Poverty Proofing the School Day Common Themes Update 1

Suffolk
September 2023

Children North East Poverty Proofing©

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Introduction

Poverty Proofing©

Poverty Proofing© the School Day is a powerful tool for identifying the barriers children living in poverty face to engaging fully with school life and its opportunities. Focused on listening to the voices and experiences of young people, it offers a pathway for schools to address often unseen inequalities within their activities, helping them reduce stigma, break the link between educational attainment and financial background, and supports schools to explore the most effective way to spend Pupil Premium.

Our researchers conduct consultations with students, parents, staff and governors to understand the challenges they face, in an inclusive, straightforward and supportive process. We then complete a Poverty Proofing© audit and work with the leadership team to identify pathways to reducing the impact of poverty on students. Schools then receive a thorough written report and action plan to inform impactful decision-making, and receive accreditation pending a follow-up review. The process will also include training for staff and governors on the causes, consequences and impact of poverty on children, young people and their families and ways to identify and mitigate barriers in their roles.

Work Completed

Children North East (CNE) have been commissioned by Suffolk County Council to deliver Poverty Proofing© the School Day. To date:

- Audits completed: 7 (Primary: 5 Secondary: 2)

- Pupils consulted: 3781 (Primary: 1985 Secondary: 1796)

- Parent survey responses: 233

- Staff survey responses: 53

- Governor survey responses: 8

Overview

The overall engagement with the project from schools has been good to excellent. Most schools we have worked with have taken a genuine and protracted interest in the project. Senior leadership teams at all schools have been committed, receptive, and enthused towards the aims and methodology of the project, particularly in the initial stages. Impact is gathered up to two terms after an audit and it is proving difficult to collect this information. This is being put down to the pressure that schools are under and the Children North East Team continues to pursue this information

Each school has received an individual report as a result of this process, highlighting the things the school is doing well as well as exploring areas for consideration. Some of the changes discussed can be implemented with immediate effect with little or no use of time or resources. Others will require further investigation and collaboration regarding the most effective way to address them. In some of these areas there is a role for the Local Authority to play to support schools to bring about change.

This report draws what has been identified in Poverty Proofing audits from schools across the locality, and includes examples of what is working well but also the common issues that students and families across Suffolk are facing. The data presented shows the percentage of schools where these issues were reported. The final page lists the themes included in the audits and has been categorised in order that there is an overview of the prioritisation of themes.

Additional Opportunities

In this theme

We explored the curriculum beyond the academic, vocational and technical and discussed with pupils the artistic, musical, sporting and cultural opportunities available at their school. We sought to understand how the school ensures that there is equality of opportunity for all pupils to take part in a wide, rich set of experiences which provides them with the cultural capital they need to succeed in life. We sought to understand if all pupils benefit from these experiences and if there are any barriers for disadvantaged pupils.

What is working well?

Across the majority of schools, clubs are widely available and free to attend, meaning their is no barrier to participation due to cost.

"We get a choice like this week it is darts, basketball and choir."
"There are a lot of clubs and things to do at lunch."

At the secondary school, it was positive that course-related trips were paid for by the school. This ensures that everyone can participate and therefore achieve the best they can in the subject, without cost as a barrier.

"Whilst the trip was for Art and Photography specifically, 20 of those we took had never been to London and 15 had never been to a museum before." (Staff)

Pupils in some schools spoke about the range of visitors that had been, which enhances learning whilst keeping costs for families to a minimum.

"Africa alive was so cool."
"The owl lady came in they had real stuffed birds, it was fun we learned loads."
"Someone came in from the recycling centre with Gary the Gorilla."

"If a club costs to go to, it would stop people participating."
Student

Main barriers

Pupils have the perception they missed out on trips due to cost - 57%
"Like the camping trip is like £260, my Dad cannot afford it at once, they let you split it into payments but if you can't afford that you just don't go."

Families think trips are too expensive - 42%
"£330 is still a huge amount of money to find for a one-night trip but I feel like I have to find the money now."

Low purchases of school photographs (taken by external provider) - 28%
"Wouldn't buy the photos as even one was £15 – I just couldn't afford it."

