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eis

FACE UP TO  
**CHILD**  
POVERTY



## Help children to reach their potential

“The experience of poverty and the impact of poverty invade every aspect of a young person’s life and cannot be left at the classroom door.

Focused pupils and students are more likely to learn and are also easier to teach. The life of a learner beyond the classroom can have a profound effect on a learner’s ability to focus on the work at hand. Being freed of other challenges and enjoying a degree of stability and security in and out of the classroom, increases everyone’s potential to do well.

The EIS, in common with a wide range of other Scottish civic institutions, has concluded that the Westminster Government’s welfare reform measures, in particular, will make living in poverty an even more challenging experience than it already is. This is why we have felt it necessary to update our advice to members.

Though we are well into the second decade of the 21st century, members will note that this updated advice includes for the first time a section on hunger. Hunger has always been an issue; however it is moving from the exceptional to the more commonplace. Others out with the profession, particularly those who claim that austerity, whether full-blown or ‘lite’, is an economic necessity, should take note of this as well.”

Bill Ramsay, Equality Committee Convener

“The key drivers of rising child poverty are cuts to family benefits, low pay and lack of secure employment but teachers can make a real difference to how that poverty impacts on children and young people. Taking time to understand the barriers that pupils from low income families face at school and taking action to remove those barriers as far as possible can make a real difference - reducing pressure on hard pressed families and helping ensure all our young people get the full value of what Scotland’s schools and colleges have to offer.”

John Dickie, Child Poverty Action Group, Scotland



# Poverty in Education

Child poverty in Scotland is an area of increasing concern. In this document, we consider some of the causes, detail some of the problems that arise in classrooms as a consequence of poverty, and advise members of possible steps they may wish to take when they become aware of issues that impact on the experiences of children and young people in school.

## Child Poverty in Scotland

A combination of high living costs, the low wage economy and, crucially, changes to the welfare system introduced by the Westminster government, has resulted in growing income inequality in Scotland for the first time in 20 years.

Among those most severely affected by this deleterious economic combination are the children and young people that we teach. Currently 222,000 children in Scotland are in poverty - more than 1 in 5, (i) with the ratio increasing to more than 1 in 3 in several parts of Scotland (ii). Within five years, if the current austerity agenda is maintained, the number of children living in poverty will have increased by almost 50% to 322,000 (iii).

Not only is the incidence of poverty increasing, the nature of poverty is changing. Low wages mean that more than half (59%) of children living in poverty are within families in which

at least one adult is employed (iv). Scotland has seen a 400% increase in the use of food-banks within the past year and organisers report that a significant proportion of their clients are in work (v).

Besides what is known as ‘low-income poverty’, changes to the benefits system and the system of benefit sanctioning (complete withdrawal of income as a penalty for failure to comply with the conditions attached to receipt of benefits) have resulted in the growing incidence of ‘no-income poverty’. Charities such as Barnardo’s Scotland are reporting that their caseworkers are regularly finding families with literally no food in the house, this having been the case for days at a time, as a consequence of suspension of their benefits.

It should be borne in mind that poverty and hunger are not confined to children and young people living in areas of high deprivation or within families known to be struggling financially. Children, young people and their families who often may not appear to be struggling financially or to keep themselves fed, are frequently

seeking to hide the reality of their circumstances to others out of embarrassment or fear of unwanted service intervention.

Clearly, the current socio-economic context in Scotland has significant implications for the classroom and the wider school setting. While it is understood that education is not the panacea to poverty, and that teachers and lecturers cannot be expected to banish its effects from the lives of their pupils and students, education policy and practice must address it.

This document contains some advice that EIS members may wish to consider in relation to poverty and how it affects a child’s day-to-day experience of school and their educational achievements in both the short and long term. Included within the advice are practical examples provided by members of the Equality Committee of how schools and colleges are responding with ‘poverty proofing’ measures to try to mitigate the impact of low income on the education of their pupils and students.

