



Because growing up can be hard

# Turning the page on poverty

A practical guide for education staff to help tackle poverty and the cost of the school day



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# Turning the page on poverty



## 1. Poverty Proofing the School Day

Poverty Proofing the School Day, a project developed by Children North East following consultation across the North East of England in 2011, places the importance of children's voices at the centre of decisions made by senior leaders. Poverty Proofing is a process of speaking to every single child within a school to identify the barriers to engagement and unintentional stigma and discrimination faced by those suffering the effects of poverty. The process also engages with staff, Governors and parents to truly understand the context in which children are living, and be able to provide meaningful and local recommendations. We recognise at Children North East that poverty impacts different communities differently. To date we have spoken with over 120,000 children and young people across the country and Children North East are working with partners to ensure this voice has national impact. For more information or to discuss how you can Poverty Proof your school then visit [povertyproofing.co.uk](http://povertyproofing.co.uk)

## 2. The UK Cost of the School Day project

The Cost of the School Day project was started by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland in 2014 with the aim of reducing the financial barriers that prevent pupils from fully participating in the school day. The Cost of the School Day approach involves working with whole-school communities to identify and reduce cost barriers faced by pupils from low-income backgrounds, including eating at school, uniform costs and school trips. Following the success of this project in Scotland, CPAG has joined forces with Children North East to expand the project to local authorities in England, Wales and parts of Scotland. Beyond school-level action, we also work with local and national governments to bring about system and policy change. This work is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. Find out more at: [cpag.org.uk/cosd](http://cpag.org.uk/cosd)




### 3. The National Education Union's No Child Left Behind campaign

The National Education Union represents the majority of teachers and education professionals in the UK, and is committed to making the education sector a great place to work and learn. Our members know first-hand how poverty limits the life chances of children and significantly affects their educational experience and outcomes in school. Every child deserves equitable access to education, but schools cannot tackle the problem of child poverty without system change. The NEU's No Child Left Behind campaign calls on the government to take urgent action to break down the barriers to learning that poverty creates for so many children and young people, so every child can thrive in school.

This guide is a collaborative piece of work with sections written by education and poverty specialists from Children North East and Child Poverty Action Group, drawing on learning and examples from their existing projects and research. The guide includes contributions from frontline researchers in schools, practice advisors, communication experts and policy specialists.

# A practical guide for education staff to help tackle poverty and the cost of the school day

## Introduction



*"It's just really nice to make sure that everyone's equal in this school. No one's singled out at all."*

Pupil at a school in Moray, Scotland

In every school in the UK, an increasing number of families are struggling on low incomes. Poverty was already a deeply entrenched problem in the UK before Covid-19, and the economic effects of the pandemic have caused a further reduction in household finances, hitting families with children hardest.

Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life. In school, it can lock children out of opportunities to participate, learn and thrive. But schools can also play a key role in tackling child poverty and ensuring children are protected from the worst effects of the pandemic.

We developed this resource to support teachers and school staff to understand how poverty affects children and young people in the UK, and equip them with tools, recommendations and solutions to address poverty in school. It is the result of a collaboration between the NEU, Child Poverty Action Group, and Children North East.

This resource can be used by school leaders and staff in all schools and colleges, no matter where they are in their journey, to tackle poverty and address costs.

We recognise that each school has to operate in its own individual context, with unique challenges and opportunities. We have endeavoured to bring together our knowledge of poverty and the lessons we learned through our work in schools. Teachers and school staff can adapt these in a way that works for their school community.

Tackling poverty in school is not an easy or straightforward process, but it is crucial to ensuring a just and equitable experience of the school day for all pupils. Involving children and young people in this process is vital and valuable as they bring much-needed insight of their own experiences and are often best placed to devise inclusive solutions.

We hope this resource will help teachers and school staff drive forward the conversation on poverty in a school context and will enable them to recognise and address poverty where they can.

# Why do we need to understand poverty and its impact on education?

Poverty is the strongest statistical predictor of how well a child will achieve at school.<sup>1</sup> It is not only that children from low income households tend to fall behind academically but their overall experiences of the school day are, in many ways, determined by the level of disadvantage that they experience.

As of the latest official data (2018/19), 4.2 million children live in poverty in the UK: that's 9 in a classroom of thirty<sup>2</sup>. The number is likely to be even higher now, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here we look at the link between poverty and education.



**9 children in poverty** in a classroom of 30

## What are the effects of poverty on children's educational outcomes?

### Facts and feelings

- > At the end of primary school, pupils living in poverty are often over nine months behind their peers in reading, writing and maths. Children with a high persistence of poverty (those on free school meals for over 80 per cent of their time at school) have a learning gap of 22.7 months – twice that of children with a low persistence of poverty (those on free schools meals for less than 20 per cent of their time at school), who have a learning gap of 11.3 months.<sup>3</sup>
- > The attainment gap persists for pupils throughout secondary school. Students eligible for free school meals are half as likely to achieve a good pass at GCSE in English and Maths in comparison to other students.<sup>4</sup>
- > In general, students living in poverty are four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers.<sup>5</sup>
- > Even with the same qualifications disadvantaged students are 50 per cent more likely to be Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes? An update 2017

<sup>2</sup> Households below average income: 1994/95 to 2018/19.

<sup>3</sup> Education in England: Annual Report 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Key stage 4 Performance 2019 (Revised).

<sup>5</sup> Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England: 2018 to 2019

<sup>6</sup> Research Briefing I: Establishing the Employment Gap.

Months behind in secondary school

Low persistence poverty



High persistence poverty



Average disadvantage gap



Children with a high persistence of poverty have a **learning gap of 22.7 months** – twice that of children with a low persistence of poverty **who have a learning gap of 11.3 months**.

“““

*“ Well I think if all of your friends or people you know go to the after-school clubs, school trips, that kind of isolates you from them. You’re singled out, you’re not with them, just a spare person.”*

(Pupil, age 15)

## What is the link between poverty and health, social and emotional outcomes for children and young people?

- > Respiratory problems such as asthma and bronchitis are more common in children growing up in poverty and can negatively impact on attendance at school.<sup>7</sup>
- > Young people living in more deprived areas are more likely to report lower life satisfaction than those living in less deprived areas.<sup>8</sup>
- > 23 per cent of parents with children under 18 reported skipping meals in order to make ends meet and feed their children.<sup>9</sup>
- > There is a strong stigma attached to poverty and children living in poverty are often bullied at school. A lot of children who are entitled to free school meals don’t actually take them, and poorer families will often go without other items to protect their children from this stigma.<sup>10</sup>
- > Poverty affects friendships at school with children growing up in poverty more likely to play alone and fall out with their friends, and less likely to talk to their friends about their worries.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> State of Child Health.

<sup>8</sup> Health and Wellbeing of 15-year-olds in England - Main findings from the What About YOUTh? Survey 2014.

<sup>9</sup> 1 in 4 UK parents skipping meals due to lack of money.

<sup>10</sup> Going Hungry? Young people’s experience of free school meals, Child Poverty Action Group and British Youth Council.

<sup>11</sup> Growing up in poverty detrimental to children’s friendships and family life.



## Why social justice and inclusion must be at the heart of school improvement

While child poverty ultimately stems from families not having enough money, institutions and systems can help to reduce inequalities in our society and mitigate the impact of poverty on children. However, national policy can also work against families to compound these differences. For example, we know that deprived areas are more likely to have overcrowded and under resourced schools, making it harder for children in those schools to learn. Sadly, children from low-income families are more likely to face these structural barriers than their better-off peers, and that is why school improvement must focus on changes that benefit all pupils, but in particular pupils growing up in poverty.

Schools may want to consider the following areas when thinking about how the school experience can be improved for low income families:

- By providing a full curriculum for all, as opposed to a reduced curriculum for some students, schools can ensure that students have equity of experience.
- Connecting learning with pupils' lives and contexts outside schools and valuing the knowledge and experiences of all pupils can be transformative.<sup>12</sup>
- View all students' experiences as an asset and actively encourage every student's voice in the classroom, creating a safe and engaging environment for learning across social differences.
- Ensure school staff understand the local context and community so that they can better view the world from the perspective of their students.<sup>13</sup>



*"Schools, in their structure and organisation, can do more than simply reflect the society we have; they can try to be the precursor of the kind of society that we wish to have."*

(Gorard, 2010)

Demonstrating that the school is undertaking self-evaluation about the needs of particular groups of students and the barriers that they face, is highly effective practice and will be useful evidence at the time of school inspection by Ofsted.

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**In conclusion**, while schools cannot make the difference, they can make a difference. Schools can act as the key to loosening poverty's hold on children and young people. Our education system does not have to mirror the society and economy within which it is situated. On the contrary, we must start and deepen the conversation about how policy and practice in schools must be orientated towards challenging and removing the constraints that poverty places on people. This is when education can become transformational; when we focus schools on prioritising the needs and experiences of their students.

