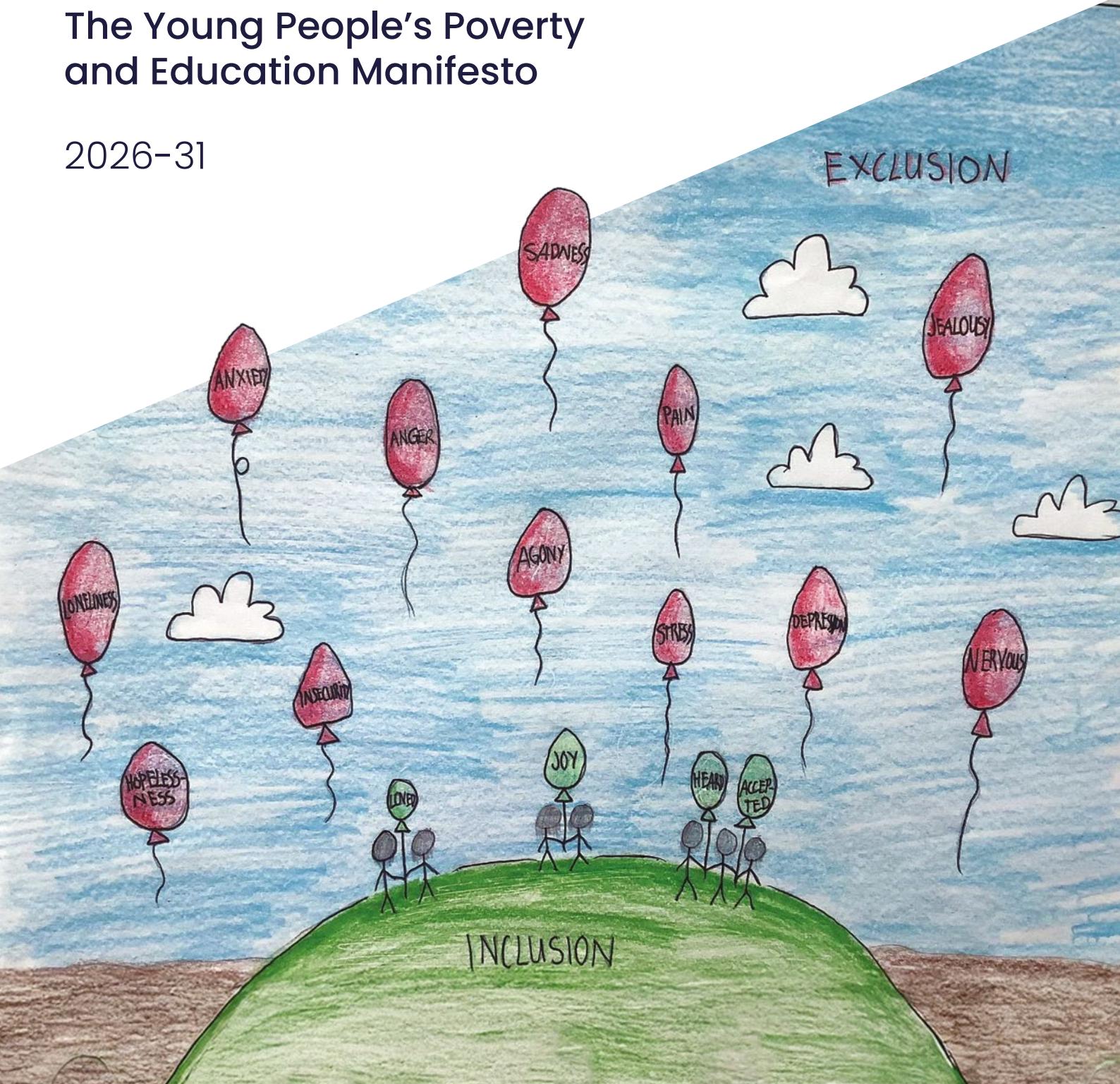


# School Shouldn't Cost

CHILD  
POVERTY  
ACTION  
GROUP  
in Scotland

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

**350**

schools in the Cost  
of the School Day  
Voice network

**80**

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

**90**

group online  
manifesto  
responses

**40**

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

## 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' residential 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.



