

THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY DUNDEE

SUMMARY REPORT



THE COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY DUNDEE



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Cost of the School Day is a Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland project. The project aims to support schools and local authorities to ensure that all children, regardless of financial backgrounds, are able to get the most out of the school day. The CoSD Dundee project is funded by the Scottish Attainment Challenge Fund and was commissioned following the Dundee Fairness Commission 2016 which found that:



Good quality education is the essential first step towards a future in which horizons are lifted for... children. This is currently undermined by the burdensome consequences of the cost of the school day... [We will] commission a project to address the Cost of the School Day to both reduce stigma and the hidden costs of attending school and associated activities in Dundee.

AIM OF SUMMARY REPORT

This report summarises key findings from Cost of the School Day Dundee's work with 11 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 2 Early Years Centres. It highlights the cost barriers to participation in school, the measures schools are currently taking to reduce or remove school costs and recommendations for what more could be done to address the barriers to taking part in the school day.

METHODOLOGY

Between April and December 2017 the Cost of the School Day project conducted:

- 62 workshops with 485 primary school pupils
- 22 workshops with 71 secondary school pupils
- 20 focus groups with 205 members of staff in 11 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 2 nurseries
- Focus groups and informal chats during holiday provision, school events and at nursery gates with 198 parents and carers.

Pupils took part in two participatory sessions based on a case study involving a character from a low income household called Ross/Katie. This provided a way for children and young people to discuss school costs without having to disclose personal information. Children were invited to identify school costs and consider where these might create a barrier to learning or participation in school for pupils from low income households. They were then asked what was currently being done to support families with school costs and what more could be done.

Semi-structured discussion guides were used in parent and staff focus groups to explore key issues across the school day.

All workshops and sessions were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Each school and nursery received an individual report of their findings and were supported to develop an action plan to address issues arising in the report.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The evidence gathered by the Cost of the School Day Dundee project shows that schools are generally aware of the financial hardships that their families may be facing and are already taking actions to reduce or remove costs. However, pupils, parents and staff identified issues where school costs still impact on children's ability to fully access the school day or resulted in schools restricting the opportunities they were able to offer.

Early years

Cost barriers are not a big issue in the local authority Early Years centres we worked in. Parent and carers feel that they get value for money when it comes to snack costs and they don't feel that they are under pressure to give any other financial contributions to the nursery. The main issue that emerged was the fact that children in nursery do not receive free school meals in the same way that P1-P3s do in school. Staff and parents feel that this was unfair and just 'doesn't make sense'.

Primary schools

Similar issues were identified in each of the 11 primary schools we visited. The 'big issues' for children were the P7 residential trip, trips in general and the cost of school lunches, particularly where there are several children from the family at the school. Parents and staff agreed with this and also identified breakfast clubs and the cost of school uniform as potential barriers for low-income families.

Secondary schools

In secondary schools, peer pressure and stigmatising attitudes toward poverty became more apparent. Subject costs were identified as being a barrier to young people accessing learning opportunities and the uptake of free school meals was an issue. Young people felt that staff consistency was a problem, be it around the lending of resources, homework or staff attitudes to school uniform. Trips also emerged as something that young people from low income families struggle to access.

IN CONCLUSION

Dundee schools and Early Years Centres are already generally mindful of the cost of the school day. This report lays out the steps that they already take and the positive impact that this is having on families and on children and young people. However, there is still some way to go to ensure that children and young people from low income households are able to access all of the same opportunities as their peers.

We have illustrated where there are still issues, and have set out the barriers to learning and participation that children and young people in Dundee still have to deal with on a daily basis. Working with pupils, parents and staff we have set out a series of 'things to consider' to address costs at each point of the school day, as well as highlighting some key general recommendations. Further, we have highlighted where these recommendations should be raised at a citywide level.

07:00 UNIFORM



You see from day one the ones that it will get worse for, you see it as the term goes on - they all start smart and clean but then some families can replace [clothing] and some can't
(Staff)

What works well

- Schools providing second hand uniforms (e.g. recycling lost property).
- New P1s given school tie by the school.
- Promoting school clothing grant at events.
- Automatic payment of clothing grant to families in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or Housing Benefit.
- School and Family Development Workers (SFDW) supporting families to apply for school clothing grant.
- Schools being mindful of costs when setting uniform policy.
- Strict no-bullying policies with staff acting on teasing and name calling.

