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FACE UP TO **CHILD** POVERTY

Survey

Session 2016/17





EIS Child Poverty Survey 2016

Background

Launched during Challenge Poverty Week in October and running until December 2016, the findings of this latest survey of EIS members' perceptions of how poverty arising from cuts to social security benefits, poor wages and insecurity of employment, is impacting in the classroom, make sobering reading.

Findings

Results indicate that poverty and its related socio-economic disadvantage continue to mar the school experiences of far too many of our children and young people.

Almost **60%** of respondents, from across 31 Local Associations, indicated that they had seen an increase in the number of children attending their schools who are experiencing poverty.

In relation to food, nutrition and hunger, more than **50%**, of those who took part in the survey reported an increase in the number of children coming to school without play-pieces, snacks or money for the tuck-shop, while **more than 10%** highlighted that a greater number of families were requesting local foodbank referrals.

Other health issues were also flagged up. **More than three quarters** of those who engaged with the survey observed increased signs of poverty-related mental ill health, and **more than half**, an increase in the number of children appearing with other physical symptoms such as headaches, lethargy and unhealthy pallor, which they attributed to the effects of poverty.

Equipment and access to resources were regarded as a challenge for families struggling on low income, also. **72%** of those who completed the survey reported an

increase in the number of children coming to school without items such as stationery, school-bags and PE equipment. **46%** of members replying said that they had seen increased numbers of pupils unable to complete homework that required ICT access at home.

In terms of clothing, **two thirds** indicated greater frequency of pupils coming to school inappropriately dressed for weather conditions, while **more than 35%** reported increased incidence of children not wearing uniform in schools where it is the norm to do so.

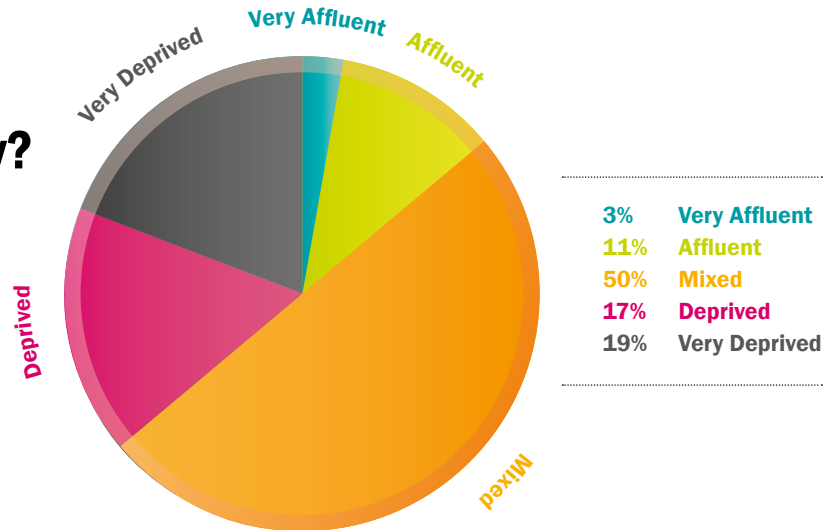
Survey results also demonstrate the many efforts being made by schools and individual teachers in a personal capacity to mitigate the impact of poverty on the learning and wider school experience of children and young affected. **Almost half** of the survey respondents indicated that their schools had introduced or adapted practices to support children and families experiencing poverty.

Meanwhile **more than half** of the teachers who completed the survey - and double the proportion since the last time members were surveyed - indicated that they or their colleagues had personally introduced practices to help children and families living in poverty.

Who replied to the survey?

More than 90% of responders were teachers in Primary or Secondary.

50% said that their schools were in mixed catchment areas, with 36% indicating that their schools were in areas of deprivation or high deprivation.



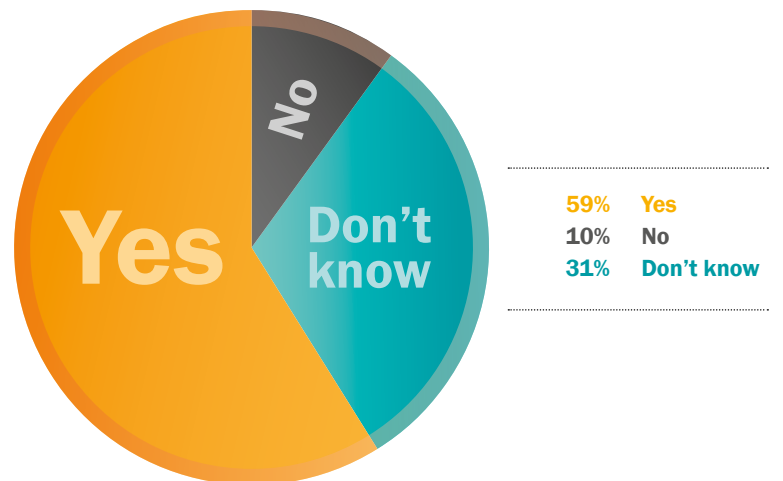
What were members' perceptions of the incidence of poverty in their school communities?

