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The Price of Pupil Poverty

Taking a Whole School Approach to improving the well-being of children from lower income families

Children in Wales is the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with babies, children, young people and their families in Wales. We work closely with Welsh Government and others in Wales to ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of policy and decision making. To do this, we focus on ensuring that children and young people in Wales have a voice, we fight for sustainable and equitable services, advocate for policy changes in Wales and connect and represent the work being undertaken by our membership.

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The Price of Pupil Poverty

Taking a Whole School Approach to improving the well-being of children from lower income families

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Introduction

The **Price of Pupil Poverty Guides** have been developed to raise awareness of the lived experiences of learners from lower income families and set out the impact poverty has on children's day to day experiences in school.

The Guides provide schools with **tangible and cost-effective solutions** which can help lift barriers faced by learners from lower income families and **improve learner well-being, engagement and opportunities**.

Set out thematically, the Guides explain how poverty impacts on **5 Key Areas** of the school day.

1. **Understanding poverty;** causes, key drivers and impact of poverty on learners living in lower income families
2. **School Uniform and Clothing**
3. **Food and Hunger**
4. **Participation in the Life of the School**
5. **Home-School Relationship**

Each Key Area has examples of what **practical steps** schools can take, many of which are **low or no cost measures** and have been designed to help schools tackle the impact of poverty through a **whole school approach**.

As part of the development of these Guides, consultation has taken place with strategic partners including academics, policy makers, teachers, third sector organisations and the Children's Commissioner for Wales' office.

Grounded in Welsh Government's commitment to tackle child poverty and to improve the mental health and emotional well-being of all children in Wales, the Guides draw on key Welsh Government legislation, policies and guidance.

In addition to being informed by Welsh Government priorities, the Guides draw upon research which has examined the relationship between child poverty and education and include findings from the Children in Wales, Annual Child & Family Poverty Surveys. Through these findings we hear directly from learners about how poverty impacts their school experience.

To further support a whole school approach, a **governor specific guide** has also been developed and this, along with a supplementary guide on **reducing poverty related bullying** plus **school case** studies showcasing best practice when implementing the guides, is available on Hwb.

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The Price of Pupil Poverty

Taking a Whole School Approach to improving the well-being of children from lower income families

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES, KEY DRIVERS & IMPACT OF POVERTY ON LEARNERS LIVING IN LOWER INCOME FAMILIES

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Children's rights and poverty

All children have a **right to education** and education in Wales is intended to be free. However, there are still costs associated with education, for example school uniform and not all families are able to afford some of these additional costs.

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)](#) is enshrined in Welsh law under the [Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011](#). The UNCRC is based on 3 principles: **Participation, Protection and Provision.** Many of these rights are particularly relevant in the context of children and their school experience:

- **The right to fulfil their potential** (Article 6)
- **The right to an education and on the basis of equal opportunity** (Article 28)
- **The right to the best possible health and nutritious food** (Article 24)
- **Best interests of the child** must always be a top priority (Article 3)
- **The right to an adequate standard of living** that meets and supports their needs (Article 27)
- **The right to express their views and be listened to** (Article 12)
- **The right to play and leisure opportunities** (Article 31)
- **The right to benefit from social security** (Article 26)

A school which considers and takes action to ensure that all children from lower income families have an equitable experience in their school life, is also a school which is helping to secure the rights of all learners under the UNCRC and UNCRPD and is fulfilling the duty required by the [Curriculum and Assessment Act (Wales) 2021.](#) Children's rights should be at the core of whole school planning and delivery. The Children's Commissioner for Wales has published a [framework](#) on how to achieve this.

Whilst the focus of these Price of Pupil Poverty Guides is in respect of children from lower income families, adopting a **children's rights approach** in schools provides a unified value base which will benefit all learners. Many schools are using these Guides to take practical steps to not only support children to realise these rights, but in doing so, alleviate the impact that poverty has on children's day to day experiences of school.

The evidence and examples provided throughout these Guides, highlight the significant impact that living in poverty can have on children being able to access these rights, from individual progress, to being made to feel different and unable to participate in school trips and enrichment activities.

Adopting a children's rights approach will benefit **all** learners and deliver important aspects of [the Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales](#):

Ambitious, capable learners
Enterprising, creative contributors
Ethical, informed citizens
Healthy, confident individuals

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Prevalence of child poverty in Wales

In their first and subsequent Child Poverty Strategies, Welsh Government define poverty as:

"a long term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in their society".

The current Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2024) | GOV.WALES was published in January 2024.

The key indicator used to measure child poverty is the percentage of children living in households below 60% of the median UK household income, after housing costs. This indicator is widely used as it provides a more accurate picture of available income. Income matters as it is a key resource which enables households to meet their everyday essential and basic needs, such as food, energy and clothing.

Statistics, provided by Loughborough University in 2024, show that after housing costs, **29% of children in Wales are living in poverty.** Whilst still unacceptably high, this figure shows a marked reduction from 2022, which stated that 34% of children in Wales were living in poverty. However, given that the data do not cover the peak period of the cost of living crisis or inflation, it is not yet known how stable this reduction is or indeed, if it is fully reflective of the current child poverty rates in Wales.

"Children are missing out of vital parts of their childhood due to families not being able to afford basic necessities"

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Drivers of poverty

The drivers of poverty in Wales comprise a wide range of structural, household and individual-level factors, which include:

- Levels of worklessness
- Impact of welfare reform changes
- Insecure employment and inconsistent hours offered
- Low wages
- Poor economic conditions
- Increased cost of living
- Poor education and skills
- Parental qualifications
- Family stability
- Childcare availability and affordability
- Housing affordability and conditions
- Poor health

The **causes of poverty are complex**, not simply a matter of lower income and this is more so in Wales than in other parts of the UK. It is a structural problem with a lack of income at its core. Whilst many families experience persistent poverty, it is also dynamic, for example; those living in poverty this year are not necessarily the same group of people who will be living in poverty next year.

However, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identified that children living in **certain groups are more likely to experience poverty** and at a higher rate. These include:

- Minority ethnic families, particularly Black and Asian groups
- Families with a disabled parent or child
- Lone parent household
- Families with three or more children
- Those living in social rented or insecure accommodation

One of the perpetual myths around poverty is that it only affects households who are not working. This is not the case and there has been a steady **increase in the number of working households living in poverty**.

"The increase of 'in-work' poverty is staggering. How can it be OK that you work a good job and still can't afford to feed your family?"

Annual Child & Family Poverty Survey Report 2022, Children in Wales

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Poverty and health

A [report](#) published in 2022 by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) found that poverty is a serious issue for children's health. The report stated that children living in poverty are more likely to have **poorer health outcomes, poor physical health and mental health problems**. Children living in poverty were **72% more likely to be diagnosed with a long-term illness.**

Healthy foods are generally three times more expensive per calorie and lower income families are far less able to afford a healthy, nutritious diet. This often leads to obesity and malnutrition in children.

Children in lower income families have **less access to the healthcare** they need. The RCPCH report identifies that when supporting factors, such as transport and childcare costs are taken into consideration, the average cost of attending a clinic appointment is £35. For families living in poverty, this cost is often more than their weekly food budget and the additional financial burden of health appointments can mean that children are unable to attend.

The **environment** that children live in can also affect their health. For example, families on lower incomes are more likely to be impacted by **cold, damp or overcrowded housing**, making illnesses such as asthma or chest infections more common. This situation is often exacerbated for families with a disabled child.

Even access to outdoor play and exercise can be affected by poverty as there can be **limited open spaces** in disadvantaged areas and transport and equipment costs are prohibitive.

Adverse childhood experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are **stressful events** that occur in childhood which can a have lifelong impact on health and behaviour. Public Health Wales [evidence](#) shows that children who experience stressful and poor quality childhoods are **more likely to perform poorly in schools.**

These adverse childhood experiences include:

- Domestic violence
- Parental separation
- Verbal, physical or sexual abuse
- Growing up in a household in which there is alcohol misuse and drug use
- Having a parent with a mental health condition
- Having a household member in prison

Those who have experienced 4 or more of these are likely to experience poorer physical and mental health and poorer life outcomes.

Poverty is not caused by ACEs, nor does having experienced ACEs result in poverty. However, there is a significant proportion of families with multiple ACEs who experience poverty.

ACEs should never be viewed as being deterministic. Providing sympathetic responses, trauma informed support, building resilience and adopting a strengths-based approach will help to support children and young people.

Research has shown that having a relationship with **one trusted adult** during childhood can mitigate the negative impacts of ACEs.

To find out more, visit the [ACE Hub Wales](#)

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Impacts on learning attributable to poverty

In a Children in Wales survey, carried out in 2023 with professionals, practitioners and educators across Wales, **92% said that poverty affects children's experience of school and learning.**

The survey found the impact on learners to be:

- **Inability to concentrate**: Hunger; tiredness; anxiety about financial pressures at home; and concern about their parents' mental health.

- **School avoidance:** Unable to afford transport costs, school trips, fundraising days and school uniforms; bullying and being ostracised; expected discipline for non-compliance with homework or rules.