# 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.

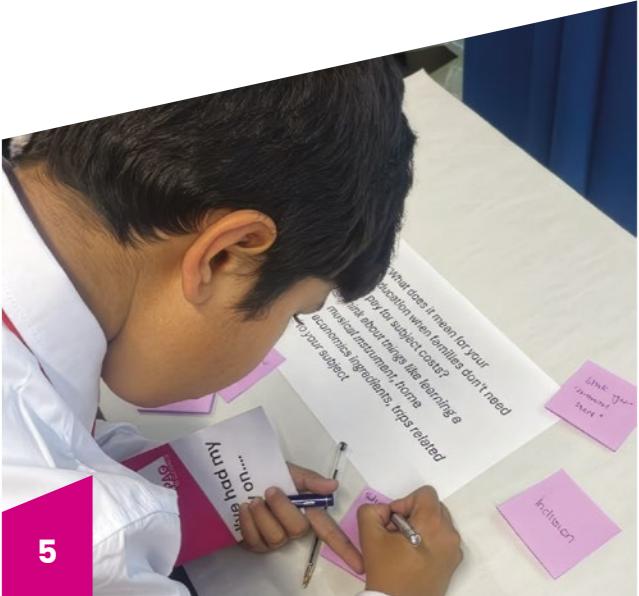
Too many children in Scotland are still living in poverty. If we want to improve educational outcomes, we need to tackle the poverty in the poverty related attainment gap.

***“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**



## 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

***“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.”***

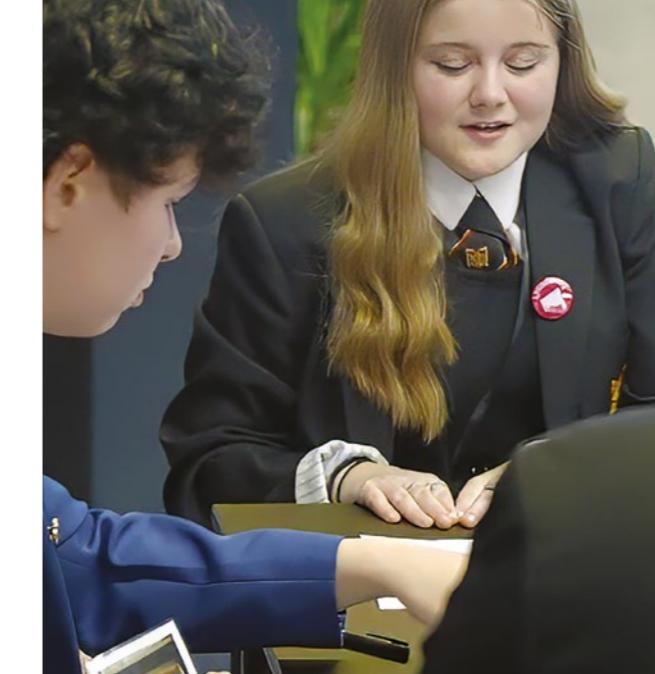
**Young person**

***“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**



Speak out!

## 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**

## 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



Image © Dunlop Primary School

## 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?"**

**Finty 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.



### 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' residential 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.

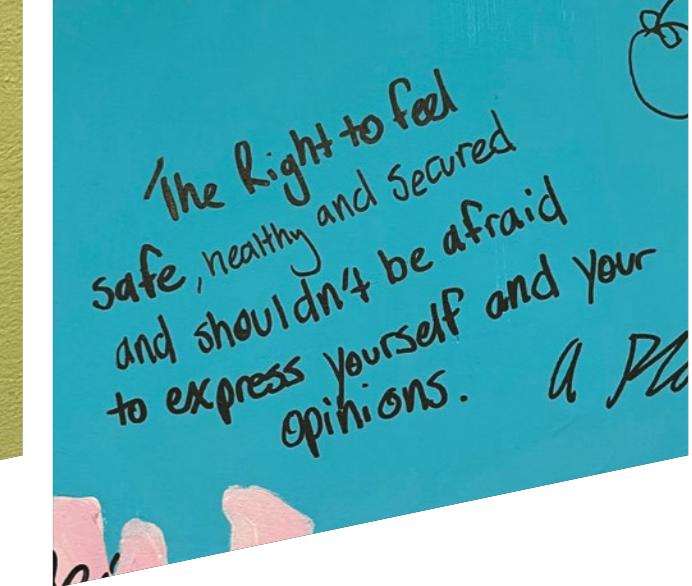
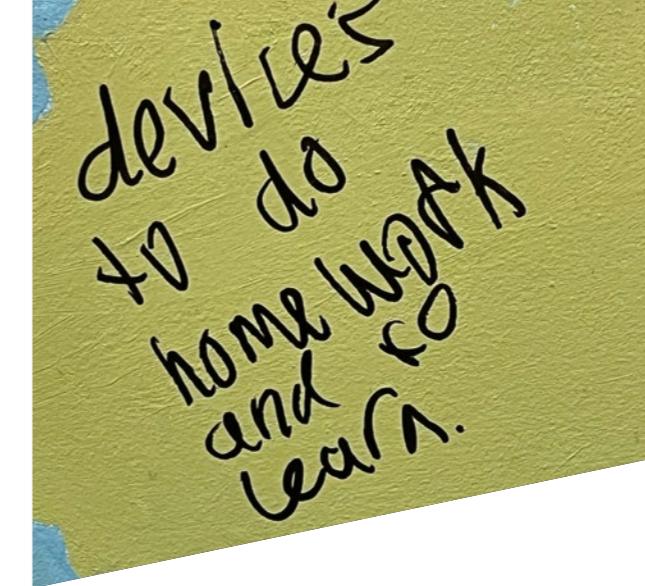
With ideas like specific school trip funding to grants for families and cheaper entry fees, young people want to see investment in school trips for more equal and consistent access for all.