Issues and concerns

- It was agreed that uniform was one of the biggest cost for families, particularly replacing items throughout the school year.
- Uniform is one of the main indicators of household income. Families are unable to replace items that have been outgrown or damaged and this can risk their children being exposed to comments and feelings of shame and embarrassment.
- Young people in secondaries felt staff are not always consistent with rules around what constitutes appropriate uniform.
- Some parents reported a pressure to buy branded items only widely available in the official school shop (at a high cost).

Things to consider

Schools

- Ensure that uniform is easily affordable and attainable - if uniform supplier is only available online consider supporting families to make purchases e.g. at parents' evenings and other parental events.
- Effectively promote school clothing grants through all platforms e.g. Twitter, newsletters, events, by text.
- Provide opportunities to buy recycled uniforms throughout the year, promoted in a sensitive manner.
- Involve pupils in uniform policy decisions and develop a consistent approach amongst staff regarding uniform and sanctions including the awareness that incorrect uniform may be related to low income.
- Demonstrate staff's awareness of bullying related to stigma around clothing.

Dundee City Council

- Clothing grants are stopped in Dundee after young people become eligible for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Consider continuing clothing grants for pupils in receipt of EMA as happens in some other local authorities.
- Address the issue of EMA not being paid in time to afford new school uniform for the year ahead.

08:00 TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL



I can't actually afford the bus so I just walk.

(Pupil S4)

What works well

- Most children and young people find it straightforward to walk to school.
- Children and young people are encouraged to use bikes and scooters and have a safe place to store them at school.

Issues and concerns

- Certain circumstances (e.g. living outside school catchment, separated parents) can mean high bus costs for some families.
- For some pupils, travelling to school means taking more than one bus each way. This can affect access to after school activities.
- Difficulties affording travel costs can affect pupil attendance.

Things to consider

Schools

- Provision of bus tickets if pupils attend something after school - e.g. supported study or clubs - or are struggling with travel costs.
- Where possible take individual circumstances into account when dealing with late coming.

Dundee City Council

- Explore with bus companies ways to get discounted travel for young people travelling to school.
- Acknowledge that there may be a good reason for a young person travelling from outwith catchment and that it is wrong for them to be penalised financially.
- Ensure that travel costs are not a barrier to school attendance.

08:15 BREAKFAST CLUBS



We couldn't get into the school breakfast club so I've had to put (daughter) into a private one. It's £3 a day and that's a lot for me. But I'm a single parent and I need to be in work for 9am so I don't have much choice

(Parent)

What works well

- Breakfast clubs run in primary schools are popular with both parents and pupils who feel that the cost (25p a day) is excellent value.
- Breakfast club, if you have a place, provides a good range of food and supports children to eat in the mornings.
- Breakfast clubs in secondary are free and more of a social gathering to remove stigma.
- Schools and individual teachers provide snacks for children who come to school hungry.

Issues and concerns

- Breakfast clubs operate differently in every school and ward.
- Staff to pupil ratios and physical space means there aren't always enough spaces and schools aren't always able to prioritise places for families in need.
- Some parents have had to place children in private breakfast clubs (at a cost of £3 a day) because they were unable to get a place at the school breakfast club.
- Often the food aspect finishes at 8.30am meaning some children don't get anything to eat.
- Missing breakfast means that children are often tired and struggle to concentrate in class.

Things to consider

Schools

- Consider using Pupil Equity Fund for staff hours to increase number of places at breakfast club.
- Explore possibility of providing healthy food like fruit and toast for children between 8.30-9.00am.
- Consider ways to offer a free snack for everyone who needs it that don't require school staff to purchase food themselves.

Dundee City Council

- Work with schools and provider services to ensure all children who want to are able to access school breakfast clubs.
- Investigate ways to ensure greater consistency in provision across the city.