(i) Child Poverty Action Group (ii) Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP), Loughborough University (iii) Institute of Fiscal Studies (iv) Scottish Government, Poverty Statistics Summary Briefing, December 2014 (v) Trussel Trust

# Hunger

For the first time since the Second World War, the Red Cross has been involved in the distribution of food aid within the UK, including in Scotland, with children and young people being among the recipients of this and food-aid from other charity providers.

While the universal provision of free school meals for P1 to P3 is a welcome introduction, for many children this will be their only full meal during a week day. For P4-S6, free meal entitlement continues to be means-tested. Between free school lunches many children and young people who receive them will be underfed, with the problem being particularly acute at

## Advice to Members

EIS members are advised to take these issues into account in observing any such signs among their pupils or students, and to act with sensitivity in accordance with established school/college protocols for responding to the needs of children and young people, making a referral to pupil support staff and/or senior management, for example.

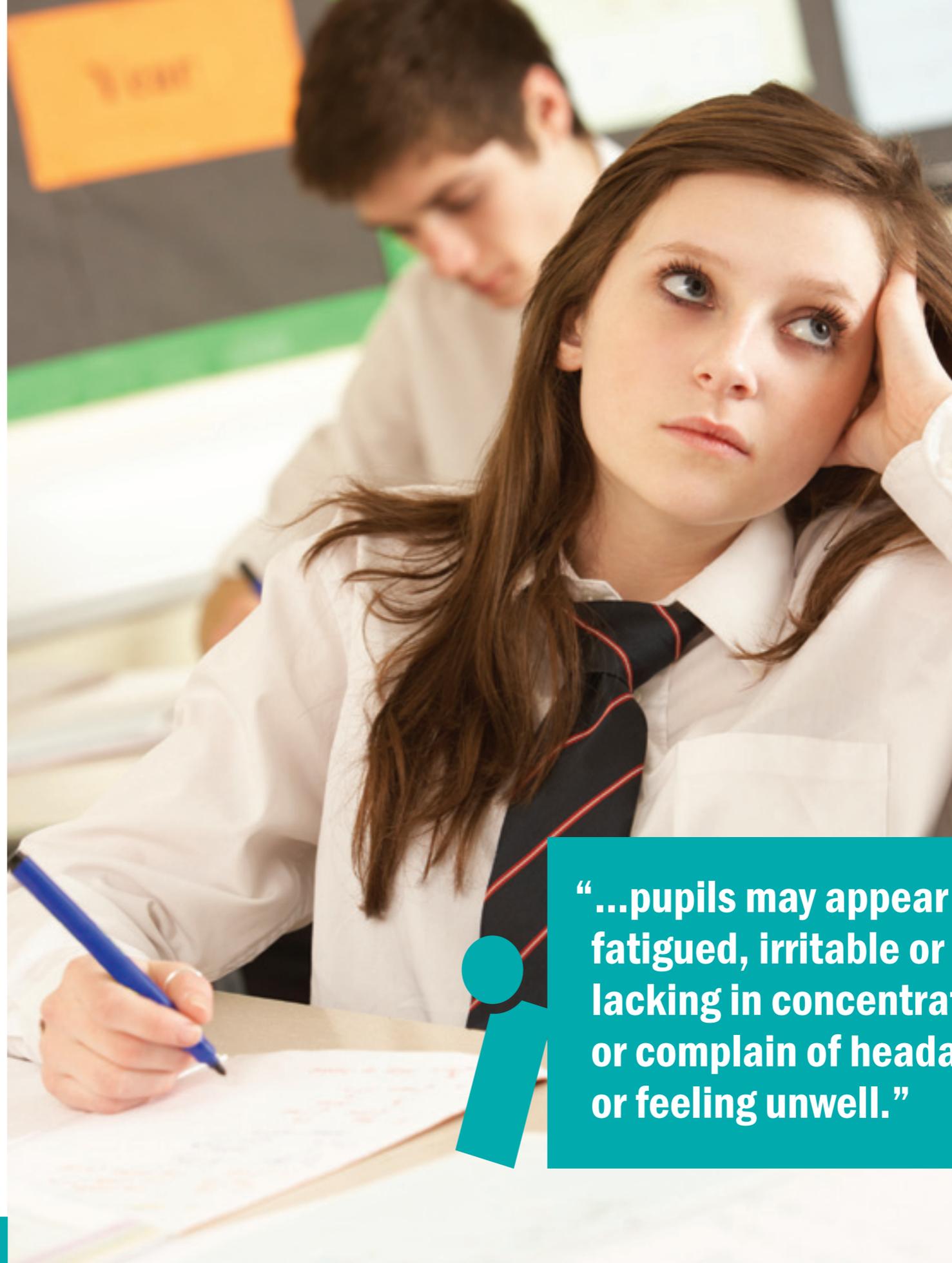
In the event that there has been no significant discussion within an education establishment of the possibility of hunger being experienced by pupils/students and of how staff should respond, EIS members within that establishment are advised to raise the issue with the senior management team as a matter of priority, with a view to agreeing a whole-school/college approach.