We asked:

Do you think the number of children who live in poverty, and who attend your educational establishment, has increased?

Key Findings

59% of respondents indicated that they had seen an increase in the number of children attending their schools who are experiencing poverty. This is consistent with the findings of the Scottish Government's Annual Report on the Child Poverty Strategy which highlights that both relative and absolute child poverty levels have risen in Scotland since the last annual report was published.





What were the perceptions with regards to food, hunger and nutrition?

We asked:

Have you seen an increase in any of the following in your school that you think is attributable to poverty?

	YES	
Children older than P1-3 taking free school meals	20%	
Children coming to school with no / little food, snacks or money for tuckshop	53%	
Children demanding / stealing food from others	16%	
Attendance at breakfast clubs	24%	
Parents / Guardians requesting foodbank referral	11%	
Families not accessing free school meal entitlement	18%	
No	8%	
Don't know	28%	
Non applicable	3%	

Key Findings

In relation to food, nutrition and hunger, more than **50%**, of those who took part in the survey reported an increase in the number of children coming to school without play-pieces, snacks or money for the tuck-shop, while **almost a quarter** signalled increased attendance at breakfast clubs and **more than 10%** highlighted that a greater number of families were requesting local foodbank referrals.

These figures clearly highlight that poverty is causing hunger both at home and at school for a growing number of children and young people in Scotland.

However more than **11%** of respondents reported seeing families who were entitled to access free school meals, not doing so. This points to issues of stigma among both parents and children, and to lack of understanding of how to access entitlements.

Survey comments:

Children are hungry and needing fed before learning.

Parents / children (are) saying they don't have enough money for ... food at Christmas.

Snacks that are bought are often the expensive single packets rather than something from a multipack as parents live day to day and do not have transport to large supermarkets so rely on local corner shops.



What were members' perceptions of the impact of poverty on health and wellbeing?

We asked:

Have you seen an increase in any of the following in your school that you think is attributable to poverty?

	YES	
Signs of mental ill health (e.g. anxiety, stress, low mood, extremes of mood, aggression)	77%	
Signs of physical ill health (e.g. headaches, lethargy, unhealthy pallor)	56%	
Signs of weight loss or significant weight gain	29%	
Struggle to maintain standards of personal appearance and hygiene	61%	

Key Findings

An alarming number of respondents - **more than three quarters** - perceive that poverty is impacting negatively on children's and young people's mental health.

More than half observed signs of what they judged to be poverty-related physical ill-health among pupils.

By implication, their view is that poor nutrition, living in cold, damp conditions, and the stress and anxiety that characterises the lives of families on low and very low income, undermines the physical and mental wellbeing of many children.

Survey comments:

Pupils comment that they like school as it is warmer than their home.

A number of families are facing eviction from their homes.

Many families who live in private lets are being made homeless and being given very short notice.



And the impact on the experience of school?

We asked:

Have you seen an increase in any of the following in your school that you think is attributable to poverty?

	YES	
Children with unexplained absences from school	55%	
Children unable to concentrate in class	75%	
Children with behaviour issues / multiple support needs	85%	
Increased stigmatisation / bullying or marginalisation of children who are living in poverty	15%	

Key Findings

Teachers reported a direct impact on children's and young people's behaviour in the classroom: **three quarters** indicated that they observed detriment to children's concentration, while **85%** had seen increased numbers of children with behaviour and other support needs that could be a consequence of living in poverty.





What were members seeing in terms of the impact of poverty on school clothing and equipment?

We asked:

Have you seen an increase in any of the following in your school that you think is attributable to poverty?