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<sup>12</sup> [Addressing working class educational disadvantage.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Developing a culturally responsive pedagogy.](#)



# A Children's Rights approach to tackling poverty in the classroom

Taking a Children's Rights approach means using a principled and practical framework that places the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the core of planning and delivery, and integrating children's rights into every aspect of decision-making, policy and practice.

## The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a treaty that sets out the basic rights that all children everywhere are entitled to. Article 12 of the UNCRC states that all children have a right to express their views and have them taken seriously – this includes at school.

■ **Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.**

## Why should we use a Children's Rights approach?

Understanding the experiences that children growing up in poverty have at school must be at the centre of our efforts to ensure that all pupils have a positive and fulfilling education.

Poverty is often hidden, and the stigma and discrimination faced by children at school is often unintentional. Listening to pupils and allowing them to have their voices heard is central to ensuring an equitable school experience; guaranteeing responses to poverty in school are sensitive and led by pupils themselves. Pupils are best placed to talk about their experiences and also offer creative solutions to bring about positive change.

To ensure that children are at the centre of our work to tackle the impact of poverty in school, schools need to create opportunities and space for young people to talk and make a contribution to school life.

### Taking a Children's Rights approach ensures that children and young people:

- > have equal opportunity to meaningfully participate
- > benefit from their involvement
- > feel valued, empowered and heard
- > are able to make a difference
- > improve their education and skills through participation opportunities.

For advice on speaking to pupils about poverty and inequality, please see How to talk about poverty on page 15.

## Other Children's Rights that schools should be aware of

As well as Article 12, there are a number of additional key Children's Rights that we need to consider when tackling poverty in schools.

### ■ **Article 2 (non-discrimination):**

The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.

### ■ **Article 26 (social security):**

Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance.

### ■ **Article 27 (adequate standard of living):**

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

### ■ **Article 29 (goals of education):**

Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

### ■ **Article 31 (leisure, play and culture):**

Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

## Applying Children's Rights in the classroom

It's important to consider how you can provide opportunities to facilitate these rights for children growing up in poverty in your school. Below are some suggestions:

- > Create and facilitate opportunities for all pupils to talk about poverty, give feedback on their school day and equip them with the tools they need to articulate their experiences.
- > Work with children and young people on things that matter to them and help to make a difference to their school community.
- > Always listen to the views, experiences and ideas of children and young people, and tell them how their ideas have been used.
- > If you are thinking about making changes in your school, involve children in the research process using participatory methods that enable children to play an active role in the investigation.

## Examples from schools

- > A number of pupils at a secondary school in Fife established an anti-poverty group which now runs a uniform swap shop. The students recognised this was a cost pressure that was affecting pupils at their school and so set up the initiative to ensure everyone could access affordable uniform.
- > Children at a school in South Tyneside campaigned to ensure that every pupil at their school received their own water bottle so children could keep hydrated throughout the day, helping them to focus on their learning.
- > Students in Falkirk took action to ensure every pupil that joined the school received a welcome backpack to help them feel settled. This was identified as a small thing that would make starting school less daunting, as well removing some of the costs associated with going to a new school.
- > At a primary school in Newcastle, students worked with the school council to develop a Poverty Proofing Policy that outlines all the actions and commitments that have been made by the school to address hidden costs and poverty-related stigma. This also includes guidelines for staff to ensure the policy was actioned in the classroom.

# Child poverty drivers and risks

Child poverty exists in every corner of the UK and exists in every state-funded school. You are considered to be below the poverty line if you live in a household with less than 60 per cent of the national median income. In more human terms, you are poor if you are unable to live at the same standard that most other people would expect.



Jane has three meals a day, adequate clothing and goes to school, but she is still poor because her family don't have enough money to ensure she can live in a warm home, have access to a computer to complete her homework, or go on school trips.

On average, nine children out of a class of 30 currently live below the poverty line, but poverty is often hidden. Schools may not always be aware of the children and families that are facing hardship. Poverty-related stigma can mean that families go to great lengths to hide their financial circumstances but will often struggle with school costs.

“““

*“If your pals are going out at lunch you'll be a loner. It puts you out the group because they're going out and then you're sitting there on your own with a free meal.”*

(Pupil aged 14)

Poverty rarely has a single cause. A range of factors including rising living costs, low pay, insecure work or lack of sufficient working hours, and inadequate social security benefits together mean some people do not have enough resources. These structural causes often place a 'grip' on families in poverty.

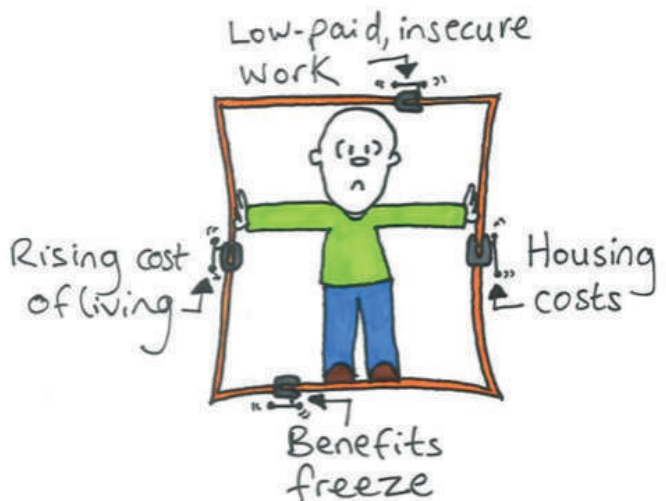


Image by Paul Brook, Joseph Rowntree Foundation



*"Money's tighter as I'm spending more on gas, electricity, and food than I usually would. I have had to borrow money from family, so it's a never-ending cycle."*

(Mum of four children)

Any family can fall on hard times and find it difficult to make ends meet. Life changes such as unemployment, illness or family separation can happen to us all. Increasing costs, especially for essentials such as food, housing and fuel, affect most people. Covid-19 has starkly shown that poverty isn't something that happens to others. It's something that can happen to almost anyone. But certain groups of people face a much higher risk of living in poverty than others.

- > **Families with children** face higher risks of poverty because of the extra costs of raising children and the effect that caring for children can have on parents' working hours. Children's benefits do not fully compensate.
- > **Lone parents** are more likely to experience poverty than those in a couple. 44 per cent of children in lone-parent families are in poverty.
- > People from **Black and Ethnic Minority groups** are also more likely to live in poverty. 46 per cent of children living in minority ethnic families are in poverty, compared with 30 per cent of all children.
- > Disabled parents often face multiple barriers to work, and additional costs arise for families caring for a disabled child. 34 per cent of children in **families where someone is disabled** are in poverty, compared to 28 per cent of children in families where no-one is disabled.

The effects of poverty are more profound when people live in poverty for longer or fall deeper into poverty.

Importantly, child poverty is not inevitable. When governments prioritise child poverty, significant progress can be made. The National Education Union's [No Child Left Behind](#) campaign is lobbying for significant, national commitments to be made regarding Free School Meal provision, affordable school uniform policies and access to reliable internet and digital devices to break down the barriers of poverty in the classroom and to ensure all children can access their education equitably.

However, schools also have an important role to play and can make a difference by tackling child poverty in their school community and creating an inclusive experience of the school day for children living on a low income. This includes ensuring that their structures, policies and practices do not identify, exclude, treat differently or make assumptions about those living in poverty.

# How poverty intersects with other characteristics

Both inside and outside the school gates, poverty is compounded by other systemic inequalities. It is vital to understand the experience of children and young people in this context. Some groups are significantly more likely to experience poverty, including Black and Ethnic Minority people, migrants and families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and disabled people or those who care for disabled children. Many children and families may experience multiple disadvantages simultaneously. A stark example of this was highlighted in the Children's Commissioner Report on school exclusions: in 2009-10 a Black African-Caribbean boy with special education needs who was eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) was 168 times more likely to be permanently excluded than a white female counterpart not eligible for FSM and without special educational needs.<sup>14</sup>

## Reflective questions

- > What are the specific identities that overlap or intersect at your school, both among pupils and staff? What is your understanding of how these identities overlap?
- > Do all pupils feel a sense of belonging? Is anyone less likely to feel a sense of belonging? Why do you think this is the case for example, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children missing a certain number of weeks a year?
- > Are all staff aware of the different and overlapping inequalities that children and young people might experience for example, NRPF policies?
- > What are you doing to understand and challenge racism in your school?

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<sup>14</sup> They never give up on you.

## Black and Ethnic Minority young people

Race impacts young people's experience of education in a way that can perpetuate inequalities and, in some cases, create poverty. For example, the low rates of retention and progression of Black staff, an unrepresentative curriculum and racial harassment and discrimination can all contribute to a systemic exclusion of young Black and Ethnic Minority people. This racism and racial inequality is often in addition to the barriers experienced as a result of living in poverty.

