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SUMMARY

In 2014-15, the Cost of the School Day (CSD) action research project, which involved 339 pupils and 111 staff across eight schools in Glasgow City, identified important barriers that prevented children from low-income households fully participating in school and the actions that can be taken to reduce and remove them. This briefing paper builds on the CSD project, wider evidence, which includes research on education and literacy, public health and social policy, and national data to consider further actions to reduce barriers across the school day.

- Child poverty affects one in five children in Scotland; rising to one in three in Glasgow.
- Child poverty negatively impacts on health, wellbeing and educational attainment with lasting effects that can persist in later adult life.
- The CSD study found that children living in poverty have to negotiate a range of financial barriers that can prevent them from fully participating at school.
- Some of the important challenges for low-income families include meeting the costs of school trips, uniforms, lunch, class materials, and computer and internet access at home.
- Young children can be aware of the income differences that mark them out as different, or as having less than others, which can lead to some experiencing poverty-based shame.
- Wider evidence suggests that poverty-based shame can lead to coping strategies that involve pretence and withdrawal from education. Stigma around poverty can be enhanced by a lack of awareness and external blame from institutions, policy and the public.

KEY POINTS

Tangible actions identified in this paper include:

1. a 'whole-school' approach that involves children, teachers and parents in the process of minimising the impact of school costs and tackling the stigma around poverty
2. a need to ensure equal access to resources, such as school clothing, classroom materials and transport, as well as extra-curricular activities, at a school, local authority and national level
3. consideration of emerging evidence on the merits of extending universal free school meal entitlement beyond the first three years of primary education to include all children in Primary 4 to 7
4. maximising family income to address cost barriers by testing out new partnership models, such as providing access to money advice services during registration of children entering primary school.

Although not silver bullets that will abolish child poverty, each of these individual actions, and all cumulatively, are positive steps towards ensuring that all children have the opportunity to enjoy growing up, learning and achieving their full potential.

INTRODUCTION

The Cost of the School Day (CSD) project is delivered by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland, in partnership with Glasgow's Education Services, the city's Health and Social Care Partnership and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health. Between 2014 and 2015, the CSD project undertook research to address two central questions:

1. How do education policies and school practices impact on the participation and school experiences of children and young people from low-income households?
2. How can education policies and school practices be designed to reduce or remove stigma, exclusion or disadvantage for children and young people from low-income households?

Involving 339 pupils and 111 staff across eight schools in Glasgow, which faced varying levels of deprivation, the study identified key points throughout the day where costs placed pressures on children and families. They included school uniforms, bus fares, and equipment needed to help with school subjects. Other pressures involved the costs of school clubs and trips; poor nutrition and a lack of food; children with less money feeling left out, which can lead to stigma and exclusion; and families not having resources at home, such as computers and internet access, to help children study. (The CSD study report and learning resources can be found on the CPAG in Scotland website¹.)

More than one in five (220,000) children live in poverty in Scotland, rising to one in three in Glasgow (36,000). Moreover, independent modelling by both the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Resolution Foundation suggests that child poverty across the UK is expected to increase by 50% by 2020², largely driven by changes in tax and benefit policies. This briefing paper will consider how the learning from CSD and other evidence from a diverse range of sources can be utilised to encourage further actions to reduce the barriers throughout the school day. The paper comprises two sections.

In Section one, the CSD learning and other evidence is used to:

- explore the relationships between child poverty, health, and education
- identify the psychosocial factors that impact on educational outcomes
- identify the material factors that impact on educational outcomes.

The focus in Section two is on exploring in more detail four important responses that could reduce the barriers throughout the school day, namely:

- adopting a whole school approach to reducing the impact of costs and tackling stigma
- promoting equal access to school activities and experiences
- providing free school meals to address inequalities
- maximising family income to address cost barriers.

SECTION ONE

The child poverty strategy (2014-17) for Scotland³ recognises that children's health, wellbeing and education are inter-related and impact on outcomes throughout life. The strategy aims to improve life chances through a combination of better physical and mental health and to improve relative levels of educational attainment. In other words, a healthy child performs well at school and those with higher educational attainment levels are more likely to find higher quality employment.

A significant number of children who took part in the CSD study continue to live in areas of Glasgow that already experience stark differences in life outcomes that begin early. Therefore, this section will:

1. explore the broader relationship between health and education inequalities
2. identify psychosocial factors that can impact on education outcomes
3. consider material factors that can influence children's wellbeing and attainment.