- **Low aspirations:** A need to contribute to the financial home situation; low self-worth and expectations; inability to look forward due to immediate needs such as food, clothing and heating.

- **Isolation:** Activities; school trips; stigma; bullying; embarrassment; and mental health.

For many children living in poverty, they face a number of barriers to regular, consistent educational attendance before they even get to the school gates. For example; transport, school uniform and equipment costs can be prohibitive to many families living in poverty, leading to erratic or irregular attendance. The Annual Child & Family Poverty survey report found that many families are **having to choose** between paying for school uniform or transport, or feeding their children.

Once in school, many children living in poverty are hungry and bring with them financial anxieties and concerns about how their parents are coping or in some cases, if they will still be in the same home when they return from school. This often leads to **poor concentration and engagement.**

Even handing in home-work can be stressful for children. Many families are having to choose whether they provide food or electricity, or are alternating provision each day. Even though some schools provide devices for lower income families, affordability of, and access to data can lead to home-work not being completed.

Whilst the **drivers of poverty are wide ranging and complex**, the impact can be too, affecting every aspect of a child's life, including their educational outcomes and experiences.

"Ever present money worries can impact a child's mental health, their ability to sleep, school attendance, especially due to transport issues or caring responsibilities. Lack of understanding of the overarching impacts can cause children to be penalised by teachers"

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Impact on children and young people

Poverty in Wales is widespread with all local authority areas experiencing child poverty. This means that the majority of maintained schools will have learners who are living in poverty.

Through a wealth of research, it has been shown that poverty has a **detrimental impact** on children's learning, educational attainment and their school experiences.

There is a wealth of research evidencing **that poverty has a huge impact on children's learning at school and consequent educational attainment levels**. Learners from lower income and disadvantaged families are **more likely to**:

- Have poorer physical health
- Experience mental or emotional health issues
- Have a low sense of well-being and life satisfaction
- Underachieve at school
- Have poorer prospects in work
- Experience social deprivation and isolation
- Feel unsafe
- Experience stigma and bullying at school

"Lower self-esteem. Feeling severely left out, misunderstood as in school, you can be punished for being tired, however if you have to work or have inadequate food and housing, then sleep can be tough" (child/young person aged 14-16yrs)

CiW Annual Child & Family Poverty Report 2022

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Impact on children and young people

Children and young people living in poverty or disadvantage often feel **excluded, stigmatised and bullied** because they cannot afford the same things as their peers. Children are missing out on opportunities to be the best they can be at school, because the day to day costs of attending and engaging at school are often unaffordable.

Children are aware of the costs which impact on their family's finances. Even young children can be aware of financial constraints such as housing and food and know when money is short. Children living in these situations can be subjected to social exclusion because they don't have the correct school uniform or PE kit, cannot participate in things like 'Fun Days' or school trips, or constantly need to borrow basic school equipment, such as pens, from their teachers and peers. For many, **school can be a place that highlights their disadvantage.**

Learners' experiences of poverty in school can be **affected by school policies**, which may unintentionally stigmatise children or increase exclusion.

Examples of these policies include:

- Uniform and dress
- School meals
- School trips
- Behaviour
- Inclusion
- Emotional health and well-being
- Equality and diversity
- Bullying and safeguarding

Each day at school, children from lower income or disadvantaged **families face practical challenges** that they must overcome or negotiate. **These include**:

- **Having the right clothes for school**
- **Travelling to school and transport costs**
- **Having the right resources and equipment for lessons**
- **Stigma and isolation**
- **Affording school trips**
- **Food and the ability to pay for it**
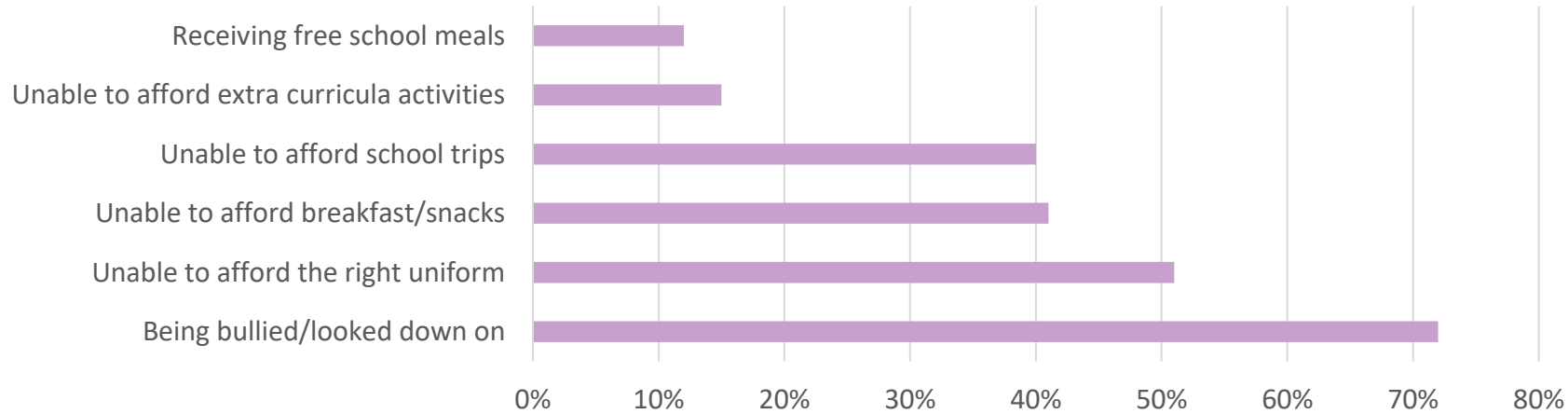- **Extra-curricular activities**
- **Home learning**

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Impacts of poverty in school: Children's views

In a [recent survey](#) children and young people in Wales were asked to identify 2 areas that were most likely to affect children who live in poverty the most:

Receiving free school meals	
Unable to afford extra curricula activities	
Unable to afford school trips	
Unable to afford breakfast/snacks	
Unable to afford the right uniform	
Being bullied/looked down on	

Source: CiW Annual Child & Family Poverty Report 2023

The findings from this survey identified that overall, the most important issue to children and young people was **the need to be included in the life of the school and feel accepted**, not just by their peers, but also by the school and staff. Anything that drew attention to their financial circumstances or disadvantage, such as not being able to afford school trips or the correct school branded uniform or snacks at break time, was highly likely to lead to bullying. This in turn, led to comments and observations around anxiety, poor mental health, isolation and school avoidance.

"Struggling with uniform and not being able to go on school trips. On non-uniform days, children get bullied for not having nice clothes" (child/young person aged 10-13yrs)

CiW Annual Child & Family Poverty Report 2023

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My School Day - Affluence and poverty perspectives

More recently there has been increased activity in relation to sensitively asking children to share their experiences and views about child poverty, including food insecurity. There are good examples of this from across the UK and Scotland . This work has highlighted how **children are more than capable of suggesting new, practical approaches and ways they can be better supported.**

There are increasingly more positive examples of children exercising their right to give their views on matters that affect them and for these views to be considered.

Through school councils and other **participatory arrangements**, both schools and learners will benefit from hearing the ideas and perspectives of children, many of whom will be negatively affected by poverty.

The experience of poverty for some young people is starkly illustrated in the table opposite. A group of **young people** from **Caerphilly Youth Forum** held a workshop on the experiences of poverty in schools. They produced the following comparison on the school day between learners from lower income families and those from more affluent backgrounds.

Go downstairs - breakfast on the table.	7.00	No food in cupboards.
Uniform is ironed and ready, takes clothes out of wardrobe.	7.30	Picks up uniform from yesterday off the floor.
Parent drives child to school.	7.45	Misses school bus because helping with baby sister; walks to school in the rain.
Gets to school. Hands in permission for upcoming school trip.	8.00	Wet and cold since it was raining; makes up an excuse for not having a permission slip.
Turns in homework.	8.30	Didn't have the internet to search at home.
PE lesson- shows friends new trainers.	9.00	Is made fun of for borrowing school's spare trainers.
Break-time - buys food, spends time with their friends in the canteen during break.	10.00	Avoids canteen, is hungry (isolation)
Turn in project made with help from parents; wins the best volcano competition.	11.00	Volcano made out of toilet roll; teachers criticise for lack of effort and classmates laugh.
Lunch-time - fancies cake and fruit and can't decide so buys both.	12.00	Ashamed of free meal pass.
Home time; picked up by parents after extra-curricular activity.	4.00	Detention for not doing homework; has to walk home.

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Impact on children and young people

Schools can often make a distinction between children whose parents are struggling financially and those whose parents make, what are perceived as poor lifestyle or financial choices. However, better awareness of poverty and the impact this has on children and families, will lead to **greater understanding, support** and ultimately, a better school experience for children living in poverty.