- Black and Ethnic Minority young people make up around 27% - more than one in four - of state-funded primary and secondary school pupils. 46% of children from Black and Ethnic Minority groups are in poverty, compared with 26% of children in White British families.
- For children from Bangladeshi and Pakistani families, child poverty rates are 60 and 54 per cent respectively.
- Black and Ethnic Minority people are overrepresented in precarious parts of the economy and are more likely to be in low-paid work.
- Additionally, Black and Ethnic Minority households are more likely to include larger families. This means government policies, like the two-child limit and benefit cap, disproportionately impact Black and Ethnic Minority children and leave them worse-off.<sup>15</sup>

It is not only that children in Black and Ethnic Minority groups are more likely to live in poverty, but racism and racial harassment also further compound poverty in these communities. However, with a proactive strategy, many schools are playing an important role in challenging the normalisation of racism by talking about racism, designing robust responses to harassment and evaluating what is happening in their schools.

The NEU's Anti-Racism Framework has been designed to help school staff explore ideas around race equality and plan how to tackle racism with children, young people and work colleagues.

“““

*“I was born in the UK but bullies tell me to go back to my own country. I don't understand because I'm from the UK. I've tried to make my face whiter before using makeup so that I can fit in. I just want to enjoy going to school.”<sup>16</sup>*

(Girl, age 10)



<sup>15</sup> [The 2015 budget: effects on Black and minority ethnic people.](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Children whitening skin to avoid racial hate crime, charity finds.](#)



## Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Children and young people with SEND are a diverse group and there are many different ways they may find their experience of school impacted by their learning needs. For example, research shows they are more likely to be bullied,<sup>17</sup> may find it harder to make friends<sup>18</sup> and are almost six times more likely to be permanently excluded.<sup>19</sup> 14.6 per cent of English children have Special Educational Needs and these children are more likely to experience poverty than their peers.

- In the UK 31% of households with a disabled family member were living in poverty compared to 19% without.
- Poverty rates are especially high among families where there is a disabled child: this figure is 40%.<sup>20</sup>
- Many parents of SEND children have had to give up their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic due to lack of appropriate childcare and concerns about their children being at greater risk of contracting Covid-19, forcing more families into poverty.



*"School didn't treat me properly, they didn't understand my behaviour... I want to be treated good and have someone who understands my behaviour. School's not my place."*<sup>21</sup>

(Boy, age 8)

## Refugees, migrants and those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

NRPF is a condition imposed on someone based on their immigration status and is a key driver of poverty among migrant families. Regardless of need or level of income, families are prevented from applying for welfare benefits because of parents' immigration status or because of conditions placed on their stay in the UK and their ability to settle. This means low-income families with NRPF cannot access social security support, including Free School Meals (prior to the pandemic) and child benefit.

Children and young people who are refugees or migrants and whose families have no recourse to public funds must often deal with additional challenges at school. They may experience disruption to their education combined with inadequate and insecure housing, as well as lack of knowledge of the English education system. Anecdotal evidence suggests many migrant children take on additional caring responsibilities and that this is often hidden from the view of teachers.



*"I couldn't sleep because I panicked that my children will not eat...my wage went to pay my rent and then childcare, if I didn't pay childcare I couldn't work to even pay for the rent...I was just working like 70 hours a week, and it still wasn't enough...In the night I would be just crying."*<sup>22</sup>

(Mum with no recourse to public funds)

<sup>17</sup> [Bullying experiences among disabled children and young people in England.](#)

<sup>18</sup> [The mental health of young people with learning disabilities.](#)

<sup>19</sup> [School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children.](#)

<sup>20</sup> [UK Poverty 2019/20.](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Off the Radar Report.](#)

<sup>22</sup> [The Children's Society.](#)

# How to talk about poverty

This section contains practical advice for talking about poverty with pupils, with parents and carers, and with colleagues or your wider networks.

## Part 1: Talking about poverty with pupils.

### Why is it important to talk about poverty with pupils?

- > It helps you to **understand children and young people's experiences** of poverty.
- > It helps raise the issue with other pupils who may not have experienced it or know what it is. In turn, this can help to **reduce stigma and negative attitudes**.



*"Pupils need to be more open minded. Maybe if we were taught lessons about people who have less money...You need to be brought up in an environment where you're open to people who are different. If you're brought up to be open to talking about these things then you'll be a better adult and then our generation will be better".*

(Pupil, age 10, Glasgow)



### Key things to keep in mind when talking to pupils about poverty:

- > Create a **safe space to talk**. Ensure pupils have opportunities to approach you and talk about poverty privately.
- If talking about poverty in the classroom or with groups, be mindful **not to expose pupils** who do not want to be identified as living in poverty. Make pupils aware at the start of the conversation that you do not want any names.
- **Avoid having these conversations at the end of the day**. That way, pupils can come back to you later in the day if they have concerns.
- Use **clear and straightforward language**. Try to have the conversations in bite sizes.
- **Using art, drama and play** can help pupils express their feelings and personal experiences without feeling stigmatised or singled out by classmates.
- With younger children, you can start the conversation using **a story, a character or a puppet**.
- **Address pupils' feelings**. Learning about poverty can make pupils sad and emotional. Let them know it's natural to feel this way. Try to end on a positive note (for example, "we're finding ways to help").
- **Remodel any negative language** pupils might use by rephrasing what they say.

- **Provide pupils with different perspectives.** Children often repeat everything they hear at home, including misconceptions about people in poverty. It can be a difficult topic to discuss, but it's important to recognise that we live in a world of great inequality, while still keeping the focus on hope.
- Talk about poverty in a UK and local context. Local statistics can be found on the End Child Poverty website ([endchildpoverty.org.uk](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk)).

## Conversation example: Ross's story

The fictional story below, about a boy called Ross who lives in a one-parent family on a low income, can be used to broach the topic of poverty with children and young people. You can adapt the tone of the story and Ross's age depending on the group.

*'Ross is 10 years old. He has just moved to this area with his mum and little sister Amelie, who is three. Ross is about to start at your school. He's a bit nervous because he doesn't know what to expect. He wants to fit in and be happy. He hopes he makes friends and that the teachers are nice. He hopes he'll be able to do the work and that there's a computing club there like there was at his old school.'*

*Ross gets on pretty well with his family – well, Amelie is a bit of a pain sometimes but he likes her really. His mum used to work part-time in Tesco near where they used to live, but since they moved here she's finding it difficult to find another job which will fit in with Amelie's nursery hours. This means that there isn't a lot of money at home and sometimes Ross knows that his mum is a bit stressed about paying bills and things like that. She quite often tells Ross that they can't afford the things he wants, like new computer games and a phone.'*

Discussion questions can be used to understand how Ross, or any pupil from a low-income family, would experience the school day. You could ask:

- > What would Ross need to pay for in your school?
- > What sorts of things cost a lot? Is there anything you think Ross would find it difficult to afford?
- > Would Ross ever feel different or left out because of not having much money? What would be a big deal for him? How would he feel and what would he do?

## Conversation example: Explaining poverty and remodelling negative language

**Teacher:**

Poverty is when someone doesn't have enough money to do the same things as their friends. For example, a child might be poor if their parents don't have enough money to heat the house, to buy a computer to do homework, or to pay for school trips. Sadly, it is a common issue in our country.

**Pupil:**

Sometimes it's because their parents are lazy and don't have a job.

**Teacher:**

Sadly, many people in our country live in poverty even if they do have a job, because they still don't earn enough money. Sometimes people aren't able to work, for example, if they have to care for someone.

**Pupil:**

But there aren't any poor people in our school, right?

**Teacher:**

I know it's sad to think about, but many families in our community can struggle to pay all their bills and afford all the things that cost money. That's why we're trying really hard to help all families, for example, by making sure that school events don't cost a lot of money.

### What should I watch out for?

Even when you are not explicitly talking about poverty, it is important to make sure that you don't use language that inadvertently excludes children in poverty. Some class discussions may highlight financial inequalities between pupils. For example, asking "What did you do over the holidays?" can be distressing for pupils whose families may have struggled to afford food, heating or outings. Instead, you could ask: "Who did you spend time with?"

## Part 2: Talking about poverty with parents and carers

From what parents and carers have told us, we know that some schools are really good at communicating regularly and effectively in non-stigmatising ways, which can help parents feel confident coming to the school for support when they need it. It's important for schools to keep promoting the ways in which they are addressing school costs, showing that they understand the financial pressures being placed on families.

- > Messages to families should be accessible and inclusive and take into account people speaking English as an additional language and those with literacy issues.
- > Whenever possible, communicate through a mix of methods (letters, emails, texts, in person...).
- > Describing initiatives like uniform sales as 'green' or 'community-focused' can help increase uptake (instead of focusing on the financial aspect).

