

Pupil Equity Funding



2025
Report

Deepening the understanding of how Pupil Equity Funding is improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap



PUPIL EQUITY FUNDING

£130 million/year - part of the wider **£1 billion** Scottish Attainment Challenge Programme investment over this parliamentary term (2022-2026)

97% of all schools receive Pupil Equity Funding

Pupil Equity Funding ranges from **£1,225/year** to **£350,000/year** per school

We engaged with **129 schools** across all **32 Local Authorities**

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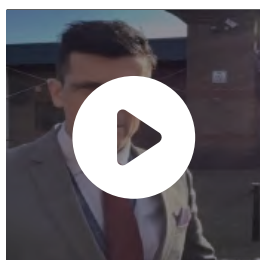
School videos



- **Young People from Castlemilk High School** in Glasgow highlight the differences a wide range of study support opportunities, including residential study weekends, Easter revision and Saturday classes, coaching and mentoring have made to them in improving relationships, supporting their readiness to learn and prepare for exams.



- Young people from **Woodmill High School** in Fife highlight the difference a mentor and family link worker have made to them.



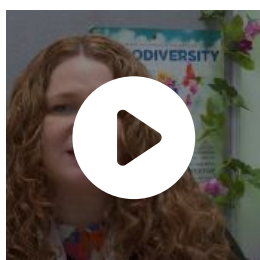
- **Leith Academy**, Edinburgh – a package of PEF supported work delivered by additional staffing helping young people attend, learn and remain engaged, (including a youth worker, nurturing staff & two Pupil Support Officers), developing trusting relationships with young people. Listen to Headteacher Mike Irving and the team outline their approach to PEF.



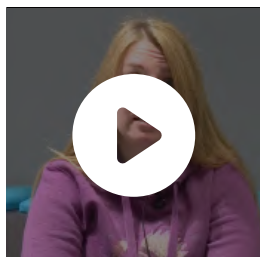
- **St Machar Academy** in Aberdeen has a highly effective partnership with the local football club, with an alternative curriculum offer focusing on health, wellbeing, communication and confidence building.



- **St Ignatius Primary School** in North Lanarkshire has invested PEF in developing a bespoke tracking system. This allows them to target tailored interventions such as Forest clubs, to encourage improved attendance, attainment and the engagement of children – all underpinned by a lens-like focus on data.



- At **Strathmore Primary School** in Angus, 'Read, Write, Inc.' has been adopted as their core literacy programme and a partnership with Alba Explorers has been a huge success, upskilling teachers to deliver an outdoor learning programme.



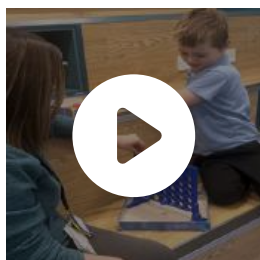
- **Woodmill High School**, Fife use a data-driven approach supporting a family link worker and mentor, helping improve children and young people's attendance, engagement and aspirations.



- At **St Catherine's Primary School** in Renfrewshire, PEF is invested in health and wellbeing support for pupils through **place2be** and a Health & Wellbeing key worker with every child participating in an extra-curricular activity which also contributes to the professional development of staff.



- **Stornoway Primary School**, Western Isles focus on targeted support on attainment, in particular literacy. This is being complemented by the school involvement in the Children & Young People Improvement Collaborative programme with notable improvements in attainment and in particular literacy.



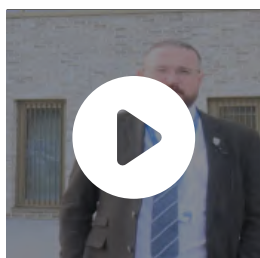
- **Renton Primary School**, West Dunbartonshire uses PEF to fund an additional teacher to support enhanced multi-level teaching and capacity for targeted learning support within the class for those who need it; and to invest in a pupil and family support worker to work with pupils and families to improve attendance and health and wellbeing, delivering approaches such as nurture and play therapy and supporting families to engage other services and income support services as needed.



- A former pupil of **Castlemilk High School** (now at the University of Glasgow), talks about the benefits Castlemilk High School's study weekends, supported focussed study opportunities, coaching, and mentoring have had in developing her skills and learning helping her to 'be better, learn better and open our minds to better opportunities'. The support provided has helped the young person 'to be more confident and aware of the opportunities available' and she remains very appreciative of the extra support she received at Castlemilk High School with the knowledge and skills developed still being used now.



- Here **Strathmore Primary School** outline the approach it has taken with outdoor learning. Staff are being upskilled in approaches that ensured that all pupils experienced high-quality learning. PEF is improving outcomes for pupils in these schools.



- Schools are using robust data and tracking systems to target the use of PEF to maximum effect. In this way they provide evidence based tailored learning and teaching, based on their children's needs and appropriate to their school's local context. Listen to Sandy McIntosh, Headteacher at **Woodmill High School** in Fife, and Depute Rector Duncan Harvie, outline their data-driven approach.



- **Castlemilk High School**, Glasgow – with the school's focus on high quality learning and teaching, and with the support of PEF, the school provides a wide range of studying opportunities, residential weekends - intensive studying in relaxed fashion, including breakfast clubs, learning for sustainability, Saturday classes, easter holiday revision sessions and tuition, with the developing young workforce team also supporting the onward opportunities for young people to enter into further and higher education and employment. [Headteacher Lynn Gibson outlines their approach.](#)



- **The Nicolson Institute**, Western Isles - has a PT Raising Attainment specialising in data analysis, a teacher of literacy and numeracy delivering targeted support, a health and wellbeing and attendance-focussed pupil mentor and an MCR Pathways Coordinator, with a bespoke tracking and monitoring system ensuring outcomes are delivered. The school tells its story [here](#).

Scottish Attainment Challenge - Background

The **Scottish Attainment Challenge** was launched in February 2015 with the strategic aim of “closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most deprived communities”.

The **Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF)**, which supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge, prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy and the health and wellbeing for children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland’s schools.

Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims of the Challenge.



The mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge:
“to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap”

Pupil Equity Funding - What is it?

What is Pupil Equity Funding?

Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is additional funding allocated directly to schools and targeted at closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

How is PEF Allocated?

PEF is allocated to schools based on the estimated number of children and young people in P1-S3 registered for free school meals (FSM). PEF is a part of our wider investment of up to £1 billion in the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme this Parliamentary term. PEF allocations were confirmed over four years to help assist headteachers' planning between 2022/23 and 2025/26.

How much PEF do schools receive?

This varies depending on how many children are registered for free school meals. 97% of schools receive some PEF, ranging from £1,225 to almost £350,000 per year.