weekends and during school holiday periods. For many who are not covered at all by free meal entitlement, hunger may be ever-present.

The effect of this may manifest itself in the classroom in a number of ways: pupils may appear pale, fatigued, irritable or lacking in concentration, or complain of headaches or feeling unwell. While there can be other reasons underlying such signs, for a growing number of children and young people in our schools and colleges today, the reason will be hunger. In effect, their ability to learn is being seriously impeded, and their health and wellbeing undermined, by lack of nutrition.

## Poverty Proofing

- Availability of whole school advice on how to make a referral when hunger is identified by a member of staff as a concern
- Ensuring that children who may be at risk of hunger are included within breakfast clubs
- Families (or individuals in the case of college students) being advised of or referred to, outside agencies that can offer support in the form of food-aid or advice on matters such as income maximisation
- Making information about such provision available to all students, e.g via school noticeboards, websites or PSHE lessons. This may reduce stigma and increase uptake.



**“We are seeing a huge rise in the number of young people coming in to school without having had a proper breakfast. In Glasgow, one child in two is now meeting at least one of the criteria that indicate they are living in poverty. Half of all the children in our largest city – that is why we must act.”**

Susan Quinn  
Education Committee Convener

**“...pupils may appear pale, fatigued, irritable or lacking in concentration, or complain of headaches or feeling unwell.”**

# School Uniform

Policy on uniform varies from school to school, as does opinion more widely on the merits of uniform. One argument often cited in support of school policy which insists on the wearing of uniform is that it eradicates obvious differences between children and young people arising from socio-economic inequalities, in terms of their outward appearances. In some schools, therefore, uniform is seen as a means of mitigating some of the effects of poverty for children and young people who experience it.

There are complexities to the issue, however. School uniform can be costly, and disproportionately so for families struggling on low incomes. While clothing grants are available to some families for the purchase of school uniform, these do not always sufficiently cover the cost of uniform expenses throughout the year. Children and young people grow out of shoes and clothes, sometimes within months, leaving parents with the burden

of the additional cost of replacement items. Sometimes, and particularly in the current socio-economic context, families are simply unable to purchase replacement items in the middle of the school year, meaning that children and young people have no option but to come to school wearing alternative items of clothing and/or footwear.

Furthermore, some families living on low incomes fall just below the threshold of entitlement to clothing grants and have to meet the full cost of school uniforms themselves, often for more than one child at a time. Again, for many families living in low-income poverty, the family budget just cannot stretch to the purchase of additional items of school clothing to allow for mid-week changes in the event that an item of clothing requires to be washed. Furthermore, it should be remembered that parents within low-income families are often required to work long hours and at evenings and weekends, often

in two or three jobs, to make ends meet. Time to do laundry of school uniform between the end of one school day and the beginning of the next is not always available due to demanding shift patterns. A further issue is the cost of fuel which is prohibitive for many families. In some households, gas and electricity for cooking, heating and powering appliances is unaffordable, making regular washing and drying of clothes problematic, if not impossible in some cases. The problem may be particularly acute for families, including asylum seekers, who are living in temporary accommodation.

