

# THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**More than one in five (210,000) children across Scotland are officially recognised as living in poverty. In Glasgow, it is estimated that one in three (over 36,000) children are in poverty. Insufficient household income can mean that some children and young people don't have the resources needed for school and can't easily afford to take part in school activities which cost money.<sup>1</sup> This can put them at risk of missing out on opportunities at school and feeling different, excluded and unhappy.**

## Introduction

Recent Scottish Government policy and investment has focused on closing the attainment gap between children from high and low income households in order to reduce current inequalities in educational outcomes.

Integral to this agenda must be an understanding of how education and school structures, policies and practices affect children and young people from low income households and where difficulties and financial barriers to participation exist throughout the school day. Understanding more about this from children's perspectives can support schools to poverty-proof their policies and practices so that conditions are right for all children and young people to learn and to achieve.

The Cost of the School Day project aimed to answer the following questions:

- **How do education policies and school practices impact on the participation and school experiences of children and young people from low income households?** We asked what a school day is like for children and young people from low income households, about potential problems in school policies and practices and about the impact these might have on children's participation and experiences at school
- **How can education policies and school practices be designed to reduce or remove stigma, exclusion or disadvantage for children and young people from low income households?** We asked which existing policies and practices work well and what else should be in place.

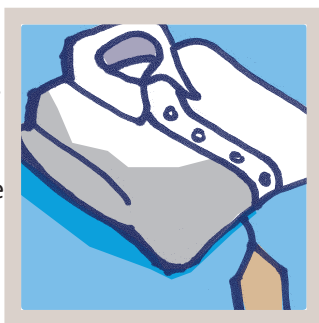
This report presents qualitative data from eight Glasgow Primary and Secondary schools in areas of varying levels of deprivation. In total, 339 children and young people between Primary 5 and S6 and 111 staff members shared their views, experiences and ideas in workshop sessions and focus groups. Each school then received an individual report of findings which allowed them to decide on poverty proofing action. Included in the full report are further details of methods, materials and some of the changes made by schools in response to their reports.

## Key issues identified by children, young people and staff

Children, young people and staff identified points throughout the school day where school costs place pressure on family budgets and insufficient income leads to unequal access to opportunities or poverty related stigma and difference.

### 07:00 Getting dressed for school

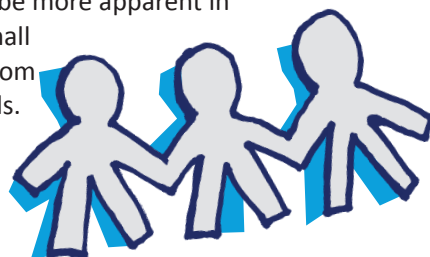
Uniform is the cheapest option for families but still presents a significant cost. Council clothing grants only go so far and some children and young people don't have decent or sufficient school clothing and footwear. Although uniform minimises visible differences it is still the main indicator of income and the first thing to be picked on. Strict dress code enforcement embarrasses young people and quickly replacing items of uniform can be difficult if parents don't have immediate access to funds.



school means that some children and young people can come to topics with little prior knowledge and can display difficulties in engaging with staff and with learning.

### 10:30 Friendships at school

Friendships are affected by income levels and the ability to have and to do the same things as other children both in and outside school. Children and young people can tell who has less money in their school and this can lead to stigma and exclusion. These differences can be more apparent in schools which have small numbers of children from low income households.



### 08:00 Travelling to school

Transport costs are significant for low income families. No financial support is provided for children and young people living less than 2 miles (Primary) or 3 miles (Secondary) from their catchment school. Children and young people's attendance and their participation in after school activities and learning support can be affected by routes which involve lengthy journeys, high costs or reliance on school transport.



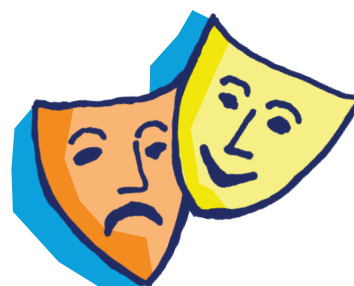
### 11:00 School trips

Low cost trips can be difficult to afford for families on low incomes and expensive trips abroad can prove impossible. Missing trips means that children miss fun, new experiences and personal development and feel left out. Providing free or heavily subsidised trips takes staff time and effort and a greater variety of trip options exist in schools where more parents can pay. Having to ask for help to pay for trips is potentially embarrassing for children and they may choose not to do it.



### 09:15 Learning at school

Resource and subject costs can place pressure on family budgets and risk limiting young people's participation in particular tasks and subjects. Expectations surrounding resources and practice in lending them varies both between and within schools. Inability to access opportunities outside



## 12:40 Eating at school

Lack of food and poor nutrition are realities for some children and young people in Glasgow. Staff often plug gaps when children are hungry. Receiving free school meals can lessen the financial burden on low income families but not every family entitled to free meals applies for them and not every child receiving free meals takes them, preferring to go to the shops with friends. Children and young people are broadly aware of who gets free meals but report limited stigma apart from when taking free meals on school trips.



## 14:00 Fun events

Fun events, even low cost ones, create difficulties for children and young people from low income households when they happen close together or have hidden costs. Children and young people can feel embarrassed or left out when they can't take part in events and activities. In particular, non-uniform days single people out for non-participation or the clothes they wear and leads to a dip in attendance in some schools.



