

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY



Practice Case Study

Young people leading anti-poverty work in schools

This case study describes the valuable work undertaken by the Pupil Anti-Poverty Working Group at Queen Anne High School (QAHS) in Dunfermline, Fife, and suggests how this could be replicated in other schools.

Key messages

- Pupil led anti-poverty work can help pupils access support available to them in a non-stigmatising way
- Involving a diverse range of pupils in anti-poverty groups helps build relationships and understanding about the realities of poverty amongst group members
- Staff awareness of the impact of poverty on children and young people is enhanced by hearing about it directly from them
- Participation leads to a range of positive outcomes for pupils such as increased employability, accreditation, life skills and greater social awareness
- Pupil anti-poverty groups support learning and action on poverty and social justice within a school, local, national and international context.

"I joined first to get volunteering experience for my CV. But once you get involved you see how poverty affects your community and your friends. Helping to make them feel more safer and secure at school, it makes you feel so much better about yourself when you're involved in something like that."

Craig White, S6

"The impact and sustainability of the work achieved by this group clearly evidences that young people can successfully lead whole school improvement when they are both empowered and supported. They have improved outcomes for young people in the Queen Anne High School community but also have a much better awareness of the impact of poverty locally, nationally and also globally. I have been impressed by their passion and commitment to make a difference."

Ruth McFarlane. Rector, QAHS

Establishing and developing the pupil anti-poverty group

The group began in 2015 following discussions in Modern Studies about Cost of the School Day and financial barriers to participation and learning at school. Senior pupils were asked if they would like to get involved in a group to look at these issues.

Teachers were keen that the group was pupil led and inclusive of any pupil who wanted to take part rather than just those directly affected by poverty. This helped to increase group numbers - at one point, 50 young people were involved.

“We didn’t go and pick the pupils from SIMD 1 to 3 and target them and say what are the issues? It was any people, any background, would you be interested. It’s never been a labelling or a targeting, it’s just been driven as an issue amongst the kids.” **Laura Martin, Depute Head, QAHS**

Building relationships, having fun and doing things together as a group has been key in getting pupils involved. Recently, S3 and S4 pupils have joined the group

“It’s about teachers having a good relationship with pupils so they think, yeah, I could come along and work with you. One of the main things we do is about forming relationships in the group. It feels like one big cohesive group and they’re all in it for the same thing. That’s why we’ve been successful in getting people involved. We opened it up to 3rd years. We said we’ve been doing it with the seniors so do you want to join in?”

Correen Dickson, Teacher, QAHS

Finding out the issues at Queen Anne High School

The group designed a survey to find out what issues were important to pupils. Asking questions about how low income affected pupils at school helped raise awareness around the school of the issues and of the anti-poverty working group.

“It was really powerful because you had more pupils wanting to get involved. People really started to feel that they were being listened to and that what they had to say was of benefit.” **Laura Martin, Depute Head**

Two key issues which emerged from the survey were **affordable uniform** and **staff attitudes and perceptions**. The group started planning some solutions.

Key activities for the anti-poverty working group

1. Uniform Swap Shop

“The Swap Shop was so that people can always have uniform and clothes that fit. You swap in your old uniform or clothes that don’t fit and you get ones that do.”

Ben Lawrence, S4

The group decided to start a uniform swap shop. They researched what their swap shop should look like and used Pupil Equity Funding to buy a washing machine and refit an old medical room with professional shop fittings to make it look like a high street store. They thought that making it look familiar and up to date would reduce potential stigma and encourage use.

Stock comes from swapped items, unclaimed lost property and donations of clothing which pupils have grown out of. The shop has more than just basic uniform, containing branded outdoor jackets, hoodies, PE kit, trainers, schoolbags, watches, jewellery, tights and stationery.

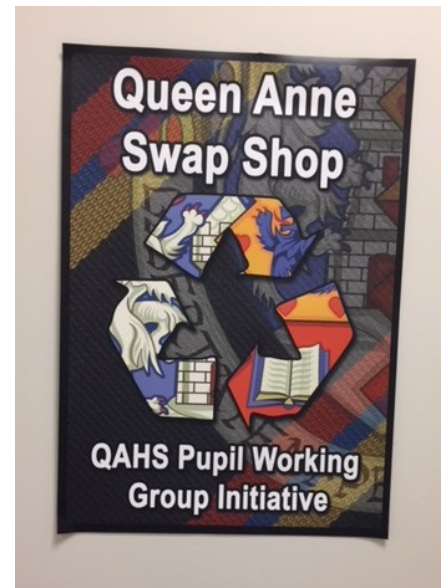
Group members run the shop, organising themselves into teams and nominating leaders. They take in donations and swaps, wash and iron clothes and are responsible for merchandising, serving and controlling the stock.