Working to support disadvantaged children can lead to staff feeling frustrated because whatever actions they take in school to help, they cannot substantially change the situation at home. However, **actions in school do have an impact** and there **is a great deal that schools can do to help mitigate the impact of poverty** and enhance children's wellbeing, engagement and experience in schools. **These Guides will help schools to do this.**

Schools cannot of course be solely responsible for alleviating the impact poverty has on children's experiences of education. It is for this reason schools must be encouraged to work in partnership with local authorities, regional consortia, health and social care sectors, and voluntary and community organisations. **Working together can make a real difference** in maximising finite resources and delivering joined up solutions.

"Unable to think or concentrate due to worrying about my parents, not able to go to school as parents are unable to put credit on the electricity and gas meters so being cold and not able to have hot meals or even enough food as its too expensive"

(child/young person aged 10-13 yrs)

CiW Annual Child & Family Poverty Report 2023

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National leadership from Welsh Government

There are several **legislative, strategic and policy levers** that Welsh Government has introduced to tackle poverty and its impact. These include:

The 2010 Children and Families (Wales) Measure places a duty on Welsh Ministers to develop a Child Poverty Strategy for Wales.

The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024 with a vision for a Wales *"That enables children and young people to access their rights, have good wellbeing and fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances")*

The Socio-economic Duty came into force in March 2021. This means that some public bodies must consider how their strategic decisions can improve inequality of outcome for those in socio-economic disadvantage.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) means that Welsh Government must consider children's rights in everything they do.

Welsh Government's **National Mission** is to achieve high standards and aspirations for all by tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and supporting every learner. In their roadmap document Welsh Government bring together policies and ambitions for education in achieving this. These include breaking down barriers to education opportunities, creating a positive education experience and supporting learners. There is a particular focus on learners who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

Education is central to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014 and all 7 Well-being Goals within the Act endorse this, delivered through the New Curriculum for Wales.

A prosperous Wales

A resilient Wales

A healthier Wales

A more equal Wales

A Wales of cohesive communities

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

A globally responsible Wales

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Pupil Development Grant

The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is a key resource for tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment. This funding is provided to schools and settings by Welsh Government and aims to raise the attainment of learners from lower income families, as well as care experienced children. Allocation of funding is based on the number of learners aged 5 to 15 who are:

- Eligible for free school meals (eFSM)
- Looked after children

There is also an Early Years PDG that gives similar support to children aged 3 and 4 in schools and nurseries. The PDG funding is for 'whole-school approaches' and whilst these can benefit all learners, schools must support the needs of disadvantaged learners. In 2023, Welsh Government produced guidance on how schools should use this grant, and funding rates are published online annually. The **guidance prioritises 2 areas for PDG spend**:

- High quality learning and teaching
- Development of Community Focused Schools

School Essentials Grant

The Welsh Government provides funding through the School Essentials Grant to parents and carers of pupils eligible for free school meals and for all looked after children. The **purpose of the grant is to provide financial help** for items such as:

- School uniform, including coats and footwear
- School activities, including sports kit, musical instruments and equipment for after school activities
- Classroom essentials, including pens and school bags

Families who are eligible can claim once per child, per school year. It is available for children in years Reception to year 11. To apply, parents and carers must claim directly from the local authority in which their child's school is based. However not all families are aware of the grant or their eligibility, so it's important to promote it and support parents/carers to apply wherever possible. Promotional materials are available to support at: Get help with school costs: promotional toolkits for schools and local authorities | GOV.WALES

Period dignity grant

Girls living in lower income or disadvantaged families risk missing days of education, stigma and humiliation during their period. Welsh Government's *A Period Proud Wales: Action Plan* aims to achieve period dignity in Wales. As part of this action plan, local authorities receive funding for the **provision of free period products to schools** across Wales. These products should be easily accessible to all girls, not just those in lower income and disadvantaged families and in a manner that **protects their dignity**.
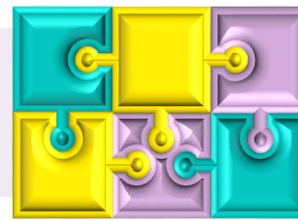
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What schools can do.......

Taking a whole school approach to tackling the impact of poverty

Schools are facing a number of challenges, but despite this, many are taking actions to alleviate the educational and well-being impact of poverty on children from lower income or disadvantaged families.

These actions and programmes show **improvements in learner progress, behaviour, attendance, uptake of free school meals and better learner well-being.**

In their [annual report](#) 2021-2022, Estyn state that providers that are effective at tackling the impact of poverty, focus strongly on **high standards, equity** and mitigating the **material impact of poverty.**

Reducing the impact of poverty on the school day need**s a whole school approach**, with all parts of the school working together and being fully engaged and committed to make positive change. It requires partnership working between governors, senior leaders, teachers and all school staff, as well as parents, carers and the wider community.

These guides focus on key areas, providing tangible and cost effective solutions to tackling the impact of poverty. The guides also show overarching actions that support and enhance these key areas, providing the foundations on which schools can positively address the impact of poverty for their learners.

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What schools can do…….
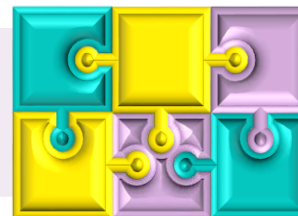
Overarching actions

- All school staff should take part in **poverty awareness training**, helping them to understand the impact and identify which children show signs of being affected by their situation.

- Appoint an **Equity Champion** from amongst school staff to promote and ensure fairness and equity for all. The champion can:

  ▶ **Recognise** which learners are from lower income or disadvantaged families

  ▶ **Monitor** and track which learners are, or who should be receiving free school meals

  ▶ Positively and sensitively **engage** with parents/carers to ensure they are aware of and able to apply for any benefits or grants they may be entitled to

  ▶ **Encourage** parents to have a voice in their child's education by joining the Parent Council or PTA

  ▶ Keep a **list of organisations** and contacts where parents can get advice or additional help for specific issues such as debt advice or access to food banks

  ▶ Develop an **action plan** to address barriers to school participation and which seeks to reduce all costs for families

- Appoint an **Equity Ambassador** from amongst learners in school, supported by school staff to develop a role that benefits all learners and informs staff of the barriers to be addressed. Ideally this should be a learner with experience of living in a lower income family.

- Promote a **whole school approach** where learners are encouraged to talk to their teachers or particular member of staff if they are worried about another learner.

- Identify which **policies and practices** unintentionally stigmatise or impact disadvantaged children and where changes can be made

- Involve and **listen to children and young people** to find out what challenges a learner from a lower income family may face

- Increase engagement and commitment from a **range of stakeholders** at regional, local authority and community levels

- Use **resources** to help you. These could include:

  ▶ These **Price of Pupil Poverty guides**

  ▶ **'Check with Ceri'**, a resource from the Children's Commissioner for Wales to help learners and staff think about the costs of school, understand poverty and make plans for improvement

  ▶ **Peers**: There are many schools now undertaking actions to reduce the impact of poverty for learners. Talk with them, share experiences and resources and importantly, learn from them.

- **Implement low or no-cost changes** that make a difference

- Make a commitment to a **whole school approach** to attitudes, understanding and actions that have a positive impact on children and young people living in poverty and disadvantage.

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The Price of Pupil Poverty

Taking a Whole School Approach to improving the well-being of children from lower income families

SCHOOL UNIFORM AND CLOTHING 'IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT LEARNING'.

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Introduction

Affordability

Whilst school uniforms offer many positives, including helping to minimise visible differences and instil a sense of identity and belonging amongst learners, for many, it still presents a **significant, often unaffordable cost** for families.

Children and young people living in lower income families face substantial barriers to learning when their families are not able to afford the costs of a school uniform.   Learners often feel **embarrassed or worried** about being ridiculed, bullied and pitied by peers and school staff. These concerns increase the stress and anxiety faced by learners and their families and can result in **greater absenteeism** as they would rather not attend school than face the humiliation of being sent home or receiving a letter from the school.   This is an **ongoing issue throughout the school year** as items are outgrown or become worm and need to be replaced.

Lower income families are less likely to be able to afford multiple uniform items and this too presents issues for learners, particularly in schools with a strict enforcement policy. It may be that a child arrives at school without the correct uniform because they only have one shirt and if that is damaged or being washed, they do not have access to a spare one. Even if they are sent home, they have nothing to change into. These can be **unintended consequences of a strict uniform policy.**

"If you do not have the correct uniform you are given a uniform slip to take home and if the uniform is not corrected you get a negative behaviour point which can escalate to detention" (child/young person aged 14-16 yrs)

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Affordability

In the Children in Wales, Annual Child & Family Poverty Survey [report] 2023, 50% of children and young people said that not having enough money to buy uniform has a significant impact on children living in poverty. They were **more likely to be bullied and isolated** as a consequence and more likely to be sent home.

They believe this to be grossly unfair and recognised that **uniforms do not have to be as expensive** as they are.

"It's ridiculous that parents have to spend so much on uniforms. It's exploitative and controlling. Why make them pay so much for a grey jumper?" (aged 14-16 yrs)

The survey found that 79% of children and young people must wear a school badge or logo on at least one item of their uniform. However, for many, this rule extended to 3, 4 or even 5 items of uniform. For these children, the school branded items had to be purchased from a specific uniform shop at a much greater price than none school branded items.