As a consequence of difficulties such as these, children and young people from families on low incomes will be forced to come to school, at times, not wearing school uniform as outlined in the school policy, and, in trying to avoid humiliation, may not always wish to give the real reason for this.

## Advice to Members

EIS members are advised to be mindful of these issues and, again, to raise the matter with the senior management of the school in order that due consideration is given to it in the application or revision of uniform policy, as well as the operation of reward systems which take adherence to school uniform policy into account

Consideration should also be given to the financial cost to families of adherence to the school's uniform code, especially in cases where the school recommends a particular uniform supplier. Often such suppliers are more expensive to purchase from than high street stores and supermarkets. In encouraging parents to buy from these more expensive suppliers, schools may be causing families, albeit inadvertently, even greater financial hardship.

## Poverty Proofing

- Calculating the total cost of the required school uniform and weighing this against the amount made available to families through clothing grants
- Considering ways in which uniform could be made less expensive for all families
- Considering appropriate responses to breaches of the uniform code that are likely to be linked to a child living in poverty
- Setting up "swap shops" and other such systems can help, handled with tact - one approach may be to promote these as a form of environmentalism, thus challenging the stigma of second-hand clothing
- Recycling of lost property/items of uniform that have been outgrown/uniform no longer needed by P7s or Secondary school leavers.



**“One parent families with more than one child are trying to afford more than one change of shirt or top. Teachers anonymously provide these.”**

Secondary Teacher, Falkirk

# Equipment and Resources

In light of the fact that thousands of families in Scotland are currently living in poverty, often unable to ensure that basic needs in relation to food, fuel and clothing are met, it is not surprising that many children and young people will be solely reliant on the school/college for the provision of equipment and resources. Colouring pencils, paper, books, smart phones and tablets are items to which many family budgets simply cannot extend.

## Advice to Members

It should never be assumed that all families can afford to buy even the most basic of resources such as pens and pencils. In the event that children and young people are unable to bring equipment and resources from home or to access them at home, they should be treated with sensitivity and steps taken to fill the gaps where possible, or where not, to ensure that activities are designed such that no learner is excluded as a consequence of lack of suitable equipment/resources.

EIS members should seek to raise the matter of supply of equipment and resources within departmental or establishment policy wherever they feel it necessary in light of the above advice.

## Poverty Proofing

- Making classroom resources available on a daily basis for all children and young people to use
- Activities being designed to involve resources that all pupils/students can access
- Non-punitive responses when children and young people come to class without the necessary resources as a possible consequence of their poverty.

**“...smart phones and tablets are items to which many family budgets simply cannot extend.”**



**“Children are coming to school without the correct items for activities such as P.E. e.g. no gym shoes, shorts. This became even more noticeable as I have been delivering P.E. as NCCT for P1 to P7. I keep my own supply of lost, outgrown items which I happily allow children to share.”**

**Primary Teacher**  
Aberdeen City

# Homework and Out of School Learning

As with access to equipment and resources, the effects of poverty can weigh heavily on the ability of a pupil/student to complete homework and other less traditional out of school learning activities. Careful consideration of any barriers to participation should be given by EIS members when setting/encouraging independent out of school learning in its various forms: traditional homework tasks, research, library visits, cultural activities, even personal reading.

For example, a craft activity that requires children to make an object that relates to in-class learning may require paper, scissors, glue, colouring pens - none of which a family living in poverty is likely to have in great supply, if at all. Another example may be learning that is dependent on a visit to a library or a park. For some children/young people this may incur travel costs which cannot be met by the meagre family budget. Even what on the face of it is a simple piece of internet

research will be problematic for many families living on or below the breadline; many pupils/students do not have access to a computer at home or, if they do, access to the internet cannot be funded by the family's income.

