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The Price of Pupil Poverty

A Guide for Governors



Tackling the Impact of Poverty on Education Programme

Taking a Whole School Approach to improving the wellbeing of children from lower income families



Tackling the Impact of Poverty on Education Programme



What are The Price of Pupil Poverty Guides?

The **Price of Pupil Poverty Guides** have been developed to raise awareness of the lived experiences of **learners from lower income families**, setting out the impact **poverty** has on children's **day to day lives** and providing schools with tangible and cost-effective **solutions** which could help lift **barriers** towards improved learner wellbeing. The Guides are grounded in the **Welsh Government's commitment** to tackle increasing levels of **child poverty** and to improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all children in Wales, drawing upon key Welsh Government **legislation, policies and guidance**, along with relevant **research and inquiries**.

The Guides explain how poverty impacts on **5 Key Areas** of the school day:



Each Key Area has examples of what **practical steps** schools can take by applying a **whole school approach**, many of which are low or no cost measures.

The **Guides** are a key part of the programme and can be used to create **real change** within the school setting.

"It has shifted our culture as a whole school so that poverty and its impact remains a focus for us all" (Primary School in Pembroke)

The **Tackling the Impact of Poverty on Education programme** requires **partnership working** between governors, senior leaders, teachers and all school staff, as well as parents, carers and the wider community as part of a **whole school approach**.

This **governor specific guide** sets out where governors can fit into this **whole school approach** along with advice and suggestions on how to go about it. The full **Price of Pupil Poverty Guides** can be found on the Welsh Government education platform, [Hwb](#)

For more information please contact pupilpoverty@childreninwales.org.uk



1. Understanding the causes, key drivers and impact of poverty on learners

Welsh Government defines Child 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 or open spaces), which are taken for granted by others in their society.”¹

The key indicator of child poverty is the percentage of children living in households **below 60% of the median UK household income (after housing costs)**. This is used because housing costs differ so widely across the UK, so measuring after these gives the best comparative result. **In 2020, median income in the UK** was £29,900 per annum making the relative poverty line of 60% in the UK £17,940 per annum.

Poverty among children in the UK has risen in the last few years. According to the **most recent reliable statistics, 34% of children in Wales now live in poverty** with a high proportion of children eligible for **Free School Meals**. It is important to recognise that there is also a growing percentage of children whose families **do not meet the threshold for FSM eligibility**, but are still considered to be living in poverty. Since September 2022, free school meals have started to be rolled out for all Reception pupils. This new initiative highlights the serious commitment being made by Welsh Government. As part of the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, all primary school pupils will receive a free school meal by 2024.

Poverty is **complex**. It is a **structural problem** with a lack of income at its core. Children most likely to be affected by poverty are those living in some minority ethnic families; in families with a disabled parent or child; in lone parent households; or in a family with three or more children and living in social, rented or insecure accommodation.

Drivers of Poverty

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

- **Insecure employment**
- **Low wages**
- **Levels of worklessness**
- **Impact of welfare reform changes**
- **Poor economic conditions**
- **Increased cost of living**
- **Poor education and skills**
- **Parental qualification**
- **Family stability**
- **Housing affordability and conditions**
- **Poor health**



Poverty and Children's Rights

All children have a **right to education** and education in Wales is intended to be **free**. However, not all families are able to afford some of the additional costs associated with their child's education. The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** is an international agreement setting out the rights of children. These rights are enshrined in Welsh law under the **Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011**. Several of these rights are particularly relevant in the context of children and their school experience:

- **The right to the best possible health and nutritious food** (Article 24)
- **The right to an adequate standard of living** (Article 27)
- **The right to play and leisure opportunities** (Article 31)
- **The right to benefit from social security** (Article 26)
- **The rights to fulfil their potential** (Article 6)

The **Children's Commissioner for Wales** is appointed by Welsh Government to promote children's rights across Wales. The Commissioner works with schools through the **Super Ambassadors** scheme, where elected pupils make sure the school is informed about the work of the Commissioner and undertake '**special missions**' each term.

These principles also lie at the heart of UNICEF's **Rights Respecting Schools Award** system operated across Wales, which provides training and resources and includes **Bronze, Silver and Gold** categories.



