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**“Poverty affects every area of a child’s life and this is no different for school.”** (The Children’s Society 2014)

**National Picture**

More than 22% of children in Scotland (212,000) live in poverty. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) forecasts that this will increase by 100,000 to over one in four children by 2020. The impact of poverty on children’s lives is pervasive. The gap in outcomes remains wide in terms of standard of living, quality of life, health, opportunities and educational attainment.

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 supporting schools to consider their policies and practices to ensure that financial difficulties are not barriers to children’s right to learn and achieve.

**Local Picture**

In Edinburgh, the child poverty rate matches the national average and affects 1 in 5 pupils. According to recent City of Edinburgh Council figures, that means 20,474 children live in poverty in the capital (after housing costs are taken into consideration). Although considered an affluent capital city, every single Ward across Edinburgh registers child poverty rates of over 10% after housing costs.

**‘1 in 5’ Child Poverty Work in Edinburgh**

The 1 in 5 project began in August 2015 and is centred on a programme of work to: raise awareness and understanding of child poverty and its impact on educational outcomes; explore the cost of the school day; and, examine the impact of poverty-related stigma.

Six pilot schools took part in the project which involved training and focus group sessions with staff, parents/carers, and children and young people in order to:

a) Raise awareness of the impact of stigmatisation on children living in poverty;

b) Identify and understand the range of costs involved in the school day from different perspectives;

c) Make recommendations and propose actions for schools to take forward.

Pupils from the schools have also been involved in a number of other initiatives to help raise awareness of child poverty, and these are detailed later in the report.

**‘1 in 5’ Child Poverty Work in Edinburgh**

The schools selected were deliberately chosen to represent a wide social mix; in some cases this may mean that, for schools with a high intake of more affluent students, the pupils and parents affected by poverty experience more stigma and difficulties with the cost of the school day because this is not a barrier for their peers. The five primary schools had at least 50 pupils (or over 30%) eligible for free school meals (Sciennes, Hillwood, Gracemount, Dalry and Royal High). Broughton High School, also selected, has one of the highest numbers of pupils (175) eligible for free school meals. Positive action schools were not included as these schools are already aware of the impact of poverty on outcomes for children and receive additional funding for this purpose.

The impact of the project is highlighted in some of the feedback below.

 *‘I have learned that things cost a lot of money and Alex’s story and it must be hard for their parents to bring him up. We should try many ways to help people like Alex. ’ (Primary pupil)*

*‘I was very surprised at just how ignorant I was about the many causes of child poverty!’ ‘Addressing poverty will have a positive effect on all areas of a child’s development.’(Parents)*

*‘It was hard listening, thought provoking and challenging. It makes me want to make a difference – particularly in my role as a teacher.’ (Class Teacher)*

*“The project has had a significant impact on the life of our school and the decisions we make. The children and families in our school community face real challenges. It is our job to equip them with the skills and aspirations to overcome these.  More than that though, as a school we have social responsibility to ensure opportunities are for all and that they are inclusive. A good example of the impact of this project is when we planned for our whole school community outing at Christmas. We spoke about the way we charged for it in the past and this year we have a price structure that means bigger families pay less. It is these small things that make a difference. Small changes in our approaches make for big changes in our children’s lives.”* (Head teacher)

**Key Messages**

* Edinburgh has 1 in 5 pupils living on or below the poverty line (consistent with the national average).
* In terms of the scale of child poverty, Scotland ranks about equal with Estonia, Hungary and Portugal and below Poland and the Czech Republic [[1]](#footnote-1). In Edinburgh in 2014, only six children from the poorest families gained three ‘A’s at Higher. This compares to 290 young people from the wealthiest families who achieved this standard.
* Two thirds of children in poverty live in families in which at least one adult works.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Two-parent families with children are also managing the highest levels of household debt, which has risen by 42% since 2013 [[3]](#footnote-3)
* Contrary to popular stereotypes, 93% of people receiving out of work benefits are not dependent on drugs or alcohol.[[4]](#footnote-4) All the evidence supports the analysis that the causes of poverty are structural. Principal causes include unemployment/underemployment, inadequate levels of benefits (compounded by recent Welfare Reform policies), low wages, and insecure terms and conditions of employment, such as zero hours contracts.
* A recent report estimated that the average cost of school per year is approximately £800 per child.[[5]](#footnote-5)
* This report found that 71% of parents said they had struggled with the cost of school. These costs can include, for example, buying uniforms and other essential equipment (e.g. stationery), paying for school trips and one-off events like school proms, or affording subject choices that have material costs.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* The same report found that 55% of children have avoided asking their parents or carers for something school-related because they thought they would struggle to afford it.