## Advice to Members

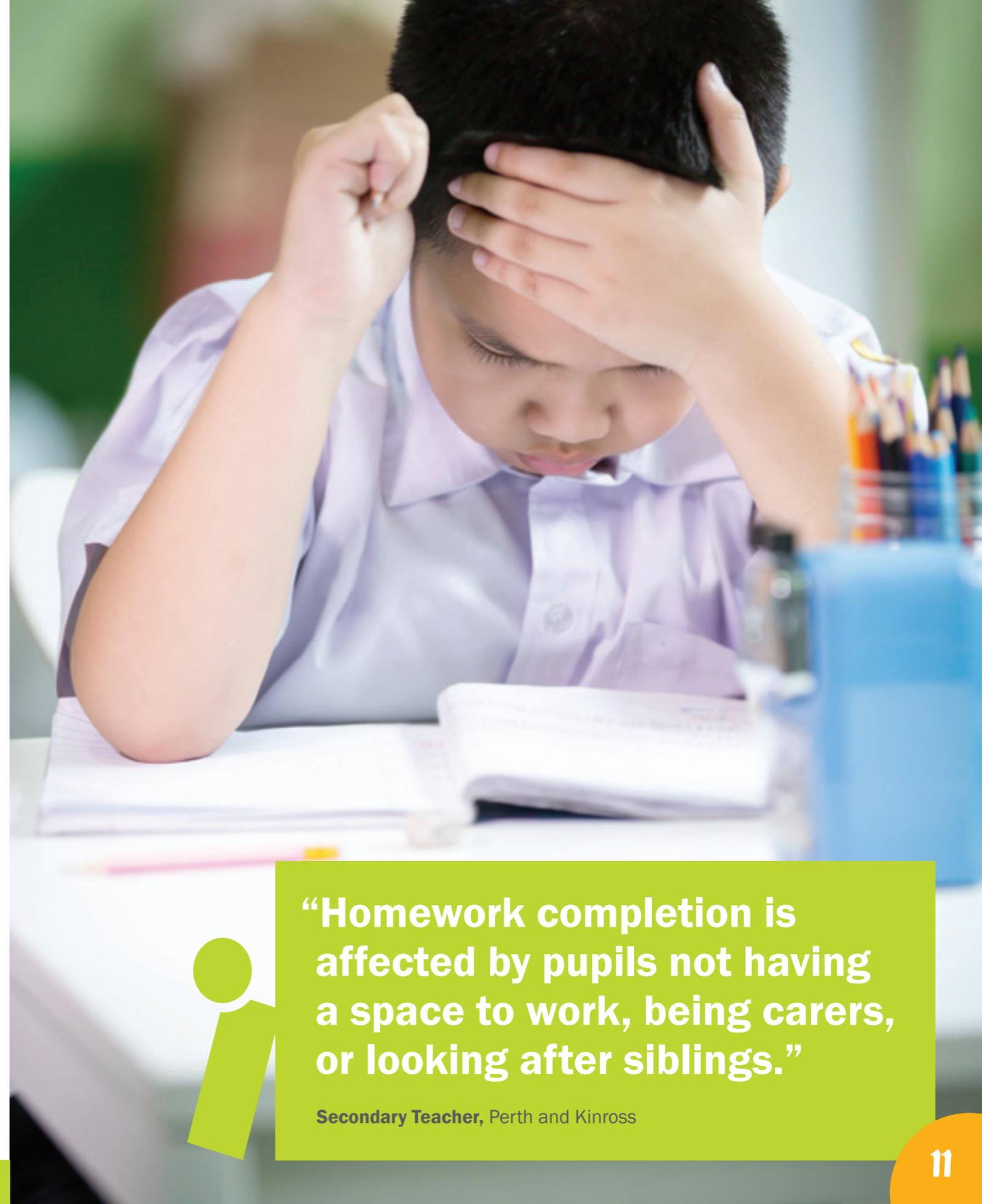
As far as possible, EIS members should ensure that homework and out of school learning activities are fully inclusive and do not have an associated cost.