The table opposite shows examples of uniform costs and gives an insight into the policies of 2 schools in Wales. These costs were for the school year 2023/24. Where non-branded items are not required, the costs of supermarket items have been used.

School year 23/24	School A Costs	School B Costs	Supermarket costs with no logos
% of learners eFSM *	19%	38%	
Blazer	£30.00**	£30.00 **	£14.00
Skirt/trousers x 2	£ 8.00	£ 8.00	£ 8.00
Shirt x 5	£ 7.50	£ 7.50	£ 7.50
Tie	£ 7.00 **	£ 6.00 **	£ 4.00
Jumper x 2	£34.00 **	£32.00 **	£ 5.00
Socks/tights x 5	£ 5.00	£ 5.00	£ 5.00
Shoes	£14.00	£14.00	£14.00
PE top x 2	£44.00 **	£37.00 **	£ 3.00
PE shorts x 2	£24.00 **	£ 5.00	£ 5.00
Trainers	£10.00	£10.00	£10.00
Total	**£183.50**	**£154.50**	**£75.50**

* Eligible for free school meals

** Compulsory with logo and only available from specified shop
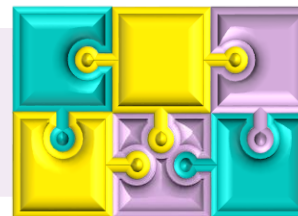
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What schools can do.......

Actions: school uniform and clothing

- **Implement Welsh Government's** *School uniform and appearance policy guidance.* This statutory guidance recognises that uniforms are a financial burden, particularly for lower income families. To help address and alleviate this impact, **the guidance states that:**

  - Schools should give high priority to **cost and affordability**

  - No uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils feeling unable to attend

  - Branded items should **not be compulsory**

  - Arrangements should be in place for the provision of **second hand/recycled uniforms**

  - High cost items, such as blazers, should be avoided

  - When changing uniform policies, **a transitional period** should be introduced

  - Single uniform suppliers should be avoided

- The statutory guidance states that branded items should not be compulsory. Whilst this non-compulsory option does help with costs, children and young people have identified that this can further highlight their financial circumstances as not having the optional logo makes them *"stand-out".* A more positive and impactful action would be **to remove branded items completely.**

- **Schools Essentials Grant:** Families on lower incomes and who qualify for certain benefits can apply for this grant. Families can only claim once per child, per school year and applications are made via the local authority. **Raise awareness of the Schools Essential Grant** with families, ensuring that those eligible are aware of it and importantly, how to access it.

  There are many ways to raise awareness, for example; through school notice boards, parent/carer communications, forums, newsletters and web pages, family liaison officers and other members of staff who have contact with parents. It should be noted that many families fall short of the current eligibility criteria for this grant, but still struggle to afford uniforms. It is therefore crucial that other actions are considered and implemented to support learners and their families with the costs of school uniforms.
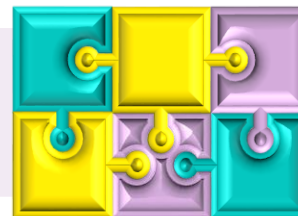
"If uniforms had no badges and was plain, it would be cheaper and more accessible to more people. The school could even sell iron on badges so it would be cheaper because having to buy from a uniform shop is very expensive" (child/young person aged 10-13 yrs)

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Actions: school uniform and clothing

- **What does your uniform cost? Conduct a costing exercise** to identify how much your families must spend to adhere to your uniform policy. This exercise should include the whole school uniform, PE kits, footwear and any other recommended items stated in your policy or guidance. Given that, on average, around 1/3rd of children and young people in Wales live in poverty and many more experience low incomes, **is this affordable** for the families of learners in your school?

- **Conduct an impact audit:** Identify **the impact of your current school uniform policy** on all children, especially those from lower income and disadvantaged backgrounds. Ask children, young people and parents what they think about the costs of your uniform, where they buy items from, how easy it is to purchase these items and the financial impact buying your school's uniform has. Some schools have done this and have implemented several changes, including working with credit unions to enable parents to pay for uniforms via instalments.

- **Does your uniform include school branded items? Consider whether branding is really necessary** on each of these items, or indeed at all, and consider the financial impact of this branding. Could your school use colour as an identifier, rather than branded items? If so, will the chosen colour be affordable, easy to access and available from a non-specialised shop? Depending on the size of your school, some supermarkets may be willing to stock these locally.

- **Uniform recycling schemes.** Operating a recycling scheme within your school, not only helps to reduce the cost of school uniforms for lower income families, but reusing and recycling is also seen as having a positive impact on our environment. Clothes can be donated by learners who have outgrown or no longer need items of uniform. This can include sports kit and equipment. To **ensure recycling schemes have a positive impact and are used** and accepted by learners and families, the following should be considered:

  - ► Available items should be **clean and in good condition**. Donors should be aware of this and donation points should be easily accessible.

  - ► Items should be **free** or available at a **nominal fee**

  - ► Schemes should be facilitated in **a sensitive and non-stigmatising** manner. Consider how to do this and **involve learners and their families**, asking how, where and when they would like to access the scheme.

  - ► Include the importance of recycling and reusing uniforms as part of your lessons and conversations on **environment and climate change**. This helps to reduce any associated stigma around wearing second hand uniforms and instead, becomes a proactive and positive step in helping the environment.

The Children's Commissioner's Office has produced the *Revolve* resource, which can help schools explore and plan a recycling scheme.
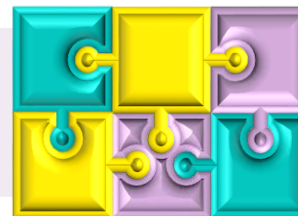
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What schools can do.......

Actions: school uniform and clothing

- Consider **different approaches to non-compliance with school uniform policy.** If pupils are not complying, the first approach should be to **ask why and check that everything is OK**, rather than taking an immediate punitive approach or sending pupils home to change. For those living in lower income families, it may be that they can't afford the correct uniform or that the family cannot afford to wash that item at that time and therefore, they have no alternative uniform. In the Children in Wales Child & Family Poverty Report (2023), children and young people felt unfairly punished for uniform policy breaches that were related to income. **A non punitive approach and greater flexibility within the school's uniform policy should be sought.**

- **Equity champion:** School staff who have concerns regarding a pupil's uniform, whether it is non-compliant, worn or ill-fitting, could liaise with the school equity champion. This person could then sensitively work with parents to ensure they are **aware of any available support, such as grants and recycling points.**

- **Avoid rewards linked to the consistent wearing of school uniforms.** These linked rewards can be stigmatising for children living in lower income families and for many, often unachievable. Consistent compliance to school's uniform policy is often outside of their control due to financial circumstances, therefore **schools should avoid this linked reward system.**

- School uniform policies **should not dictate different items of clothing** on the basis of sex/gender. This action is recommended within the statutory school uniform and appearance policy and not only helps to support equality, but also **creates a wider choice for lower income families**, either when buying new uniforms or when accessing recycling schemes.

- Children in Wales showcase **Case Studies** from schools that are implementing the Welsh Government's School uniform and appearance policy guidance. These can be found here: Supporting Change: School Uniforms

"Our school really works to make sure children in poverty don't obviously stand out. There is free uniform for children who need it and it's been donated by other children"
(child/young person aged 10-13 yrs)

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FOOD AND HUNGER

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Introduction

All children have the right to adequate nutritious food and clean water ([Article 24, UNCRC](#)). Studies undertaken by food experts, education unions, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Children in Wales have revealed a startling and worrying trend of children being hungry at school, some even resorting to stealing food, borrowing money from friends or going without.

In the absence of additional support to help address food insecurity, many children are unlikely to progress well through school and achieve good qualifications or life outcomes. The aim of this guide is to help schools identify and support those children who need additional help because of food insecurity and hunger and consider ways to do this.

"The amount of pupils we see coming through school with an issue with getting and being provided with food is becoming an increasing worry. Many pupils now don't have access to a sufficient amount of food at home"

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Food Insecurity

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity means being **unable to reliably afford or access enough nutritious, healthy food** to meet their basic needs. Those experiencing food insecurity regularly don't know where their next meal will come from and must cut back on the quantity or quality of their food or skip meals completely.

The primary cause of food insecurity is low or inadequate income.

The scale of the problem

For many thousands of families and children in Wales, food insecurity is a daily reality. In a 2023 report by the Trussell Trust, *Hunger in Wales*, **69,683 emergency food parcels were provided for children** between April 2022 and March 2023. This is a significant increase on the figure for 2021/2022, which showed provision of 48,658 emergency food parcels, representing a 41% increase.

These latest figures are just the tip of the iceberg, showing only the number of parcels provided by the Trussell Trust and their partners. There are many other providers, such as pantries, larders and community food hubs that are not included in the figures.

The *Hunger in Wales* report 2023 also shows that the majority of those experiencing food insecurity (74%) did not seek or receive food aid.

