UK COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY
FINAL EVALUATION
SHORT REPORT

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1. Key findings

> **Headline finding**
>
> There was a demonstrable impact of the Cost of the School Day project (CoSD) on the wellbeing of children and families, reductions in the costs of schooling, strengthening of the institutions of schools through new structures and processes, and impact on policy at school, local authority and national levels.

CoSD work in schools

1. Schools, young people and families all commented on the impact of the CoSD project on the wellbeing of children and families. For example, how actions such as reductions in the costs of schooling, changes to breakfast club operation, the organisation of lunchtimes or how free food is distributed to all rather than a few, positively impacted lives.

2. Keeping children and young people at the centre so that staff can hear the children's words is one of the main factors in making change happen in schools. Specific examples from their own children of both positive and negative school practice reported to school staff made a deep impression on them and proved a powerful driver of change.

3. Whilst the in-person audits were preferred to the online version (as highlighted by young people, schools and CPAG practitioners), both on-line and in-person audits produced similar evidence and led to significant changes in school practices.

4. Speaking to a reduced number of young people in online and some in-person audits was still found to be effective in gathering evidence and producing change in schools. Nevertheless, care should be taken to ensure that consultation is comprehensive, inclusive and appropriately represents students.

5. The school audit reports shared similar main themes such as food, uniform, visits, special days and learning resources, but it was the detail specifically relating those themes to the practices of particular schools, with actions specific to the school, that contributed to the likelihood that schools made changes.

6. The strength of actions being taken was supported by: the nature of existing school values; the active support of senior management teams; schools sharing practice with each other; staff training from CPAG; the nature of the report dissemination; working groups in schools; and working with the school council or peer researchers on actions. Through working with CoSD in these ways, schools developed structures and processes that strengthened them as institutions.

7. Ensuring that the audit process was seen as non-judgemental, and as a learning process, was important for schools to engage fully in the change process. Schools found the reports helpful in being able to use them to tell all staff about their values and about the positive action already being taken (especially since some new staff did not always know what was happening).

8. Factors inhibiting change in schools included: the assumption that a process decided externally could not be challenged (eg, food portion sizes, bus fares); pressure on school budgets; the belief that an action was not wanted by a majority of parents; and national pressures on schools such as restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, and curriculum reform processes.

9. Trained peer researchers added immense value to the audit process in secondary schools, being people children could easily identify with. They enabled more children to be listened to and provided a supportive reference group for change in schools. However, training needed to be more helpful in giving note-taking skills and enabling peer-researchers to know how to adapt questions when delivering focus groups.

10. School staff need more training in poverty awareness, including in initial teacher training, since most school staff questioned before the audit process thought that their schools were doing all that was possible to tackle the effects of poverty.

11. There is a disconnect between how approachable schools perceive themselves to be and how comfortable families feel about asking for help. 98 per cent of school staff (from a pre-audit survey of 662 staff from 56 schools) thought that parents could approach them for help but 35 per cent of parents (from a pre-audit survey of 1798 parents across schools) indicated that they were not comfortable with approaching teachers.

CoSD work with local authorities and councils

12. In terms of the longer-term effects of the UK Cost of the School Day project on the work of local authorities and education consortia, there is evidence of a strategic impact ie, they are using the findings to support and influence their poverty strategies and the lobbying of their council leaders as well as national governments. They also intend to share the specific school findings and examples of best practice with all of their schools.

They particularly valued having the qualitative evidence eg, the voice of the children and young people and their families, to present alongside their hard data.

CoSD national development work

13. In Wales, the CoSD project has influenced national policy, teacher development and curriculum development. Without substantial partnership work prior to carrying out any audits in order to understand the context and establish credibility, the project would not have been possible.

14. In England, partnership working and the publication of key research and resources throughout the CoSD project have ensured its continued influence on both policy and practice.

15. Scotland has adopted CoSD as a national policy priority, with the result that LAs and local partner organisation are actively seeking to learn from the findings of the CoSD project. CoSD in Scotland has supported the strategy and policy development locally and nationally, and resulted in a range of resources.

2. Context

Project aims

The UK Cost of the School Day project (CoSD) led by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and based on project partner's Children North East's (CNE) 'Poverty Proofing' model, aimed to cut the costs of school for families in England and Wales and remove stigmatising practices to bring about a fair education for children living in poverty.

Cost of the School Day has become a national policy priority in Scotland with national development work supported by the Scottish government in recent years. The UK CoSD project in Scotland aimed to strengthen and further develop the work in Scotland with LAs and local partner organisations actively seeking to learn from its findings. Alongside working with schools, the CoSD teams worked with government, local authorities, a range of national organisations, bodies and charities in order to shape national policy and practice and extend the findings of the project beyond the individual schools taking part.

Cost of the School Day work is continuing in different forms across England, Scotland, and Wales. This evaluation looks specifically at the UK Cost of the School Day project which was carried out between 2019-2022.

Evaluation

Researchers at the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) at Newcastle University were commissioned to provide an evaluation of the project, led by Liz Todd (Professor of Educational Inclusion), with support from Karen Laing, Ulrike Thomas and Lucy Tiplady. Laura Mazzoli Smith of Durham University also formed part of the team and brought her expertise in Poverty Proofing and qualitative educational research.