PEF sampling: Reach



32

Local Authorities

from Dumfries and Galloway to the
Shetland Islands and everywhere in-between



129

Schools Visited



56,360

Total pupil roll



Total PEF allocations –

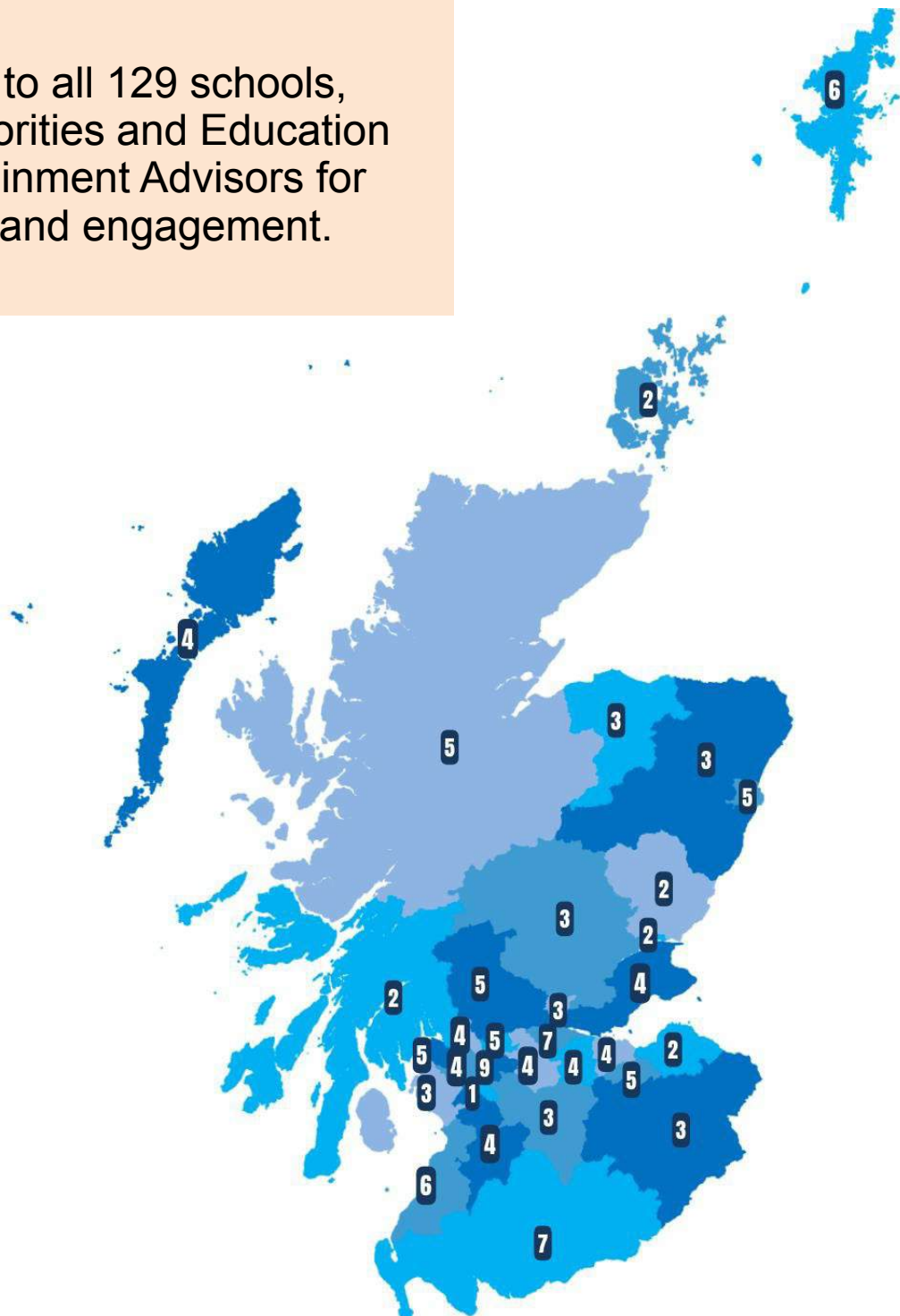
£10,565,370

129 Schools

ranging from just over £2,000 to almost £340,000

129 Schools across Scotland

Many thanks to all 129 schools,
32 local authorities and Education
Scotland Attainment Advisors for
their support and engagement.



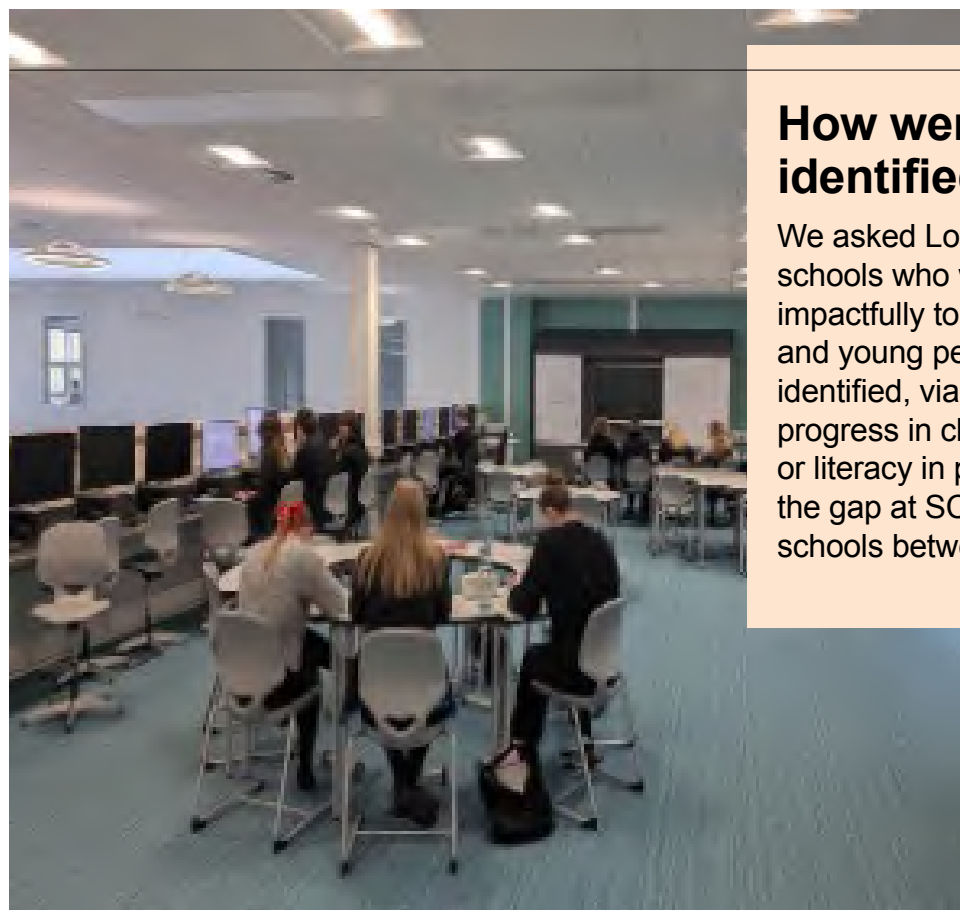
Pupil Equity Funding Report - What, Why and How

What engagement took place?