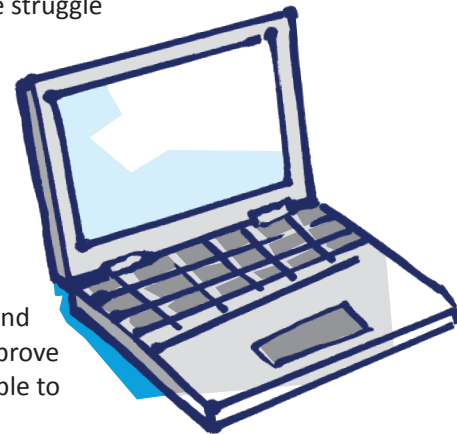
## 16:00 School clubs

Free and low cost school clubs make new interests and experiences accessible to children and young people but small costs can still stand in the way of participation. Schools balance the need to keep club costs low with being able to provide stimulating and worthwhile experiences. Fewer opportunities exist in schools where parents are unable to pay for clubs.



## 19:00 Learning at home

Although most home learning tasks cost nothing, some children don't have basic resources required at home. Homework requiring computers, internet access, software and printers means that some children and young people struggle to access the resources needed to complete homework. Practice in lending resources and assumptions around ICT access varies between and within schools. Some children lack calm quiet environments to work in and shared learning tasks can prove difficult if parents are unable to help.



## 00:00 Understanding and attitudes towards poverty

Children and young people of all ages are aware of costs and pressures on family budgets and speak openly about what this means for them. Staff are often aware when children and young people are experiencing poverty but say that some could be overlooked if visible signs are hidden. Many are aware of the financial difficulties faced by families but some draw a distinction between 'real' unavoidable poverty and poverty created or exacerbated by poor financial choices and consumerist priorities. There is great scope to raise awareness of poverty and to explore it further with children, young people and staff in schools.

# Children's views on what helps to remove poverty based exclusion and stigma at school

## Minimising costs and reducing pressure on family budgets

- Providing financial support like free meals, clothing grants and Education Maintenance Allowances.<sup>2</sup> Children say that schools should make sure that everybody entitled is getting this support
- Ensuring that anything with a cost is as affordable as possible (e.g. uniform, trips) and supporting children and parents to afford it (e.g. flexible instalments for trips, signposting to cheapest uniform supplier)
- Covering costs, subsidising and providing sibling discounts where possible
- Fundraising which doesn't always ask families to contribute (e.g. supermarket bag-packing) and not asking children for money
- Letting parents know what help is available and what support there is to access it
- Looking at the school year with affordability in mind – spacing events and activities out so that lots of costs don't come all at once.

## Ensuring equal access to opportunities, regardless of income

- Understanding the resources pupils have at home, modifying expectations and tasks and providing support to access resources, especially ICT
- Ensuring consistency of rules, expectations and practice around resources between staff
- Lending resources like stationery, uniform and equipment for clubs without comment or trouble and having them there for everyone so that nobody stands out
- Providing opportunities (e.g. clubs, supported study) at different times of the day to ensure that more people can take part and that transport isn't an issue

## Reducing and challenging stigma

- Putting systems in place to ensure that children and young people don't have to feel embarrassed asking for help or subsidies
- Making sure that reward and merit systems are not affected by issues which could be related to finances at home
- Having clear anti bullying policies and practices which are alert to income based bullying and stigma.

Children and young people also recommend that they be taught more about poverty to remove stigma and shame. They think that staff should understand poverty and know that they can't be sure about everybody's situation; staff should listen, not shout in public and ensure that there are confidential ways to disclose financial problems.

**More detailed suggestions for each part of the school day are included in the full Cost of the School Day report.**

## Conclusions

The cost of the school day is significant for low income families and costs can create barriers to participation and negative experiences for children and young people. However, there are a range of simple and practical measures which can help to minimise costs, reduce stigma and ensure that children and young people have equal access to opportunities at school.

Awareness of poverty, the findings in this report, the good practice already happening and of children's recommendations can ensure that more schools are able to make small changes which could make big differences to children and young people from low income households. Schools participating in Cost of the School Day have already made a range of simple changes such as improving communication with parents about financial support, making approaches to lending resources consistent, starting homework clubs with ICT access and removing the need for expensive badged sweatshirts.

Poverty proofing education and school policies and practices pre-emptively protects children from disadvantage and stigma rather than dealing with the consequences after they encounter it. The findings, reflective questions and tools presented in the full report can help schools understand likely barriers, establish their current position and involve the whole school community in deciding where changes can be made.

These findings and recommendations must also be taken on board by local authorities, national government and other stakeholders who should provide schools with the support required to engage in this work and ensure that their own policy and budget decisions are poverty impact assessed with a view to reducing school costs for low income families and mitigating the effects of poverty on children and young people.

**A more detailed set of recommendations is included in the full Cost of the School Day report.**  
<http://www.cpag.org.uk/costoftheschoolday>



The Cost of the School Day is a Poverty Leadership Panel project, delivered by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland in partnership with Glasgow City Council Education Services. This project was funded and supported by Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership, Glasgow Centre for Population Health and Glasgow City Council Education Services.

The Cost of the School Day was inspired by the success of Poverty Proofing the School Day from Children North East in England.