09:15 LEARNING IN SCHOOL



Course fees are just really unfair. It's not a free curriculum... we really want these kids to do Home Economics especially if they're not academic and might excel in more practical subjects
(Staff)

What works well

- Schools provide equipment for children in class, including pens and pencils – however, staff in all settings report regularly buying materials with their own money.
- Children are normally able to take part in PE if they do not have their gym kit and schools provide spare kits.
- Secondary schools in Dundee have used PEF money to remove some subject costs.

Issues and concerns

- Secondary pupils felt that the lending of resources wasn't always fair or consistent across departments and between teachers.
- Some staff felt that they were able to buy cheaper and better quality stationery themselves rather than go through the procurement process.
- Instrument hire costs £83. Pupils entitled to FSMs get instruments for free but low income pupils not taking or entitled to FSM may be unable to afford this cost.
- Subject costs in secondary, especially Drama, Home Economics and Technical, can be unaffordable and may be affecting subject choices.
- Subject costs place extra pressure on the teachers who have to ask young people to pay.

Things to consider

Schools

- Involve pupils in policy decisions and have clear, consistent rules and guidelines around the lending of resources with awareness that not having the 'right' things for school may be related to income.
- Ensure all children and young people are aware of the opportunities available to them in the expressive arts.
- Ensure spare gym kit is plain and kept decent to remove stigma.

Dundee City Council

- Provide guidance and support to ensure all schools reduce and where possible remove inequalities in access to materials.
- Review policy and practice around procurement so that teachers do not need to spend their own money on equipment for school.
- Remove curricular costs for subjects like Home Economics and Technical Studies which are standing in the way of pupil participation.

10:30 FRIENDSHIPS AND ATTITUDES TO POVERTY



In classes such as PSHE pupils should be taught about why they should be considerate towards people who don't have the same amount of money or are going through a rough time at home

(Pupil S4)

What works well

- Children and young people show empathy toward their peers and are open to hearing different stories and experiences.

Issues and concerns

- Staff don't always have the time or opportunity to hear children and young person's problems.
- Cultural stigma around poverty and lack of understanding/knowledge of how low income affects families.

Things to consider

Schools

- Explore how the subject of poverty can be explored within school in a local context.
- Ensure staff can support pupils by participating in professional learning opportunities on poverty causes, consequences and solutions.

Dundee City Council

- Include poverty related stigma in anti-bullying guidelines and support schools to include it in their policies and address it in their practice.

10:45 BREAK TIME



I forgot my play piece and I just have to starve till lunch...it's really hard to concentrate

(Pupil P7)

What works well

- In some schools teachers are able to ask the school kitchen to provide children with toast or a free play piece if they don't have a snack.
- Schools and individual teachers provide snacks for children who come to school hungry.
- Parents of nursery children were happy with snack selection and value for money.
- Low cost options at school tuck shops.

Issues and concerns

- Some children go without a snack at break time.

Things to consider

Schools

- Consider ways to offer a free snack for everyone who needs it that doesn't require staff purchasing it themselves.

11:00 SCHOOL TRIPS



The P7 trip is like the biggest deal. So many memories

(Pupil)

What works well

- Schools are accessing grants and free visits, including Heritage Scotland and local area regeneration funds.
- Schools are accessing activities locally which do not require transport hire.
- Schools and Parent Council fund raising to reduce costs for school trips (including tombola, sponsored walks and dress down days).
- Allowing parents to pay cost of trips in instalments (including after the trip if necessary).
- Offering sibling discounts on trips- e.g. families with twins only need to pay for one place.
- School and Family Development Worker approaching each family that is not able to attend and exploring if there is anything the school could do to help.
- Providing parents with a breakdown of the costs of the school trip (travel, entry fee, snack etc.) so that they understand where charges come from.

Issues and concerns

- The cost of bus hire has meant that schools have chosen to reduce the number of trips that they offer.
- The primary 7 residential trip was identified as the biggest cost by children across the primary schools. Costs ranged from £140- £340. Children in several of the schools spoke about missing the P7 trip because of cost. Not attending meant they missed out on the excitement in the run-up to the trip, opportunity to have new experiences and shared memories with their classmates.
- There are many examples of individual teachers sourcing free or low cost trips for pupils but this is dependent on staff having the time and knowledge to access these opportunities.
- Young people in secondary schools were frustrated that there weren't many school trips and those that did exist were usually quite expensive.