“They’re handed the keys and they know what needs to be done and the expectation is there that if it doesn’t get done then you’re going to be letting down not just yourself but the people who need it. And they really did go on a journey from being quite unsure to having free reign and just running it as a team.”

Laura Martin, Depute Head

“Yeah, we’ve just been using our own initiative and we’ve just got it done.”

Craig, S6



Who is it for and how is it accessed?

The Swap Shop is open to anyone who needs it: pupils struggling to afford new uniform, pupils who want a bargain, pupils soaked in bad weather, social work emergencies and any other circumstance. The group didn’t want to charge for items but were concerned that giving everything away for free would put some people off. The swapping system allows people to give something back if they want and are able to.

Guidance staff can help pupils get what they need and pupils can also approach their guidance teachers or any other member of staff and ask to have a look. Parents can use the shop and there was a lot of interest when the shop was recently promoted at a P7 parent information meeting.

The swap shop is in a corridor where support staff are based and where partner agencies work from. Next to it is a bathroom where pupils can have a shower, use toiletries and freshen up.

Non stigmatising approaches

The swap shop is marketed as a resource for anyone in the school. On posters and on the shop sign, the group removed 'anti-poverty' from their title in case this put anyone off.

Staff see it as a measure of the shop's success that they now regularly have pupils approaching them in the corridors and asking to look at the shop or letting them know that they've grown out of their clothes and need new ones.

"There's a sheet that people sign to show which items they've taken. We don't have to be there. They can do it in their own time with somebody they feel comfortable with." **Craig, S6**

"I recently took a boy in to kit himself out and I'd thought he might be a bit sheepish about it but he came out quite brazen, saying to his friends 'Miss Dickson got me this! It's alright, eh! Do you know there's a shop in there?' Every single day since then he's come in in full school uniform." **Coreen Dickson, Teacher**



*Above: group members Molly, Ben and Craig
Left: outdoor jackets in the swap shop*

2. Pupils delivering staff poverty awareness training

The group wanted to highlight to staff the financial barriers faced by pupils and the practices which help and don't help them at school. Part of this was about helping staff understand what the realities of poverty are for young people.

"Teachers are predominantly a middle class group and they don't necessarily know a lot of behaviours are masking challenges in the home and how that really is a barrier to learning. It was trying to open their eyes to how that might present in class - or how it doesn't present in class and how it's hidden by some kids. How things like hunger can affect kids' learning, their motivation, their attendance and trying to get them to look at the broader picture."

Laura Martin, Depute Head

The group designed an Inset training session based on real pupil experiences. They highlighted scenarios where not having the right clothes or equipment had been treated as a behaviour rather than a financial issue. They told staff that refusing to take hoodies off might be because their shirts are dirty and they don't have spares. Not having the right equipment might be because it's difficult to afford. The group asked staff to think about what might be behind perceived acts of defiance.

Again, using real experiences of difficulties faced by pupils on low incomes, the group prompted staff to think about how they could respond and support pupils affected by poverty.

"They said what would you do, what would you recognise, what would the red flags be, what would you do to support this young person to achieve? I think it moved them [staff] because they genuinely were shocked that these cases was in this school."

Laura Martin, Depute Head

"I think with us being young adults, it gets it across more. Because it's us that are leading it, teachers and higher up people say, oh, they're taking the initiative and trying to help. The spotlight is on us and people listen to us."

Craig, S6

3. Local and international action

The group doesn't focus only on the impact of poverty in school but has looked outwards to their local community and to other countries. The wide variety of activities has broadened the appeal of the group.

Activities have included foodbank drives in the school and running community markets at Christmas time to raise money for the anti-poverty group work. The group is involved in period poverty campaigns and are part of a toilet twinning project with a school in Africa. Although the group has lots of fundraising ideas, members are always conscious not to ask for money from pupils as they know that some families will find this difficult.