1. Health and education inequalities

Acknowledging the unequal distribution of power, money and resources as the fundamental causes of inequalities⁴, the foundations for differences in health and educational outcomes are established early in life. The Growing Up in Scotland study compared children living in the 20% lowest income households with those in the 20% highest income households⁵. In the first four years of their lives children in low-income households were more likely to have been exposed to smoking during pregnancy, have lower birth-weights and experience 'less than good health'. Aged five, they were more likely to have a poor diet and aged eight, they demonstrated higher social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and reported the lowest levels of life satisfaction, an important measure of wellbeing. These differences in satisfaction can persist among young people. The Scottish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey in 2014 found a higher satisfaction rate (91%) among the 20% least deprived children when compared with the 20% most deprived children (86%) for pupils aged 11-15 years⁶.

Education inequalities are evident before primary school and can persist throughout general education and remain clearly visible in final school qualification results⁵. The recent Scottish Government policy focus, and investment in closing the educational attainment gap, means that evidence regarding the differences in attainment is well known. For example, children aged five years in the 20% lowest income households have below average vocabulary and problem-solving abilities compared with those in the 20% highest income households which were around 13 months ahead in

vocabulary knowledge and ten months ahead in problem-solving abilities². Surveys of progression through primary and secondary education show that children in the least deprived areas of Scotland have higher levels of attainment in literacy, numeracy and qualifications compared with those in the most deprived areas⁷. There is also evidence of a clear relationship between levels of deprivation and attainment levels with 39% of school leavers from the most deprived areas in Scotland gaining at least one Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework at level 6 compared with 79% from the most affluent areas⁸.

School qualification levels can shape a young person's future labour market destination and outcomes, such as the type of job, status, position and pay they achieve in adulthood. Although trends are improving in Scotland, young people from deprived areas still remain less likely to enter positive job destinations and are less likely to enter into higher education. Between 2013 and 2014, nearly three-quarters of school leavers from the 20% least deprived households were in further or higher education compared with just over half from the most deprived 20% households². Moreover in 2015, affluent suburban areas in Glasgow, like Newton Mearns, Clarkston and Bearsden, were each sending more than 50 new undergraduate students to the University of Glasgow which was ten times as many from more deprived areas, like Bridgeton and Easterhouse⁹.

Persistent adult health inequalities exist alongside these education inequalities. In Glasgow, differences in adult life expectancy between the most deprived and least deprived deciles have remained at 13.5 years for men and increased from 8.1 to 10.7 years for women since the 1990s¹⁰. Women in affluent areas can expect to live until they are 84.3 years of age compared to 73.1 for those in more deprived neighbourhoods, a difference in life expectancy of 11 years. Increasing education attainment can help address these stark gaps in life expectancy. For example, a strategic review of health inequalities in England, which referred to an analysis of mortality based on adults' qualifications in England and Wales, found that if the mortality level of all people was the same as for those with degree-level qualifications, then 202,000 premature deaths would have been avoided at ages 30 and over each year¹¹.

2. Psychosocial factors

Poverty-related psychosocial factors that can have a negative impact on children's education include the psychological impact of poverty, status anxiety, shame, stigma, stereotyping and bullying. From a very early age, children can be aware of the income differences that mark them out as different, or as having less than others and therefore that are likely to induce stress and affect their developing self-efficacy.

Comparative poverty has the potential to trigger psychological states in children that affect their wellbeing and performance at school¹². An international study across seven diverse countries found that those living in disparate circumstances, but in poverty according to the norms of their society, experienced similar feelings of shame that could lead to pretence, withdrawal and to reductions in personal efficacy, which although internally felt were equally imposed by external stigma and blame from institutions, policy and the public¹³.

“You’ve got some people who are, ‘Oh, well if you live in a certain area you’re never going to amount to anything because all the boys in that area and all the kids in that area are all junky-style blah, blah, blah and you’re just going to be like them.’ You’re ashamed to be like, ‘Okay, I live in that sort of area--.’ Do you get what I mean? I don’t want to tell anyone that I live in that sort of area.”