Things to consider

Schools

- Fundraise to reduce costs/subsidise school trips in a way that does not put pressure on school community e.g. bag packing in local supermarket, singing carols in shopping centre.
- Link with Local Learning Partnerships to ensure more knowledge of funding and support from local community officer.
- Allow families to pay in instalments for all trips and give as much notice as possible to help families manage costs better.
- Explore the reasons why some children do not attend P7 residential to ensure that financial reasons are not a barrier and identify any other potential barriers.
- In secondary schools carry out wider consultation around what trips pupils would like and pay money to go on.
- More consistency and transparency around the costing of P7 residential.
- Consider offering discounts for families with more than one child.
- Develop an easy way for pupils (in secondary) to approach staff for help with trip costs.
- Improve communication with parents around help with costs available in the school - e.g. subsidies for trips – as many may be unaware.
- Explore mechanisms which will allow pupils to tell staff when they are finding costs difficult discreetly and without embarrassment.

Dundee City Council

- Better promote DCC funded school trips to local attractions including Verdant Works and the Discovery.
- Reduce the cost of residential trips - explore the potential to get a better deal for all Dundee schools.
- Make a public policy commitment that no Dundee child will miss the P7 residential due to financial costs, and allocate resources to ensure this is deliverable.

12:40 SCHOOL LUNCHES



If your mum and dad have two or three kids then that's like £30 a week, that's a lot of money.

(Pupil P6)



I struggle enough with my oldest, I'm dreading when she (younger daughter) goes into P4. We're going to really feel it.

(Parent)

What works well

- Pupils did not report any stigma around having free school meals (FSMs).
- Automatic application for FSMs has been introduced for families claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction, with schools also continuing to support families to make the application for FSMs.
- School promotion of FSMs, including in-school bag letter drops, SFDWs helping families to complete applications and social media promotion.
- Letter and text reminders to P4 parents that they no longer automatically receive FSMs and how to make an application.
- Follow up with families that are getting into debt with Parent Pay with offer of support from SFDW.
- Schools ensure that children eat regardless of whether they have money for lunch or not.
- Positive pupil relationships with dining hall staff.

Issues and concerns

- The online Parent Pay system reduces risk of pupils losing or forgetting lunch money but several schools report that it has led to some families falling into lunch debt. This means following up with families for late payments with risk to home- school relations.
- In Early Years settings, families eligible for FSMs are able to get free lunches. Nursery staff highlighted risk that non-eligible families on low incomes would remove their children from full time placements due to lunch costs.
- In secondary there is an issue with young people using their FSM entitlement at break, leaving them with nothing for lunchtime.
- Secondary schools find it hard to encourage young people to stay in school to eat.
- Families with many children struggle with the combined cost of lunches.
- Families with children going into P4 aren't always aware of the FSM entitlement or how to apply.

Things to consider

Schools

- Ensure that parents can choose how to pay for snack using either Parent Pay or handing in money directly as not all families are able or wish to use Parent Pay.
- Remind all parents of children going into P4 that there is no longer universal provision of FSMs, particularly families from outside the UK.
- Continue to promote FSMs and offer support to complete the application.
- Review policy and procedures around Parent Pay- ensure that if parents are starting to build up lunch debt they have opportunity to meet with SFDW to see if there are supports available.
- Ensure new pupils are given clear instructions on the use of payment cards in secondary.
- Prioritise pupil/staff relationships in the dining hall
- Reductions available for school meals for families with several children.
- Look at ways to encourage young people to eat within the school (e.g. extra-curricular activities).

Dundee City Council

- Review use of Parent Pay in Early Years Centres to ensure that it is clear for parents.
- Further promote the uptake of FSM, with particular focus on families who are not from the UK.
- Consider extending FSM entitlement to all in early years and P4.