Whilst the focus of the 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 and, therefore, deliver important aspects of the **Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales**, namely:

Ambitious, capable learners ready to learn throughout their lives

Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work

Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world

Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society



Impact of Poverty on Children and Young People

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

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

Research into children's experiences of **loneliness** found that 27% of children aged 10-15 receiving free school meals reported often being lonely, compared to 18% of non-FSM pupils.

Children and young people living in poverty are aware of the costs which **impact** on their **family's finances**. Children living in these situations can be subjected to **bullying and social exclusion** because they don't have the correct school uniform or games kit, cannot participate in things like 'Fun Days' or school trips, or constantly have to borrow basic school equipment, like pens, from their teachers and peers.

Period Poverty is also an issue for older pupils. The Welsh Government's **Period Dignity Grant** for schools provides funding for local authorities to buy menstrual products to be placed in all schools in Wales, including primary schools.

Learners' experiences of poverty in school can be affected by **school policies**, which may unintentionally stigmatise children from lower income families. Examples of these policies are:

- **Uniform and dress**
- **School meals**
- **Trips**
- **Behaviour**
- **Inclusion**
- **Emotional health and wellbeing**
- **Respect for equality and diversity**
- **Bullying**
- **Safeguarding**



Schools can often make a distinction between children whose parents are struggling financially and those whose parents/carers make what are seen as poor lifestyle or financial choices. However, it is important to put **children's rights** at the heart of the school and ensure that their needs come first and foremost at all times.

What Governors can do

- **Take part in awareness training** such as that offered by **Children in Wales**
- **Listen to the voices of pupils and parents** through regular updates from, for example, the School Council, Super Ambassadors, home-school organisations such as the PTA or the Parent Council
- **Review policies** using Welsh Government guidance documents with the issues faced by pupils from lower income families in mind
- **Ensure regular updates with regard to use of the Pupil Development Grant** as part of discussions on how best use can be made of the funding, alongside exploring other ways in which all children in lower income families can be fully supported
- **Ensure that Equity/Tackling Poverty** is a standing agenda item in Governor meetings - schools that are involved in implementing the Price of Pupil Poverty Guides can link into this item on a regular basis, ensuring that **poverty-related issues** remain a **key consideration in decision making** across the school. This method is proven to be good practice and contributes to an effective **whole school approach**
- **Involvement** in school **self-evaluation, improvement and accountability** is advised as it is crucial for Governors to understand how the school improvement guidance sets out the framework around using information to tackle barriers such as poverty. Tackling the impact of poverty on attainment forms a key part of this process [School Improvement Guidance](#)

Equity/Tackling Poverty as a Standing agenda item in Governor meetings can:

- Develop a deeper **knowledge and understanding** of the issues faced by children from lower income backgrounds
- Allow space to **focus and understand** what's really going on for their school community and how best to **support**
- Use this knowledge and understanding to **inform decision and policy making** at governing body level
- View the **operational decision making** and practice of the school through this lens in order to **advocate** for children from lower income families and their rights
- Make **suggestions** based on knowledge and understanding as to how to make the school experience **more equitable**
- Enable **constant and ongoing consideration and review**



2. School Uniform and Clothing

The Welsh Government has issued **Statutory Guidance** for school governing bodies on **school uniform and appearance policies**, which covers issues of **affordability and availability** of uniform items. Although there is no specific legislation, there are **clear expectations** to have a school uniform policy in place, which takes into consideration the **rights, needs and concerns** of children from lower income families **without discrimination**. Schools should consider **equality issues** and **consult widely** with pupils, parents and others.

Key difficulty for families - Affordability

School uniform is a **visible indicator** of income poverty, and a lack of the correct items can result in **adverse consequences** for pupils, particularly in schools with a strict enforcement policy. Replacing worn or outgrown items unexpectedly can be difficult if parents don't have **access to sufficient funds**. It may also be that a child arrives at school without the correct uniform because they only have one jumper/trousers/jacket and if that is in the wash or damaged, there is none spare.

Schools often keep **spare uniform and sports kit** that pupils can borrow or organise 'pre-loved' **uniform swaps or sales**. This can also contribute to pupils' understanding about **recycling and the environment**. Any actions should always be carried out in a **sensitive, non-stigmatising and dignified way**. Spare PE kits should be stored carefully and in a **presentable condition**.