CSD study – secondary pupil commenting on stigma

There is evidence that primary school children are fully conscious of differences in terms of placing people into social class by indicators, such as clothing, houses, and cars, which can have a negative impact on cognitive performance among children in lower social and economic positions¹⁴. Having limited control over material resources, such as school uniforms, sports equipment, home computers, or providing opportunities, such as children taking part in clubs and trips, may lead to feelings of disempowerment. There is evidence that disempowerment and limited control over your life can be stressful and lead to greater risk of mental and physical illnesses¹⁵. On the subject of not being able to take part in school trips, the CSD study identified a mixture of responses that included acceptance and pragmatism.

“If you cannae afford it (school trips) then don’t put your name down.”

CSD study – secondary pupil, year 6

“As I say, there are some kids who wouldn’t even look at the thing, ‘No point in me putting my name down.’ Not in a million years will they get to go.”

CSD study – staff member

Linked to a lack of control, being bullied is one of the strongest predictors of childhood wellbeing and has a strong association with lower attainment during secondary schooling¹⁶. Although bullying and exclusion are not inevitable, children in the CSD study were alert to differences in terms of what others own, what they can do and how they look, and spoke about how others can be singled out and marked as different. For example, children not taking part in clubs, what they bring to school, gifts they receive, entitlement to free school meals and their appearance e.g. shoes, bags and school uniforms.

Being aware of stereotypical attitudes can create shame and anxiety in children experiencing poverty, particularly as they start to make comparisons with others around them who are not experiencing poverty¹⁷. When children aged 8-11 years in the CSD study were invited to think about how they would feel if they were unable to afford to participate in activities or do the same things as others, they quickly identified a range of feelings: anxiety, sadness, embarrassment, frustration, a sense of being judged or laughed at by other children, or having to bother their parents with extra costs.

With awareness of the psychosocial factors described in this paper beginning at a very early age, there are clear implications for children’s subsequent wellbeing as well as performance and attainment levels at school.

3. Material factors

Alongside psychosocial factors, the CSD study identified material factors that can impact on children's education and wellbeing. The themes of school clothing, food, transport and extracurricular activities that were highlighted as being important in the study will be explored in more detail.

School clothing

The CSD study found wide support for school uniforms from teachers and students with children recognising the value in everyone wearing the same clothes and minimising visible income differences. However, uniform was still a key income indicator and potential trigger for exclusion and risk of stigmatisation. Some schools in the CSD study applied a strict policy which prohibited brands in an effort to minimise differences among pupils. In some instances, this may have had unintended consequences by placing pressures on families unable to afford school uniforms. This can lead to embarrassment and sanctioning of pupils attending without the correct uniform.

“Teachers openly discuss people’s shoes and what they’re wearing, in front of everybody in the hall. Which I think that should be private, especially if it’s an issue to do with money. If their parents can’t afford to buy them shoes that are plain black, because they’ve only got coloured shoes, then they’ll discuss it in the main hall.”

CSD study – secondary pupil, year 4

It has been estimated that the basic cost of buying a child's school uniform is nearly £130^a, which includes all the components, such as shoes, trousers, shirts, jacket and sports kit, and is based on the lowest retail prices (see Figure 1). These uniform items may need to be replaced throughout the school term as a child grows, or clothes become damaged through daily wear and tear, which can cause problems for families on low income who are unable to immediately afford to buy what is needed.

^a The figure of £130 comprises a winter coat (£20), a blazer (£25), a jumper (£4), two shirts (£11), two pairs of trousers (£12), a tie (£5), a pair of shoes (£14), a school bag (£15), one physical education kit (£3.50), two polo shirts (£10) and a pair of trainers (£10).

Figure 1: School uniform costs.



Providing free school clothing grants can help address these pressures. However, the CSD study did identify some confusion and guesswork from school staff about why families might not apply for a clothing grant, as well as variations in how schools promoted entitlement or supported parents to apply. Although the Education (Scotland) Act creates a power enabling Scottish Ministers to make regulations requiring education authorities to pay school clothing grants and set them at a specified amount, there remains wide variation in terms of the amounts paid across

Scotland's 32 local authority areas, with no apparent relationship between the amounts and differing child poverty rates across authorities. It is noteworthy that within six Scottish local authorities a child in primary school will receive less in clothing grants compared with a child attending secondary school. The assumption being that providing school clothing for a primary school pupil will be cheaper than when they become a secondary school pupil. In at least one local authority area parents were given vouchers rather than money for school clothing grants, which could restrict parental choice and prevent them from taking advantage of cheaper options.