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Impact on children and young people

It is well established that **food insecurity and hunger impacts on children's educational experiences**, attainment, attendance, engagement, behaviour, emotional and physical well-being. It has been shown that hunger affects both children's ability to learn and their behaviour. Hungry children have difficulty concentrating, so learning is impaired. **Food insecurity and hunger are associated with hyperactivity and inattention, mood and anxiety disorders as well as aggression**.

Children from food insecure households are more likely to be overweight or obese due to a lack of affordable, nutritious and balanced food. Growing up with food insecurity can teach children to eat when food is available, rather than when they are hungry. As they become adults, this can affect the body's ability to regulate and understand hunger signals, making it difficult to control or lose weight.

Analysis of a recent study in Leeds and shared at a UK parliament event showed that children who experienced food insecurity reported feeling stressed or anxious on most days or every day. This study also found children from food insecure households were 3-4 times more likely to experience negative emotions compared to their food secure peers.

Food insecurity causes stress and anxiety for all members of the family. Children are very often aware that parents and carers are eating less or not at all, to make the food stretch further. Over a number of years, the Children in Wales Annual Child & Family Poverty surveys have repeatedly found that children feel guilty if their parents don't eat, hide their hunger from their parents to avoid upsetting them and in some cases, take food from settings to provide for their parents and siblings.

"My Mum cries all the time because she has no money. I feel really bad and don't know to do. I can't tell her I'm hungry because she will cry more" (child/young person aged 10-13 yrs)

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Free School Meals

Local authorities are required to provide a free school lunch for eligible pupils, commonly referred to as free school meals (FSM). Many local authorities choose to fulfil this obligation by providing a daily allowance for pupils to spend in the canteen using a cashless, card or pass system. The rollout of Universal Primary Free School Meals means that all primary school children in Wales will receive free school meals by September 2024.

Under the means-tested FSM eligibility criteria, **90,108 pupils in Wales are eligible for FSM (eFSM)** in 2024 according to the School Census data. However, not all eligible parents and carers claim this entitlement. Reasons for this include being unaware of their eligibility, unsure how to make a claim, concern about the stigma that can be associated with eFSM, or the Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) rollout making parents think they do not need to register as eFSM.

Under the Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009, schools have a legal duty to encourage the take-up of free school meals. Under this same Measure, **schools also have a legal duty to protect the identity of learners who receive FSM**. Whilst cashless systems for payment of secondary school meals have had a positive impact in reducing the identification, stigma and embarrassment that is often associated with eFSM, schools should be mindful of how this works in practice at lunchtimes.

For example, are learners who are eFSM able to flow through the lunchtime process in the same way as other learners, without being easily identified?

Learners who are in receipt of FSM are given a daily spending limit to purchase their lunch and in some secondary schools, this allowance can be used to purchase break time snacks. Whilst this flexibility can have a positive impact on children by reducing hunger prior to lunch and enabling them to concentrate more during class, it may also mean that they will not have enough left to purchase their lunch.

There are many other children and young people living in **lower income families that do not meet the income threshold for eFSM**. These families often struggle to provide food or pay for school meals and they too can experience food insecurity and the stress and anxiety this can bring.

Encouraging and supporting eligible families to sign up to receive eFSM is important to help reduce food insecurity and hunger. However, it is also important in terms of families being able to access additional support and grants which may only be available to those who are eFSM, such as the School Essentials Grant.

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 allows schools to implement a variable pricing structure for food and drink. This is known as **'flexible charging'.** Under the Welsh Government's Charging for food and drink provided in maintained schools guidance, local authorities and school governing bodies have the power to operate flexible charging for school meals. Schools can use flexible charging in several different ways to support lower income families who do not qualify for free school meals. For example, charging less for meals, stepped payment charges, discounts or meal deals.

"Children say they are not hungry and don't bring food in. This is because they have none."

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School Breakfasts

Nearly all schools will have some experience of children arriving at school without having eaten breakfast. Teachers may assume that they were perhaps in a rush that morning or that their parents/carers did not ensure they had eaten before leaving their house. Whilst this may be the case for some learners, given the prevalence of poverty in Wales and the numbers who experience food insecurity, it is highly likely that a lack of breakfast is related to this, rather than to time or parenting.

Breakfast is important and aids learning and engagement. Cardiff University research found a significant link between eating breakfast and performing above average on teacher assessment scores. In 2023, the British Nutrition Foundation published a report highlighting that **school breakfast provision has a positive effect on diet quality, weight status and school-related outcomes.**

All children who go to a maintained primary school can have a free healthy breakfast at school, if their school provides a free breakfast scheme. According to research by Magic Breakfast, around 81% of primary schools offer breakfast provision. However, a survey conducted by Child Poverty Action Group and Parentkind shows that 1 in 7 families were unable to access a place, either because of school capacity or because their school did not offer this provision. Unfortunately, those in lower income families were the most likely to need a place but could not access one.

Holiday Hunger

Families who rely on free school meals during term time often find it **challenging to be able to feed their children during school holidays**. The need to provide food during this time is widely recognised and in recent years Welsh Government, local authorities and charitable organisations have done this through programmes, schemes and activities.

This provision is inevitably dependent on funding at both a national and local level and will therefore vary each year and across local authority areas. Even within local authority areas, provision may vary and this is particular evident where projects are run by charitable organisations such as faith or community groups. It is always worth regularly checking if there are schemes being run in your school's catchment area.

One programme that has been running for several years is the Welsh Government's 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme, administered through the Welsh Local Government Association. This is a schools-based programme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of social deprivation during the summer holidays. Together with local authorities and health professionals the programme delivers 'Food and Fun' schemes across Wales. A recent evaluation of this programme can be found here.
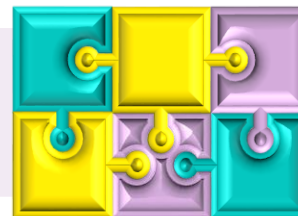
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What schools can do.......

There is much that schools can do to help learners from lower income or disadvantaged families who experience food insecurity and hunger. For example, schools could:

► Recruit an '**Equity Champion**' from amongst existing school staff to promote fairness and equity for all. Their role is to identify, monitor and support learners, engaging with them and their parents/carers in a positive and sensitive manner.

As part of the Children's Future Food Inquiry, young people suggested the presence of a dedicated 'hunger' teacher who support children and make it easier to talk about hunger issues. By placing a staff member in the dining room, the school would gain a better understanding of which learners were struggling with food issues, enabling the school to implement more effective ways of dealing with problems in the future.

► Appoint an '**Equity Ambassador**' from amongst the learners, who can identify which pupils are hungry or who has had little or nothing to eat during the school day with support from school staff and the equity champion.

► Promote a **whole school approach** where learners are encouraged to talk to their teachers or particular member of staff if they are worried about another learner.

► **Raise awareness amongst all school staff** on how to identify which children show signs of being hungry and how to respond sensitively and liaise with appropriate staff.

► Ensure **all parents and carers are aware of the free school meals programme**, the benefits of applying and how to apply. Provide support with this process and raise awareness of other support that may be available, such as the Healthy Start scheme.

► Using the Curriculum, begin a **conversation on food insecurity**, what it means and the impact. This will help to dispel myths, reduce stigma and help progress learning in the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience of the Curriculum for Wales.

► **Survey all learners** to identify where the barriers might be to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

► If your school is part of the Free Breakfast in Primary Schools scheme, ensure that the school has **sufficient free places** to accommodate all children who need one. If the scheme is over-subscribed, seek solutions with the local authority.

► If take up of breakfast clubs is poor amongst lower-income groups, consider how the school can **work with local authorities and families to increase take up.** Understanding the needs of and barriers faced by parents and carers is a crucial aspect of this. Include families on lower incomes, not just those in receipt of free school meals.

► Regularly and **effectively communicate and promote** the free school meal entitlement with parents and carers. Families may move in and out or poverty as circumstances change and may be unaware of what they are entitled to.

► **Review school menus** and ensure that learners in receipt of free school meals can afford sufficient quantity of healthy food choices.

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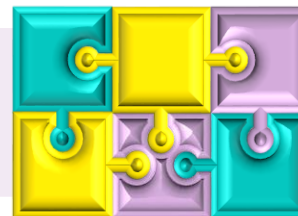**Lywodraeth Cymru**
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What schools can do.......

For example, schools could:

▶ In line with the [Health Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure](#) 2009, ensure that **free drinking water** is always available and repair water fountains that are damaged or in poor condition.

By providing access to free water, schools are helping to promote healthier choices, reduce plastic waste and ensure that children from lower income families are able to use their funds to buy food.

▶ Review the logistics around lunch times. **Carry out an audit** to see where improvements can be made, checking that all children have healthy and affordable choices, sufficient time to eat and do not have to wait too long for their break. Ideally lunch times should be no later than 12.30pm.

▶ Be aware of families who are struggling with school meal debt, let the catering team know and encourage families to speak with them. Sensitively approach parents and carers about **school meal arrears**. Work with families to try to resolve the situation and consider writing off the debt if necessary.