"There's girls in countries who can't go to school because on the way when they go to the toilet they get raped so we were trying to get funding to build a toilet block so that wasn't happening. So we did a coffee morning for teachers and got people into the school to raise awareness and raise money for the toilet blocks." **Ben, S4**

"We made loads of different things to sell at the community market to raise money like reindeer soup and hot chocolate and reindeer food. And we did a foodbank stall and a photo booth." **Molly Reid, S4**

Key benefits for group members and the school

1. Skills development, accreditation and employability

From retail experience, marketing and training delivery to survey design, events planning and greater social awareness, group members have developed skills useful for the workplace. Staff have ensured that their volunteering is accredited through the Saltire Awards.

Working in the Swap Shop means that pupils have valuable experience when applying for retail jobs and that staff can write references for them. One member of the group got a summer job working in a charity shop using the experience he gained from being part of the group.



2. Pupil led approaches can help to tackle poverty stigma

Being involved in the group has helped to develop increased poverty understanding and empathy amongst members. It has then given them the tools and the permission to take action, raise awareness and tackle stigma more widely in the school.

"Some of them actually didn't have a clue about the realities people were facing, they were quite ignorant of it. To open up their eyes and let them see that some pupils in the school had huge barriers to learning and to being able to participate, it was really eye opening for some of our pupils and I think that's led to some empathy and understanding there."

Correen Dickson, Teacher

"We as a group, we show that it doesn't matter where you come from or what you have, it's not about that when you're at school, it's about learning together, being together, having fun together. We try to tell people that it doesn't matter if I have nothing and he's rich... You can get an understanding of what people have been through "

Craig, S6

"The group it builds bonds between different groups, financially speaking. And in the school it's all about raising awareness of the effect of what's happening to people that can't afford things, they might want to but they can't." **Ben, S4**

3. Pupil participation drives change in the school

The anti poverty working group has been able to have real impact in QAHS. Positive relationships, a common purpose and the experience of having their voices heard and being involved in decision making means that the group are a valuable resource in the school. Recent opportunities for the group have included reviewing the school anti-bullying policy and giving evidence to the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee inquiry into poverty and attainment.

"You can see when you come forward with an idea it's listened to and it changes. Rather than them just saying they'll do something and it never changes." **Ben, S4**

Top tips for starting a pupil anti-poverty group in your school

- Ensure senior support and strong leadership so that young people know that they are joining a group which will be listened to and will make a difference
- Carry out inclusive recruitment of young people from any and all financial backgrounds. Creating a safe, inclusive, welcoming school is everybody's business
- Focus on relationships within the group. Having fun and doing things together will help to build a cohesive and effective group
- Encourage the group to consult with the wider school community to ensure that activities are based on the issues that matter to their peers
- Don't just focus on one activity or topic, make sure that there's something for everyone - for example, some young people may not be interested in the cost of the school day but will want to get involved in international work
- Recognise pupil efforts and achievements through accreditation and awards schemes - this can provide another incentive to get involved
- Don't be scared of talking about poverty with children and young people - nothing can change if the issues aren't addressed head on with and by the people it affects.

"This model - there's no reason other schools couldn't do what's happened here." **Laura Martin, Depute Head**

"I think sometimes staff are afraid of stigmatising, afraid of getting it wrong. My advice to schools would be to not be so afraid about talking about poverty because you need to be talking about it. It's a serious issue and the kids can cope with talking about it actually better than we can. If you give them the platform and give them the space you'll be blown away by what they're able to do and achieve." **Correen Dickson, Teacher**

Next steps for the QAHS Pupil Anti-Poverty Working Group

This school year, 2018/19, the group will be recruiting again to increase numbers and planning activities for the year ahead. They are also keen to start measuring the impact of their work to see if pupils feel there's a change in the classroom as a result of what's been happening so far.

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Thank you very much to the members of the Pupil Anti-Poverty Working Group and staff at Queen Anne High School for taking the time to speak with us and tell us about their work.

For information about the Pupil Anti-Poverty Working Group

Laura.Martin-qh@fife.gov.uk

For more information about Cost of the School Day

www.cpag.org.uk/cost-school-day

costoftheschoolday@cpagscotland.org.uk

Cost of the School Day Toolkit and school costs film

www.cpag.org.uk/cost-school-day-toolkit