Besides this, even where there is no immediate financial impediment to a pupil's/student's engagement with homework and out of school learning, it should be borne in mind what has been stated previously regarding the reality of many parents' struggle with in-work poverty and the often long and erratic working hours associated with this. As a consequence, younger children, in seeking support to complete homework activities, may not have adequate access to their parents' time to enable them to do this; older children and young people may be acting as carers of young siblings while parents are at work in the evenings or at weekends, this placing additional and unavoidable demands on their time at the cost of time to devote to their own homework activities.

EIS members are advised to bear these factors in mind when designing out of school learning activities, when giving feedback on what pupils/students have/have not done at home and when operating systems of reward which take homework and out of school learning into account.

## Poverty Proofing

- Providing opportunities to complete extra out-of-class activities in school
- Making internet/library access available to all pupils within the school
- Offering a range of homework activities, allowing pupils/students to opt in to those that they can fully access
- Avoidance of planning class lessons for which pupil participation is wholly dependent on the completion of homework/out of school learning activities
- Making packs of relevant materials and resources, including stationery, available for pupils to pick up
- Providing 'active bags' with maths and language games for pupils to play at home, this is a less stressful option for both pupils and parents
- Reviewing homework policy to ensure relevance and necessity of tasks and giving consideration to the ability of all pupils to participate.



**“Homework completion is affected by pupils not having a space to work, being carers, or looking after siblings.”**

Secondary Teacher, Perth and Kinross

# School Trips

Costs associated with school trips are a further area of anxiety for families living on low incomes. Parents who are under pressure to manage meagre finances sufficiently to cover the costs of necessities have little or nothing to spare to pay for school outings.

Even when the cost of a school trip is relatively low - only a few pounds - many families are unable to make the weekly income stretch to this, particularly at short notice.

## Advice to Members

Where there has been no whole-school discussion of the issue of poverty in relation to school trips, EIS members should raise it with the management team of the school/college with a view to updating existing policy to cover the planning, payment and running of outings.