Considerations

Cost of trips, especially transport
- Are there local funds available?
- Consider key staff attending bid-writing training.
- Map venues that are walkable / near public transport.
- Consider which trips are deemed part of a Suffolk education for all students (e.g. every pupil will experience one residential).
- Are there ways that parents in one school can 'pay it forward' for other schools?
- Is there a way for parents to 'save' for trips over a number of academic years? Could the LA match fund?
- Wider promotion of support available to fund trips and discreet ways for families and pupils to access this would be beneficial for families.
- This calendar will support schools with scheduling events that incur costs: Cost of the School Day Calendar 2022/23 - Children North East (children-ne.org.uk).

Many schools do not monitor participation in trips and clubs
- Ensure that there is monitoring of those who take up opportunities, to ensure that there is proportional representation from those with disadvantaged backgrounds in all aspects of school life.

Arts and Technology

In this theme (secondary only)

We sought to better understand how pupils with less financial resources take part in these subjects, both through a broad curriculum and through extra-curricular opportunities. We were trying to find out if students require any resources to participate and how the school ensures equity of experience for all.

What is working well?

Both secondary schools ensure that students have access to music. In one school, links with the Music Hub enable students to take home the instruments they are learning, allowing them to practice without purchasing the instrument themselves. Opportunities are also available at lunch/after school for practice. In the other school, fees for peripatetic lessons are paid for by the school, removing cost as a barrier to participation.

"You just turn up to the Head of Music, and you get put on the waiting list, it's free."
"Lessons are free, it's paid for by the school, anyone can do it, the only limit is capacity."

In one secondary school, all students are provided with ingredients for food technology. In another secondary school, ingredients are provided to those who are unable to purchase the required items.

"The school provides us with everything. All the food, aprons, art supplies, fabric for textiles, everything."
"You need nothing for food technology, the only optional thing is an apron."

Main barriers

Students unable to take equipment home if it has been borrowed from school (e.g. musical instruments, cameras).

Cost for materials (e.g., ingredients, art supplies).

Bullying

In this theme

We explored pupil's understanding of bullying as well as whether or not bullying as a result of poverty takes place within the school. We also discussed from a pupil perspective how quickly, consistently and effectively the school addresses bullying if it does occur.

What is working well?

Pupils across all of the schools that investigated bullying were aware of what bullying is and had began thinking about potential reasons behind bullying.

"It's a repeated behaviour. Consistently hurting someone emotionally or physically over a period of time."
"The school does a good job teaching us about different religions, genders etc. so children know about respecting difference."

Pupils and parents in some schools felt that teachers were good at dealing with bullying if it does occur.

"They sort it and call parents."
"If there are any issues you can phone and speak with the class teacher."
"They've got pupils in mediation – they are helping with resolving."

In two schools, allowing pupils to mix on the playground has had a positive impact on bullying.

"It's better now we all mix."

One school has implemented a programme called 'No Outsiders', which appears to be very well embedded in all aspects of the school. All the pupils know what this programme is about, and most groups talked about how important this is to them.

"You can't leave anyone out, no bullying, no fighting, be kind."
"No outsiders has stopped bullying."

"We've learned about bullying – the teachers want us to be safe."

Pupil

Main barriers

Pupils feel that school doesn't deal effectively with bullying - 71%
"School say they take it seriously, but it doesn't feel like it is."

Reports of poverty-related bullying (e.g. material possessions) - 28%
"Your dad cut your hair (it's so bad) – because you are poor."

Considerations

General understanding and discourse around poverty within society
- The End Child Poverty Now coalition has created a toolkit designed to start conversations around poverty with 16 – 24 year olds. Children North East offers face-to-face and remote workshops for Key Stage 2 and 3 looking at unconscious bias related to beliefs around poverty.
- Kidscape Help With Bullying (kidscape.org.uk) offers support, including free online groups sessions for pupils and parents.

Celebrations

In this theme

We explored how occasions such as holidays, the end of the school year and Christmas are celebrated in school. We also looked at how key events within the school calendar are marked, exploring whether there are any barriers for poorer pupils.

What is working well?

Across the schools, pupils spoke about inclusive activities throughout the year to celebrate different events, which had no or low cost to families.

"We practice songs, elves hide and make it fun, we decorate our classroom – we each get a bauble."
"At Easter we all got chocolate eggs in collective worship."