▶ Explore ways in which the **cost of lunches** can be covered for learners who are struggling to pay. For example, lending lunch money or providing food when children need it.

▶ Identify if there are currently any local, regional or national **holiday food provision programmes** or schemes. If yes, inform all staff and promote this provision with lower income families. If families need to apply or enrol for this provision, support and encourage families to do so.

▶ **Involve learners** in all aspects of scoping, potential changes and decision making, ensuring that those who are most likely to be affected are included in this group.

▶ Use '[Check with Ceri](#)' resources. These **resources**, developed by the Children's Commissioner's Office support schools to take forward some of the actions listed. They are free and help children, young people and staff to think about the costs of the school day, how this affects families and to identify what works well in your school and what could be improved.

Practice examples

• One primary school in Wales promoted free school meals by placing a large banner across the school during the first two weeks of the Autumn term. This included information on how to apply.

• A family run greengrocers in Swansea has teamed up with the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme, providing fresh fruit to schools. This fruit is given out during break time.

• One secondary school has, in partnership with their local authority, improved the nutritional value of lunches. This change was introduced after consultation with learners.

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PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

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Introduction

How involved and engaged a learner is in the life of the school will, to a large extent, determine their long-term educational outcomes.

Learners from lower income families can face significant **challenges in being able to participate** in and benefit from the diverse range of academic learning and wider/other learning experiences in schools.

The aim of this guide is to identify those children who often face additional barriers to participating fully in the life of the school and consider ways in which schools can best support them.

The Education Act (1996) states that schools cannot charge for any materials related to the delivery of the national curriculum.

It is widely acknowledged that, with continued austerity, school budgets are being squeezed year on year and that schools are having to take some drastic measures to reduce costs. One consequence of this that particularly impacts children from lower income families, is that **parents are increasingly being asked to pay** 'voluntary contributions' or subsidise items, materials or experiences related to the delivery of curricular subjects.

Books can often be in short supply and are therefore shared between learners. This can result in a lengthy wait to complete coursework. Parents who can afford to buy the books and associated items for their children do so, putting them at a distinct advantage over their less well-off peers.

Teachers' expectations and responses to learners who arrive at school without the correct resources or materials can vary enormously, both between schools and teachers within the same school. **Inconsistent expectations and insensitive practices can be confusing** and frightening for many children, whose parents are simply unable to afford any additional costs.

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School trips

School trips linked to the curriculum are not chargeable. Welsh Government guidance on charging states that families of any child in receipt of free school meals, should not be charged for school trips. However, according to the Bevan Foundation, nearly a quarter of children who are eligible for free school meals, did not take up their entitlement. Reasons for this include stigma and embarrassment that often surrounds free school meals, both for children and their parents and carers. Significantly, there are an estimated 55,000 children who live in poverty, but do not meet the eligibility threshold for free school meals.

Learners in these situations, may **not be able to afford the cost of any suggested 'voluntary contributions'** and could miss out. For children who also have additional support needs, affordability can be an even greater barrier.

Welsh Government Guidance on School Charging states:

 "When arranging school trips and activities governing bodies and head teachers should do as much as is practicable to ensure that children and young people living in poverty are not unfairly disadvantaged. The cost pressures on families with low incomes are significant and governing bodies and head teachers should try to ensure this is not exacerbated to the detriment of the child or young person. It is important to balance the education value of residential trips against their financial cost."

Missing out on educational visits and trips means that pupils whose families cannot afford the cost often **feel isolated, embarrassed and disappointed**. Not only do they miss out of the educational value and enrichment of the trip, they also miss out on the anticipation and excitement prior to a trip, and the stories and experiences that are shared after the event amongst their peer group.

They may find means by which to protect themselves and their family from this embarrassment through poor behaviour and therefore exclusion, disengagement, disinterest or illness.

In a 2023 poverty survey, 39% of children and young people cited school trips as being one of the issues most likely to affect those living in poverty. They stated that **those who could not afford to go on trips felt excluded, isolated and more likely to be bullied for not attending.**

In this same survey, children also reported feeling stressed and more anxious both before and after school trips. For example, the 'pre-trip' letter with information and costings, could lead to pressures on parents and following the trip, teacher and peer discussions around the activity would further increase feelings of isolation and exclusion.

Even where schools do subsidise or pay in full for excursions, there are still likely to be additional costs for extra activities, food and snacks. It is not unknown for families to go into debt to enable their children to attend.

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"Sometimes school trips are important for your education purpose and to see that would be nice" (child/young person aged 10-13yrs)   CiW Annual Child & Family Poverty Report 2023

Enrichment and other activities

With schools increasingly unable to offer enrichment activities free of charge, these **are becoming out of reach for many children** in lower income families.

After-school activities which are presented as free, such as homework clubs or sports activities can also be beyond access for many learners who rely on free school transport, which is only available at the end of the normal school hours. This affects all schools but can be particularly pronounced for Welsh medium schools or those with religious characters. It is not just about the practicalities and affordability of transport; other areas also present barriers for children living in lower income families. For example, the cost of additional or specific clothing, footwear or equipment for sports.

Fundraising initiatives or 'fun' days may also further isolate or exclude learners from lower income families. For example, fundraising activities such as 'dress down' days, where pupils pay a nominal sum to come to school in their own clothes, can create stress and anxiety for both the pupils and their parents. Not only is the nominal sum an additional cost for families, but children and young people also worry about what they will wear and this can be distressing, particularly for those living in poverty.

"Being bullied a lot for being poor. Not having things that other have and that makes you feel left out. Feel lonely and your life is empty."
(child/young person aged 14-16yrs)

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Enrichment and other activities

Costume or 'dress up' days also **create additional barriers** to children from lower income families as there is often an expectation or need to **buy a costume and/or materials to make one**. Some schools may 'loan' costumes to pupils who need them, however, these are frequently old, poorly fitting, unwashed and in disrepair. Where this is the case, learners may feel too embarrassed or ashamed to wear them as they feel this highlights their circumstances and will lead to bullying. Children who do still attend on these days may, to avoid embarrassment, state that they 'forgot' about the activity, but are still likely to feel excluded.

Present buying for teachers at the end of the school year has become the norm in many schools and parents often seek to purchase an expensive or unusual present for teachers. Once again this can be especially challenging and create pressure for lower income families. They may feel that by not buying an end of term/year present this may be misinterpreted by the school, other parents or other pupils.

End of term activities, such as 'leavers' events, often organised by other parents, can also prove costly and again exclude many learners who are unable to financially contribute and will therefore miss out.

In **practical subjects** that use materials or ingredients, if the learners wish to take home their finished product, schools often charge for these 'optional extras'. This may lead to pupils from lower income families feeling demoralised and unable to share their learning experience and pride with their family.

"For design we have to pay £6 to make our models and take them home. So if we don't pay for it then we can't use it so we have made it for no reason."

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Impact on children and young people

Pupils from lower income or disadvantaged families are very aware of social differences and worry about stigma and being judged by their peers and teachers. It negatively affects their self-esteem, confidence and well-being, and their overall ability to fully participate in school life.

It is known that **learners from lower income families are more likely to experience poverty related bullying**. In the Children in Wales poverty survey 2023, the consequences of this were clearly expressed by children and young people.

"Bullying in schools due to wealth is horrible. As a person who experienced it severely, it destroys you and kills any self-confidence or self-worth you have about yourself"
(young person aged 17-18yrs)

The subjects that learners choose to do at GCSE or 'A' level can also be affected due to the ancillary costs of taking that subject. For example, a child who is talented or interested in art, design and technology or music and drama may be unable to take up the subject because of the extra costs of resources and materials, which their family cannot afford. In a report by the Children's Commission on Poverty, around **30% of children from lower income families have fallen behind in core subjects** because their family could not afford the necessary books or materials.

Through no fault of their own, lower incomes and poverty can and does affect children's abilities to fully participate in the life of the school financially, physically and emotionally.

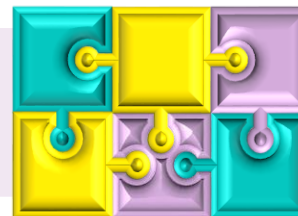| Introduction | 0 | |
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What schools can do.......

Participation in all aspects of school life and all the opportunities presented through both classroom and extra-curricular activities will **increase learners' confidence and self-esteem**, their social skills and ultimately educational attainment.

There is much that schools can do to help pupils from lower income or disadvantaged families and lift many barriers to participating in the life of the school.

► **Appoint an Equity Champion** from amongst school staff to promote fairness and equity for all. The champion can:

- **Identify, monitor and support** learners from lower income or disadvantaged families

- **Engage** with their parents and carers in a positive and sensitive manner, informing them of any or grants that are available.

School Essentials Grant

► The Welsh Government provides funding through the Schools Essentials Grant (SEG). This is available to learners who are **eligible for free school meals** and to all looked after children. This grant can be used by parents/carers for school uniform, equipment and activities.