Impact on Children and Young People

For children from families who struggle to afford a school uniform, school can be a source of **worry and anxiety**. Learners may feel **embarrassed and worried** about being **ridiculed or bullied and pitied** by their peers or school staff. They may be **anxious** about being sent home to change, knowing that they have nothing at home to change into. Taking a **whole school approach** and applying a **consistent response** across the school to infringements will **reduce fear and stress** for those pupils unable to abide by the uniform policy, due to lack of household income.



What Governors can do

School governors should be aware of and ensure that schools regard the Welsh Government **Statutory Guidance** on School Uniforms when considering school uniform and appearance policies. Including:

- Ensuring that **due regard** is given to securing **equality of treatment** between pupils of different sexes and genders; pupils from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and disabled pupils
- **Cost** and **affordability**
- **Practical considerations** involved in **introducing or changing** school uniform and appearance policies
- **Consultation** with parents, pupils and the community
- **Affordability, access** and **availability** of uniform items
- Different items of clothing being **open to all** regardless of sex/gender
- A **flexible approach** to account for **extreme weather conditions**

Governors should also consider:

- Whether the **school logo** is essential or whether the **uniform colours** are sufficient to **identify the school** and **create a sense of community**
- How much **flexibility** there is and how **uniform infringements** are handled by staff

School Essentials Grant (formerly PDG-Access)

The Welsh Government provides funding through the [School Essentials Grant](#) to parents/carers of pupils eligible for free school meals, and for all Looked after Children for **school uniform** and other school related items.

The grant is **available through the local authority** and schools should do all they can to raise awareness of its existence and how it can be claimed, eg, through **parent/carer communications, noticeboards** and through **Family Liaison** staff. Governors should be **kept informed** of this work through **regular updates**.

Governors should, however, be aware that there are **many children** whose parents work in low paid jobs and **fall just short of the free school meals eligibility criteria**. Because of this, all schools should fully ensure that when setting or revising their **school uniform policy** that they take into account the **affordability barriers** children may face.



3. Food and Hunger

Studies undertaken by food experts, education unions and the Children's Commissioner for 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. Without support to help address **food insecurity**, many children's progress and outcomes are likely to be affected.



Food Insecurity

For many families in Wales food insecurity is a **day-to-day reality**. Many families make daily choices between **'heating or eating'** and **foodbanks** are a **growing feature** of our communities. Dealing with **food pricing structures and rises** can also lead to **unhealthy choices and weight** resulting in obesity amongst children, whose parents/carers can **simply not afford to buy healthy food**, particularly if there is a risk of it being rejected by the child.

Food insecurity causes **stress and anxiety** which can bring about **depression** in both parents/carers and children, **aggressive behaviour** in some children and a sense of **despair** amongst families. Once children begin school, for those trapped in poverty, the **food** they eat during the **school day** is **particularly important**.

The **NHS Healthy Start** scheme **provides help** to buy healthy foods like fruit and vegetables and milk, and free vitamins for **pregnant women and children up to the age of 4** in lower income families. Schools can help **by promoting** the scheme www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Free School Breakfasts

Nearly all schools will have some experience of children **arriving at school without having eaten breakfast**, and teachers may assume that they were perhaps in a rush not to be late for the start of the school day, or that their parents/carers did not ensure they had eaten before leaving their house. **Learners who eat breakfast** have been found to be **twice as likely to do well in school**. All primary school children can have a **free healthy breakfast** at school, if their school provides a **free breakfast scheme**. Approximately **82% of primary schools** are funded by the Welsh Government through local authorities to provide free healthy breakfasts, and **nearly 50% of secondary schools** provide **breakfast clubs**. For all children, having a **healthy breakfast** and, importantly, a **healthy balanced diet** helps improve their **overall health**, and eating a wide variety of nutritious foods and having regular meals can help mood, attention and learning, which is key for learners whilst in a school setting.

A free breakfast offer for Year 7 pupils eligible for **Free School Meals** is being piloted to help with the cost of the school day.