In two schools, leavers celebrations were inclusive. Leavers gifts were given to Year 6 pupils at no cost, ensuring that every child was able to keep something to remember their time in primary school.

"Teachers gave year 6 a year book with photo's on."
"Because of poverty, they get it [hoodie] free – everyone gets them."
"Two leavers' parties, one at school and they get bowling, last day on the field, extra time in the woods and extra break and lunch. All free."

One school ensures that birthday celebrations are inclusive by not allowing pupils to bring in sweets, which could potentially highlight financial differences. Instead, classes celebrate by singing happy birthday.

"We used to bring in sweets, but we're not allowed to anymore."
"We sing happy birthday at the end of the day."

"We had Christmas activities, we made decorations and we all made cards it was nice."

Pupil

Main barriers

Teachers asking questions after the holidays can highlight finances - 85%
"Teachers ask if you had a good time and ask did you get the presents you wanted. I might not share if I didn't do or get anything."

There is a gift/card giving culture around Christmas/end of year - 57%
"Maybe they expect it, the teachers gifts."

Birthday celebrations highlight finances - 28%
"My parents can't always afford sweets for me to bring in."

Considerations

Gift-giving culture within society
- Explore this within PSHE curriculum to look at other ways of celebrating events and thanking others.

Charity, Fundraising and Community

In this theme

We explored how the school provides opportunities for pupils to engage with society and make a positive contribution to their wider community. We also looked specifically at fundraising activities and if there are any barriers for pupils engaging in these opportunities.

What is working well?

Across the primary schools, pupils were aware that donations are optional, and that they could still join in if they didn't bring money. This is great, as it reduces pressure on families to contribute if they are struggling financially.

"There have been a number of fundraising opportunities, but these are voluntary and there is no pressure to donate." (Staff)
"We would be nice about it, not a big deal." (Staff)

Community was an important aspect of fundraising in some schools, focusing on donating supplies to local foodbanks and churches, rather than asking for monetary donations. Activities focused on helping the community were also mentioned, such as making Christmas cards for residents of a local care home. This highlights how young people can directly help others, instead of just giving money.

"We just leave the food in the hall for harvest, no one can tell who hasn't brought it in."

In two schools, items of clothing could be provided to pupils who did not have anything to wear on themed dressing up days, to ensure they did not stand out as different to children who did have the resources.

"The school has dressing up clothes."
"If any children have costumes that don't fit then they can take them to the front office for people who don't have a costume."

"I think everyone gets a poppy, we can just grab one."

Pupil

Main barriers

Payment required at bake sales - 42%
"If students forget money they can't get a cake."

Pressure around non-uniform days - 28%
"I was definitely the most Pudsey."

Collection of money is identifiable - 28%
"You bring in £1, the teaches goes round collecting your donations, you can see who hasn't paid."

Selling of items for charities - 28%
"You can buy a poppy, usually a person comes around selling them at form and break time. No money, no poppy."

Considerations

Schools need to fundraise but often do within their own communities
- Explore other ways to fundraise: e.g. local marketplace / bag packs / local businesses. Is there capacity for some key staff to attend bid-writing courses in order to apply for local / national pots of money?

Schools sell items for well-known charity days, at a cost to families
- Encourage all schools to utilise EasyFundraising as an efficient way of fundraising: Fundraising | Charity Fundraising Online | You Spend Online, Brands Donate | Easyfundraising

Pupils feel pressure on non-uniform days
- If schools are to go ahead with these days, consider including appropriate items in uniform banks.

Many schools do not monitor attendance and/or participation on charity, fundraising and community events, including those outside of school time
- Monitor attendance at all events in order to identify trends and patterns.

Curriculum and Ability Groups

In this theme

We sought to explore the school's curriculum intent with a focus on how the school ensures that disadvantaged pupils have access to a broad curriculum. This included looking at how ability setting is used within the school.

What is working well?

Across some of the schools, pupils did not believe their table groupings were based on ability, but instead on behaviour. This meant that pupils did not treat each other differently based on which table they were sat at.

"Different tables for different countries, teachers base this on who works well together."
"You are on different tables because if you sit on the same table, you will get distracted and talk."
"[We are] kind to each other and not a lot believe about a table being smart or not as smart."

In one school, each year group gets to learn a specific instrument in class, exposing them to a variety of instruments during their time at school. Pupils enjoyed this opportunity and were able to access instruments to practice.