**Introduction to the Report**

Clearly, the most effective response to child poverty will involve a wide range of agencies and services including schools, housing, health, economic development, welfare rights and local, community-based organisations working together.

However, this report highlights 30 main recommendations for change which can be taken forward by Communities and Families. These have been developed in response to the eight principal issues raised in the training and focus groups undertaken by the project team with nearly 400 children, families and staff. A further 700 pupils took part in assemblies.

**1. Raising Awareness**

*‘ I find it shocking that only 6 people from the poorest families got 3 ‘As’ at higher . That will affect like their whole future life and prospects’.* (S4 pupil)

One of the most powerful pieces of feedback received from staff, pupils and families has been the impact of the training and focus groups, both in terms of content and quality and how this has changed attitudes and perspectives. Many staff, pupils and families were surprised that 1 in 5 children are living in poverty in Edinburgh and concerned about the implications of this on both a personal and public level.

*‘Very thought provoking and sad – a lot of ignorance on my part. Made me think about what I can do and I want to understand more so I can help’* (Primary teacher)

The focus groups also raised the issue of ‘hidden poverty’, which affects pupils and families who may not be entitled to benefits but because of changes in circumstances or factors such as debt management programmes are struggling to get by. Schools have reported increased levels of self reflection and empathy in all parties involved as a result. All schools embraced the idea of reviewing costs associated with the school day which has contributed to the development of training for schools and the recommendations held within this report. The initial pilot for this work took place in six schools but there is also great interest from many other schools to take part in similar training to raise awareness, help with focus groups and conduct similar ‘poverty proofing’ work in their establishments.

**Recommendations**

1. There should be ongoing support for the project team to continue the roll-out of training and develop focus group tools in order to continue to raise awareness of the impact of child poverty, reduce stigma and examine the costs of the school day.

2. Send out the ‘Top Tips’ leaflet to all staff in schools with a covering letter from the Executive Director.

3. Build on the success of the 1 in 5 Child Poverty event in March 2016. This should include organising an annual conference or event to highlight issues around child poverty and sharing good practice.

4. Endorse and support the actions proposed in this report.

5. Many of the recommendations proposed could be addressed in a new Equity Framework or similar which would help support schools to make any changes necessary to enable pupils to take full advantage of the education provided.

**2. School Uniforms**

*‘School uniform can be expensive so Alex (case study) might have a problem getting it. But school uniform shouldn’t stop you getting a good education.’*(Primary Pupil)

The average cost per child on school uniform is estimated to be £159 per year.[[7]](#footnote-7) In every single school, the families interviewed felt strongly that they should be able to buy school uniform from a store of their choice in order to be able to benefit from cheaper deals. Uniforms already carrying school badges should be optional rather than compulsory, and schools should consider providing badges that parents can buy and sew-on themselves. Some schools had a different uniform for each year and this increased costs.

An internal City of Edinburgh Council report [[8]](#footnote-8)found that over half of schools (both primary and secondary) were generating income for the school with sales of uniform being channelled through certain suppliers.

The obligation that parents have to buy school uniform from certain suppliers could be seen as discriminating against families who as a result of low income are struggling to afford the costs for these and could find uniform cheaper elsewhere.

Families who are eligible for clothing grants (in Edinburgh this is £43 for primary pupils and £50 for secondary pupils per year, which is below the average spend) currently have to collect their vouchers from the City Chambers. Many staff and parents have raised this as an issue and questioned why this could not be distributed by schools or in neighbourhood centres. Furthermore, at present, these vouchers can only be redeemed in BHS, Marks and Spencer, EESLS and Sondico Professionals, or directly with the school.

**Recommendations**

6. Review information given out to parents on the wearing of school uniform to ensure that all reasonable steps are being taken to support children who are from low income families.

7. The Equity Framework could encourage schools to be flexible in the purchase of school uniform rather than buying exclusively from sole suppliers. Where any income is generated, it could be used for inclusion purposes.

8. Clothing vouchers should be sent to schools to ensure these are more easily accessible to families.

9. Procurement should investigate how these vouchers could be more widely redeemable.

**3. Food & Drink**

*‘We keep spare fruit for children who come in to school hungry. Some staff have a supply of biscuits they provide for children without snack’* (Head teacher)

Free school meals for P1-P3 children have been widely welcomed; however, issues arise from P4 onwards. Research has found that pupils not identified as qualifying for free school meals (but who are just above the poverty threshold) are four times more likely to go hungry. [[9]](#footnote-9)Staff were aware of these children not having money for snacks, and both staff and families who were interviewed all raised the issue of free milk and fruit. However, they are also aware that this has budgetary implications. The majority of schools offer extended day services to pupils, such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs, (for which a charge can be made ) in order to address some of their pupils needs but this is not universally available.