Free School Meals



Local authorities are required to provide a free school lunch for eligible pupils. For older pupils, many provide a **daily allowance** to enable eligible pupils to get their lunch. In many secondary schools, this **can also be spent at morning break**. If a pupil arrives at school hungry, this can mean that the pupil is then able to **concentrate for the rest of the morning**. However, where a proportion of the daily allowance has already been spent at morning break, **it is unlikely the child will have enough left with which to buy a sufficient lunch**. **Long queues** at lunchtime, **lack of time** and **insufficient healthy options** can also add to the **stress and anxiety of not having enough to eat**.

Not all pupils entitled to free school meals take them up and this can be for a variety of reasons, including **stigma** or **fear of bullying**; **not being able to sit with friends** who have a packed lunch; **long queues**; **food choices** or **shame and embarrassment** by their parents/carers. In rural communities, the **‘free school meal’ stigma** can be more evident because of **‘rural pride’**. A recent **school census** in Wales revealed that **almost a quarter of those eligible do not take up their entitlement**. It is important to note that schools have a **legal duty to protect the identity of pupils** who receive free school meals and should always be **mindful of any associated stigma** and take positive steps to **mitigate against any negative effects**.

There are a **growing number** of children living in poverty who are **not entitled to free school meals** because their parents/carers **do not meet the current threshold** (a household with children aged 4–16, which gets income-related benefits (such as Universal Credit) and has an annual income of less than £7,400 after tax, not including welfare payments). These families often **struggle to pay for school meals**, particularly if there is more than one child in the family. As well as putting pupils at **risk of hunger**, this can have an effect on the **stress of parents/carers** meaning they can be **less able to meet their children’s physical and emotional needs**.

Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM)

The **roll-out** of [Universal Primary Free School Meals](#) commenced in September 2022, with local authorities delivering to Reception pupils across Wales. The expectation is that **most children in Years 1 and 2** will also start receiving free school meals from April 2023.

The pace of rollout is being balanced with the **capacity of local authorities and schools** to establish the necessary infrastructure to deliver quality, safety and not disadvantage those traditionally eligible for free school meals. The **youngest children** are being targeted first of all, as they are **more likely** to be **living in relative income poverty**.

Work is ongoing with local authorities on plans to **extend the the scheme further** into the 2023/24 academic year to meet the **commitment for all primary school pupils** to receive a free school meal by 2024.



Holiday Hunger

Families who **rely on free school meals** during term time often find it **challenging** to be able to feed their children for the 13 weeks of **school holidays** during the year. The Welsh Government's **School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)** is a **schools-based programme**, administered by the Welsh Local Government Association, that provides **physical activity** and **enrichment sessions** as well as **healthy meals, food and nutrition education** to children in **areas of socio-economic disadvantage** during the school summer holidays. Together with local authorities and health professionals the programme delivers '**Food and Fun**' schemes across Wales. Other schemes are run by **charitable organisations**, such as churches and community groups.

*The Welsh Government have provided **holiday free school meal provision**, however due to the difficult financial pressures on Welsh Government budgets, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language has confirmed that they will continue to explore options that would allow an extension of the policy. Updates on holiday FSM will be communicated through the usual channels via local authorities.*



Impact on Children and Young People

It has been proven that **hunger affects both children's learning and their behaviour**. Hungry children **can't concentrate**, so **learning is impaired**. Hungry children become **more irritable and stressed**, often **impacting negatively on their behaviour**. Hunger can also mean that children are **unable to concentrate, more lethargic and unable to learn**. These effects could **significantly influence** a child's **ability to reach their full potential** at school.

Findings for a report by the Children's Commissioner for Wales showed there were...

...children whose families were on a low income but not entitled to free school meals being **refused a meal** at lunchtime because their **payment cards had not been topped up**.

...schools where **long queues** at lunchtimes meant that there was **little time** to actually eat the meal, and where there were **staggered lunch breaks**, those at the end of the queue were left with **little or no choice**.

...children going hungry because they were **not entitled** to free school meals because of their **insecure immigration status**, despite local authorities having **discretion to provide them with free school meals**.