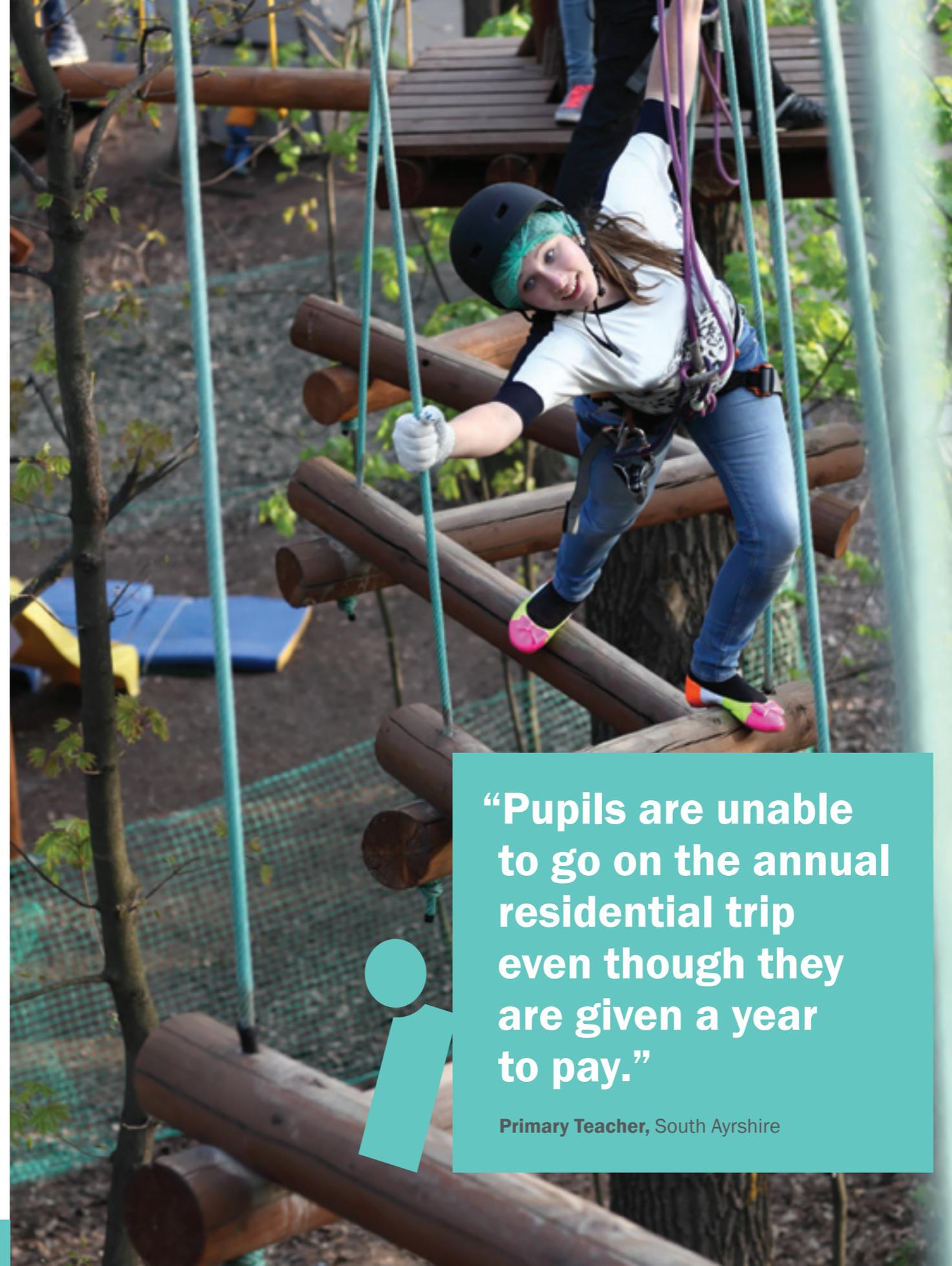
In circumstances where children/young people from low-income families are participating in outings, especially those which may involve lengthy travel and extended periods away from home, consideration should be given to the fact that these pupils/students may not have enough money to purchase food. While many will be entitled to free school lunches, those from P4-S6 are at risk of feeling stigmatised and may reject the free meal on offer; others who take the free packed lunch may need to eat again before returning home in the event of the trip spanning a whole day or more.

Families with more than one child at school may be being asked to pay for multiple outings at a time, either causing real financial hardship to the family or resulting in the non-participation of the pupil(s)/ student(s) in the outing(s).

Often children and young people from poor families will feign lack of interest in the trip on offer simply because they know that their parent(s)/carer(s) will struggle to or be unable to afford the cost so do not even wish to ask at home for the money.

## Poverty Proofing

- Retaining a special fund to cover the cost of school trips for pupils whose families cannot afford to pay
- Ensuring that plenty of advance notice is given to parents/carers of school trips in order that families can plan for the associated cost
- Fundraising to cover the cost of school trips
- Contacting local charities that may be able to help
- Placing limits on spending money for all pupils and provision of it from a school fund to those who would otherwise not be able to afford to have it
- Agreeing a policy on school trips which ensures that they are fully inclusive of all pupils/students.



**“Pupils are unable to go on the annual residential trip even though they are given a year to pay.”**

**Primary Teacher, South Ayrshire**

**“We are facing another five years of austerity and our pupils are first in the firing line. I work in a very mixed comprehensive and an area of extreme concern is for the parents who are not part of the system e.g. families with one or two working parents who don’t qualify for benefits. I recently ran a theatre trip and of the 50 pupils I took, six could not afford the £8 ticket (not including the pupils we knew would have to be subsidised). None of these pupils were your typical “deprived” pupil. All were high achieving, Higher candidates who were mortified at the thought of admitting that £8 was a big deal to their families. There must be thousands slipping through the net.”**

**Secondary Teacher  
Glasgow**

# Charity and Fundraising Activities

No assumption should be made that all children and young people can afford to make even small donations to well intentioned charity initiatives organised by the school or college. The same issues are pertinent here as in the previous section: many families simply do not have any additional funds to spare; some families have no funds at all when they are subject to benefit sanctions.