**Recommendations**

10. Support the implementation and roll out of breakfast clubs in all schools. This work is being led by the Early Years team.

11. Investigate any wider Governmental/NHS programmes around provision of free fruit in schools.

12. Approach large supermarkets and other companies (e.g. farms’ ‘wonky’ vegetable initiatives) to find out whether they would be prepared to support such a programme as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

**4. Curriculum materials and homework**

**‘***We need to be mindful of how teachers deal with late homework, not paying for trips, lack of uniform etc. if this is directly related to poverty!’* Class teacher

*‘This has really made me think and also evaluate what a classroom environment is like for a child in poverty and how it COULD be if we put things in place to change attitudes and make provisions’.* Class Teacher

According to law, schools must provide free education and cannot charge for any trip or activity (or materials, books, exam entry fees or equipment for use in connection with the activity) which:-

* takes place wholly or mainly during school hours;
* is an essential part of the curriculum or religious education syllabus; or
* is an essential part of the syllabus for a prescribed examination.

There are costs charged for certain courses such as ICT, CDT, HFT which vary from school to school from £0 to £90 per year. There is widespread agreement that this cost may act as a barrier to young people from low income families and prevent them from taking these courses. However, school staff were keen to point out that these courses do carry costs for materials and that this is not centrally funded, unlike free school meals. If there is no budget for these materials to be provided free of charge, schools often have little choice but to charge parents/carers.

Courses referred to above are often appealing to pupils who are not looking to go to University and interested in developing skills for trade or commerce. Given that over 50% of pupils do not go to University [[10]](#footnote-10) [[11]](#footnote-11) it is important that we maximise pathways and alternatives for the other 50% of children to ensure they are well equipped to enter other positive destinations.

**Recommendation**

13. An Equity Framework could include explicit guidelines to schools about what can/cannot be charged for including those that relate to subject areas e.g. ICT, CDT, HFT

14. Explore the potential of the private sector to cover some of these costs. For example, large companies and supermarkets could be approached about providing food for hospitality courses across the city as part of their CSR initiatives.

15. Support ongoing initiatives in schools that encourage pupils to explore and move into a range of positive destinations not just academic ones.

**5. Trips and After School Activities**

*‘We want to increase the opportunities for dialogue with children who know their parents may struggle with costs – making it ok to speak about these issues rather than keeping them hidden’* (Primary Head teacher)

*‘At times it feels as though there were letters home every week asking for this or that. Yes then there’s the pressure for trading cards and items like penny boards etc that affects them (children) and the finances.’* (Parent in ‘1 in 5’ focus group)

As mentioned above, the law states that schools cannot charge for any trip or activity which is an essential pat of the curriculum or a prescribed examination. Department of Education Advice for England and Wales (there is no equivalent document for Scotland) states that parents and carers can be asked to make voluntary contributions for board and lodging, transport but the voluntary nature of the contribution must be made clear and state that the children of parents who don't contribute will not be discriminated against. They also state if insufficient voluntary contributions are raised to fund a visit, or the school cannot fund it from some other source, then it must be cancelled.

Schools involved in the 1 in 5 project undertook an activity to audit all the costs requested of parents for their child(ren) to take part in trips, events and other activities in the school. In some cases, including in primary schools, this came to more than £1000 over the school career for just one child. Parents in focus groups stated that at times it felt as though ‘there were letters home every week asking for this or that’. Parents stated they would prefer information to be provided at the start of the year for all trips to help plan ahead, some consideration from the schools to better space out events/trips and that perhaps a system of contribution on a weekly basis could be set up that would cover all costs and negate the need for further letters.

Parents and staff related instances of children not sharing letters with information about the costs of trips and activities with their parents because they knew, or worried, that their parents could not afford it.

**Recommendations**

16. The drawing up of an Equity Framework could set out guidelines for our local authority around activities for which a charge can be made and include information about when charges will not be made, for example, for parents on a low income.

17. Schools should be encouraged to audit how much they ask parents and carers for over the duration of a pupil’s career and review the necessity and distribution of these requests.

18. Information requesting money should be emailed or, if given to children to take home, sent out in sealed envelopes

**6. Events & Fundraising**

*‘Even though everyone is encouraged to take part he (case study) might be worried and anxious as he would feel that everyone would know he’s not wearing new clothes’* (Secondary School Pupil)

Parents, pupils and staff all raised the issue of dress down/up charity days (having to pay both for the fundraising activity and the relevant costume) and its impact on attendance and potential stigmatising of certain pupils.

Another issue that was raised was holding book fairs in schools and the subsequent letters they send home to parents (e.g. ‘your child would like X book’) which, according to some parents, causes *‘tantrums every time and huge pressure on us as parents to buy the relevant book’*.