What Governors can do

- **Ensure regular updates on the uptake of free school meals** and take part in discussions on how to ensure that as many families as possible take up this entitlement
- **Find out how lunch times are managed** and what measures are put in place to ensure that no child misses out on a school meal due to lack of access or time
- **Consider breakfast provision.** For primary schools, find out if the school offers **free breakfasts**, what the barriers might be if not and possible solutions. If take up is low amongst lower income families, look at ways of increasing this. For secondary schools, consider whether low or no cost breakfast items could be available on site, before the start of the school day
- **Establish what arrangements are made for the statutory obligation to provide free drinking water onsite** and how this is made freely available
- **Find out if the school takes part in School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)** and what take up is like amongst lower income families. Consider how it could be improved. If not, find out if the school is eligible and look at setting this up or how the school can signpost parents to community schemes

Findings from the Children in Wales

Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey 2022 include observations such as:

"Whilst there were increasing numbers of pupils becoming eligible for FSM, there were equally many more thousands that did not qualify, but still experienced the same need."

"Like education itself, school meals should be universal. It would benefit all, avoid stigma and be a good investment in the end."

"Constantly thinking about food and not being able to concentrate leads to failure in exams and not being able to get a further education, just adding to the evil cycle."
(14-16yrs)

"Many children are not having enough to eat to give them the best chance at education."



4. Participation in the life of the school



How involved and engaged a learner is in the life of the school will, to a large extent, determine their long-term educational outcomes. Pupils from lower income families can face significant challenges in being able to participate in, and benefit from, the diverse range of curricular and extra curricular opportunities for learning in schools.

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 cut costs. One consequence of this, that particularly impacts on children from lower income families, is that parents are increasingly being asked to pay **'voluntary contributions'** to pay for or to subsidise materials or experiences related to the delivery of curricular subjects.

Expectations and responses of teachers, to those learners who arrive at school without the correct resources or materials for lessons, can **vary enormously** both between schools and between teachers in the same school. **Inconsistent expectations** and **insensitive practices** can be confusing and frightening for many children whose parents, despite their best efforts, are simply unable to afford any additional costs.

Enrichment Activities

Enrichment activities are fast becoming **out of reach** for many children in lower income families because schools can **no longer afford** to offer these for free. These include activities carried out by **outside agencies** who charge a fee for after school activities, music tuition and visiting presentations and performances for example. **Homework clubs** can also be out of reach to those who are reliant on **school transport**.

Fundraising initiatives or 'fun' days, where pupils pay a nominal sum to come to school in their own clothes or are encouraged to dress up instead of wearing their school uniform, can **impact on children's attendance** and it is not uncommon for pupils to stay away from school as their parents/carers may not be able to afford the additional cost. Children whose parents/carers do find the money may **not have the 'right' clothes** to wear, and will come to school in their uniform, saying they 'forgot' in an attempt to avoid **embarrassment, stigma or exclusion**.

Present buying for teachers at the end of the school year has become the norm in many schools and this can especially be a **challenge and pressure** for lower income families. End of term activities, such as 'leavers' events, often organised by other parents, can be also prove costly and again exclude many learners who are **unable to financially contribute** and will, therefore, **miss out**.



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, figures indicate that up to **25%** of families with children entitled to free school meals **do not take them up** because of **stigma or embarrassment**, and many lower-income families **do not meet the eligibility threshold** for free school meals. Pupils 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. **Missing out** on educational visits and trips means that pupils whose families cannot afford the cost feel **isolated, embarrassed and disappointed** before, during and afterwards. Misbehaviour, disinterest in attending or illness can be displayed in order to 'protect' themselves.

Pupils have reported **feeling embarrassed** by having to ask teachers for help with paying for the costs of a school trip, and the **'additional extras'** often associated with **residential trips**, such as appropriate clothing, equipment and sleeping bags. Even where schools are able to subsidise or pay in full for excursions, there are typically the **extra costs of spending money** required for extra activities, food and snacks. It is not unknown for parents to go into **debt** and take out **high interest loans** to enable their children to attend.



Impact on Children and Young People

Pupils from lower income 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 wellbeing**, and their overall ability to fully participate in school life.