"Loads, like clarinet over year 5."
"The school gives us one and we keep it at home."

At the secondary school, students were provided with sufficient information and support regarding Year 9 options, as well as taster sessions for new subjects. This is great, as it helps students and families make informed decisions.

"Parents can phone staff to talk about options if they can't make the parents evening."

"We pick lollipop sticks to work with a partner."

Pupil

Main barriers

Peripatetic music tuition is too costly - 28%
"I have a guitar but no lessons. My Dad tries."

Considerations

Ability grouping can lead learners and their teachers to define themselves and their ability according the set they are assigned to
- Reconsider ability grouping. See Challenging Education's Raising Attainment for Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) Recorded-RADY-offer-Sept-2022-1.pdf (challengingeducation.co.uk).
- Some schools have looked moved into mixed ability teaching as an alternative. Others have mentioned Teaching for Mastery and Adaptive Teaching as alternatives.

Peripatetic music tuition – see also Additional Opportunities
- Music for Schools – Music for Schools Foundation (mfsf.org.uk).
- Consider what additional funding and support could be utilised, to ensure any pupil who would like music tuition, is not held back due to cost.

Curriculum swimming – see also Additional Opportunities and Uniform
- This thought piece also gives suggestions for curriculum swimming, especially the timetabling of it: Is Swimming Accessible for Everyone? - Children North East (children-ne.org.uk).

Food

In this theme

We explored how pupils access food over the course of the school day including breakfast, break time, lunchtime and out of school visits. We examined how discretely Free School Meals are administered, how debt is tackled as well as the quality of the lunchtime experience for pupils.

What is working well?

Some of the schools provide fruit for the children during the day, ensuring everyone has access to a snack whether they brought one themselves or not. This reduces the pressure on families to provide a snack each day.

"We all bring snack, if you don't have snack, there is fruit."
"There are fruit bowls by the entrances where children of all ages can help themselves. It is everywhere rather than in lower year classrooms only."

In two schools, seconds are offered to children who are still hungry after eating their school dinner. The catering team in one of the schools has built good relationships with children and families, having awareness of who may be struggling. This ensures children leave the dinner hall feeling full, which is important as this may be their only hot meal of the day.

"One of the dinner ladies goes around the hall asking if you want seconds."
"If a child asks for seconds, we remember them so the next time we up their portions and give them extra veg."

Across two schools, breakfast provision is accessible for all children and is spoken about positively. Breakfast sets children up for the day, making them ready to learn, so it is important as some children may not have access to it at home.

"I come to breakfast club every morning, but I make sure I come in early on Thursday for a fry up."
"We offer a good selection at the breakfast trolley and fruit (and toast) is available throughout the day if we know children haven't had breakfast."

"I'd never tried porridge before coming here, I now have it most mornings."
Student

Main barriers

Portions are perceived to be small in size - 71%
"School dinner doesn't fill me up."

Food is perceived to be poor quality - 42%
"Food is left out too long, when we get there, it can be cold."

Poor or no breakfast provision offered to pupils/students - 42%
"I used to go to breakfast club but can't afford it."

Cost of school dinners - 42%
"I wanted to get a sandwich and a drink but it was 5p too much."

No/inconsistent breaktime food provided by school - 28%
"You can't eat if you haven't brought anything [for break]."

Slow queues / not enough time to eat - 28%
"Queues too long so you can spend entire lunch waiting and sometimes can't get food."

Possible to identify pupils in receipt of FSM (breakfast or lunch) - 28%
"Other kids know we have Free School Meals, no one makes fun but you can tell because they have green stickers."

Limits on FSM spending (e.g. unable to spend at breakfast/break time) - 28%
"I'm on free school meals and I have food at break and can't afford anything at lunch."

Considerations

Ensuring all families eligible are registered for FSM
- Look into automatic enrolment. There are SIMS systems that have this information (e.g. Capita) and schools using them can pay for automatic enrolment. Could this be done at a LA level with no charge to schools?
- In the meantime, continue to support families to apply for FSM (e.g. paper forms).