Finally, concerns were also raised about ‘end of school leaver proms’ or similar such events, and the associated competitive and ostentatious spend that often takes place amongst many pupils as a result. Some schools are already addressing this by providing alternatives like a day trip to the beach and a barbecue instead.

**Recommendations**

19. Review any current contracts or arrangements where private or profit making enterprises are allowed in schools to sell their products e.g. book fairs, and review the methods by which they communicate with parents and carers.

20. An Equity Framework could give guidelines to schools around end of term leaver events so that they can feel confident about issuing advice about these to parents with the backing of the local authority.

**7. Inclusion Funds**

*‘Depending on the area the school is in, parent councils will contribute more to school trips and resources like new playground equipment. This can lead to inequalities across the city on what schools can provide to pupils depending on the ability of parents to pay directly or contribute to school funds.’* (Head teacher)

*‘Parent councils have money which could be made available to support tackling poverty.’* (Class Teacher)

All schools are concerned with supporting pupils to be able to engage with activities equally; however, the way that this was done varied substantially from school to school. Staff, pupils and families all felt there should be an Inclusion Fund to support families facing difficulty with meeting some school-related costs both within the school and centrally. There are some clear examples of children living in poverty not receiving the support they needed unless social work was involved. Some parent councils provided an equivalent of an Inclusion Fund, but many did not. Parents and staff were concerned that some parents did not apply to this fund as it may mean other parents would have access to sensitive or personal information and therefore preferred for this to remain amongst school staff only.

While schools have detailed information about pupils on free school meals, they may be less aware (unless shared by parents) of those families who are affected by issues such as debt management programmes and therefore not eligible for certain benefits. One example was of a family of four, with both parents on a reasonable income but who were on a debt management programme and having to live on £60/week, and therefore not eligible for state support. This is an important reason why schools need to be able to apply discretion and be flexible in responding to children or families facing hardship. Given that 1 in 10 pupils are living in poverty regardless of which electoral Ward they reside in, the issue about inclusion funds applies to all schools.

**Recommendations**

21. Parent councils should be encouraged to put aside a percentage of their income to be exclusively used for Child Poverty/Inclusion Funds.

22. Any type of application to an Inclusion fund or similar needs to be confidential, and take into consideration issues such as difficulties with literacy that some applicants may have. It may, therefore, be better to be managed by the school rather than the parent council.

23. Develop ways to further strengthen links between schools and teams within the locality who support children and families in need.

24. Make sure that all families are aware of the Scottish Welfare Fund and how to apply. Additionally, consider setting up a separate locality fund to help respond to emergencies that arise within families.

25. Explore with Transport for Edinburgh what affordable travel options might be made available for families on low incomes.

26. Investigate whether existing CEC trust funds could be used to create a central inclusion fund that parents can access to support the cost of trips, education activities, materials and other appropriate school-related costs.

27. Explore how donations to this fund could be enhanced.

**8. Benefit Advice & Support**

*‘I spend a lot of time supporting parents to fill in forms for claiming Free School Meals and Clothing Allowance - they are quite complicated and then they need to hand the forms in and collect the funding centrally. I supported one parent who lived in Granton. He then had to walk all the way into town and back to hand in the form as he couldn’t afford the bus fare.’* (Pupil Support Teacher)

*‘I would say a really key part of my job is to build relationships with parents- being there in the playground to welcome parents and children, having regular opportunities and events to invite parents in school in an informal, sociable way. That means then when they have difficulties of any kind, including financial problems, they feel more able to come and speak to me about it.’* (Head teacher, Positive Action School)

Nearly all the focus groups with parents and staff agreed that more support with benefits advice would be welcome. Schools provided this where they were able to; however, time and capacity meant that this was often limited. Support with this advice is important because research has found that the level of household income is a major determinant in attainment levels. In Scotland, parental socio-economic background has been found to have more influence on children’s attainment than the school they attend. [[12]](#footnote-12) [[13]](#footnote-13)Initiatives to help maximise household income should therefore be a priority.

There are (approximately 1000) families whose children are entitled to financial help with school uniforms and free school meals but who do not currently claim this money.

The numbers of people not claiming may be because they are unaware of the support they are entitled to, have difficulties completing the form or, research also found, deterred from claiming benefits they are entitled to, because of the stigma. [[14]](#footnote-14)Feedback from both school staff and parents indicated that there were several different forms and that the process could be simplified and maybe operate on an opt-out basis.

**Recommendations**

28. Consider whether the number of forms for families on low income could be simplified and reduced.

29. Ensure that all families who are eligible to claim financial assistance, including school clothing grants and free school meals, are encouraged and supported to do so**.**

30. Schools should organise social events that encourage ‘hardly reached’ parents to come into school. These should be informal and focused on building relationships between school staff and parents.

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