	YES	
Children coming to school without equipment (stationery, books, bags, PE equipment, etc.)	72%	
Children stealing items such as stationery and toys	18%	
Children not being able to complete homework due to lack of access to IT at home	46%	
Children not wearing school uniform (where it is the norm)	36%	
Children inappropriately dressed for weather conditions	67%	

Key Findings

Equipment and access to resources were regarded by members as a challenge for families struggling on low income, also.

Almost three quarters of those who completed the survey reported an increase in the number of children coming to school without items such as stationery, school-bags and PE equipment.

46% of members said that they had seen increased numbers of pupils unable to complete homework that required ICT access at home.

This clearly has implications for schools in terms of the affordability of the equipment and resources that they ask families to provide for pupils, and raises questions about the extent to which schools can provide the equipment and resources necessary for all pupils to participate fully in all activities.

In terms of clothing, **two thirds** of respondents indicated greater frequency of pupils coming to school inappropriately dressed for weather conditions, while **36%** reported increased incidence of children not wearing uniform in schools where it is the norm to do so.

This highlights clearly that general clothing, and on top of that, school clothing costs, are a challenge for families on low income to meet. The EIS continues to stress the need for school clothing policies to be affordable for all, for local authorities to ensure that clothing grants are set to reflect the real costs of school clothing, and for families to be supported to access their entitlements to clothing grants.

Survey comments:

Children are not coming to school because they have grown out of uniform and parents don't have money to buy new shoes.

I am unable to send a homework task that requires any form of artwork or construction due to lack of materials. A child asked me what they could draw a poster on as they had no paper. Notes from parents are written on scraps of envelopes.










What were the reported signs that parents are struggling financially?

We asked:

Have you seen an increase in any of the following in your school that you think is attributable to poverty?

	YES	
Parents / guardians struggling to afford transport of pupils to school	16%	
Parents / guardians accumulating debts to the school	25%	
Parental disclosure of financial issues to school staff (redundancy, debt, financial hardship)	23%	
Parents / guardians unable to afford cost of school trips	47%	
Parents / guardians unable to afford to contribute to fundraising activities	42%	

Key Findings

It is clear from members’ responses that a growing number of families are facing financial pressures and hardship. A quarter of responses indicated that parents and guardians are informing school staff of their financial difficulties.

Some of the unexplained absences highlighted earlier in the survey results are likely to be down to the fact that some parents cannot afford the cost of daily return bus fares for their children’s school journey.

Over a fifth of respondents indicated that parents are struggling to pay money owed to the school, for example, for trips and the cost of participation in some practical subjects in Secondary. This is underlined by the responses of **almost half** of members who indicated that they see an increased number of parents and guardians unable to afford school trips. Similar struggles have been observed in relation to parents’ ability to contribute to fundraising efforts.

Survey comments:

Parents are unable to come into school to discuss pupils’ progress due to working extra hours or taking on a second/third job.

The payment of £1.00 to non-uniform days- the number of children embarrassed by not having a pound.

An increasing number of pupils are taking part time jobs while at school and accepting more working hours and are too tired to attend and/or not completing homework for assessments and their exams.

Parents are opting out of school photos. Not contributing to the snack fund in the nursery.



What are schools doing in response to rising levels of child poverty?

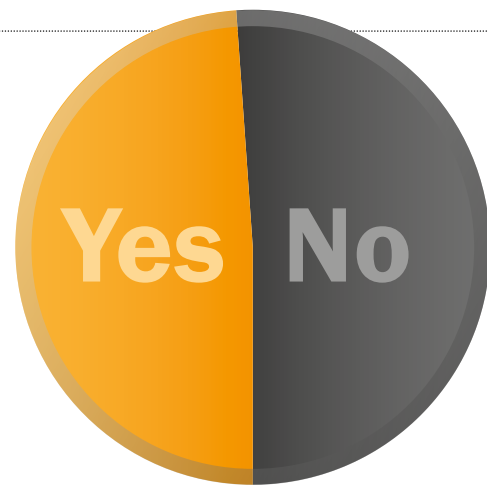


We asked:

Has your school recently introduced or adapted practices to support children and families experiencing poverty?

Key Findings

Almost half of the survey respondents indicated that further additional measures have been taken in their schools in the past year to counteract the effects of poverty on children's and young people's school experiences. A wide range of approaches have been adopted, indicating the varied efforts that schools are making to try to minimise the barriers to learning and participation in wider school life for children and young people whose families are struggling on low incomes.