Scottish Government officials and Education Scotland Attainment Advisors, occasionally alongside Local Authority officials, met with Headteachers and staff at 129 schools across all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland to capture how those schools were using PEF to support improved outcomes for the children and young people.

Why was this work undertaken?

We undertook this engagement, to share the good work taking place in our schools and communities, supported by PEF, with other Headteachers, Local Authorities and key stakeholders. This resource draws out key learning on how schools use their PEF to improve the educational outcomes of children and young people/families impacted by poverty.



How were schools identified to take part?

We asked Local Authorities to highlight schools who were using PEF innovatively and impactfully to improve the outcomes of children and young people impacted by poverty. We also identified, via our analysis, schools who showed progress in closing the gap in numeracy or literacy in primary schools, or closing the gap at SCQF levels 5&6 in secondary schools between 2017/18 and 2022/23.

Image: Pupils learning
at Woodmill HS

Pupil Equity Funding Report - When and What

When did this engagement take place?

This took place from the end of May, to December 2024. Learning Directorate officials, alongside Education Scotland Attainment Advisors, engaged with 129 schools in all 32 Local Authorities, from Angus, to Dumfries & Galloway, to the Scottish Borders, to the Western Isles.

What has emerged through the engagement?

Headteachers have been hugely positive in their engagement with this work and are highly appreciative of the added benefits PEF brings. Many schools do not have another discretionary school budget to rely upon, so PEF is seen as a vital resource that enables headteachers to respond to the particular needs of children impacted by poverty (and in many cases many other children facing other barriers to learning, such as those with additional support needs (ASN)) in their schools. Headteachers shared robust evidence and data demonstrating that PEF is helping close the poverty-related attainment gap and improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. Our thanks go to everyone who supported this work.





What has this work shown?

- A clear and consistent message from headteachers has been their recognition that PEF empowers them to target resources in the best way to meet their school's needs. [Listen to Headteacher Mike Irving and the team at Leith Academy outline their approach to PEF.](#)
- Headteachers were very clear, supported by robust evidence and data, in demonstrating that PEF is helping close the poverty-related attainment gap and improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. [Listen to Woodmill High School pupils outline the progress they have made, thanks to PEF supported work.](#)
- Schools' approaches vary, with PEF helping to drive improvements in attendance and attainment, strengthen relationships between schools and families and children, and in enhancing the curriculum offer. The data and evidence underpinning these approaches is definitive, with clear progress being made in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. [Listen to Peigi Nicolson, Headteacher at Stornoway Primary School, highlight how PEF supports their learners.](#)
- We have seen high-quality learning and teaching, strong leadership teams, exceptional teachers and dedicated support staff – all working in collaboration – focussed on helping to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people in their schools.

What have Headteachers told us about PEF?

Attendance, Behaviour and Curriculum

Schools are using PEF to drive improvements in attendance and engagement. PEF supports additional staff to focus on family engagement focus, nurture spaces and supports, and partnerships with businesses and colleges to enhance personalised curriculum pathways underpinned by excellent, equitable, learning and teaching.

Empowering Leadership and staffing

PEF enables school leaders to empower their leadership teams, helping to provide high-quality learning for children and young people with enhanced support and challenge from Local Authorities and Attainment Advisors.

Data and evidence

There is a clear focus on the identification and tracking of children and young people to ensure the additional support provided is improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, including a focus on children with additional support needs and other issues of equity.

Health and Wellbeing

Schools are using PEF to improve nurturing and wellbeing, including by appointing counsellors, providing professional training for staff, and establishing bespoke calming places for children in schools.

Headteachers have been clear about the added value PEF brings. **As Chris McMillan, Headteacher at Brunstane Primary School** in Edinburgh outlined:

“Pupil Equity Funding has allowed us to transform the day-to-day experience of our children and young people here at Brunstane. By focusing a significant part of PEF spend on leadership, we have been able to accelerate our school improvement journey and narrow our poverty related attainment gap.

The extra capacity created by Pupil Equity funded posts has allowed us to focus on early intervention to combat the significant vocabulary and literacy gap that many of our children arrive with and to relentlessly focus on improving our pedagogy and removing barriers to learning, radically improving our school attainment and ensuring that our Primary Seven leavers go well equipped and confident in their abilities to high school.

PEF has provided us this extra-capacity to be able to reach out to families, identify the barriers to school attendance and provide tangible support that allow these challenges to be overcome.

Finally, PEF has also ensured that we are able to meet the well-being needs of our pupils. Our PEF funded school councillor has allowed hundreds of our pupils the time, space and opportunity to open up to a trusted adult and share their worries. The information we gather from this informs our GIRFEC approaches and allows us to target our family support offer to where it is needed most.

The combined impact of all of these approaches has been transformational for our school community – and would not have been possible without the flexibility that Pupil Equity Funding has provided.”

What have children and young people told us about the impact of PEF?

6 young people from Woodmill High School in Fife highlight the difference a mentor and family link worker have made to them:



On support from a mentor

“ Helped me stay in school....He’s made me think more of myself than I am.”

“ He’s helped me through some tough times, not just in school, I can talk to him about anything, he can understand what I’m going through.”

On support from a family link worker

“ She helped me, calmed me down and I know she can be there for me in tough situations.”

“ Taught me how to be a better person and not do certain things. My resilience has gone up loads. I feel like now I’m doing pretty well in school.”

“ Helped me improve my attendance, by one to ones and it has been getting me to classes and engaging in learning.”

“ We talk about what’s going on. I’ve got better at going to school and my attitude to teachers. That’s helped me.”

What have children and young people told us about the impact of PEF?

Young People from Castlemilk High School in Glasgow highlight the differences a wide range of study support opportunities, including residential study weekends, Easter revision and Saturday classes, coaching and mentoring have made to them in improving relationships, supporting their readiness to learn and prepare for exams.



“ Study weekend was great as it wasn’t in the classroom setting, and the different environment really helped me study intensively in a relaxed atmosphere. I also loved the Easter revision school session as it helped me prepare for my exams.”

“ I really enjoyed the coaching and mentoring sessions and found them very beneficial as they helped me to understand what is expected of me and how I can stay motivated.”