- > Talking directly about poverty or financial difficulties can sometimes worry parents and carers. Try using collective words like 'us' (for example: "we want our families to get the support they're entitled to"). For more examples, see template letter in Annex 1.
- > In any messages that involve costs (for example, in letters home about school trips), remind families where to go to get information regarding financial entitlements and support.
- > Parents sometimes find it easier to talk to other parents, which is why it is important to get Parent Councils involved.
- > Families appreciate that schools are willing to think about family finances. Asking families what help they need is often the best way to make sure your school is providing the right support.

**You may also encounter discriminatory or negative views towards poverty being expressed by parents or carers.** We have included a conversation example showing how you might address some of these views. You may also find the advice in part 3 (below) helpful.

## Conversation example: Dealing with negative views towards poverty from parents

**Parent:**

*Not putting on the school trip to France this year isn't fair. Just because some people have spent all their money on flat-screen TVs instead of saving up.*

**Teacher:**

*It's easy to generalise, but the sad reality is that many families in our community don't have enough money to participate in society in the same way as everyone else. Unfortunately, it often isn't about saving up. People can find themselves locked in poverty due to factors that are outside of their control, such as low-paid and insecure work, unaffordable housing costs, and a rising cost of living.*

**Parent:**

*But why should my child miss out?*

**Teacher:**

*Pupils can get much more out of school activities if all their peers are included. We want all children and young people in this school to have a full and enriching experience. That is why we are coming up with alternatives that are inclusive of all pupils, from all backgrounds.*



## Part 3: Talking about poverty with colleagues and your wider networks

Speaking about poverty can be challenging, especially when well-meaning people offer unhelpful views and misconceptions. For example, many people see poverty as a thing of the past or believe people in poverty need to work more or harder; or hold the fatalistic view that things will never change.

We might think that sharing statistics about poverty or heart-breaking stories will challenge people's beliefs, but it often isn't enough. It's important to show the bigger picture if we want others to really understand poverty.

Below, we've included some recommendations for talking about poverty in a way that ensures you are heard and understood (adapted from JRF's research, [How to build lasting support to solve UK poverty](#) and Equally Ours' [Talking About Equality guide](#)).

- > Show why poverty matters by appealing to shared values of justice and compassion.

**Example:** As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, millions of people in our country are living in poverty. We share a moral responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.

- > Address poverty directly and present it as a pressing problem. Avoid starting with benefits or the welfare system, as these must be part of the solution, not the problem.

**Example:** Poverty in the UK is increasing. More and more people are struggling to get by. We need to put this right so that everyone can have a decent life.

- > Steer clear of overly politicised language.
- > Use metaphors to explain how the economy locks people in poverty. Words like 'locks', 'restricts' and 'restrains' help create a mental picture and help people understand poverty better. It is also helpful to use phrases that illustrate how poverty reduces choices and makes it hard for people to change their situations; for example, talking about 'being pulled under by poverty' or 'powerful currents' that are working against families, such as low wages.

**Example:** Poverty restricts the choices people can make, leaving them in impossible situations like choosing either to heat their home or pay their rent. With rising living costs and unstable work, our economy is holding people down and locking them in a daily struggle to make ends meet.

- > When talking about solutions (in the wider sense), you can present benefits as 'helping to loosen poverty's grip', and explain that the economy we have was designed, and so can also be redesigned.

**Example:** The economy we have today was designed – it is the result of a set of decisions that were made about our society's priorities and resources. Just as it was designed, we can redesign it so that it works for everyone.

- > Use stories and statistics to complement these recommendations: link them to values of justice and compassion, and to the way the economy restrains people.



**Example:** Marcus Rashford wrote an open letter to MPs in England in June 2020 to urge them to extend the Free School Meal provision to the summer holidays (his call was successful). He linked his own story, as well as stories and statistics that were shared with him, to the wider structure and systems restricting people's choices and locking them in poverty. Excerpt:

“””

*“ My story to get here is all-too-familiar for families in England: my mum worked full-time, earning minimum wage to make sure we always had a good evening meal on the table. But it was not enough. The system was not built for families like mine to succeed, regardless of how hard my mum worked.”*

- Talk about a better world. Remind the person you're speaking to of the better world you're striving for and be clear that it is achievable.

**Example:** If we work together as a school community, we can create an environment that is truly inclusive of all pupils and allows all children to fully participate in school. Other schools have made a lot of progress in that respect and we can too.



The economy we have today was designed – and it can be redesigned to work for everyone.

Image by Paul Brook, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

# Taking a whole-school approach to poverty

## Why is it important?

### **Inclusive ethos**

It is important that schools develop an ethos that seeks to ensure that all children have an equitable experience of the school day, regardless of their family's financial background. A whole-school approach is the most effective way of achieving this.

### **More than Free School Meals**

It is not always easy for schools to identify which families are struggling financially, particularly if families are suffering from in-work poverty and are therefore not eligible for Free School Meals or Pupil Premium.

### **Changing family circumstances**

At a time when lots of families are facing changes to their household incomes, whole-school initiatives and projects are more successful at ensuring that timely help and support is offered to all and not limited to those in receipt of certain benefits.

### **Lessen stigma**

A whole-school approach normalises talking about poverty and makes it easier for students and families to reach out if they need help. Providing an equitable experience for all also means that you don't draw attention to children who are growing up in poverty, reducing the risk for children to face stigma among their peers.

.....

*All activity and planned activity in schools should not identify, exclude, treat differently or make assumptions about those children whose household income or resources are lower than others.*

.....

## Who to involve and how?

All stakeholders will have a unique perspective on how poverty impacts upon the school day and have ideas on how this can be addressed.

### **Pupils**

Children and young people are the most important people to consult with about all aspects of the school day. It is only by listening to and understanding the experience of children in our schools that we can start to unpick some of the barriers that they face and bring about meaningful change. What opportunities do you provide at your school for all pupils to share their experience of the school day?

### **Families**

Feedback from parents and carers about additional school costs, notice periods for payments and how communicative and approachable the school is with regards to financial support, is crucial in helping schools to better support families.

### **Leadership**

As key decision-makers in school, the school leadership plays an important role in tackling poverty inside the school gates. Their understanding of how poverty impacts families in their local community and how the school can address this, as well as how the school ethos promotes equity, are important reflection points.

.....

*"Pupils feel that our [uniform] policy is simple and easy to get right and parents appreciate that we have tried to reduce the cost and make life simpler. As a school we feel we are helping and working together with our families to reduce the cost of the school day."*

.....

### **Governors**

With responsibility for some aspects of the school day that incur a cost, such as uniform policies and agreeing school budgets, governor perspectives on school related costs and poverty within the local community are also important.

### **Staff**

Staff are often the first point of contact both for children and families and have valuable insight about how children in your school experience poverty and how it impacts them and their families. School leaders can help staff to share these meaningful insights by building-in time for reflection and training.

.....

*"So we're being more canny about what we can get in that we don't have to charge for; we don't have to take them out for trips all the time."*

.....

What are children growing up in poverty at risk of missing out at your school?

How do you ensure equity of experience and opportunity for all pupils at your school?

What opportunities are there for pupils to talk about their experience of the school day?

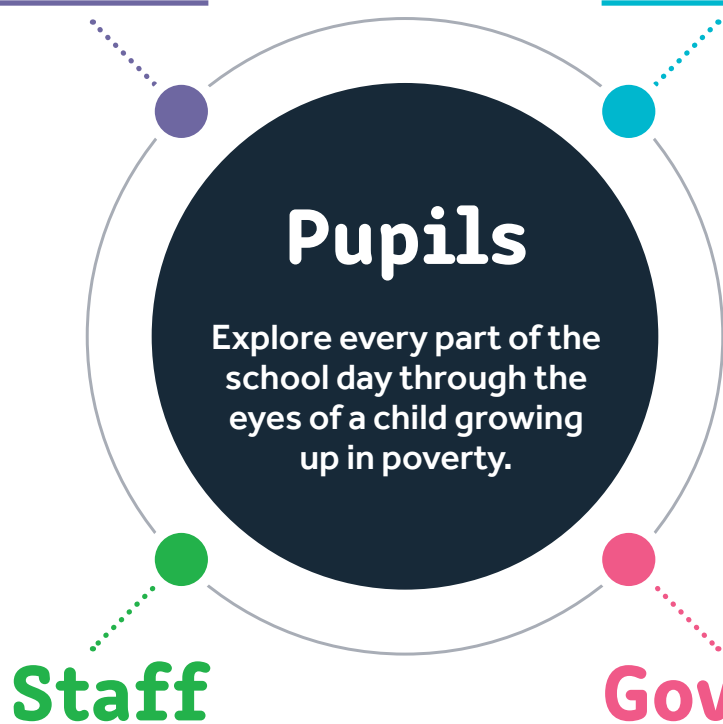
## Leadership

How much notice do families get about events and activities in school that require resources or money?