14:00 FUN EVENTS



Last year for World Book Day...instead of buying a costume you're only going to use for one day the teachers said bring your favourite book and wear your pyjamas

(Pupil P5)

What works well

Strategies to reduce costs of fun events and ensure children don't feel left out:

- Alternative ways to celebrate World Book Day that don't involve parents spending money.
- Free things for children to get involved in during events like the summer fair.
- Collections of 'things' e.g. tins of food instead of money.
- Staff lending/giving children money so that they can take part in activities.

Issues and concerns

- Often timing (e.g. at Christmas) means families are paying for several events over a short and financially difficult period.
- Non-uniform days can put financial and social pressure on children and young people.
- Children sometimes miss out on events and report feeling 'left-out' and 'different'.

Things to consider

Schools

- Implement suggestions of spare costumes for certain occasions and a 'free thing' at coffee mornings and fairs.
- Monitor attendance at family events with costs attached.
- Ensure no pupil is left out at events like school fairs and coffee mornings.
- Consider 'chuck it in a bucket' voluntary donations rather than specific amount.
- Space events out across the school year to avoid too many events at once and liaise with Parent Council, nursery and individual class teachers to avoid clashes.
- Ensure families get sufficient notice before fundraising events, particularly those where pupils are asked to wear costumes.
- Ensure funds are available to cover school leavers costs if needed.

16:00 SCHOOL CLUBS



It's a shame - great people come and do like karate, a taster, but then it costs a fortune...and they might have siblings

(Support staff)

What works well

- Free activities at lunchtime and after school.
- Teachers and other staff giving up their time to run free activities.
- Active Schools Coordinators sourcing additional funding to provide free opportunities for all.
- Support from Active Schools in training staff, pupils and volunteers.
- Older pupils working alongside staff to run clubs.
- Free travel (e.g. secondary minibus) to take pupils to activities outside their local area.
- Often no 'special' kit is needed, just normal gym kit.

Issues and concerns

- Activities don't exist in every local area meaning that there is still a transport issue for some.
- Free taster sessions for activities that are high cost leave disappointed children and parents under pressure.

Things to consider

Schools

- Consider using available funds to create free to play opportunities and subsidise school clubs which cost money.
- Consider charging organisations (for room let) who are charging for the club.
- Support staff and pupils to help run clubs in school.
- Consult with children and young people about the clubs they want.
- Identify and support children with barriers to participation e.g. appropriate kit for a specific sport.

Dundee City Council

- Put guidelines in place on charging for activities and associated costs to ensure consistency across schools.

19:00 LEARNING AT HOME



It turned out they didn't have a flat surface in their house, they were having to do their homework on the kitchen counter standing up because there was no single flat surface in the house to be able to do their homework on, and then you think we're giving them loads of grief for not doing their homework and they're trying to do it lying on their bed

(Senior Management)

What works

- In general, homework is not compulsory in primary and resources are available to take home if required.
- Many staff realise that pupils might not have access to ICT and so try and set homework that reflects this.

Issues and concerns

- Young people don't always have access to the ICT needed for homework in secondary schools.
- Accessing ICT outwith their home takes extra planning and is dependent on accessibility (e.g. library opening hours).
- There is often inconsistency around homework policy between teachers and between departments.

Things to consider

Schools

- Ensure all children and young people have the resources needed to complete homework (e.g. ICT, craft materials or a homework pack to take home).
- Be mindful of home circumstances: is the environment likely to be suitable? Will they have what they need?
- Consider using available funds for supported study/homework clubs.
- Consider accessibility to libraries both within school and local to pupils.
- Consistency regarding homework policy and practice across both primary and secondary schools.

20:00 ACCESS TO FINANCIAL ENTITLEMENTS AND CRISIS SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES



There's a lot of things you would never know about if you hadn't gone out to their house- like he would never have phoned me and said 'oh, I've got no electricity', it was because I was actually in the house that I realised and was able to put some supports in place for them

(School and Family Development Worker)

What works

- Good relationships between school staff and money-advice and welfare rights services.
- Increasing household income, through ensuring that families are claiming all the financial supports they are entitled to, increases the opportunities that children and young people can access.
- SFDW can carry out initial home visits (e.g. to every child starting the nursery) that can result in the knowledge that further support is required and can be offered.
- Pupil Support Workers, Guidance and other support staff offer a great deal of help in secondary schools.