“ I love the support study sessions and the Saturday classes as they give me one-to-one time with the teacher and I can complete my homework.”

“ I can also get help from my teachers at any time and they always encourage me to do my best.”

“ We also had a study weekend, everyone in S5 got the chance to go out in nature, be away from the hustle and bustle of life and focus on relaxation and studying and bonding with our classmates.”

What have parents/carers told us about the impact of PEF?

Parents/Carers from Fair Isle Primary School in Fife highlight the differences Family Link Worker (Angela) has made on them, thanks to the support provided through PEF by Headteacher Vicki Bell:

- “ If it wasn't for this opportunity I would still be sitting in the house. Coming to class has boosted my confidence.”
- “ Learning in Scotland is different from Poland. By attending class, I now feel confident in helping my child with her homework.”
- “ I have gained my Nat 4 Numeracy qualification.”
- “ Talking with other parents and seeing you are not alone. We all share similar experiences.”
- “ More confident in parenting and coping with difficult situations.”
- “ I loved the fact that it is a safe space to be able to speak freely.”
- “ Much happier home life = calmer happier kids.”
- “ Less stressed out, didn't feel judged.”
- “ This group has been a great help. Everyone has helped each other. A place where you can get help if needed, always someone to talk to.”
- “ Able to focus on something, which helps my mental health.”

Key positive themes

Some key positive themes emerged on the use of PEF:

- Strong leadership and dedicated teaching and support staff – supporting school cultures with high ambitions for children and young people.
- Enhancing staff capacity by supporting teachers and support staff with professional development opportunities.
- Big focus on increasing attendance, the importance of high-quality learning and teaching in raising attainment, and significant efforts being made to providing a person-centred, individual curriculum pathway.
- Robust tracking and monitoring of interventions. Effective use of data is central to identifying pupils who would benefit from intervention, including many children with ASN.



Image: Pupils learning at Woodmill High School, Fife

Further key positive themes on PEF include:

- Primary schools have a focus on using PEF to support transitions between early learning centres and primary schools. Schools continue to provide enhanced targeted support for children and young people as they move between primary and secondary schools. As young people's journeys through school progress secondary schools are using PEF to develop young people's confidence, skills and preparedness for work, ensuring post school progression routes and pathways are developed with further and higher education and employment services, helping support young people into positive destinations.
- Schools' engagement with families is being strengthened alongside work to tackle child poverty. Family Link officers are being appointed with PEF to help strengthen relationships between the schools and families. Opportunities to develop family learning through classes held at the school and in learning centres, the signposting of families to other services' support, the provision of breakfast clubs and healthy snacks, income maximisation officers, targeted free school trips and the provision of additional targeted resources for improving literacy and numeracy.
- Support for improved health and wellbeing for children and young people and nurturing/wellbeing with Counsellors appointed alongside training for staff and bespoke calming places for children in schools.
- School partnerships with community groups, colleges, universities and businesses supported by PEF to provide opportunities and experiences for children and young people.
- Support and challenge role of ES Attainment Advisors and LA staff, including through Strategic Equity Funding, highly valued by headteachers.



Image: St Catherine's Primary School Play area

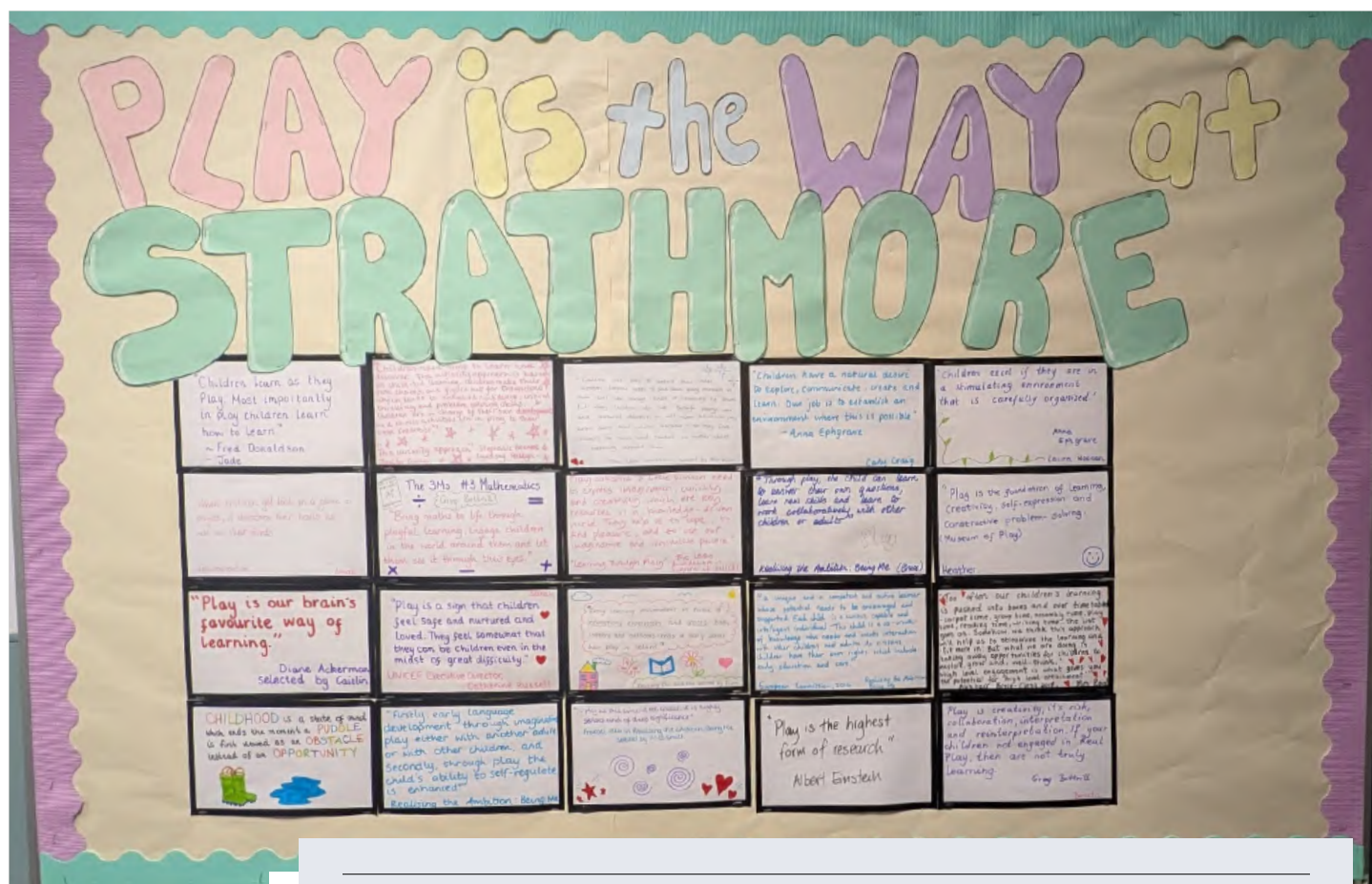
Challenges

There were some challenges too...