Who should families speak to at school if they are struggling with school-related costs?

How do families know what help and support might be available?

## Families



## Staff

How do you know which families are finding things difficult financially?

How does poverty impact on the lives of children and families in your school?

How do you ensure that differences in family finances aren't highlighted in the classroom?

## Governors

What support does your school offer to families struggling financially?

What monitoring do you undertake to determine to what extent there is equality of experience and opportunity at your school?

How does pupil voice inform policy and practice at your school?

# Learning from lockdown



We're all experiencing the same Covid-19 storm but we aren't all in the same boat – some families have less protection than others.

## Key considerations for schools

Covid-related job losses and drops in income will have made some families on low incomes more vulnerable, while others will be experiencing poverty for the first time. Children and young people will have had varied experiences during the pandemic and many will be facing changes in financial circumstances.

Schools and teachers have already gone to extraordinary lengths throughout the crisis to ensure children in low-income households don't miss out on their education. Many are building on the existing work that they do to support families, while others are thinking about new ways they can help families through Covid-19.

Reflecting on the following questions can help you to consider the best ways forward in mitigating the effects of poverty in your school, particularly as a result of the pandemic:

- > How poverty-aware is your school? How confident can children and families feel that they will be met with understanding and empathy if in need of support?
- > How effectively are financial entitlements like Free School Meals and support grants for families on low incomes being promoted to families? Do all families in the school know what is available if it is needed? Are there processes in place to support families to apply for and benefit from extra help?
- > How are you communicating with families to find out what resources are needed for children to learn and stay connected at home? What processes are in place to provide resources for all children who need them?
- > To what extent are school policies and practices designed to reduce financial pressure on families and include children and young people on low incomes? Are there particular practices or policies that could be established or reinstated that have clear benefits for low income families, for example extended school services such as after school clubs?



- Has the school considered how new Covid-related policies might be affecting families in low income households, for example, bringing in learning materials from home, the need for pupils to wear masks or asking pupils to wear warm clothes if windows are open for ventilation? Are these policies sensitive to families facing financial difficulties or could they be revised to ensure they don't include hidden costs?



*"My friend has lots of brothers and sisters and he can't get on his computer as much as me. I like learning new stuff. So does he but he can't do it as much as me. After lockdown he can come to visit and we can do our maths together. I will help him."*

(Boy, age 11)

## What helped during lockdown?

Families reported that the following actions from their schools helped them to address the cost of home learning and alleviated other financial pressures during lockdown. These are useful insights for schools generally, but also for any periods of home learning.

- Providing work packs and practical resources to ensure all pupils have easy access to learning at no additional cost.
- Loaning devices to support pupils to access learning, support and contact with school staff and peers.
- Providing support with food costs, promoting Free School Meal provision to all and offering help to access the different methods of provision.

- Recognising that families may have experienced a change in income and taking time to understand what support would therefore be necessary.
- Communicating (through multiple mediums - letters, emails, social media and online platforms) useful links to specific sites where support could be accessed and information about free local events or opportunities available to families.
- Children and families have greatly valued efforts made by teachers and school staff to support family wellbeing during the pandemic. This has included phone contact, facilitating peer-to-peer interactions, supporting with extra-curricular activities for families to enjoy together and being easily contactable to answer queries quickly.<sup>23</sup>



*"I got a nice card from my teacher and a rainbow to colour in. The school have phoned and checked on me and my mum and dad. I can ask questions on glow and the work is set out good and easy to understand."*

(Boy, age 7)

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<sup>23</sup> [The Cost of Learning in Lockdown.](#)

# Addressing the cost of the school day and poverty-related stigma

*"I actually think, if you enjoy something, then I don't think you should have to pay for it if you're going to school. That you should just be able to take it if you enjoy it. Because as well if, like, if people can't afford it and they want to be a baker and stuff when they're older, they might not be able to take classes like this."*

(Pupil, Lockerbie Academy, Dumfries and Galloway)

This section contains a range of tools to support schools in identifying and addressing the financial barriers to learning and poverty-related stigma that some children and young people face. To develop these tools, we have drawn on research from Poverty Proofing the School Day and the Cost of the School Day projects.

By investigating the school day with pupils, parents and school staff and taking action, your school can begin to:

- > ensure there is equal access to opportunities at school for all children
- > minimise opportunities for stigma and exclusion related to income
- > relieve financial pressures on family budgets

- > support families to access financial entitlements
- > support pupil and family wellbeing
- > help to improve learning and attainment.

## What are the costs of your school day?

In order to start exploring the costs of your school day, we recommend the Senior Leadership Team at your school carries out a group discussion exercise to estimate likely costs for families in your school.

For each part of the school day, you are asked to reflect on how much money families are likely to spend. Refer to school policies and also to your knowledge and experience of how things are done in your school. While you won't be able to examine the impact of costs, as a Senior Leadership Team you will gain an understanding of the most significant costs, pressure points across the year and costs at different stages and age groups.

To support you with this, a copy of the What are the costs of your school day? form can be found in the appendix of this toolkit and also here in Annex 2 at end of document.



## Understanding the barriers in your school

### a. Survey parents and staff

Template surveys are available below which can be used to start to understand some of the income-related barriers that might exist in your school. Hearing from parents and carers is an important part of the process and will help your school to check whether school costs are causing concerns for families. These surveys also give school staff an opportunity to think about costs and highlight any good practice already happening in the school. In addition to completing the survey, it's also important to allow space and time to discuss these topics as a staff group so solutions can be identified and action taken.

**Staff survey:** [bit.ly/3f01EOq](https://bit.ly/3f01EOq)

**Parent survey:** [bit.ly/3pnAhCy](https://bit.ly/3pnAhCy)

### b. Working with Children and Young People

By making use of Ross's story in the 'How we talk about poverty' section of this toolkit (page 18), you can start to explore children and young people's views, and address poverty in the classroom. It's important to remember throughout this toolkit, however, that any changes you make should reflect what children and young people are saying as well as considering your school's local context. It is only by speaking in-depth to children and young people about their experience of the school day that you can gain a full understanding of the needs of your school community. This will be an ongoing process that should be reviewed regularly, ensuring the actions you take are raised by children and young people and help to address inequalities within the classroom.



## Reflective questions and good practice examples from schools

Reflective questions for staff	Good practice examples in schools
How are parents made aware of the Free School Meal application process? How are Free School Meals given out on trips?	Regular promotion of Free School Meals, including through school bag letter drops and social media. The Family Welfare Leader is also available to support parents and carers with Free School Meal applications.
Is there second-hand uniform provision available? What about spare PE kit?	Set up a second-hand uniform shop where families can donate/collect items.
How much notice is given ahead of school trips? Are there subsidies available? Is specific kit required?	Give at least one month's notice for trips so families can budget. For larger trips promote any subsidies available.
How many non-uniform days are there and when? How are donations collected?	Instead of a non-uniform day, consider an 'odd-sock day'. Rather than collecting donations from individuals, provide a bucket so nobody knows who has/hasn't donated.
Are pupils supposed to bring their own pencil cases in from home?	Pupils are provided with a set of identical school resources at the start of the year or equipment such as pens, pencils, and calculators are provided for use in class by teachers.
What homework do you set that requires pupils to make things? eg junk modelling/ model making	Establish a resource area to support pupils with creative homework options when the resources required are not available at home.

# School teacher testimonials

Below are some reflections from head teachers in schools that have taken part in either the Poverty Proofing the School Day programme or Cost of the School Day project. They discuss how the programmes have helped them and their school to become more inclusive.

.....

*"It's given us a much more complex picture of the needs of our population in school. ... Across the school there was a pattern that there were fewer children in lower year groups from more affluent families, our demographic was changing. We'd had a gut feeling, but this was the data that really clarified it. ... For some who had made assumptions about families at all levels this was a revelation."*

.....

*"Staff are aware that these children are not on an even playing field, and it's affecting their thinking it's affecting their planning. ... At the micro level, it's changed people's thinking: "Well if I do that, are X Y and Z going to be able to take part in that?" So yes it has had an impact."*

.....

.....

*"It was very cathartic and it was quite a revelation to some people who made, perhaps, assumptions about our pupil body and their parents... There had been quite a lot of discussion, anecdotal, about children who were presenting as not being particularly well looked after, but we didn't have the backstory. We had some of it from our family support worker, for the real key cases, but the poverty in school was much more prevalent and across families that we had never really thought of as living in poverty before. That was one of the key things, that mind shift to say: "let's look at the reasons why this child is late, or doesn't have the right uniform."*

.....