FSM uptake and experience
- Monitor uptake in schools of FSM eligibility. Roll over unspent money in Secondary's. Consider what happens to students who do not take up their eligibility (e.g. due to fasting).
- A recent change from DfE means more children from migrant families are now able to apply for free school meals. The Children's Society have developed these resources to support schools with this. They are saved and downloadable from this Google folder: NRPF - Google Drive.

Hunger
- Breakfast / break/ lunch: provide options for schools unable to afford beyond statutory universal offer.
- Monitor portion sizes, changing offer of food options and price changes for families with recent rises in cost of living.

Arrears
- Use this as a prompt for a conversation about support needed by family.
- Signpost to services (e.g. Citizens Advice).
- Ensure all pupils have the opportunity to eat even if they are in arrears.

Homework

In this theme

We explored how homework is administered, what resources and materials pupils need at home to complete homework, and the various ways in which the school supports pupils.

What is working well?

Every school tries to make homework inclusive by offering paper-based versions of online activities, or moving completely to paper-based homework tasks. This is great, as not all children will have access to technology at home in order to complete the set tasks.

"You tell the teacher and you get a paper copy."
"[Home work] used to be online but now on paper."

Most of the schools offer space for pupils to complete their homework on-site. Not all children will have a access to technology or the internet at home, or even a quiet space to concentrate. Allowing homework to be completed at school means all children have an equal opportunity to succeed.

"There are lots of computers in the library and we can access the IT rooms too."
"iPads are available at break or lunch but you can also use them in class if you have finished your work properly."

One school offers a homework menu, allowing children to choose their tasks. This means that resources are not a barrier to participation, as tasks can be chosen based on what resources are needed. However, children are made aware that if they are interested in a particular task, resources can be borrowed from school so that they don't miss out on an activity that is perceived to be 'better' because of limited resources.

"The teachers try to help you with homework."

Pupil

Main barriers

Homework set requires internet access - 71%
"My Maths and Maths zone requires internet access."

Pupils have difficulty accessing internet/devices at home - 28%
"You ask Miss to do it in break or lunch time if you don't have a computer."

Difficulties using apps/tech (e.g. out of date or not confident) - 28%

Considerations

Some pupils do not have a suitable place to complete homework
- Are the opportunities to run homework clubs outside of schools?

Leadership and Governance

In this theme

We explored with leaders, staff and governors their awareness and understanding of issues relating to poverty; including their accountability in relation to Pupil Premium and what actions they have taken to address social disadvantage within their local context. This included an exploration of the school's curriculum intent.

What is working well?

Across the schools, staff and senior leadership display clear awareness and understanding of poverty and how it impacts their local families. This has led to a range of initiatives and interventions being put in place to help reduce these impacts, such as reviewing uniform policies and stopping ability grouping.

"We have noticed different make up of families since Covid - we help those who need it, not just PP, we give them food vouchers to those who are struggling. There are many hardworking families who still need to claim Universal Credit – how is that right." (Staff)

"We endeavor to eliminate the gap in demonstrated learning between disadvantaged children and non-disadvantaged children." (Staff)

"There is no single barrier that applies to all. Our approaches to teaching are based on EEF strategies but students may experience more problems with health, confidence and support at home which can affect their ability to engage. The withdrawal of so many services means that the impact of the cost of living is having a notable detrimental impact on mental health." (Staff)

"We already do so much – we subsidise - the trips for Pupil Premium are half off." (Staff)

"Success is that children come in to school happy and feel safe. The learning can always come later, but self value and knowing who they are is so important."

Head Teacher

Main barriers

Not a member of the Living Wage Foundation - 28%

Considerations

- Could schools take up the Pillar 3 option of the Child Poverty Prevention programme?
- Ensure that all staff have the opportunity to contribute to how Pupil Premium funding is spent; if they already do, ensure that they are made aware they are part of the decision making.
- Consider scheduling Poverty Proofing© training, to ensure all staff are aware of the causes and consequences of poverty, and how it relates to their school's context.
- Communicate the importance of governors sharing their voice through completing questionnaires; if there are any schools who do not currently have a Pupil Premium link governor, consider encouraging them to appoint one.

Pupil Support

In this theme

We looked at what pastoral support is available for pupils, how pupils access support, and what impact it has. We explored how the school supports the development of pupils' confidence, resilience and knowledge so that they can keep themselves mentally healthy.

What is working well?