- Pandemic impact remains.
- Local budget challenges.
- Deepening poverty in some communities.
- National/local services more limited so increased demands on school and its staff/services.
- Increases in numbers of children with additional support needs coming into schools, increasing overall pressures
- Staff wellbeing also raised as an ongoing concern.
- School tracking systems and capacity vary in quality and robustness.
- Some schools taking universal approaches with their PEF, not targeted (though not always a problem, e.g. in schools with very high concentrations of poverty).
- Attendance remains an ongoing challenge.



Image: Castlemilk High School, Food Larder



So, how are schools specifically using PEF?

The three organisers of learning and teaching; leadership; and families and communities have shaped local approaches.

Additional priorities on tackling child poverty, driving improvements in attendance, on children with additional support needs, approaches in rural communities, and schools' work supporting young people into positive destinations, have also been very evident.

The schools in this report have PEF embedded as part of their overall approaches to providing high quality teaching and learning. So, although a school may feature under a particular theme in this report, the ways they use their PEF is far wider and more impactful than what may be referred to within this report.

Attendance, Behaviour and Curriculum

Strong focus on increasing attendance, the importance of high-quality learning and teaching in raising attainment, and significant efforts being made to providing a person-centred, individual curriculum pathway.

- **Lesmahagow High School**, South Lanarkshire, prioritises improving attendance and engagement with lots of activities to meet these changing needs, in particular their Friday Club to re-engage young people in their learning.
- **St Columba's High School** in Inverclyde has partnered with a local boxing gym which has helped teach targeted pupils how to manage their mental health, wellbeing and self-discipline.
- **Jedburgh Grammar Campus**, Scottish Borders – PEF supports a youth worker, who works with children, young people and families; including attending parents' evenings with parents who had never attended before, and works with school refusers, breaking the cycle of non-attendance.
- **St Machar Academy**, Aberdeen – has a highly effective partnership with the local football club, with an alternative curriculum offer focusing on health, wellbeing, communication and confidence building. [This video](#) highlights the partnership.
- **St Ninians's Primary School**, Dundee, uses a range of digital tools to support and enhance children's learning, such as '(VR)' after 'Virtual Reality' headsets, which are supporting motivation and creativity in writing. Staff observed significant increases in the use of imaginative adjectives and vowels after using VR as a writing prompt.
- **Renton Primary School**, West Dunbartonshire – uses PEF to fund an additional teacher to support enhanced multi-level teaching for targeted learning support within the class for those who need it. A pupil and family support worker improves attendance and health and wellbeing, delivering approaches such as nurture and play therapy and supporting families to engage other services and income support services as needed. [Watch a video](#).

Leadership

Schools are using PEF to increase leadership opportunities. Additional promoted posts with a focus on delivering equity have been supported by PEF.

- **Leith Academy**, Edinburgh – a package of PEF supported work delivered by additional staffing helping young people attend, learn and remain engaged, (including a youth worker, nurturing staff & two Pupil Support Officers), developing trusting relationships with young people. [Listen to Headteacher Mike Irving and the team outline their approach to PEF.](#)
- **Garnetbank Primary School**, Glasgow – set in the heart of Glasgow with a multi-cultural school community and high rates of ASN. The school has a clear set of values and multiple bespoke and responsive interventions for individuals, classes and the whole school and community informed by professional expertise, policy and research – enhanced through increased capacity for staff to engage in professional learning – is supporting improve outcomes for pupils.
- **Park Primary School**, Dumfries & Galloway – supports capacity building and training for staff, with a focus on Play pedagogy, improving the transition into primary school and with bespoke interventions within that, such as Lego therapy, literacy ladders, and a “soft start” for some pupils.
- **Mary Russell School**, Renfrewshire – PEF is primarily used to provide a classroom assistant for every class, linked to a cohort and moves with them through the school, providing a consistent touch point for pupils both in terms of learning support and pastoral support.
- **Strathmore Primary School**, Angus – Read Write Inc. has been adopted as their core literacy programme and a partnership with Alba Explorers has been a huge success. The main focus of Alba Explorers when it began was ASN but has now expanded due to its success with upskilled teachers now able to deliver outdoor learning. [Listen to Headteacher Jennifer Garns outline their approach here.](#)
- **Letham Primary School**, Perth – delivering precision teaching in literacy and numeracy, targeted at pupils who are 1 or 2 tracking periods behind. Between 2017-23, interventions like these led to a 33% improvement in literacy and a 53% improvement in numeracy for their **SIMDQ1** pupils.

Learning and Teaching

Schools are using PEF to enhance staffing and the senior leadership team in providing high-quality learning and professional learning.

- **Castlemilk High School**, Glasgow – with the school’s focus on high quality learning and teaching, and with the support of PEF, the school provides a wide range of studying opportunities, residential weekends - intensive studying in relaxed fashion, including breakfast clubs, learning for sustainability, Saturday classes, easter holiday revision sessions and tuition, with the developing young workforce team also supporting the onward opportunities for young people to enter into further and higher education and employment. [Headteacher Lynn Gibson outlines their approach.](#)
- **Paisley Grammar** in Renfrewshire has targeted work on improving literacy designed to help children and young people improve their literacy skills to enable them to engage in BGE curriculum and onward into senior phase. It has a clear assessment methodology to identify needs and robust tracking and monitoring of progress as they work through evidence-based approaches to improving literacy.
- **Windygoul Primary School**, East Lothian – PEF being used on staffing, specifically a Pupil Support Teacher, a classroom assistant and a ASN officer - staff focussed on improving literacy, spelling, reading and numeracy.
- **Belmont Academy**, South Ayrshire – using PEF to support their “Belmont Academy Skills Academy” working with teachers and third sector partners to target support for pupils who benefit from a range learning and community programmes such as college visits and health and wellbeing support for them and their families.
- **Stornoway Primary School**, Western Isles – focussed on targeted support on attainment, in particular literacy. This is being complemented by the school involvement in the Children & Young People Improvement Collaborative programme with notable improvements in attainment and in particular literacy. [Head of School Peigi Nicolson, shows how the school has used PEF to support their learners.](#)

Robust use of Evidence and Data

Schools, supported by their local authorities and Education Scotland Attainment Advisors, are making more effective use of robust data to inform and target their PEF, including children with ASN.