*"Actively seeking the views of our children, parents and staff helped us identify what we could do practically in school. We discussed the significant costs of uniform, especially our sweatshirts with the school logo embroidery. Now we offer our parents a variety of options to purchase uniform with or without embroidery. Although we are unable to eliminate uniform costs completely, by simply placing the focus on the wearing of school colours, our parents now do not feel under the same pressure to spend more than necessary. What we have truly realised is that small changes really do make a big difference."*

.....

# Get in touch

If you or your school are interested in further exploring any of the following areas, then don't hesitate to get in touch with Children North East and Child Poverty Action Group.

## They can work with you to:

- > Investigate the school day from the perspective of children and young people.
- > Identify and address school-related costs and poverty-related stigma in your school.
- > Understand how you or your school can support wider campaigning and policy work related to tackling poverty in schools.
- > Provide training to school staff and governors to help raise awareness of poverty and unpick what more your school could do to support low income families.
- > Explore good practice examples with other schools who are working hard to address school costs and stigma.

You can reach Children North East at **[info@povertyproofing.co.uk](mailto:info@povertyproofing.co.uk)** or Child Poverty Action Group at **[UKcosd@cpag.co.uk](mailto:UKcosd@cpag.co.uk)**.

To find out more about Children North East and Child Poverty Action Group's existing work in this area visit [povertyproofing.co.uk](http://povertyproofing.co.uk) and [cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day](http://cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day)

# Supporting families affected by poverty

There are measures that schools can take to minimise cost pressures on families and ensure that they get the right information to access the financial support available to them. Actions like these can reduce financial pressure on families and help to improve outcomes for children and families in England.

## Communicating with parents

It is important to ensure that there is an inclusive and consistent dialogue with families about their individual financial circumstances, so that changes in their circumstances do not slip through the gaps and families are accessing everything they are entitled to. Some principles to enable this include:

- > Regularly and consistently promote what is available and happening at your school (online, school letters, newsletter and apps).
- > Where possible make opportunities universal not just targeting families on low incomes.
- > Screen all communication to families with a 'poverty sensitive' lens.
- > Focus on promoting the positive outcomes of any activity that is supporting families living on a low income; for example, focus on widening participation and enhancing offers.
- > Provide parents with an annual calendar of costs at the beginning of the year and reissue at the start of each year.
- > Understand the barriers to making applications for financial support and identify ways to provide support to parents to apply; for example, one-one support, computer access, translator etc.

- > Regularly include information on entitlements, grants and allowances in school newsletters, on the school website, on social media and through any other communications with parents/carers.



### Top tips from Jane Allen, School and Family Development Worker, Ardler Primary School (Dundee):

- > I'm in touch with families on a regular basis: phone text, home visits.
- > Offer help with applying for support, for example, with filling out forms, scanning evidence, or accessing IT.
- > Remember, parents might have English as an additional language or issues with literacy.
- > In order for families to accept support, you have to be approachable. In the school I'm known by Jane, not by Miss Allen.



## Asking the questions

- Asking children, parents, staff and other members of the school community what support families on a low income might need and how activities might best be designed to address any challenges they face, is key in making sure the right initiatives are available and promoted.



*"At no point did anybody approach me to say have you got what you need, like can you get onto Google Classroom? It was just assumed that that would be something I had. I think people make an assumption because you're in work and whatever else, that you would just have these things. That was actually not the case, but nobody asked. I'd imagine that some people wouldn't want to lose face by asking the question themselves. So if they asked everybody, you know what is it you need, that would open up a few more conversations."*

(Hannah, mum of two)

A template letter, text and tweet can be found in Annex 1. These can be used when communicating with parents and carers about school-related costs and family finances in a sensitive and non-stigmatising way.

## Helping families to access entitlements and financial support

### Why this is important

Schools can play a key role in supporting families to access their entitlements and further financial support. They can refer or signpost families to services, signpost families, ensure high levels of take up, and help with application processes.

We know that families often find identifying and accessing the right support difficult<sup>24</sup> and, at times, confusing. Families won't always know what schemes and grants are available to them in their area and they may not be aware if they are eligible for entitlements or how they should apply for them. This is a particular issue for families for whom English is an additional language. School might also be the only place that families go to for support and information.

By being equipped with a good understanding of what financial support is available to families in the area, your school can significantly help families who might be struggling to maximise their income and therefore help to reduce child poverty.



*"The school has been fantastic at providing all the websites, numbers etc for charities and support systems. With constant reassurance, if we need any help, to just get in contact with themselves and they will do the best they can to help."*

(Mum of child aged 8)

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<sup>24</sup> [The Cost of Learning in Lockdown](#).

Financial support or entitlement	Information	Initial steps for schools
<b>Free School Meals (FSM)</b>	Encouraging families who are eligible to access Free School Meals can significantly support family budgets and home life. <sup>25</sup>	Continuously promote Free School Meals and ensure families are supported in applying for them. Ensure the delivery of Free School Meals in your school is stigma-free and children in receipt of Free School Meals are not distinguishable from their peers.
<b>Welfare or debt advice</b>	Financial support for families can be delivered on a local level either through dedicated teams within local authorities or through alternate delivery organisations, for example, Citizens Advice. Referring families to welfare rights advice is important as these services can help families get the support they need and ensure they are receiving the benefits they are entitled to.	Provide clear and regular signposting to these services. Understand what the barriers to accessing these services might be for families. Engage with appropriate council team members. Refer families directly where appropriate. Explore the possibility of advisors using school space to remove barriers for parents.
<b>Local welfare assistance schemes (LWAS)</b>	These schemes provide emergency support to people who have fallen into a financial crisis or who need help to remain or start living independently. Schemes vary greatly: some councils offer vouchers to pay for food, fuel or clothing, or bigger basic living items such as beds, cookers and fridges.	Contact the relevant council member to understand more about your school's local scheme, the eligibility criteria and application process. Promote and communicate information about the scheme and support applications where appropriate.
<b>Families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)</b>	Access to support for refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants can often be found at a local level. Organisations such as Project 17 or Hackney Migrant Centre offer free advice on issues such as immigration, welfare, and health concerns.	Work with the local council to understand what support is available and identify organisations that might be able to help families with NRPF. Monitoring the number of families with NRPFs in your school is also an important part of understanding poverty in your school community.
<b>Available grants or in-kind support</b>	Some local authorities support families living on a low income by helping with additional school costs. This can include help with uniforms, transport and some school related activities, like music lessons. Families will need to apply to the local authority for this support but schools can help this process to ensure families don't miss out.	Discuss with council education teams about availability of support. Promote availability on school website and on social media.

<sup>25</sup> [The free school meals poverty trap](#)



## The role of extended schools programmes in tackling poverty

The term 'extended schools programmes' refers to provided school services that go beyond the core function of the classroom education of children within the normal school day. While the pandemic continues to place a great strain on schools and staff, it may be difficult to deliver full extended schools programmes. However, where it is possible, we know these activities can have significant benefits for all families, but particularly those living in low-income households.

**Extended schools programmes might include the following activities:**

- > Support services for children provided within school – e.g. therapeutic services.
- > Homework clubs/additional classes for disadvantaged children.
- > Sporting and cultural enrichment activities.
- > Before- and after-school childcare and holiday childcare/play provision.
- > Support services for parents – e.g. adult education or parenting classes.
- > Activities targeted at the wider community.

**Extended school provisions have a number of benefits for pupils and families including:**

- > Narrowing the attainment gap<sup>26</sup>
- > Improving children's health and wellbeing<sup>27</sup>
- > Providing low-cost childcare for parents, supporting parents to work and a route out of poverty<sup>28</sup>
- > Improving pupil/teach relationships and children's relationships<sup>29</sup> with family members<sup>30</sup>
- > Positively engaging parents with their child's education<sup>31</sup>

**To ensure the school's provision benefits families living on a low income, they should:**

- > Consult with families to design the right provision for your school community
- > Develop specific objectives and monitoring tools
- > Take a universally targeted approach so families are not excluded
- > Ensure leadership provides a clear vision and operational management, with oversight of activities delivered by external organisations.

CPAG recently published [Tackling child poverty: a guide for schools](#) which shows how schools in London are using extended schools programmes and other initiatives to support children in low income households.

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<sup>26</sup> [Extended services evaluation: End of Year One Report](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Unfinished business: where next for extended schools?](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Extended services in practice](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Extended services evaluation: End of Year One Report](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Extended services in practice](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Extended services evaluation: End of Year One Report](#)

## Directing families to other support services

### Why this is important

There are lots of resources and sources of expertise in the wider community that can help schools with this work. Developing strong links and partnerships with these organisations and with multiple teams across your local authority is an effective way to support low income families. This is crucial as schools are often able to refer families directly without having to go through local authority pathways.

## Things to consider

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many families may have had a change in their financial circumstances and may be claiming benefits for the first time. It is therefore crucial that schools actively promote access to Free Schools Meals and other available financial support through regular communications with families, on social media, and on the school website. They should also encourage families to alert them to any relevant employment or income changes.

