

Secondary Voice Meeting

This session focused on:

- Child poverty facts
- Young people's own experiences
- What secondary schools are already doing to help
- The School Shouldn't Cost Manifesto
- Opportunities to speak directly to politicians

Understanding Child Poverty

Students shared stats they had researched:

- **"240,000 children — 23% — are living in poverty in Scotland."**
- *"Being in work isn't always enough to protect families."*

They discussed emotional impacts of poverty:

- *"Social isolation."*
- *"Not feeling like everyone else."*
- *"Worried about being bullied."*
- *"It affects your mental health."*
- *"You feel lonely if you can't go out with your friends."*

Kirsty emphasised that poverty exists in every local authority.

What Are the Biggest School Costs?

Young people listed the barriers most affecting them:

- **Uniform** ("really expensive", "designer PE kit makes people self-conscious").
- **Food and school cafés** ("pressure on parents", "kids go every lunch but some can't afford it").
- **Trips** ("sad watching friends go", "can cause friendship groups to split").
- **Transport** ("Young Scot cards help but not everyone has good routes").
- **Stationery, bags, water bottles.**

They discussed how rising prices "just keep going up."

What Schools Are Doing Right Now

Students proudly described amazing supports already in place:

Food Support

- **Magic Breakfast Bars** with free *bagels, toast, cereal*.
- **Free toast and fruit** at break and lunch.
- **Fair Share deliveries** of weekly groceries for families.
- **Christmas hampers** with food, toiletries, and even gifts.

Essential Items

- **Uniform cupboards** ("anyone can take what they need").
- **Jacket drives** ("stops people getting wet or cold").
- **Stationery trolleys in every department:** pencils, rulers, rubbers, snacks.
- **Sanitary products everywhere.**

Big Community Projects

- **Royal Resources:** a no-cost shop with toiletries, winter clothes, uniform — "all done discreetly with QR codes."
- **Mission Christmas:** £5,000 worth of gifts delivered to families.
- **Prom dress and S6 cost-reduction work,** including second-hand dresses and planning for expenses as early as S5.

Many emphasised the importance of **reducing stigma**:

- *"Everything is open to absolutely anyone."*
- *"People feel embarrassed asking — we want it to be anonymous."*
- One school is even planning **an app** so pupils can request items privately.

Icebreaker – What Shape Are You?

Pupils chose between a circle, triangle, square, squiggle or rectangle.
Descriptions included:

- **Circles** – "social butterflies, kind, include everyone."
- **Triangles** – "born leaders... ambitious and confident."
- **Squares** – "good in a crisis, like structure."
- **Squiggles** – "creative, colourful, don't think in straight lines."
- **Rectangles** – "curious, brave, ask questions."

One pupil said they wanted to be a **mix of squiggle and circle**.

School Shouldn't Cost Manifesto

Two young leaders, Lois and Ozal, explained the 5 key calls and the activities available on the website for pupils to further share the calls:

1. **End child poverty**
2. **Financial support for families**
3. **Basics to learn** (pencils, uniform, iPads)
4. **Importance of trips**
5. **Young people involved in decisions**

They also shared that they're making a **TikTok account** to spread COSD messages.

Opportunities for Young People

Students were excited about:

- **Young People's Poverty Hustings** in Glasgow (23 April).
- **Speaking in Parliament** about the manifesto.
- **Designing a workshop** for a national Children in Scotland conference.
- Writing letters, making posters, doing assemblies.

Many schools volunteered on the spot.

One powerful moment: Two S6 pupils said they want to **keep helping even after they leave school**, because of their own experiences and because they have younger siblings.

Closing

Kirsty ended by reminding participants that MSPs *want* to hear their honest views.