Survey comments:

I raised the EIS Face Up to Child Poverty report at a teachers' meeting and we tried to ensure that we were not repeatedly asking for money for charity days. We are also mindful of the impact that we may be having on selling things at whole school events (such as the Christmas church service) as this may be putting people off attending events in school.

A senior community liaison person has been appointed to our school for over a year and is making super links with hard to reach parents and offering valuable support for them and their children. Unfortunately, we only have her for a limited period, which is a terrible shame as most of the work she has started will be almost impossible to continue with one less member of staff. We have also set up a nurture group and we are beginning to see an impact on the individuals with whom we work. Again this will not be continued once the CLP leaves due to shortage of staff.

Enrolment / induction process is now in place to ensure families have the necessary information / access to support when / if required. We ensure children are registered with GPs and dentists on enrolment. I am the link person.

Shirts / ties are provided for some pupils. Free calculator / rules / maths kit are issued to all first year pupils. Support with completion of free school meals paperwork is provided. There is greater provision of counselling services and partner groups to work with families.

There are lots of food groups. We have breakfast clubs and after school study sessions with food on offer.

We are raising funds for Christmas presents for children and families who are in poverty. There is a drop-in area for children to access clothes and other essentials.

What are teachers doing personally in response to rising child poverty?



We asked:

Have you or teachers at your school, personally introduced practices to support children and families experiencing poverty?

Key Findings

More than half of the teachers who completed the survey - and double the proportion since the last time members were surveyed - indicated that they or their colleagues had personally introduced practices to help children and families living in poverty. Teachers are organising foodbank donations among staff, providing food for children who are coming to school hungry, personally buying items of clothing to give to those who need them and providing pupils with spending money for school trips and school fairs.



Survey comments:

Some of us provide fruit for breakfast when some children are late or have obviously not eaten. It clearly affects their mood, concentration and readiness for learning.

I have personally funded uniform, PE Kit, shoes, gloves, stationery and bags for young people who have none – particularly our recent arrivals from Syria. I regularly buy lunch for pupils who don't have funds.

I have been supporting families with paperwork to do with the new benefits system. There are a number of families who feel ill-equipped to fill out the lengthy forms.

...each time we plan an event we sit down as a staff team to minimise cost to parents. We ask parents to give their time instead of money.

Conclusion

Clearly, these are sobering results which underline the crucial influence of family income on children's engagement and participation in school, and the extent to which children and young people can thrive on the opportunities offered by education.

A priority for any government committed to reducing child poverty and closing the achievement and attainment gap between the most and least affluent in our society, then, has to be income maximisation of the poorest through decent pay, access to good quality public services, affordable housing and restoration of social security to levels that enable acceptable standards of living for all, including the most vulnerable in our society. Much remains to be done in Scotland towards these ends.

The results of the survey are also important to educators. While the comprehensive education system in Scotland cannot unilaterally eradicate poverty, it continues to have an important role in mitigating its effects.

Schools are best able to do this when the education system is properly resourced. That means, at the very least, enough teachers who have ongoing access to high quality professional learning, including inputs on the nature, causes and consequences of poverty. It means increasing teacher numbers to deliver smaller class sizes arranged on the basis of mixed ability for the particular benefit of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. And it means adequate specialist support for learners with additional support needs, including regular and sustained support for learners at all stages who have English as an additional language.

Tackling poverty requires adequate time for pupil support staff to attend to pupils' pastoral care needs; enough time and staffing resources for schools to plan and deliver approaches to enhance links between school and home, crucially supporting vulnerable parents to be involved in their children's learning; allowing maximum time for teachers to engage in meaningful professional reflection and collaboration around improving outcomes for children living in poverty; and the provision of classroom resources and equipment that facilitate learning that has creativity and learner collaboration at the core of it.

Nationally, the EIS continues to lobby around such issues. Locally, the data provided by the survey should inform thinking and discourse on the alignment of all aspects of education policy with social justice principles- from policy on assessment, to access to free music tuition, to addressing cost barriers arising from uniform policy, to adopting a fully inclusive approach to the organisation of school trips. The data also has pertinence for EIS members and the role of teachers in decision-making around the spending of Pupil Equity Fund allocations.

Finally, the Equality Committee is grateful to all those members who took the time to complete the survey. Your responses and comments are invaluable in helping the EIS gain a picture of just how pervasively and perniciously poverty continues to impact in our classrooms, and in shaping the campaigning response.

Further reading and resources can be found by visiting the EIS website.

Visit: www.eis.org.uk/Campaigns/Child_poverty.htm





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