### Reflective questions:

- > Is information about entitlements included regularly in school communications?
- > How equipped are staff to discuss or approach parents in a non-stigmatising way?
- > How can your school normalise this sort of conversation/awareness-raising?

Types of local support	Information	Initial steps for schools
<b>Emergency or crisis support</b>	Examples of emergency support in local areas could be food or clothing banks, and there may be specific services available for families with No Recourse to Public Funds. These may be provided through local charities, community organisations, or religious institutions.	<p>Make contact with your local emergency support organisations.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Understand their referral process.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Increase awareness among staff so they can refer families.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Some families may need further support to access these services, such as someone attending appointments with them if they speak English as an additional language.</p>
<b>Adult support services</b>	Services such as adult mental health, adult education, and employment support are often available through councils. Making families aware of them can help families access training and support to develop their skills or careers.	<p>Use existing council links to gain introductions to adult services.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Consistently promote and raise awareness through a universally targeted approach.</p>
<b>Other local charity support</b>	Larger, national organisations can have localised delivery practices that are targeted at specific geographical locations. Aimed at local residents and families, these may provide other types of support such as peer support.	<p>Understand what different provision is available in your local area.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Build partnerships and referral pathways with organisations.</p>

# Signposting families to support

Below is a list of support services that aim to help families facing financial difficulties.

**Advice Local:** find local advice services in your area.

[advice.local.uk](https://advice.local.uk)

**Citizens Advice:** free, independent and confidential financial advice.

[citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/search-for-your-local-citizens-advice](https://citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/search-for-your-local-citizens-advice)

**Citizens UK:** organises communities to act together for power, social justice and the common good.

[citizensuk.org](https://citizensuk.org)

**Connect with Work:** supports people who face barriers getting into work by providing tailored skills training and connecting them to businesses that are recruiting.

[home.barclays/society/investing-in-our-communities/our-citizenship-programmes/connect-with-work](https://home.barclays/society/investing-in-our-communities/our-citizenship-programmes/connect-with-work)

**Coram Children's Legal Centre:** promotes and protects the rights of children in the UK and internationally, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[childrenslegalcentre.com](https://childrenslegalcentre.com)

**EntitledTo:** benefit calculator to make sure families are getting the support they are entitled to.

[entitledto.co.uk](https://entitledto.co.uk)

**Fair Finance:** offers a range of financial products and services designed to meet the needs of people who are financially excluded.

[fairfinance.org.uk](https://fairfinance.org.uk)

**Shelter:** free support from expert housing advisers.

[england.shelter.org.uk/get\\_help](https://england.shelter.org.uk/get_help)

**The Money Advice Service:** general information regarding the benefits that are available to people.

[moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/categories/benefits](https://moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/categories/benefits)

**The Trussell Trust:** national network of foodbanks delivered by community groups and organisations.

[trusselltrust.org/get-involved/start-a-food-bank](https://trusselltrust.org/get-involved/start-a-food-bank)

**Turn 2 Us:** has an online grant search tool where you can find charities that offer non-repayable grants to help individuals on low incomes.

[grants-search.turn2us.org.uk](https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk)

# Useful resources

## A Children's Rights approach to tackling poverty in the classroom

**Rights Respecting Schools Award - Unicef UK:** supporting teachers and staff on their journey to become Rights Respecting.  
[unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools](https://unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools)

**Let us Learn:** aims to inspire young people to take the lead in their schools and communities to ensure all migrants have the chance to contribute fully to British society.  
[letuslearn.study](https://letuslearn.study)

**The Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens:** focuses directly on children and young adults and their right to British citizenship.  
[prcbc.org](https://prcbc.org)

## Understanding how poverty intersects with other characteristics

**The Black Curriculum:** offers teacher training and consultations that enable teachers to diversify their curriculum and engage with their student body. They also offer bespoke learning programmes for schools.  
[theblackcurriculum.com](https://theblackcurriculum.com)  
[theblackcurriculum.com/downloads](https://theblackcurriculum.com/downloads)

**Show Racism the Red Card:** provides educational workshops, training sessions, multimedia packages, and a whole host of other resources, all with the purpose of tackling racism in society.  
[theredcard.org/resources-and-activities](https://theredcard.org/resources-and-activities)

**PSHE Association:** Challenging racism through PSHE education  
[pshe-association.org.uk/news-and-blog/blog-entry/challenging-racism-through-pshe-education](https://pshe-association.org.uk/news-and-blog/blog-entry/challenging-racism-through-pshe-education)

**The National Association for Special Educational Needs:** mini-guides and resources available on website:  
[nasen.org.uk/resource-listing/miniguides.html](https://nasen.org.uk/resource-listing/miniguides.html)

**Mencap:** advice and resources on topics like relationships and friendships, and health and wellbeing  
[mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support](https://mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support)

**Project 17:** works to end destitution among migrant children. They work with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support. Their website includes resources for helping individuals access support.  
[project17.org.uk/resources/](https://project17.org.uk/resources/)

**School Wellbeing:** a range of resources on different topics including anti-racism resources. They also provide health and wellbeing training some of which covers free school meals.  
[schoolwellbeing.co.uk/pages/anti-racism-resources](https://schoolwellbeing.co.uk/pages/anti-racism-resources)  
[schoolwellbeing.co.uk](https://schoolwellbeing.co.uk)  
[schoolwellbeing.co.uk/training\\_courses](https://schoolwellbeing.co.uk/training_courses)

**NRPF Network**  
The NRPF Network provide guidance and resources to people working with families who have no recourse to public funds. These are mainly targeted at council workers but may be of use to schools.  
[nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/guidance-for-councils/childrens-services](https://nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/guidance-for-councils/childrens-services)

## Addressing the cost of the school day and poverty-related stigma

### **Child Poverty Action Group**

All Cost of the School Day resources

[cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day](http://cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day)

### **Cost of the School Day toolkit (Scotland):**

range of resources to support schools to address financial barriers to education in their schools through engaging with their school community, including parental surveys.

[cpag.org.uk/scotland/CoSD/toolkit](http://cpag.org.uk/scotland/CoSD/toolkit)

### **Tackling child poverty:** a guide for schools:

This guide contains key lessons for schools on developing initiatives to tackle child poverty.

[cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/tackling-child-poverty-guide-schools](http://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/tackling-child-poverty-guide-schools)

## Supporting families affected by poverty

**Magic Breakfast:** providing healthy breakfast food and expert support to help identify and reach those pupils at risk of hunger.

[magicbreakfast.com/](http://magicbreakfast.com/)

**Home-Start:** volunteers trained to work alongside families to overcome challenges.

[home-start.org.uk/find-your-nearest-home-start](http://home-start.org.uk/find-your-nearest-home-start)

**Greggs Breakfast Clubs:** support with funding school breakfast clubs, encouraging the use of parent volunteers.

[greggsfoundation.org.uk/breakfast-clubs/about-the-scheme](http://greggsfoundation.org.uk/breakfast-clubs/about-the-scheme)

**Football Beyond Borders:** school-based programming to support young people to finish school with the skills and grades to make a successful transition into adulthood.

[footballbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/](http://footballbeyondborders.org/what-we-do/)

**Parentkind:** blueprint for parent-friendly schools, to support school engagement with their parent community.

[parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Projects/Blueprint-for-Parent-Friendly-Schools](http://parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Projects/Blueprint-for-Parent-Friendly-Schools)

# ANNEX 1:

## Communications with parents – templates





# Letter to parents

Monday 18 January 2021

Dear Parents,

As part of our topic on "Transport", we are planning to take Year 2 on an educational visit to the British Transport Museum. The children will learn about the history of transport, by exploring a collection of historic vehicles and by completing activities to extend their knowledge of modern transport.

The date for this trip will be Tuesday 23 March 2021. We will be leaving school at 10am and will return by 4pm. School uniform must be worn for this trip. Any changes will be communicated through the school app.

## **Cost**

The school is covering the cost of the school trip for pupils, but if families would like to make a contribution towards it then they can make a donation of up to £8. This can be done through the app or in person. If you have any concerns about school-related costs, then please speak to me directly or send me a message. We are working hard to ensure money is never an issue and all pupils can enjoy everything the school has to offer.

## **Permission**

Please go on the school app to give your consent for your child to attend this trip by Tuesday 2 March at the latest.

If you are having any issues with the school app please contact the office on [phone number] or [email].

