Whitburn Academy, West Lothian
Whitehirst Park Primary, North Ayrshire
Woodburn Primary, Midlothian
Woodmuir Primary, West Lothian