As can be seen from Figure 2, local authority grants range from £20 to £110 with an average payment of £50. Even the highest local authority award would not fully cover the estimated lower end retail cost of £129.50 for all components of the school uniform; a conservative figure that does not take account of other costs, such as replacing items as children grow out of them or because of daily wear and tear.

“Some people get paid monthly and they cannae even get new shoes until next month, but they (the school) expect it the next day.”

CSD study – secondary pupil, year 4

^b City of Edinburgh Council. Free school meals and help with schoolwear. http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20183/food_and_clothing/392/free_school_meals_and_help_with_schoolwear

Figure 2: Range of clothing grant award payments across Scottish local authorities.



Table 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of Scottish local authorities' child poverty rates and clothing grant awards.

Table 1. Scottish local authorities' child poverty rates and clothing grant awards.

| Local authority | Child poverty rates ^c | Clothing grant as of Aug 2016 ^d |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Above 25% of children living in poverty | | |
| Glasgow City | 33.13% | £47 |
| Dundee | 27.91% | £81 |
| North Ayrshire | 27.23% | £40 |
| Clackmannanshire | 26.34% | £55 |
| East Ayrshire | 25.70% | £75 |
| Inverclyde | 25.56% | £90 |
| 20 - 25% of children living in poverty | | |
| West Dunbartonshire | 24.63% | £100 |
| North Lanarkshire | 24.50% | £70 |
| South Ayrshire | 24.27% | £50 |
| Fife | 24.10% | £55 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 23.00% | £80 |
| Midlothian | 21.25% | *£60(P) - £65(S) |
| West Lothian | 21.24% | £94(P) - £110(S) |
| Edinburgh | 21.12% | £43(P) - £50(S) |
| Renfrewshire | 21.00% | £55 |
| Falkirk | 20.50% | £50 |
| South Lanarkshire | 20.39% | £50 |
| 15 - 20% of children living in poverty | | |
| Angus | 19.84% | £20 |
| Argyll and Bute | 19.24% | £50 |
| Highland | 18.92% | £81 |
| Eilean Siar | 18.68% | £65 |
| East Lothian | 18.61% | £60(P) - £65(S) |
| Moray | 18.23% | £45 |
| Aberdeen City | 18.08% | £55(P) - £60(S) |
| Scottish Borders | 17.99% | £45 |
| Stirling | 17.46% | £50 |
| Perth and Kinross | 16.56% | £45(P) - £50(S) |
| 10 - 15% of children living in poverty | | |
| East Renfrewshire | 14.59% | £75 |
| Orkney Islands | 14.31% | £56 |
| Aberdeenshire | 13.51% | £50 |
| East Dunbartonshire | 13.20% | £50 |
| Shetland Islands | 10.07% | £40 - £50 |

*P = primary school pupils; S = secondary school pupils.

^c Local authority child poverty rates (after housing costs) taken from the End Child Poverty in Your area (2014). Available at: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area/>

^d Child Poverty Action Group (Scotland) obtained clothing grant data (June 2016) from local authorities' websites or by direct telephone contact.

School food

In Glasgow, there have been efforts, such as the Big Eat In, to encourage secondary school pupils to stay within the school grounds at lunchtime to eat a healthy lunch and participate in a lunchtime activity¹⁸. Children taking part in the CSD study identified various explanations for going out during lunchtime, which included value for money, being with friends rather than having a free school meal (FSM) alone, avoiding school meal queues and the risk of food running out. Added to this, according to the 2014/15 health and wellbeing survey of pupils across Glasgow's 30 secondary schools, pupils in the more deprived areas of the city were less likely to eat breakfast before school, more likely to drink fizzy drinks and less likely to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day¹⁹, thus increasing health risks, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers²⁰. The harmful impact of hunger on pupil concentration at school was captured by a secondary pupil and a staff member in the CSD study:

"We're really bad if we're hungry. You lose concentration and your belly starts rumbling and you're thinking of what you want to eat, not your work."

CSD study – secondary pupil, year 5

"I think when some of the kids are coming in hungry, they've not had breakfast, or they'll tell you that they've not had dinner. You know then that there's not much money at home and parents can't afford food for them."