Pupils across the schools spoke positively about the support they receive from a variety of staff members and how they feel comfortable going to them if they are feeling down.

"I went to the activity area and talked to the teacher when I was feeling worried."
"The teachers are nice, so of course, they help you out."
"My teacher let me be with my friend inside as I was nervous about my dog dying – I was comforted."

A few schools have great support teams, made up of different professionals such as a counsellor, Thrive practitioner, a full time educational social worker, a SENCO, a member of SLT and a qualified teacher dedicated to providing nurture sessions.

"Miss X [Thrive], I go to her and if something happens and if you feel it ruins you she helps you get over it."
"If I needed help, I think the Thrive room would be the place I would go."

At the secondary school, there is a focus on mental health within PSHE lessons and assemblies. It is great that they don't shy away from difficult subjects, however include a trigger warning prior to the learning.

"There was an assembly about self harm – it's important to know about stuff like that."
"We have loads of PSHE lessons about it [mental health]."

"It's about telling our pupils they're worth it and letting them realise they can change the bad experiences."

Staff

Main barriers

Sanitary provision is not regularly restocked and/or students have to ask staff to access it - 28%
"The pastoral managers office have everything you want but it's really awkward to ask."

Pupils feel uncomfortable speaking to staff about their worries - 28%
"I would never talk to my teacher."

Considerations

The bursary is not clearly advertised in many schools that we have worked with nationally
- Work with schools to publicise it within all educational settings at several points during the year.

Mental health needs in schools outweighed by staff capacity
- Provide more services for families and schools.
- Train/release staff to triage and/or provide short term support.

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Pupil Voice

In this theme

We explored what meaningful opportunities the school provides for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to debate and discuss issues, to share their views beliefs and opinions, and to be actively involved in school life.

What is working well?

There is a wide variety of pupil voice opportunities across the schools, allowing children to get involved and have their voice heard regarding a range of different topics/ aspects of the school.

"We have sports leaders who set up games for us to play at lunch time."
"We have digital leaders who make sure that laptops are closed and charged."
"I'm subject leader for German, I talk to the head [of department] to tell them what we think of the subject."

Pupils in a few schools mentioned the School Council and spoke positively about it, understanding what it was for. If pupils are aware of the School Council and it's purpose, they are more likely to get involved and utilise it.

"Improving break times and improving our right to learn."

Most schools ensure fairness in pupil voice by using a blind vote system, so pupils are not aware who each other have voted for. This is great practice, as it removes the barrier of popularity, preventing pupils from automatically voting for their friends, and instead voting for the ideas they think will benefit their experience at school.

"The blind vote was amazing, my friend told me to vote for him but didn't know which one was him."
"You cover it up so nobody can see."

"[School Council] speak out and help the school be a better place."
Pupil

Considerations

What genuine opportunities do children and young people have to input to decisions that affect them?

- Is there an active, representative Youth Council that School Councils feed into?
- Highlight practice of those schools where School Council is working particularly effectively.

Resources

In this theme

We explored whether pupils need additional resources to fully take part in the school day, and how the school supports pupils who cannot afford the resources required to engage with all lessons.

What is working well?

Pupils in each primary school are provided with all of the necessary resources for the school day, reducing the pressure and cost for families to buy stationary.

"We have what we need for school lessons and it is provided by school."

The secondary school provides students with 'knowledge organisers', reducing costs to students and families as they don't need to purchase revision guides. This ensures that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

"Our knowledge organisers are given in paper copies and they cover most subjects."

In some schools, additional materials are shared among the class, reducing the pressure on each family to provide resources and meaning no child is left out.

"They had tons of spares [in school]."
"If you forget or you can't bring something in, then that's ok. Some teachers bring in spares."

In one school, cups and bottles are available for children to access if they do not bring their own water bottle, allowing all children to access water. This reduces the pressure and expense for families to buy their child a water bottle or replace one if it breaks.

"The teacher has a stack of cups and some small bottles as we need to drink."

"We have what we need for school lessons and it is provided by school."

Pupil

Main barriers

Classes participating in show and tell - 57%
"If you're in poverty, you have nothing to show or communicate in show and tell."

Pupils allowed to bring in their own pencil case - 28%
"A boy was teased because he had a pink pencil case."
"Teacher told a student that basic stationary was really cheap so there is no excuse."