► **Inform parents and carers about SEG and how to claim.** SEG is available through the local authority. Claims can be made at any point between July and the following May.

Subject choices

► Ensure that **any subject related costs are not a deterrent** to learners taking a particular course. Learners must not be discouraged from choosing a particular subject or face financial barriers to fully participate.

► **Inform parents and carers about education grants** and bursaries that can support learners to purchase the necessary resources to undertake a particular subject.
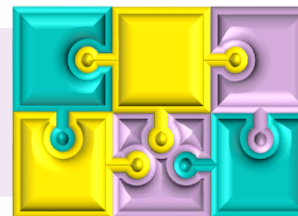
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What Schools Can Do.......

Trips and activities

Approaches to subsidising school trip costs need to be **sensitive and non-stigmatising**. For example, learners should not be expected to have to ask for help. A trusted member of staff or the Equity Champion should approach learners in a sensitive and supportive manner, ensuring they do not feel stigmatised or embarrassed. This approach should be embedded into school policies and in the ethos of the school.

▶ Equity Champions or well-being staff could **apply for small grants** (such as those available at Funding Wales) that can be used towards supporting the cost of school trips for learners from lower income families.

▶ Organise **school trips that are affordable and accessible** to all learners.

▶ Give **sufficient notice** of trips being organised to help parents and carers plan and budget more easily.

▶ Include options of **paying by instalments** as this may help to ease financial pressures, but bear in mind that parents may still find this option financially difficult.

▶ Consider if **the activity can be brought into the school**, rather than taking children out of the school. Work with local companies, enterprises and institutions to see if this is possible.

▶ Ensure that **information** about low-cost lenders, such as credit unions, is available to parents, but without expectation that they use this service.

Fundraising activities

Funds raised through events and activities can be used to subside or pay for school trips and activities. These fundraising activities **should not ask learners directly for money** and care must be taken to ensure that learners can engage and participate in these activities, without the need or expectation to contribute financially.

Fundraising activities must be sensitively considered and can be wide ranging, depending on the needs, facilities and resources of the school. They could include:

▶ A **sponsored swim** or virtual cycle ride on an exercise bike to the trip venue

▶ **Advertising** of fundraising events on local and social media

▶ Organising a **supermarket collection** or a collection at local sporting events

▶ Setting up an interview on a **local radio station** and making an appeal

▶ Asking the PTA or Parents' Council to organise a **sponsored event**, such as a Bingo Night or Pub Quiz

▶ Getting **local businesses** to sponsor litter picks in the local park or area.

However you choose to fundraise, **always consider the impact of that activity on learners** from lower income families. Consider if the fundraiser requires any financial outlay for the learner as this should be avoided. Don't forget that financial outlay also refers to clothing and equipment.

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The Price of Pupil Poverty

Taking a Whole School Approach to improving the well-being of children from lower income families

HOME - SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP

5

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Introduction

The importance of the home-school relationship cannot be over-emphasised. There is **a recognised link between the home learning environment and children's performance** at school at all ages. There is an increasing body of evidence to show that parental engagement does have a positive impact on children's progression and educational attainment.

Where a child lives, who they live with, and the environment in which they live will all impact on a child's ability and readiness to learn at school, as well as their present and future mental health and well-being. It is well documented that **children whose parents are positively engaged in their child's education are more likely to achieve better educational outcomes**. Many schools are very proactive in understanding this, engaging families and identifying solutions to lift the barriers to enable better home-school relationships.

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Parental engagement

All parents and carers will want the best for their children, regardless of their current situation, background or their own previous experience of learning and school. However, some parents and carers from lower income and disadvantaged backgrounds may be less likely or able to be actively involved in their children's education and studies.

How families interact with their child's school will depend on a number of factors. These could include their own **childhood experiences of school; distance between home and school; travel costs; work commitments; caring responsibilities; mental health; language barriers if their child is in Welsh medium education and welsh is not spoken at home and how receptive and active the school is towards parental engagement.**

Establishing positive, closer links between the school and the home is known to also have a positive effect on learner's wellbeing. Some schools make huge efforts to engage parents and carers, such as promoting initiatives aimed at building strong links between schools and parents through family learning events, informal open days and home visits.

It is acknowledged that it is much easier to build and maintain relationships with parents in primary schools than it is in secondary, due in part to the numbers of pupils. However, if parents are engaged at primary school level, it is more likely they will continue to take an active interest in their child's education once they make the transition to secondary school.

Having a **dedicated member of staff openly and visibly available at the start and end of the school day** whom parents can talk to, can be invaluable in building trust and rapport between parents and the school. A well publicised **'open door' policy**, with a warm welcome and supportive staff is also an effective tool when engaging parents.

Effective communication with families, tailored to the different needs of parents is vital to achieving positive parental engagement.

The methods of communication used by schools can vary enormously, and typically, will lead to different outcomes. For examples, some schools only send out letters to parents and carers, which can often remain unseen. Parents have reported that written communications from schools is often difficult to understand, not always in plain English and not always received.

However, text messaging, social media and other digital formats are proving to be a popular and effective method of communicating. UK Safer Internet Centre provides guides, resources and tips for schools engaging with parents through this method.

Whilst digital knowledge and skills are increasing, it is necessary to acknowledge that for some lower income families, engagement through this platform can present difficulties. For example, families may not be able to afford to purchase a phone or laptop and then consistently afford electricity to charge this equipment. Many families will also struggle with the cost of data and some may also lack the confidence or communication skills to interact or respond through this medium.

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Homework

Parent and carers can also face **numerous barriers** in supporting their child's learning. Many schools in Wales are now using homework software or apps to set homework and request that it is submitted online.

Lower income families may not have a computer, or have only one device which is shared between several children and adults. This limits the available time they have to complete their work. Where families do have a computer, this may be outdated and unable to support the required software. For others, the only available device is a mobile phone, which is not suitable for the completion of homework

It is not just access to a computer or device that can create barriers. For many lower income families, the **cost of data** presents significant issues, with many having to rely on free WiFi hotspots or limiting their daily data usage.

In a 2023 Welsh Government report on [Welsh Minimum Digital Living Standard](), families identified the importance of devices as well as connection and mobile data. They also highlighted that devices needed to be adequate and fit for the purpose they are being used for.

Computers and an internet connection at home are increasingly necessary for children to access and complete their homework. Where this is not possible, children and young people recognise that they are falling behind with schoolwork.

Homework clubs are a positive development but may not always be accessible to children from lower income families, as those who rely on free transport to get home will be unable to attend.

Learners may be encouraged to use the local library to complete homework but this can also produce barriers if the nearest library is some distance away, or they have to wait for a computer to become available. Many public libraries have also been affected by local authority cuts, reducing their opening hours or have been closed.

"We get stacks of homework and most of it is on the computer… I had to tell the teacher to print out a sheet so I could just fill it in but the teacher kept saying it wasn't high enough quality homework. I would only score a five or three out of 10."

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Transport

Free home to school travel for children under 16 is dependent on distance, not the family's ability to pay.

This distance is set out in the [Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008](#) and is referred to as 'walking distance. Learners are entitled to free transport if the walking distance is:

- **Secondary Schools:** Learners live 3 or more miles from their nearest suitable school
- **Primary Schools:** Learners live 2 or more miles from their nearest suitable school

There are exceptions to this if the walking route is assessed to be unsafe by the Local Authority.

For those learners living within walking distance, or those not in the catchment area, child bus tickets in Wales costs between £10 - £15 per week, depending on where the child lives. This means that **transport costs could be as high as £40 - £60 per month for just 1 school aged child**. This is a significant cost for lower income families.

For young people aged 16- 21, the Welsh Government has introduced My Travel Pass scheme which provides ⅓ off bus fares, but again, for many students from lower income or disadvantaged families, this cost may still be a barrier to education.
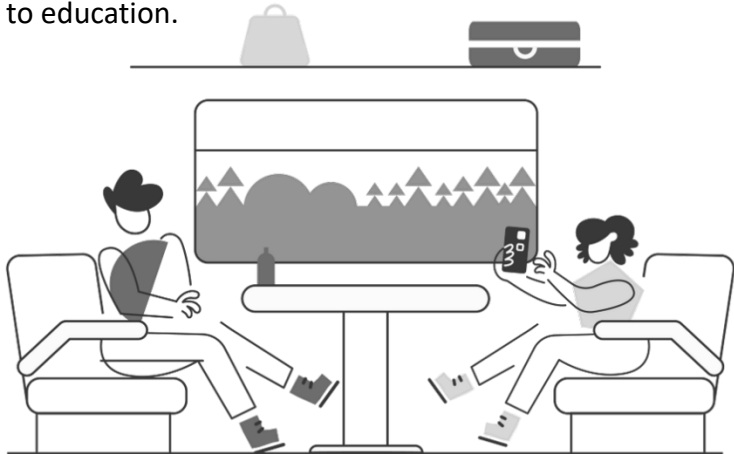
Reliance on school transport impacts on a learner's ability to participate in activities that take place after the end of the school day, such as enrichment or homework clubs and sports activities. If a family cannot afford to pay for alternative public transport to enable their child to participate in these activities, then their child will miss out on important opportunities for learning, play and social interaction.