CSD study – staff member

Providing free school meals (FSM) can help improve children's nutritional intake and reduce the financial burden on low-income families. However, the CSD study noted that not all entitled families were applying for them and not every child receiving free meals were taking them. A recent policy response has involved the introduction of universal free school meals (UFSM) across Scotland for all children in the first three years of primary school. The new policy aims to support child development, tackle poverty and improve educational attainment. Reported outcomes, particularly in the

most deprived schools, include increased FSM uptake²¹, greater levels of nutrition, reduced risks of stigma and a welcome benefit for families that were struggling before the introduction of UFSM²².

“For our situation it was definitely great because we are always on that threshold, we never get any help with anything but we are always struggling, you know. Many folk are now and I think it was just this has made such a massive difference, it really has.”

Parent previously ineligible for FSM21

School transport and extracurricular activities

Transport costs can act as a barrier that prevents children from accessing and taking part in a range of important extracurricular activities. The CSD study found that public transport costs for children and young people in Glasgow were substantial, with bus fares costing between £6 and £10 a week for those aged 16 years and under, and between £12 and £16 a week for those over 16 years. The main criterion for local authority allocation of free transport remains distance from home to school and not family income. In terms of allocation, a survey of UK local authorities found evidence that 80% of respondents had cut their school transport provision since 2010²³.

Additional transport costs can influence the decision of children from low-income households to take part in valuable extracurricular activities, particularly if it involves paying extra bus fares to get home later, or if their bus pass is not eligible after a certain distance. Activities like sports, music and dance have the potential to be enormously beneficial, and integrated academically-focused activities, such as after-school study support, have a proven and significant impact on attainment, thus making them all the more important to children’s outcomes²⁴. Taking part in these activities can also help address the psychosocial factors described in this paper, such as social isolation, exclusion from peers or poverty-based shame.

“I’m doing sound production so you’ve got to stay back after school and you’ve got to work on your project and all that. So it means I can’t get the school bus home. I’ve got to pay for public transport afterwards.”

CSD study – secondary pupil, year 5

In this section we have explored the child poverty links with health and educational outcomes, as well as highlighting important factors that must be addressed to reduce a range of barriers throughout the school day.

Using this understanding as a foundation, in the next section we consider four possible responses that could help tackle the cost of the school day.

SECTION TWO

Education policy, and closing the attainment gap specifically, is a key Scottish Government priority. There is value in extending the learning from the CSD approach across the whole of Glasgow and Scotland-wide. This should be done in a way that takes account of the local context, scale and challenges. For example, although there will be an element of shared experiences between the one in ten children in the Shetland Islands and one in three in Glasgow that live in poverty, the CSD approach can be adapted to respond to specific local barriers.

Acknowledging the geographical dimensions of child poverty across Scotland, this section considers four responses that could help significantly to reduce the cost of the school day. These are: adopting a whole school approach to minimising the impact of school costs and tackling poverty-related stigma; promoting equal access to educational opportunities; extending free school meals entitlement; and testing new approaches to maximise family income.

1. Adopting a whole school approach

Tackling the impact of poverty in school cannot be addressed by teaching staff alone. Therefore, adopting a whole school approach that provides opportunities to engage with *all* children, parents, teachers and others can help tackle stigma and address where costs place pressures on families.

Children

Children from low-income households that are exposed to negative attitudes and stereotypes may go on to experience poverty-related bullying, exclusion and lower levels of life satisfaction²⁵. Ongoing efforts to improve awareness of the prevalence of poverty-based bullying, and involving children in embedding these issues within anti-bullying approaches, need to be extended more widely.

Based on existing child poverty rates, eight pupils out of 23 in an average Glasgow classroom are likely to be living in poverty. Therefore, involving all children is crucial to supporting the processes of identifying and providing solutions where costs are placing pressures on families. This can serve as an important foundation in tackling the attainment gap: if children are unhappy or excluded or unable to participate fully at school, then they will not benefit from other strategic efforts to improve attainment.

Schools and local youth forums could ensure that pupils' voices are regularly sought on actions with cost implications, such as trips, as well as seeking their views on possible solutions, like fundraising activities that avoid placing burdens on low-income families, spreading payment costs, or applying for grants.

Children tackling stigma

Inspired by the CSD approach, Edinburgh City Council developed the 1 in 5 project, as part of their child poverty strategy. The project included a ‘*Challenge Poverty Related Stigma*’ poster competition for local primary schools with the winning poster distributed to all Edinburgh schools. Secondary pupils also had the opportunity to produce a video training tool which aims to raise awareness about the impacts of poverty.