- **St Ignatius Primary School**, North Lanarkshire – has invested PEF in developing a bespoke tracking system. This allows them to target tailored interventions such as Forest clubs, to encourage improved attendance, attainment and the engagement of children – all underpinned by a lens-like focus on data. [Here, Headteacher Anne Marie Pearson, and colleagues outline the schools' approach.](#)
- **Abercromby Primary School**, Clackmannanshire – PEF is improving the attendance of a targeted group of learners, support for targeted groups with their learning, and a Family Support Worker supporting families to engage in school / improve attendance, including a successful walking bus initiative.
- **Brunstane Primary School**, Edinburgh – the headteacher has led a transformational change in the school's reputation and in improving its attainment levels. PEF has been used primarily to invest in leadership roles to grow the capacity and development of the whole staff team. Education Scotland highlighted the [school's attendance work here](#).
- **The Nicolson Institute**, Western Isles – has a PT Raising Attainment specialising in data analysis, a teacher of literacy and numeracy delivering targeted support, a health and wellbeing and attendance focussed pupil mentor and an MCR Pathways Coordinator, with a bespoke tracking and monitoring system ensuring outcomes are delivered. [The school tell their story here.](#)
- **Braidbar Primary School**, East Renfrewshire – PEF targeted on raising attainment with a focus on social communication skills to improve vocabulary and language skills and motivate pupils, and outdoor excursions to improve wellbeing, confidence, and relationships, with strong data to evidence impact.

Tackling Child Poverty/ Supporting Families

Schools are using PEF to tackle child poverty, helping to strengthen connections with families and boost household incomes and develop skills.

- **Easter Carmuir Primary School**, Falkirk – Breakfast for All programme positively impacting on the achievements and wellbeing of the children and their parents/carers. [Education Scotland study here](#).
- **Girvan Academy**, South Ayrshire – big focus on the joint venture programme with Girvan Youth Trust (PEF contributes to this): they have a great relationship with the school helping support the young people in their wellbeing, attendance and therefore attainment.
- **Kaimhill Primary School**, Aberdeen – PEF coordinator works closely with parent and pupil councils to agree range of measures to meet needs.
- **Braes High School**, Falkirk – strong cost of the school day approach supporting families to access the benefits they are entitled to.
- **Fair Isle Primary**, Fife – using some PEF for a family worker to support families with issues such as housing concerns, boosting families household budgets, developing training opportunities for parents/carers - and helping support the daily breakfast club and adult training courses, running pupil and parent groups, and other activities. The Headteacher, Vicki Bell, continues to rigorously track the progress of the targeted support being provided, to ensure a positive impact on their pupils attainment.
- **Boghall Primary School**, West Lothian – using PEF for a family link worker who works closely with children and their families on a weekly basis to target support for improving parental/ children attendance and access to wider supports.
- **Elgin High School**, Moray – an innovative Food to Go scheme, making food not used available for families to take home each day: a non-stigmatising way of supporting children/ families.
- **Woodburn Primary School**, Midlothian – additional staffing is improving attendance, attainment, family engagement & wellbeing, with help for targeted families to apply for benefits, inc. travel cards and wider family learning.

Health and Wellbeing/ Additional Support

Schools are using PEF to support the improved health and wellbeing for children and young people and nurturing/wellbeing inc. counsellors appointed with PEF, training for staff and bespoke calming places for children in schools.

- **St Mary's RC Primary School**, Stirling – health and wellbeing officer instrumental in forging links between families and school.
- **St Catherine's Primary School**, Renfrewshire – PEF is invested in health and wellbeing support for pupils through place2be and a Health & Wellbeing key worker with every child participating in an extra-curricular activity which also contributes to the professional development of staff. [Listen to Headteacher Marie McLaughlin outline their approach.](#)
- **Macduff Primary School**, Aberdeenshire – PEF has helped create a focus on improving morale, attendance and behaviour. Investment in staff training and capacity building and strong cluster focus, with PEF invested in a nurture base and team used throughout the day to provide a safe and secure environment to meet pupils' needs.
- **Newton Park Primary School**, Highland – PEF supports the health and wellbeing of children and families with a family link worker providing bespoke support dependent on needs, inc. support with bereavement, grant applications, shopping, and transporting children to football/after school clubs. A breakfast club, facilities for showering/having clean clothes supports engagement/readiness to learn in a non-stigmatised way.
- **At Hayshead Primary**, Angus – every Hayshead child matters, with a commitment to ensuring equity for all children. PEF supports attainment, attendance, wellbeing, engagement and wider achievement, supported by robust planning and tracking, ensuring every child can thrive.
- **Rockfield Primary School**, Argyll & Bute – the headteacher noted challenges posed by children arriving with severe barriers to their learning, either through ASN or poverty. PEF supports a senior leadership team with a strong evidence base for the effectiveness of their interventions as a foundation for improving attainment.

PEF in Rural and Island Communities

Schools in rural areas are using PEF to meet the needs of pupils experiencing poverty in rural communities through working in collaboration with local authorities and community partners, to pool resources to maximise the impact to the benefit of children and young people.

- **Cumbræ Primary School**, North Ayrshire, PEF is used to provide opportunities for pupils to go to the mainland for trips (Glasgow Science Centre) and the P7s go to a cluster residential trip, to allow pupils to meet those who they will attend high school with and to attend transition events. As an island school, transport costs can be a significant barrier and encouraging pupils to have experiences off the island is a key part of the rationale related to Cost of the School Day.
- In Shetland, **Mossbank Primary School** use PEF for a learning support teacher and worker to lead targeted group work for pupils off track, to stimulate an interest and improve confidence in literacy and numeracy to reduce pupils' anxiety when they transition to secondary school. Shetland Council, via Strategic Equity Funding, invite headteachers to bid for short-term investments in projects, training, resources – all targeted to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- In Orkney, **Papdale Primary School's** PEF spend is driven by a proactive approach aimed towards early intervention and prevention to improve health and wellbeing, attendance and a readiness to learn. Significant work is focussed on Tackling the Costs of the School Day through breakfast clubs, cookery clubs, gardening clubs, and STEM/Lego clubs with strong engagement with parents, carers and the wider community including Third Sector partners.
- **Western Isles schools**, in agreement with all schools, (bar the Nicolson Institute), pool their PEF for Educational Attainment Apprentices, employed by the local Authority, enabling a larger targeted resource to be shared equitably across all the schools.

Positive Destinations

Schools are using their PEF to support the second highest initial positive destination figures since records began. The poverty-related attainment gap has reduced by 67% (or two-thirds) since 2009-10 for young people leaving school in 2024 and going on to a positive initial destination (3 months after leaving).