## Advice to Members

The growing financial struggles of families should be borne in mind when requests are being made of children/students in the classroom or when letters are being sent home to parents/carers, requesting their support in charity events. In the current socio-economic climate, many of the families who may be asked to donate to charity will themselves be in receipt of charity from food banks and other organisations. This situation, therefore, requires additional sensitivity on the part of schools/colleges in terms of planning, communication, organisation and, where applicable, systems of reward, that relate to charity and fundraising events.

Again, in establishments in which there has been no whole-school discussion of children's and young people's experiences of poverty and how this might impact on their participation in fundraising events, EIS members should raise the matter with the management team within the school/college.

## Poverty Proofing

- Consideration is given to the number of charity/fundraising activities that the school is involved in per year
- Activities are designed to create a number of roles offering a range of ways in which pupils/students can contribute - making things, designing publicity - and this being recognised and valued equally to bringing money from home
- Encouraging students to participate in bag packing at supermarkets, car washing, etc. These activities offer benefits in themselves and are an alternative to simply asking for donations.



“...many of the families who may be asked to donate to charity will themselves be in receipt of charity from food banks and other organisations.”

“Children from poorer families dread non uniform days due to lack of good casual clothing knowing their peers will have this.”

Secondary Teacher, Falkirk

# Recommended Action by EIS Members

## 1. Use

Use this guidance as the basis of discussion on the issue of child poverty and education at EIS branch level.

## 2. Raise

Raise any emerging issues with the school/college management team.

## 3. Seek

Seek review of current school/college policies where required in light of the advice contained within this document.

## 4. Consult

Consult with the local EIS Equality Rep and/or the Local Association Secretary or FE Branch Rep in the event that additional advice/support is needed.

## 5. Continue

Continue to monitor school policies and their potential to impact on children and young people living in poverty.

## 6. Share

Share any examples of strongly inclusive practice which takes account of child poverty with the EIS Equality Department.

**email:** [equality@eis.org.uk](mailto:equality@eis.org.uk)



“It is a sad reflection on the way in which our society is evolving that teachers and other education practitioners have to factor in an understanding of poverty when designing and managing the school day. However, child poverty is a reality in contemporary Scotland and it is incumbent on EIS members (and indeed everyone who works to improve children’s lives) to consider the impact of child poverty on their practice. For the avoidance of doubt, child poverty is present in each of Scotland’s 32 local authorities and, most likely, is present in each and every State school. Certainly, it will be more visible and more prevalent in those schools serving pupils from deprived neighbourhoods, but it will also be found in schools serving more affluent areas; tackling poverty presents different challenges across schools, but it is important to address it wherever it is found. For some years, the EIS has taken a strong stand against child poverty in Scotland. The EIS is to be commended in producing this excellent guide, which highlights the various ways in which child poverty impacts on the classroom in contemporary Scotland and offers clear practical guidance on how best to tackle it.”

**Dr John McKendrick**  
Glasgow School for Business and Society  
Glasgow Caledonian University

Schools and colleges cannot eradicate the poverty which exists in our society; nor can they fully mitigate the impact that poverty has on our young people. Those in public life who seek to highlight the inequalities created by poverty, would do well to understand that if we wish to end the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment, we need to address the existence of poverty itself. Having said that, however, we should recognise that schools, colleges and teaching professionals, can and do make a difference in the lives of individuals, of groups of children, and even on whole cohorts which is why the daily interaction in our classrooms is so important and indeed powerful. Teachers and lecturers care deeply about the children in front of us and we all wish to make that difference.



**Larry Flanagan**  
EIS General Secretary

*Larry Flanagan*



**Thank you for the efforts you make, on a daily basis, to support our children and young people.**

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