Parents

The voices of families living in poverty need to be heard and fully represented on local parent councils (PCs) across Scotland, if stigma and poverty-based shame is to be addressed. Parent councils can play a valuable role in providing a voice for parents in schools and within their local authority on issues that are important to them and their children. Their role could be strengthened to ensure that they consult with other parents and raise issues of cost with their school and local authority. A recent study involving some of Glasgow’s PCs found that 33% of respondents had low confidence in talking to the wider parent body about issues around cost and highlighted the need for support for PCs to engage with parents around issues of cost and the barriers it can create for low-income families²⁶.

“The majority of the parent forum at our school are reasonably well off and we are aware that this may further isolate families who are less well off: advice on how to reach and support the minority who are least well off without stigmatising would be welcome.”

CSD Parent Council survey – parent council member

The Scottish Government and the National Parent Forum Scotland (NPFSS) could both provide leadership to ensure wider parent representation across all socioeconomic groups and help increase local awareness of the scale of child poverty and the financial difficulties that can impact on families. This could serve as a powerful lever for change. For example, ensuring local commitment to effective and regular consultation on costs and participation with parents and representing their views to senior management and education services.

Teachers

Teachers' attitudes and actions both matter to children, therefore supporting the education workforce to address stigma and poverty-based shame could increase understanding of where schools' efforts need to be directed to minimise the potential for visible differences that highlight non-participation.

These challenges have been identified by the teaching union, The Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS), which has worked with CPAG in Scotland to produce resources for teachers that provide practical actions to reduce the impact of costs²⁷. Additionally, school curriculum activities that aim to improve children's financial education and awareness could also incorporate poverty or low income as a social justice issue with the aim of increasing understanding and reducing stigma.

2. Promoting equal access to school activities and experiences

Promoting equal access to every activity and experience which schools have to offer is crucial for the wellbeing and attainment of children from low-income households who may not have access to opportunities inside or outside the school gates. Tackling important barriers, such as transport costs and internet access outside school hours, as well as strengthening roles at national government, local government and school levels can all contribute towards promoting equal access.

Transport costs

Transport costs can prevent children from taking part in key developmental activities. Therefore, there is a need to consider, for example, whether the wide variations that exist in terms of clothing grant awards across Scotland's local authorities also applies to school transport costs. Lessons could be learned from other parts of the UK that appear to have generous transport provision, such as Wales, Northern Ireland and London. For example, in London children aged 11-16 can access an Oyster photocard that allows free travel on public buses and trains. Over the past decade London witnessed an increase in school bus journeys from 21% to 29% of all school journeys, which coincided with improvement in educational standards and a drop in car use for school journeys²³.

Information and Communications Technology equipment

Young people taking part in the CSD study spoke of the increasing assumption within schools that they would have access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) equipment, such as computers, printers and internet access, beyond the schools gates for homework, revision and independent study. Despite the increasing use of ICT for school work, a 2013 study on digital exclusion found that in some of the poorest areas of Glasgow only 46% of households have a broadband internet connection, compared to 91% in more affluent areas²⁸. The report noted that although current trends show a year-on-year increase in broadband take-up in most areas, the gap between the benefits of being online and the disadvantages of being offline is growing even more quickly.

Children from low-income families with limited or no access to ICT equipment, including internet access, are at increased risk of being educationally disadvantaged in an increasingly digital world. Schools need to ensure that alternative access to ICT equipment is provided. Moreover, in terms of closing the education attainment gap in Scotland, attending to digital literacy skills is important to ensure that those likely to find it most difficult to access the jobs market have sufficient opportunities to develop and apply such key skills²⁴.

Several secondary schools in Glasgow city are now exploring running homework clubs in the local community. This entails providing support for learning to young people who depend on the school bus and are not able to attend after-school supported study. Partnerships have been developed with local housing associations that can offer both a space for the homework clubs and access to ICT equipment, thus enabling pupils to access the same resources as their peers.

Strengthening roles

The Scottish Government and local authorities could be more explicit about the ways in which equal access and participation can shape attainment and make it part of any national or local plans to close the attainment gap. Following on from the CSD report, Glasgow City Council's Education Services worked with CPAG in Scotland to develop guidelines which provided practical guidance on how schools could promote equal access to opportunities. The guidance will support schools to ensure that they can

put systems in place to subsidise the cost of school trips, ensure pupils are not asked to pay for basic resources like stationary and that schools are mindful of the need to keep costs to a minimum when setting school uniform policies.