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

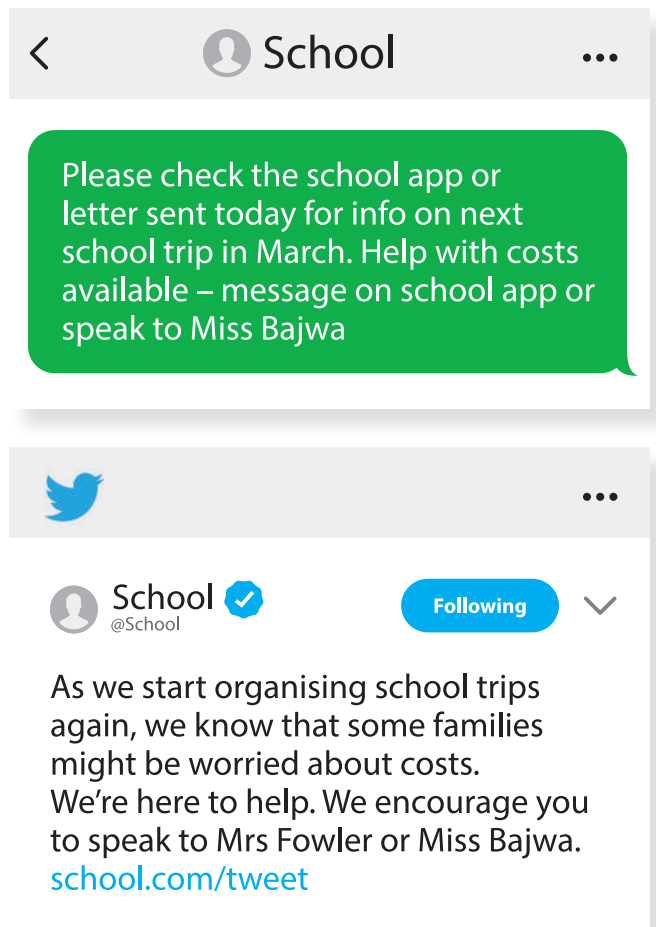
Year 2 teacher

If you have experienced a change in your income or are worried about your finances, we would really encourage you to get in touch with [HEADTEACHER/FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER]. There may be some additional support that you may be entitled to or we may be able to assist with some school costs. As a school, we're here to help you through the process.

**Some assistance that might be available to you includes:**

- > free school meals
- > welfare and debt advice
- > support for families with no recourse to public funds
- > grants or in-kind support.

If you ever find yourself in a position where you feel like you are struggling with the cost of attending school, please do contact [HEADTEACHER/FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER], and we can work with you to address your concerns.



# ANNEX 2:

## What are the costs of your school day exercise



# What are the costs of your school day?

**This group discussion exercise is designed to help you explore and estimate likely costs for families in your school, providing a baseline measure against which progress can be measured.**

For each part of the school day, you are asked to reflect on how much money families are likely to spend.

Refer to school policies and also to your knowledge and experience of how things are done in your school.

**Please note:**

- > Add any missing items to the boxes in each section. Leave blank any boxes which are not applicable to your school.
- > Costs vary depending on age and stage of children. Consider the perspectives of different learners to understand costs at different stages, for example a Y1, Y4 and Y6 pupil or a Y7, Y9 and Y11 pupil.
- > Some costs may not be mandatory - consider though what children and young people are likely to need and want and what parents/carers are likely to try to provide for their children.

- > In each category, choose the time period – weekly, monthly or annually – which gives you the clearest picture of cost pressures on family budgets, for example, annually for larger irregular costs like uniform and trips and weekly/monthly for regular costs like travel and lunch.
- > The discussion required to reach decisions will be invaluable in understanding where costs come from and when they are most significant so please record key discussion points in the summary notes boxes.

*What are the most significant costs for families at your school?*

*What times of year might be most difficult financially for families?*

# 1. Uniform costs

Estimate uniform costs in the table below. Please take into account the school uniform policy, growth of child, changes of clothes required for washing, wear and tear throughout the school year and factors which result in additional costs, for example branding, change of tie, unusual colours, embroidered logos or specialist suppliers.



- > Consider costs for those families receiving clothing grants and those not receiving clothing grants.
- > Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated uniform costs			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Recommended school uniform			
PE kit			
Shoes			
Coats/jackets			
Schoolbag			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, highest costs, times of the year with highest costs, factors which could lead to additional costs, current uptake of clothing grant, impact of receiving clothing grant, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...

## 2. Travel costs



Estimate travel costs in the table below. Take into account daily travel from home to school and back, any additional travel for after school activities and the eligibility policy surrounding free transport in your local authority area.

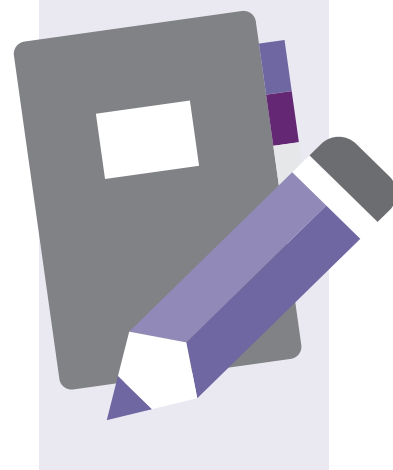
- > Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated travel costs			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Bus			
Train			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to have the highest costs, considerations on eligibility for free transport, time of the year with highest costs, instances where additional travel costs apply, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...



# 3. Learning costs



Estimate any costs associated with learning at school in the table below. Take into account school policy and variations in teacher practices surrounding provision and lending of materials.

- > Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated learning at school costs			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Stationery and equipment: for example folders, calculators etc.			
Subject costs: for example, Food Technology, Art and Design etc			
Materials for craft projects			
Study materials: for example, Past Papers			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to have the highest costs, stages and times of the year with highest costs, any variations in provision of materials across the school, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...

# 4. School trip costs



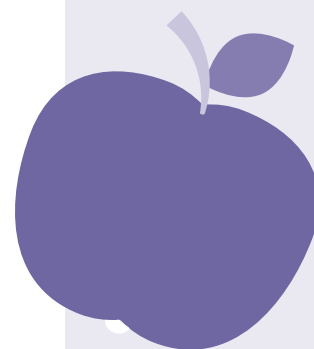
Estimate costs for school trips in the table below. Take into account nominal fees for transport to free venues and any hidden costs involved in participation (e.g. spending money and money for food if not taking school lunches).

> Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated trips cost			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Day trips related to curriculum			
Residential trips			
Other trips			
Equipment for residential trips: for example, sleeping bags, clothes, toiletries			
Other (please write below)			
TOTAL			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to participate/not participate, frequency of trips, notice given, significant hidden costs, stages and times of the year with highest costs, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...

# 5. Eating at school costs



Estimate costs for eating at school in the table below. Take into account Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement and uptake, cost of school lunches and the cost of food in local shops if pupils leave school at lunchtime.

- > Please consider costs for children receiving Free School Meals and not receiving Free School Meals.
- > **Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.**

Estimated eating at school costs			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Breakfast club			
Snacks			
Lunch			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to have the highest costs, current uptake of FSM, impact of Universal Infant FSM and FSM uptake in later years, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...

## 6. School club/ activities costs

Estimate costs for attending school clubs and taking part in extra-curricular activities in the table below. Take into account the full range of activities and opportunities available within the school and any hidden costs involved in participation (for example, travelling to competitions, appropriate sportswear).



> Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated clubs/activities costs			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Entry fees			
Equipment and materials			
Clothes			
Transport			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to participate/not participate, significant hidden costs, stages and times of the year with highest costs, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...

# 7. Fun event costs



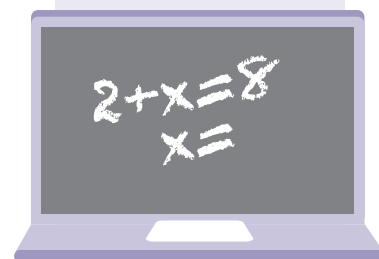
Estimate costs for participating in fun events at school in the table below. Take into account the full range of events throughout the school year, including those promoted as optional which pupils may still want to take part in.

- > Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated fun event costs			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Social events, for example, discos, Proms, leavers dances			
Seasonal events, for example, Christmas Fayres and pantomimes, Easter bonnet competitions			
Special days, for example, World Book Day			
Fundraising days, for example, Comic Relief, non-uniform days			
School photographs			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to participate/not participate, frequency of events, notice given, stages and times of the year with highest costs, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...

# 8. Home learning costs



Estimate home learning costs in the table below. Take into account school policy and variations in teacher practices surrounding provision and lending of materials.

- > Please choose the most useful time period for you – weekly, monthly or yearly – when calculating costs.

Estimated home learning cost			
Items	Weekly	Termly	Yearly
Stationery and equipment			
Computer access, including appropriate software			
Internet access			
Books and other study materials			
Craft materials			
Other (please write below)			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Summary notes** for example, groups likely to have the highest costs, stages and times of the year with highest costs, any variations in provision of materials across the school, ways in which the school tries to reduce costs...





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