- **Fraserburgh Academy**, Aberdeenshire – an innovative approach, in partnership with North-East Scotland College, supporting pupils into a range of courses designed to lead to positive destinations, which are at 98%.
- **Ross High School**, East Lothian – supported with PEF is the Brilliant Club, in partnership with St Margaret's University, providing 12 pupils registered for FSMs/or from [SIMD](#)1-4 and/or whose families didn't attend university, an opportunity to work towards completing a dissertation: including a graduation ceremony, raising expectations for the young people and their families.
- **Woodmill High School**, Fife – a data-driven approach supporting a family link worker and mentor, helping improve children and young people's attendance, engagement and aspirations. [Here the mentor and family link worker outline their approach.](#)
- **Boclair Academy**, East Dunbartonshire – a whole-school approach, with a focus on a culture of equity, high-quality learning and teaching and access to a wide range of learning experiences and opportunities to develop skills and confidence, as well as approaches to reducing the cost of the school day. This has led to improving outcomes for young people impacted by poverty.
- **Calderglen High School**, South Lanarkshire – proud of their consistently high percentage of Positive Destinations, wanted to connect alumni to their current students in a meaningful way whilst demonstrating the range of experiences of their former students. A teacher and alumni herself, began collecting Calderglen stories. These stories represent the culmination of the work of staff and the ambition of young people and provide inspiration everyday for staff and pupils alike. [Enjoy a snapshot of this work here.](#)

Summary, principles of effective practice and next steps



Attendance, Behaviour and Curriculum

Schools are using PEF to improve attendance by additional staff having a specific family engagement focus, with nurture spaces helping support improved engagement and relationships, and personalised curriculum pathways ensuring young people are more engaged. Attendance remains an ongoing challenge, as does behaviour, with PEF helping support schools' ongoing efforts to drive improvements in both – a new national marketing campaign aims to help improve attendance and reduce absences.

Leadership

PEF is contributing to increased staff capacity across the country as schools have invested in staff training and development opportunities. There are estimated to be up to 3,000 additional teaching and support staff supported via Scottish Attainment Challenge funding, including up to 700 FTE teachers. PEF empowers headteachers in many schools to increase leadership opportunities and develop leadership skills in their staff.

Additional promoted posts, with a specific focus on delivering equity and closing poverty-related gaps have been funded through PEF. Without PEF many of these leadership, training and promoted opportunities would no longer exist.

Learning and Teaching

In the schools visited, it was clear that PEF was being used to develop bespoke and differentiated approaches to learning and teaching. [**Here Strathmore Primary School outline the approach they have taken with outdoor learning.**](#) Staff are being upskilled in approaches that ensured that all pupils experienced high-quality learning. PEF is improving outcomes for pupils in these schools. This is contributing to the record low poverty-related attainment gap in literacy in primary schools, and a record low gap of secondary school pupils achieving Third level in both literacy and numeracy. Headteachers are clear the pandemic has had a lasting impact on pupils' health and wellbeing and learning.

Robust use of evidence and data

Schools are using robust data and tracking systems to target the use of PEF to maximum effect. In this way they provide evidence-based tailored learning and teaching, based on their child's needs and appropriate to their school's local context.

Listen to Sandy McIntosh, Headteacher at Woodmill High School in Fife, and Deputy Rector Duncan Harvie, outline their data-driven approach.

Health and Wellbeing/ Additional Support Needs

Schools are using PEF to support the improved health and wellbeing for children and young people and nurturing/wellbeing. PEF helps to provide professional training for staff, and recruit counsellors and health and wellbeing officers. It also helps to provide bespoke learning places that are calming and nurturing to support children in schools. With an estimated 40% of all school age pupils in 2024 having an identified additional support need (up from 37% in 2023), compared to only 10% in 2010 there is an increasing challenge. An additional £29m funding announced in the 2025-26 budget for ASL, is an important first step to addressing these challenges, with an allocation for local and national programmes to support the recruitment and retention of the ASN workforce.

Tackling Child Poverty/ Supporting Families

Eradicating child poverty in Scotland is a national mission and the top priority of the First Minister and this Government. Schools are using PEF to tackle child poverty, cut costs of the school day, and help strengthen schools' connections with families, boosting household incomes and developing family's confidence and skills. Hermitage Primary School, Argyll & Bute is based in Helensburgh, with a sizeable portion of pupils' parents in the armed forces. Much of the work focussed through a family liaison officer who works with families to build relationships and trust to improve attendance and engagement as well as running a nurture hub and a breakfast club in collaboration with local partners.

Rural

Schools in rural areas are using PEF to meet the needs of pupils experiencing poverty through working in collaboration with local authorities and community partners, to pool resources to maximise the impact to the benefit of children and young people.

There are a range of fantastic resources and opportunities specific to rural communities, however, in some instances there are ongoing challenges related to infrastructure, and access to resources including transport, housing and recruitment. At New Cumnock Primary School, East Ayrshire, a home Link Practitioner provides a vital link between school & home with bespoke via health & wellbeing sessions, counselling and breakfast clubs – all supporting attendance.

Positive Destinations

Schools are using their PEF to develop young people's skills and readiness for work or further study through the development of personalised curriculum offers supported by partnerships with colleges, universities and businesses. This is contributing towards the second highest initial positive destination figures since records began, with the poverty-related attainment gap having reduced by two-thirds (67%) since 2009-10 for young people leaving school in 2024 and going on to an initial positive destination 3 months after leaving school.

Listen to a former pupil of Castlemilk High School, talking about the benefits Castlemilk High Schools' study weekends, supported focussed study opportunities, coaching, and mentoring have had in developing her skills and learning, with the knowledge and skills developed still being used now.

Principles of Effective Practice

Evidence of What Works using PEF that have come through our engagement with schools including:

- The three key organisers of learning and teaching; leadership; and families and communities remain integral to how headteachers shape their approaches – alongside the Education Scotland Interventions for Equity [resource](#) and [webpage](#). The [Interventions for Equity toolkit](#) is still considered to be useful in informing decisions on investing PEF.
- Culture and ethos are key with headteachers and senior leadership teams demonstrating a strong focus on delivering excellence and equity for their children and young people.
- High-quality learning and teaching is essential in raising attainment, including differentiated approaches to meeting pupil needs.
- A flexible, personalised curriculum should be offered including bespoke teaching and wellbeing support for children – helping improve attendance, engagement, behaviour and learning.
- Readiness to learn is vital if children and young people are to benefit from the classroom experience. This can involve a range of supports focusing on health and wellbeing including, breakfast clubs, clothing exchanges, nurture spaces and more.
- All staff have a role to play. However, dedicated teaching and support staff help ensure children and young people receive tailored support in their learning and wellbeing.