There is scope to share the approach adopted by Glasgow City Council's Education Services to encourage other local authorities to provide clear leadership in providing guidance and support to enable schools to minimise or remove cost barriers to participation. Moreover, schools could also adopt elements of the CSD approach to understand the barriers to access and uptake of different activities and subjects by deprivation levels, which prevent equal access for all.

3. Providing free school meals to address inequalities

In Scotland, the introduction of FSMs to children in the first three years of primary education has been a proven success with evidence that the universal element is helping to address attainment and tackle educational inequalities. Stopping the universal FSM criteria when children enter Primary 4 will lead to a drop in FSM uptake that could lessen the accrued nutritional, anti-stigma and financial advantages of this new policy. Moreover, there is some evidence from a two-year pilot in England that extending universal FSM to all primary school pupils – not just those in the first three years – helps improve attainment and may reduce educational inequalities²⁹. This pilot identified substantial increased uptake due to the removal of costs and application processes, reduced stigma, and pupils in the universal FSM pilot areas making between four and eight weeks more progress than similar pupils in comparison areas. The strongest improvements were among less affluent families and children with lower prior attainment. The researchers suggest that this was linked to improvements in productivity and that only universal entitlement had a positive impact on school meal uptake, children's diet and attainment. Positive effects were not evident in a pilot area where entitlement was simply extended to a greater number of families.

With attainment a central goal within Scotland's universal FSM theory of change, there is value in paying closer attention to this emerging evidence and to consider the merits of extending universal FSM entitlement beyond the first three years of primary education to include all children in Primary 4 to 7. Building on the positive FSM outcomes experienced so far in Scotland, there is also scope for local authorities, schools and caterers to ensure that children, young people and parents are actively involved in the development of services to encourage uptake of school meals by all pupils, including those in receipt of FSM.

4. Maximising family income to address cost barriers

The Education (Scotland) Act places a duty on local authorities to provide clothing grants for eligible children with the aim of agreeing a minimum level of grant provision throughout Scotland. Although a helpful lever towards addressing child poverty, there is a need to tackle the cost barrier of school uniform and address the differences in local authorities' clothing grant award payments and family difficulties with the affordability of uniform. This could be tackled on several fronts: the national minimum level of grant provision, that is still to be negotiated, needs to be set at a realistic level that takes into account child poverty rates and forecasts, average uniform costs across a school year and involves consultation with families experiencing poverty. Moreover, these same factors should be considered at a local authority level when grant award amounts are being decided, alongside how to effectively promote entitled uptake of the grants. There is also scope to ensure that families on low income can also access other unclaimed entitlements that could help those struggling with other costs across the school day.

Data for 2013/14, using a mid-point estimate of unclaimed Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit in Scotland showed that 50,000 potential claimants missed out on £140 million³⁰. Therefore, increasing the uptake of these unclaimed entitlements could be achieved by testing out referral pathways for money advice, or strengthening established links between schools and local money/welfare advice services. For example, parents registering a young child entering primary school for the first time could be offered an initial contact with staff from advice services in the school setting. This could ensure that parents are aware of their entitlements or available financial support. If successful, this type of approach could encourage schools to universally promote entitlements at induction, as well as at regular intervals and in a variety of mediums throughout the school year. Established links between schools and advice services could also be used to support those parents that have difficulty with written communication and completing forms.

CONCLUSION

Given the forecast rise in child poverty rates across Scotland and the rest of the UK, it is crucial that the costs that shape and limit opportunities throughout the school day are addressed, if the educational attainment gap and other inequalities described in this briefing paper are to be reduced. There is a solid understanding of what works to raise attainment with investment and commitment visible across Scotland's education system.

The evidence presented in this briefing paper highlights the importance of engaging with children and families living in poverty to understand their experiences and the barriers they face to participation. Families, teachers and other educational stakeholders all have a role to play in developing solutions to reduce the impact of costs.

Within a wider context, we recognise that tackling the fundamental causes of inequalities, namely an unequal distribution of power, money and resources, remains a central priority. Equally, we acknowledge that the four responses of adopting a whole school approach, addressing access, extending FSM entitlement and maximising family income are not silver bullets that will abolish child poverty. However, each individually, and all cumulatively, are positive actions towards ensuring that all children have the opportunity to enjoy growing up, learning and achieving their full potential.

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