*"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.

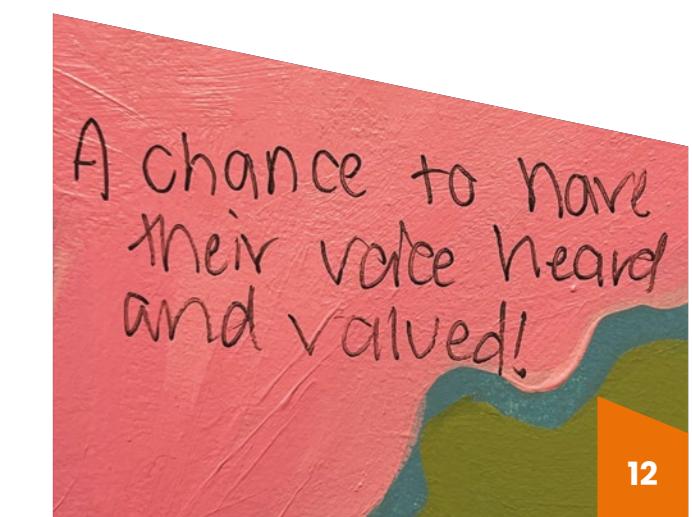
*"We would like more support for rural area transport costs so we can have opportunities such as trips to the city to experience opportunities like more central areas."*

**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.



# 5

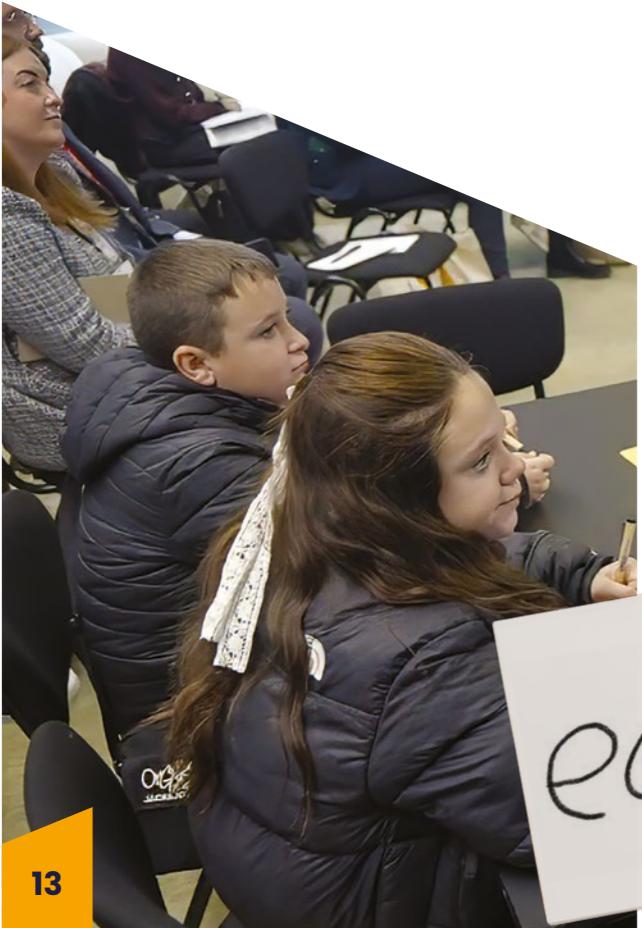
## Involve us! We can help make our schools and Scotland better