Pupils required to bring in their own suncream - 28%
"Poor children may get left or get burnt as they don't have anything."

Considerations

Many families are struggling to afford resources for learning, from stationary, to calculators to revision guides
- Could local resources banks be set up alongside uniform provision?
- Could local libraries potentially be involved?

Pathways / subject choice at Secondary level – some pupils may not be choosing certain options due to concerns at the costs of certain subjects
- Ensure that families are made aware of all costs that subjects will incur, including support that is available.

Rewards, Behaviour and Attendance

In this theme

We explored whether children from poorer backgrounds are rewarded or punished differently from other children. We looked at the consistency of the delivery of the rewards and sanctions system and how this impacts on pupils' experiences of the school day. We investigated what intelligent, fair and effective action the school takes to support pupils who are struggling with their attendance and behaviour.

What is working well?

Across the schools, pupils understood the reward and behaviour systems used, including what they have to do to receive a particular outcome. For example, showing the school values or doing good work. Pupils also spoke about how they get to celebrate these achievements in assembly.

"When you do really good work you get a shooting star."
"You get a warning, then your name on the board, then a 15 [minute detention], then a 30 [minute detention], then you get removed from lesson."
"This half term our value is compassion, we show compassion."
"We get recognised in assembly when we do something good."

Some of the schools take a supportive approach to monitoring and rewarding the attendance of pupils. For example, offering soft starts, not enforcing sanctions if pupils are late to school and giving out certificates for those with the most improved attendance. This is positive, as only rewarding 100% individual and class attendance can highlight those children who struggle to attend school regularly, which is more common amongst those living in poverty.

"We work with families in a supportive way."

"We get positive postcards home and the teacher says well done and excellent work."

Pupil

Main barriers

Inconsistency in the delivery of reward and behaviour systems - 28%
"[We get] stickers, but teachers are not consistent. Some forget to print them."

Whole class attendance rewards - 28%
"Makes you feel sad when you are ill as your friends won't get their attendance treat."

Support to Families

In this theme

We discussed how school-related costs affect families. We sought to understand from a parent's perspective the ways in which the school already effectively supports families as well as exploring areas where this support could be improved.

What is working well?

Families acknowledge how the schools have become more considerate when asking for money. This highlights the schools understanding of the current issues faced by their local families.

"In the past year the school has stopped asking for money for £1 donations here and there which is good as it soon mounts up." (Parent)
"I think [the school] are conscious of families money situations. This year they have been very careful to ask for costumes for events/special days. They offer affordable suggestions for school uniform, and uniform is sensible." (Parent)

Staff across the schools spoke about ways in which they go above and beyond to support families in the challenges they face. This includes free swimming lessons for LAC, taking families to doctors appointments, arranging audiologist appointments for children, offering access to a hardship fund and getting necessary resources for families, such as beds.

"We invite parents in and offer them help, we work with them, they trust us and that's the biggest thing." (Staff)
"We have a family support worker with a list of charities she can contact for a bed." (Staff)
"We bring children into school who are not at school." (Staff)
"We have informal phone calls made home to have discreet conversations about support for a range of things such as uniform or the foodbank." (Staff)

"I would feel comfortable if I needed to ask for support."
Parent

Main barriers

Families unaware of any financial support or signposting available - 42%
"[School should] raise awareness; advertise what support the school can provide. Be non-judgmental." (Parent)

Families not comfortable /able (e.g., EAL) to ask the school for help - 42%
"Some of our parents are quite proud and don't ask for help and we are just trying to break down the stigma." (Staff)

Families miss out on communication as it is app or email based - 28%
"The school is useless in getting me information. I never get emails and I'm not on Facebook. I never get pictures of the fun things." (Parent)

Families not sure who to speak to in school for support - 28%
"Advise where to go to get help." (Parent)

Considerations

Signposting
- Support schools with centrally created documents/links.

Those not in receipt of FSM but struggling
- Work with schools to identify and support these families.

Transport

In this theme (secondary only)

We sought to understand how students get to and from school and how they access provision outside of school. We also examined and investigated barriers that current transport arrangements present to poorer families.

What is working well?

Many students at one secondary school said that they like to cycle to school, as there is ample secure bike storage.

"I like to cycle, it's quicker than walking."