Further evidence of What Works using PEF that came through our engagement with schools includes:

- Effective use of data and evidence enables targeting of both PEF and support for children and young people, including children with ASN.
- Detailed knowledge of their children and communities is essential and empowers schools to use their PEF to target bespoke local approaches, seeing real improvements in attendance, engagement and outcomes for their children, and supporting families impacted by poverty.
- Family liaison staff and approaches provide whole family support in and beyond the school day, giving schools a key role in the national mission to eradicate child poverty.
- Schools do not need to operate on their own and should work in partnership with a range of community services such as youth workers and CLD services.
- Partnerships with local businesses, colleges, universities and 3rd sector organisations provide a variety of pathways and options to improve positive destinations for young people.
- Local Authorities and Education Scotland Attainment Advisors provide strategic resources, support and advice for schools, including collaboration across communities where it is appropriate.

Next Steps

- We undertook this engagement in order to share the outstanding work taking place in our schools and communities, supported by PEF, with other Headteachers, Local Authorities and key stakeholders, and how that work is improving the educational outcomes of children and young people/families impacted by poverty.
- Along with this report we are planning a new refreshed communications plan in partnership with Education Scotland, alongside a series of Ministerial school visits and events with headteachers and practitioners, to raise the profile of the good practice we have seen in our schools and to promote peer to peer learning between schools and local authorities.
- We are drawing upon this evidence to help inform plans for 2025/26, and the learning from this work will also, alongside ongoing engagement with headteachers, local authorities and stakeholders, help inform options for what any future national policy approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap may look like from 2026 onwards.
- Meantime Headteachers and Local Authorities should be able to access ongoing advice and guidance from the team of Education Scotland Attainment Advisors to maximise improved outcomes for children and young people using their Pupil Equity Funding and other SAC funding.



Support and Guidance

There is a package of national and local support available to assist schools in planning how to use their PEF. This includes:

- **Scotland's Equity Toolkit** continues to provide an accessible and adaptable resource to aid plans.
- Education Scotland's range of resources designed to provide support, exemplification and advice to educators for improving attendance within their context. These may be accessed here:- [Improving attendance in Scotland | Resources | Education Scotland](#)
- 2025/26 PEF National Operational Guidance helps schools plan how they will most effectively and fully invest their PEF allocation to improve the educational outcomes of children affected by poverty.
- Local authorities also issue specific complementary guidance.
- Schools also access ongoing advice and guidance from the Education Scotland Attainment Advisor team.
- Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland's **Cost of the School Day Ideas Bank resource**, showcases what schools around the country are doing to reduce costs and make sure everyone can fully take part in their school day.



Image: St Catherine's Primary School Reading area

Index: List of all 129 schools visited and links

LA	School
Aberdeen City	Seaton Primary School
	Kaimhill Primary School
	St Machar Academy
	Cornhill Primary School
	Woodside Primary School
Aberdeenshire	Macduff Primary School
	Aberchirder Primary School
	Fraserburgh Academy
Angus	Hayshead Primary School
	Strathmore Primary School
Argyll & Bute	Hermitage Primary School
	Rockfield Primary School
Clackmannanshire	Abercromby Primary School
	Tillicoultry Primary
	Virtual headteacher
Dumfries & Galloway	Park School
	Eastriggs Primary
	Belmont Primary
	Whithorn Primary
	Wallace Hall Academy
	Laurieknowe School
	Annan Academy
Dundee City	St Ninian's RC Primary School
	Grove Academy
East Ayrshire	New Cumnock PS
	Hillhead PS
	Galston PS
	Park School
East Dunbartonshire	Boclair Academy
	St Matthews RC Primary School
	Kirkintilloch High
	Bishopbriggs Academy
	Holy Trinity Primary
	Balmuildy Primary School

LA	School
East Lothian	Ross High
	Windygoul Primary
East Renfrewshire	Braidbar Primary
Edinburgh City	Brunstane Primary School
	Leith Academy
	Niddrie Mill Primary School
	Queensferry High School
Eilean Siar / Western Isles	Stornoway Primary School
	The Nicolson Institute
	Sgoile Bhaile a Mhanaich
	Sgoil Uibhist a Tuath
Falkirk	Easter Carmuir's Primary School
	Stenhousemuir PS
	Victoria PS
	Langlees PS
	Sacred Heart PS
	Falkirk High School
	St Andrew's RC Primary School
Fife	Woodmill High School
	Fair Isle Primary School
	Pitteuchar West Primary School
	Falkland Primary School
Glasgow City	Castlemilk High School
	Hollybrook Academy
	Howford Primary
	St Margaret Mary's Secondary
	Holyrood Secondary
	St Anne's Primary
	Castleton Primary
	Garnetbank PS
	Kelvindale Primary School
Highland	Newton Park Primary School
	Ben Wyvis Primary
	Dalneigh Primary
	Lairg Primary
	Rosehall Primary
Inverclyde	King's Oak Primary School
	St Mary's Primary School
	Clydeview Academy
	St Ninian's Primary School

LA	School
Midlothian	Dalkeith High School
	Woodburn Primary School
	Newbattle Community High School
	Mayfield Primary School
	Burnbrae Primary School
Moray	New Elgin Primary School
	Anderson's Primary School
	Elgin High School
North Ayrshire	Greenwood Academy
	Cumbrae Primary School
	St Matthew's Academy
North Lanarkshire	Stane Primary School
	St. Ignatius Primary School
	Kilsyth Primary School
	Chapelside Primary School
Orkney Islands	Glaitness PS
	Papdale Primary School
Perth & Kinross	Our Lady's RC Primary School
	St John's Academy
	Letham Primary School
Renfrewshire	St Catherine's Primary School
	Mary Russell School (ASN Specialist)
	Paisley Grammar
	West PS
Scottish Borders	Wilton Primary School
	Jedburgh Grammar Campus
	Burnfoot Community School
Shetland Islands	Urafirth Primary School
	Baltasound Junior High
	Cunningsburgh Primary School
	Mossbank Primary School
	Whiteness Primary School
	Sound PS

LA	School
South Ayrshire	Glenburn Primary School
	Holmston PS
	Braehead PS
	Belmont Academy
	Girvan Academy
	Dundonald Primary
South Lanarkshire	Lesmahowgow High School
	Calderglen HS
	St Athanasius' Primary School
Stirling	Cowie Primary School
	Balfron High School
	East Plean Primary School
	St Modan's High School
	St Mary's RC Primary School
West Dunbartonshire	Renton PS
	Aitkenbar Primary School
	Vale of Leven Academy
	St. Ronan's PS
West Lothian	Boghall Primary School
	West Calder High School
	Carmondean Primary School
	Murrayfield Primary School