The subjects that learners choose to do at **GCSE or 'A' Level** can be hugely **dependent** on the **ancillary costs** of taking that subject, and **30%** of children from lower income families have **fallen behind** in core subjects because their family **could not afford** the necessary **books or materials**. Subjects such as **Design or Food Technology** can be particularly **problematic** as although schools are able to cover costs for pupils from lower income families, the **charging policy** of the school can mean those pupils are **unable to take their finished product home** as others do, as it may state that 'equipment' remains the **property of the school**. This denies the learner the sense of achievement in taking the items they made and have a **negative impact on engagement and motivation**.



What Governors can do

- **Ensure regular updates and reports on how the Pupil Development Grant is spent** at the school, why it has been used this way and on how it has proved to be effective. This should include reports on measured impact, ie, before and after data on identified groups to show improvements in areas such as academic achievement and wellbeing
- **Undertake an audit on the fundraising and celebration events that** are held at the school **over a year** and look to implementing a policy that limits these to a certain number and ensures that they are spread evenly. Explore ways of fundraising that do not directly ask pupils for money, eg, supermarket bag packs
- **Review the charging policy of the school.** Trips related to the curriculum are not chargeable and families of children in receipt of free school meals should not be charged for any trips in line with [Welsh Government Charging Guidance](#). Look at value for money, no cost local options, affordability, notice periods and payment plans for trips and enrichment activities. Explore grant funding for children from lower income families and make sure that families are aware of the **School Essentials Grant**

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**.”*



School Essentials Grant (formerly ‘PDG-Access’)

The **Welsh Government** provides funding through the [School Essentials Grant](#) to parents/carers of pupils eligible for free school meals and for all Looked after Children for **school uniform** as well as sports kits, equipment such as school bags or stationery, and equipment for particular activities, eg, design and technology. It can also be used for out of school activities.

The grant is **available through the local authority** and schools should do all they can to raise awareness of its existence and how it can be claimed, eg, through **parent/carer communications, noticeboards** and through **Family Liaison** staff. Governors should be **kept informed** of this work through **regular updates**.

Governors should, however, be aware that there are **many children** whose parents work in low paid jobs and **fall just short of the free school meals eligibility criteria**.

5. Home-School Relationship

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. **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 wellbeing**.

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** and already doing well in **engaging families** and in **identifying solutions** to lift the barriers to enable **better home-school relationships**.



Parental Engagement

All parents/carers will **want the best** for their children, regardless of their **current situation**, their **background** or their **previous experience** of learning and school. Some learners from low income families may, however, have parents/carers who are **less likely to be actively involved** in their children's education and studies. How families interact with the school will depend on a **number of factors**, from their **own childhood experiences**, to **how far away** the school is from the child's home, to **work commitments** and **caring responsibilities**, and to how receptive the school is towards **parental engagement**. Establishing closer links has been found to have a positive impact on **pupil wellbeing**.

Methods can **vary enormously** between schools. **Letters** can remain **unseen** or be difficult to understand, particularly if they contain jargon or are not in **'plain English.'** **Digital methods** are increasingly used for **communication**, but these too can be a **barrier** to effective communication if the **required technology** or the necessary **literacy skills** and/or **confidence** needed are lacking. This can particularly be a problem with regard to, for example, school closures where **important information is missed**.

An **'open door' policy**, or having a dedicated member of staff, such as a **Family Engagement Officer** available at the start and end of the school day whom parents can talk to, can be valuable in **building trust and rapport** between parents and the school and go towards ensuring **effective communication with all**.





Homework

Parents/carers can face many **barriers** in **supporting their child's learning**. Parents from lower income families told a **Welsh Government Inquiry** that they were unable to help their children with homework, either because they **lacked the necessary skills** or because they had **several jobs** or competing **caring responsibilities**, leaving them with little or no time to properly support their children.

Computers and an **internet** connection at home are **increasingly necessary** for children to access and **complete their homework**. Many schools 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** which can support the software needed to complete homework, or have **only one device** which is shared between several children and family members.

Homework clubs are a positive development, but may not always be **accessible** to children from low 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**.



Home Environment

The home environment can be a significant **enabler or barrier**. **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 anywhere **quiet** with little **personal space** to complete homework or out-of-school tasks. Poor housing which is **cold or damp** will also have a **negative impact** on a child's wellbeing and learning.