In the other secondary school, most students report they live within walking distance. Where public transport is needed, regular bus services are available.

Main barriers

Worries about the costs of public transport
"It's £18 a week."

Considerations

Consider what the transport costs are for children and families across the local authority
- Are these costs a barrier to days out or to getting to activities such as swimming or clubs external to schools?
- Consider having family discounts for transport that are accessible, given cost of living, if these are not already available. If they are, consider wider promotion of these.
- Car sharing apps are available and may be a way forward for some families/communities.

Uniform

In this theme

We sought to understand the way in which school uniform and PE kits is supplied, how much it costs, and the expectations that the school has in regards to uniform and PE kits. We also investigated how the school supports families with uniform costs.

What is working well?

The primary schools have been mindful about cost when deciding upon uniform policies, including having limited or no logo'd items as a requirement. This is positive practice, as it allows families to purchase uniform from a range of local shops, instead of from a costly designated supplier.

"You can wear one [a jumper] like this without the logo, it is okay."

Most of the schools take a flexible approach to uniform, in which they do not punish pupils/students for wearing the wrong uniform to school. This reduces the pressure on families to buy or replace uniform immediately, which can be an unexpected cost they have not budgeted for.

"Flexibility if you need to get a new pair [of school shoes]."
"I wear leggings and I know they're not really uniform, but it's all I have, there's guidelines but we're not punished."

Pupils/students are able to borrow spare uniform or access pre-loved uniform to take home at the majority of schools. This is good practice, as it supports families in having the correct uniform if cost is a barrier. At some schools, pre-loved uniform is presented on a clothes rail, similar to a shop, in an attempt to reduce stigma.

"You can get free uniform at the school office if your mum doesn't have any money."
"There is a little rail outside for you if you lose things like school uniform."

"If people have spare clothes you can donate them to school."
Pupil

Main barriers

Cost of uniform - 71%
"It's over £30.00 for a blazer and they aren't very good quality the lining rips easily."

Poor awareness of support available/uniform grant - 42%

Considerations

The new law regarding school uniform means affordability must be the top priority for schools when setting uniform policies
- The Department for Education has also released statutory guidance about the issue – meaning all state-run primary and secondary schools must follow it: New Guide: Affordable school uniforms - Children North East (children-ne.org.uk).
- Work with schools to implement pre-loved uniform schemes that are bespoke to each school. Children North East can provide guidance on this.

Some staff may be unaware of the real challenges some families face e.g. washing and drying uniform
- Raise staff awareness through training.
- This thought piece also offers insight and solutions: "I forgot my kit": Poverty Proofing© school sports - Children North East (children-ne.org.uk).

Parent Survey Overview

Based on 233 parent survey responses across schools in Suffolk.

26%
of families who filled in the online survey had children entitled to Free School Meals

48%
of families would feel 'quite or very uncomfortable' approaching the school for financial help

39%
of families are aware of who to contact in school for help with paying for things

39%
of families stated that they have struggled with school-related costs

66%
of families think the school give enough notice for payments

53%
of families 'don't know' if there is financial support available from school

67%
of families 'don't know' if school signposts to additional support, outside of school

45%
of families felt that the school has a 'good or better' understanding of financial issues families face

55%
of families stated that the school 'usually or always' provides good support for those with financial difficulties

52%
of families feel that the school is 'always' a welcoming place, regardless of financial background

Priorities

Theme	High	Medium	Low	N/A
Additional Opportunities	14%	57%	29%	0%
Arts and Technology (secondary school only)	0%	0%	100%	0%
Bullying	14%	14%	57%	14%
Celebrations	57%	14%	14%	14%
Charity, Fundraising and Community	14%	29%	43%	14%
Cirruculum and Ability Groups	0%	0%	86%	14%
Food	86%	0%	14%	0%
Homework	14%	29%	43%	14%
Leadership and Governance	0%	0%	100%	0%
Pupil Support	0%	0%	100%	0%
Pupil Voice	0%	29%	57%	14%
Resources	0%	0%	86%	14%
Rewards, behaviour and attendance	43%	29%	29%	0%
Support to Parents and Families	0%	29%	71%	0%
Transport (secondary school only)	0%	0%	100%	0%
Uniform	43%	0%	57%	0%

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