Issues and concerns

- SFDWs will support families where possible but will often need to refer families on to Welfare Rights services (like CONNECT) for more complex issues. The referral process can result in delays and missed appointments.
- As universal credit is rolled out in Dundee, there is a need for additional training to enable SFDWs and other family link workers to help families, particularly around benefits for people from abroad.

Things to consider

Schools and nurseries

- Offer home visits to children starting nursery with family link worker to find out if the family requires any additional support.
- Consider offering SFDW home visits for families starting primary school.
- In Early Years centres develop good relationships with parents so that they are able to ask for help and support – parents say that it helps to feel welcomed at nursery and on first name basis with staff.
- Provide space for Money Advice services to hold drop-in surgeries for parents.
- Improve communication with parents around help with costs available in the school - e.g. subsidies for trips – as many may be unaware.
- Explore mechanisms which will allow pupils to tell staff when they are finding costs difficult discreetly and without embarrassment.

Dundee City Council

- Promote closer relations between schools and money advice services, including exploring the development of more active referral process, with follow up.
- Provide training opportunities for SFDWs and other school staff on welfare rights- particularly on the changes coming from the roll out of Universal Credit and entitlements for families from abroad.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Dundee City Council should:

- Conduct and act on poverty impact assessments when allocating resources within education services and when making decisions on policies which have cost implications for families (e.g. free meals and financial support for uniform, transport and trips) with the aim of removing financial barriers to participation.
- Understand and act on the reasons behind non-uptake of financial entitlements (e.g. free breakfast and lunch and clothing grants).
- Further promote and enhance all financial entitlements (e.g. FSM, SCG, EMA) available to families to maximise uptake and reduce school costs.
- Work with school leaders to ensure that all school improvement plans are developed to take account of child poverty and the need to remove cost barriers for all children in their schools.
- Ensure all staff are able to access CoSD training.
- Ensure that removing school costs is a key focus for Local Learning Partnerships.
- Explore the potential for schools to link with financial inclusion services to support low income families with income maximisation, including more active referral mechanisms.
- Bring key stakeholders (e.g. Education, Tayside Contracts, Active Schools, Community Learning and Development) together to reflect on and implement the recommendations and 'things to consider' contained in this report.
- Ensure regular CoSD input on in-service days.
- Commit to addressing citywide issues and concerns as identified in this report (e.g. breakfast club and P7 residential).
- Develop and disseminate CoSD guidance to all schools and staff.
- Set up and support opportunities for good practice sharing. Support schools to use the learning and resources presented in this report and connect and learn from others addressing the cost of the school day.

Schools should:

- Deliver, monitor and evaluate action to address the cost of the school day, either individually or in clusters, using the 'things to consider' presented in this report and taking into account children and young people's recommendations.
- Ensure that all staff are fully aware of the nature, causes, extent and impact of poverty both nationally, locally and within the school.
- Drawing on the 'things to consider' presented in this report, develop school action plans based on consultation with the school community.
- Use available data to understand deprivation related patterns in children's uptake of opportunities (e.g. FSM uptake and participation in extra-curricular activities).
- Plan all teaching, events and activities with affordability, accessibility and the needs of children and young people from low income households in mind.
- Effectively and regularly promote financial entitlements to parents throughout the school year at events like parents evenings and other parental engagement opportunities.
- Wherever possible remove, and at the very least minimise, charging for all school related activities. Where additional charges remain in place, establish discreet, pre-emptive systems for providing financial assistance to avoid singling out or embarrassing children or young people.
- Ensure that there is consistent practice throughout the school in dealing with issues which could be related to low income and poverty (e.g. lending resources, providing subsidies) with an awareness that children and families may hide or not disclose their financial circumstances.
- Ensure effective and sensitive communication between staff where children and young people experience difficulties in school that are related to low income and poverty.
- Explicitly name and discuss poverty with children both to raise awareness and to deal with poverty-related stigma. Engage children and young people in helping to destigmatise poverty in the school.
- Access appropriate local, national and European grant making bodies to further increase participation.