**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.



***"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**

**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.

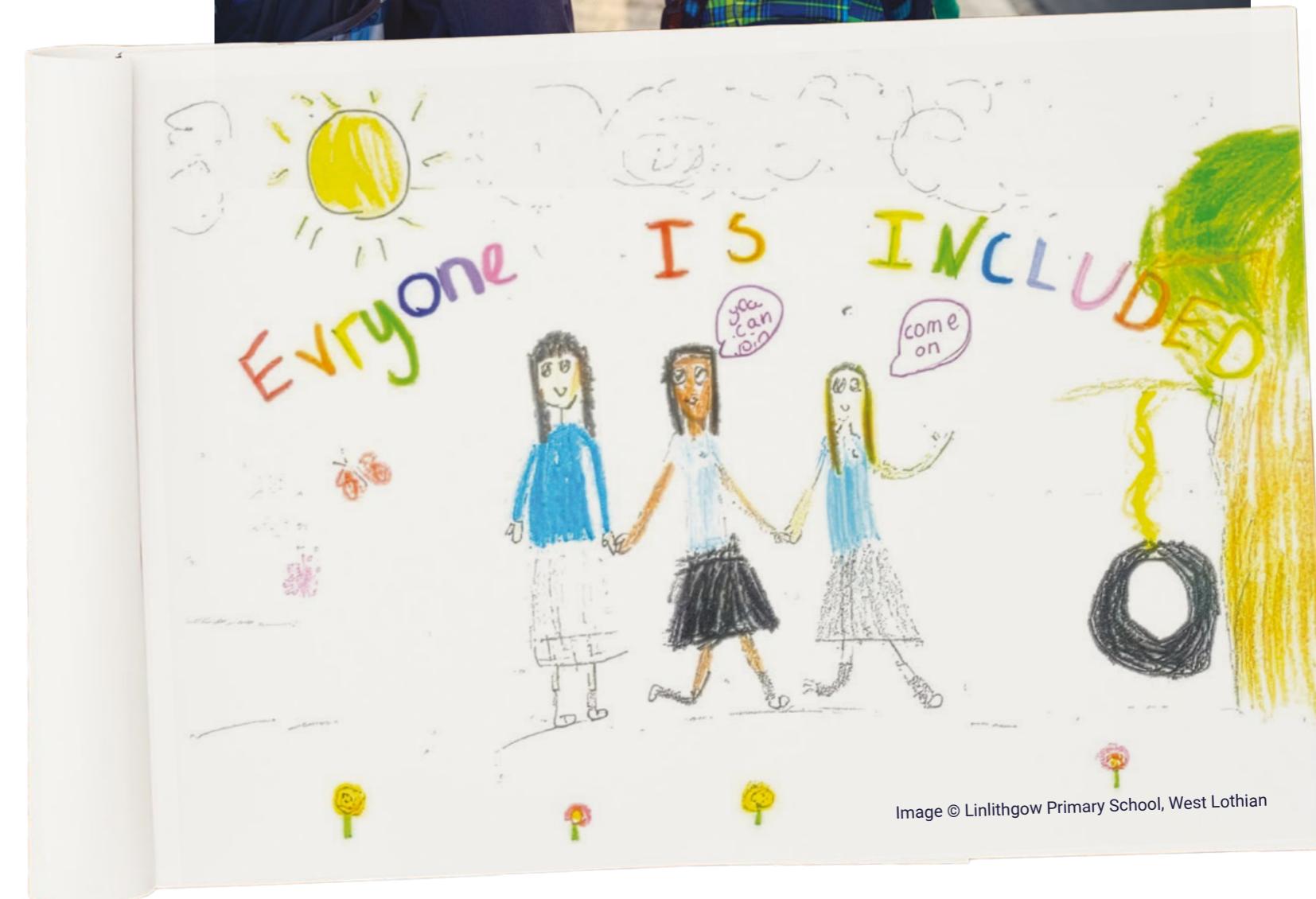


Image © Linlithgow Primary School, West Lothian

**Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland**

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[www.cpag.org.uk](http://www.cpag.org.uk)

# 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  
Clober 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  
Pittencraeff Primary, Fife  
Polkemmet Primary, West Lothian  
Pumpherston 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