Living in difficult housing conditions 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** by their home or **lack the necessary space**.

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 children from lower income families face can help schools tailor their support according to the **child's lived experience**.

What Governors can do

- **Review the school's homework policy** to ensure it is inclusive and gives consideration to the ability of all learners to complete homework tasks at home. Explore ways in which some homework tasks may be completed during the school day, without it compromising or limiting recreational and lunch times. Access grants to purchase laptops, either for all pupils or a smaller number for use by pupils who don't have IT equipment to use for homework at home
- **Consider when the school holds homework clubs**, to make them accessible to learners whose family might struggle to afford up-to-date IT equipment, but also be mindful that these same learners might miss out on a school meal at lunchtime if clubs are held during this period. Undertake an audit or survey of who takes part in after school activities, to establish whether school transport is a barrier to learners attending activities and how this could be overcome
- **Appoint a Family Engagement Officer**, possibly funded through the Pupil Development Grant or via the local authority, to build links with parents/carers who face barriers and have little contact with the school. If the school already has a family engagement worker, ensure regular updates on their work, including information on the impact in relation to the wellbeing and academic achievement of children from lower-income-families
- **Make links with the wider community**, to encourage family learning by signposting to other services. Utilising the expertise of other agencies can be hugely beneficial in ensuring families issues are addressed. While accessing the wider community can provide better engagement for all and further resources. Consider the [Welsh Government Community Focused Schools Guidance](#) as a potential model
- **Look at establishing a Parent Council** to help inform and support ways to improve parental engagement and ensure that their voices are heard in decision making, both at school leadership and governing body level



Transport

Free travel for children under 16 between their home and school is dependent on **distance, rather than a family's ability to pay**. For primary school pupils it is 2 miles or more from school and 3 miles for secondary pupils. **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** options to enable their child to participate in these activities, then their child will **miss out** on important **opportunities for learning, play and social interaction**.



Ideas in practice from other schools

Attending the **whole school poverty awareness session** really helped governors to better see issues from the perspective of our families. We are definitely more mindful of these now when making decisions about how we run things at the school.



We provide **one free school sweatshirt and two free school polo shirts** to families **starting in Reception** so no one needs to worry about initial costs.

Some pupils **didn't like coming to the canteen** because they didn't know what they could afford. Now **all items are labelled, priced and clear.**

Reviewing our **school uniform policy** using the **Welsh Government statutory guidance** led us to **removing the requirement for branded uniform.** Now the school colours are all that are needed, making it much more **affordable.**

A **parent council** has been formed following a **consultation evening** about **improving communication.** They meet half termly and **reports on ideas** they have trialled are then fed into **governing body meetings.**

Having a **family engagement worker** who can **build relationships** with our parents has made a **real difference to their involvement** in the life of the school, and because she **knows them well** she can **respond to any needs quickly and sensitively.**

We have **worked with the local authority to track and contact parents** who have **not responded to their entitlement to free school meals,** and **updates** on this are provided at **governing body meetings.**





PLANT YNG NGHYMRU CHILDREN IN WALES

Children in Wales is the **national umbrella body** for **organisations and individuals** who work with **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**.

We offer a **membership** scheme and schools can join for as little as £30 per year. Email membership@childreninwales.org.uk for further details. We also **work directly with children and young people** on a number of projects and have recently started a **dedicated membership** for our **younger audience**.

The **Price of Pupil Poverty Guides** have been developed to **raise awareness** of the **lived experiences** of learners from **lower income families**, setting out the **impact** poverty has on children's **day-to-day lives** and to provide schools with **tangible and cost effective solutions** which could help **lift barriers** towards improved **learner wellbeing**.

The Guides are grounded in the **Welsh Government's commitment** to **tackle increasing levels of child poverty** and to **improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all children in Wales**, drawing on key Welsh Government **legislation, policies and guidance**.

The **content** of the Guides and solutions put forward have been **informed by previous work** carried out in Wales, and other parts of the UK, which **recognise the existing measures already being taken by schools to reduce the impact of poverty** on learner well-being and to help improve individual progress.

Much **research** has been undertaken over the last few years with many education professionals reporting **significant increases in the visibility of child poverty in their schools and the barriers this presents**.



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