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Home environment

The home environment can be a **significant enabler or barrier** in determining how children relate to and perform in school. Homelessness, housing insecurity, overcrowding and living in sub-standard housing can all negatively impact on a pupil's achievement levels. For example, in an overcrowded home, there is unlikely to be a quiet or personal space to complete homework or out-of-school tasks.

Homes which are cold or damp will also have a negative impact on a child's wellbeing and learning. The [Children in Wales Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey report 2023](#) identified that the home environment was difficult for many children living in poverty. Children and young people were particularly concerned about not having enough money to stay in their home, having to live in cramped spaces with no private space to do homework or just relax.

In this same survey, children and young people cited their concerns about cold and damp homes, not being able to have friends over, lack of internet access and being unable to afford food and rent.

Living in difficult housing and home environment has a social and emotional impact on children. Shame and stigma cause stress and anxiety to both parents/carers and children. It can affect friendships and limit social interactions, as children often feel unable to invite friends home because they are embarrassed and the financial and emotional struggles and challenges often lead to increased family tensions and arguments.

Having an awareness and understanding of a learner's home environment can enable schools to determine the type and level of support that a child requires from school staff. Knowing the barriers that children from lower income families' face can help schools tailor their support according to the child's lived experience.

"You just don't want to go home. There's nothing to eat, it's cold and damp and smells. We can't afford nice things or to have it warm"
(child/young person aged 10-13 yrs)
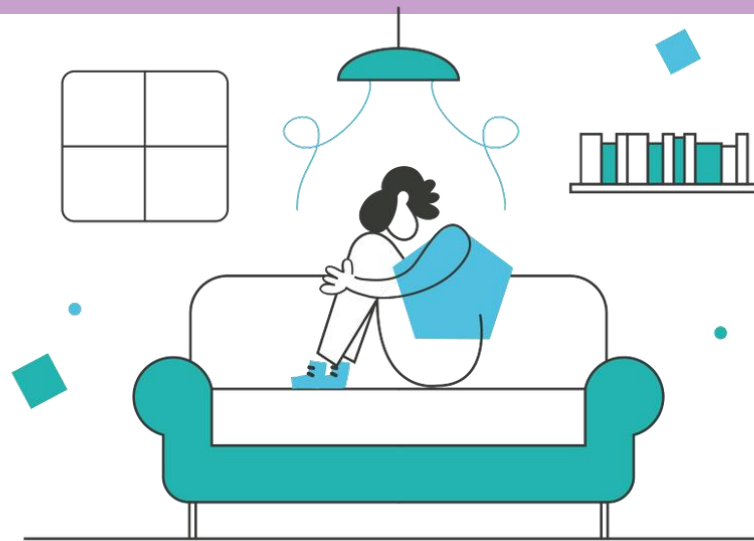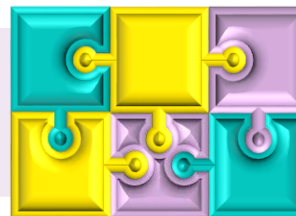
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What schools can do…….

There is much that schools can do to help support learners from lower income or disadvantaged families and improve the home-learning relationship between learner, parents/carers and the school.

For example, schools could:

► Recruit an '**Equity Champion**' from amongst existing school staff to promote fairness and equity for all. Their role is to identify, monitor and support learners, engaging with them and their parents/carers in a positive and sensitive manner.

► Develop a **whole school culture** that values parental engagement and provides a positive, welcoming experience within the school for parents and carers.

► Consider the guidance of Welsh Government's FaCE the challenge together toolkit. This **toolkit** is designed to provide practical support for schools in Wales to help them develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement (FaCE).

► Consider undertaking the Investors in Families Wales award scheme. **Investors in Families** is a quality mark that recognises the work that schools undertake with families to improve outcomes for children and young people.

► Appoint a **family engagement or liaison officer** to build links with parents who face barriers and have little or reduced contact with the school.

► Work in partnership with other agencies to **provide learning opportunities to parents and carers**. For example, delivery of a financial inclusion session in partnership with local credit unions or Citizen's Advice.

► Primary schools could adopt a policy of **visiting all new learners in their home**. Not only will new learners have a recognised face on their first day, but parents will have a better understanding of the school ethos, and the school will gain a better understanding of the family, their environment and possible future support needs.

► Secondary schools could introduce a **Parent's Welcome Evening** to meet with personal tutors. Providing light refreshments will encourage parents into the school in a friendly and welcoming manner and set the tone to develop relationships.

► **Work with PTAs** or School Councils to develop innovative ways to encourage participation by lower income families with the aim of ensuring they have a voice in the life of the school.

► Consider setting up a Parent Council to help inform and support ways to improve parental engagement. This Council should **include parents** and carers from lower income families as their voices will be invaluable to this success.
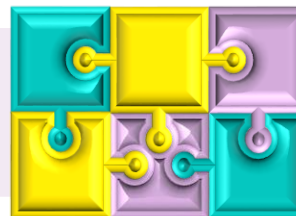
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What schools can do…….

Homework

For many children living in lower income families, completion of homework tasks can often be challenging. Schools could help to mitigate these challenges by:

► Reviewing the **homework policy** to ensure it is inclusive and gives consideration to the practicalities and affordability of completing the task at home.

► Exploring ways in which some **homework tasks** can be completed during the school day, WITHOUT it compromising or limiting recreational breaks and lunch times. Be mindful that for some children in receipt of free school meals, this may be their only meal of the day.

► Considering when the school holds **homework clubs**. Ensure these are accessible to learners whose families may struggle to pay for additional transport costs for after school activities and consider how this could be overcome. Undertake a survey to identify potential barriers to those using or who would like to use, after school homework clubs.

► Giving consideration to any **homework Apps** that are used by the school. Can these be used on older IT equipment? If not, can you adjust the task so that all learners are included, without additional costs to their families. Be mindful that additional costs include printing.

► Applying for access **grants to purchase laptops**. These could be provided to children from lower income families in order to complete homework tasks, again be mindful that families may struggle to afford electricity and data.

► Being aware of local **IT loan schemes** and share this information with families. Some libraries provide these schemes.
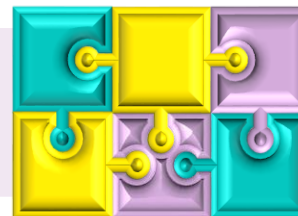
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What schools can do.......

Practice examples

In **Herbert Thompson Primary School** creating stronger bonds with parents is part of a wider vision to put well-being at the heart of the school's mission and work more closely with a range of community agencies, including the local authority children's services and families-focused organisations. They are looking beyond the school gate and addressing the barriers in the home and community, placing great importance on positive relationships between the school, families and the community. They work hard to build relationships with parents so they play an active part in the life of the school and take a close interest in their children's education. This has involved interventions such as **the Parent Council**; the **parent hub** which opens daily and allows parents a chance to mingle on the school premises; **adult learning provision**; and appropriate staffing **and professional development.**

Ty Gwyn School is an all-age special school that caters for learners with profound and complex needs. The school has a **Family Centre**, open every weekday during term time, staffed by one higher level teaching assistant and one senior teaching assistant. The centre provides a range of **support and training** for families with children aged 0–19, including Incredible Years training, therapy support, touch therapy, a toy library; assistive technology centre, counselling, home visits; outreach work, creative arts sessions and English as an Additional Language (EAL) lessons. The school evaluates all activities and there is a high level of **engagement and activity with parents/carers** and the community due to the variety of opportunities available.

Newport High School's whole school approach involves all teaching members of staff. Each has a one hour home contact session on the timetable, when they contact the parents/carers of their tutor group. This usually involves a positive phone call to highlight one encouraging aspect of the pupil's academic progress, approach to school life or behaviour. The **whole school approach** is supported by a **family engagement officer**, funded by the Pupil Development Grant, who works to **increase family involvement in school life**, particularly those families whose children are eligible for free school meals. They also attend academic review days and organise regular workshops and learning events for parents/ carers. Pupils transitioning from Years 6 to 7 are visited in primary feeders by Yr 7 tutors.

Ysgol Parc Waundew Richmond Park School runs 'PEAS' (Parents Engaged Actively in School) and 'DREAMS' (Developing Reading, English And Maths) initiatives aimed at engaging with parents/carers to raise attendance, literacy and numeracy. Families are encouraged into school with **'Family Fridays',** Learn Direct Club and 'Generation Games' an after school club where **parents/carers and children attend and learn together**, including ICT, reading and cooking skills, etc. The school helps families develop consistent approaches to literacy and numeracy. Online 'Bug Club' and 'Sumdog' accounts allow every child to access books and numeracy materials at home. Parent/carer reading volunteers help out in classrooms. Families are also engaged via social media. **Reading ages, numeracy centiles and attendance rates have all risen significantly**.

For other practice examples please see the case studies that are also available with these guides on **Hwb**.