The initial evaluation research design adopted a realist approach made up of three key modules incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. The intention was to collate 1) statistical analyses of impact; 2) school case studies; and 3) analyses of intervention processes.

Owing to the Covid 19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions in schools (which additionally impacted on the overall timeframe of the project and the number of schools that could be audited), the evaluation approach had to be necessarily adapted to become one that prioritised a rich in-depth approach using qualitative research methods. This included: desk-based work; online interviewing; observation of the CoSD audits (online and in-person); and, as soon as was possible, in-person visits to case study schools to interview members of the school community eg, pupils, staff (teaching and non-teaching), parents and governors.

The research team concentrated on examining in detail the intervention processes involved in the face-to-face and online models; exploring the challenges and opportunities presenting themselves in the different practice contexts of each UK jurisdiction; and understanding the impacts of participation on children and young people, families, schools and local authorities.

UK Cost of the School Day Project Overview

The UK Cost of the School Day project (CoSD), led by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and run in partnership with Children North East, was launched in England (London; Coventry), Scotland (Moray) and Wales (Rhondda, Cynon and Taff; Neath Port Talbot) and took place between 2019 and 2022. The project built on, and extended, existing Poverty Proofing work being undertaken by Children North East and the existing CoSD project running in Scotland that is funded by the Scottish government as a Scottish Attainment Challenge national programme. The primary funder for this three-year project was The National Lottery Community Fund. The project also received additional funding support from Pears Foundation, Orbit Housing Association, Coventry City Council and the Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Whilst the primary focus of the project was the work that took place in schools, specifically hearing the views of the children and young people and their families in order to create change, the project also involved working with and talking to a range of partners to ensure that the learning would shape national policy and practice, thereby guaranteeing the project's legacy and longer-term impacts.

The CoSD methodology in schools involves:

1) **Pre-audit preparation:** to gather school data and raise general awareness of the audit process with the school community and enable the formation of a CoSD staff and student working group.

2) **The audit and report**: The CPAG team spend two weeks in each school giving all pupils an opportunity to speak mostly in small groups about their experience of the school day, in addition to collating information from staff and parents/carers on school costs and poverty-related stigma. A report is prepared with recommendations for the school as to how to address costs and poverty-related stigma. In secondary schools the audit is assisted by trained young people (peer researchers) from the school. The peer researchers help with the pupil group conversations and in presenting the report.

3) **Post-audit support work**: A range of processes to encourage change including a post-audit training workshop, the support of a school staff and student CoSD working group and school practice networks. All other schools in the participating local authorities receive CoSD information and resources.
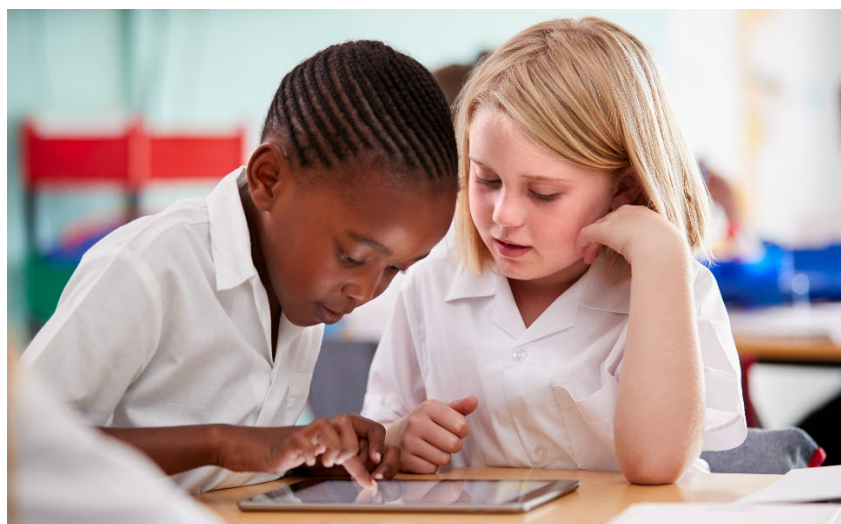
In early 2020, with the delivery of the Cost of the School Day (CoSD) project having barely begun, the Covid-19 outbreak in the UK caused major restrictions and multiple closures and disruptions to schools. The project activities in schools were initially paused and then adapted in order to enable the project to take place. It was considered critical for this to happen as the pandemic was having a significant impact on families, particularly those living in poverty.

An online version of the audit was developed that took place in schools until the restrictions eased and allowed the CoSD practitioners to return to in-person audits. Table 1 below identifies the number of audits that took place by model and school type.

Nation / Region	Online audit	In-person audit	(In-person that included peer researchers)	Primary school	Secondary school	Special school
England - Coventry	10	7	(1)	13	4	
England - London	3	13	(4)	11	4	1
Scotland	2	8		6	4	
Wales	8	4	(1)	11	1	
Total	**23**	**32**	**(6)**	**41**	**13**	**1**

Alongside the work in schools, CPAG undertook wider development work which included, but is not limited to:

- Participation in a range of networks/forums/groups, eg, Anti-Poverty Coalition (Wales), Fairer Moray Forum, the Northern Alliance (Scotland), Children and Young People's Forum (Wales), Public Health Wales Task and Finish group and North of Tyne Combined Authority Child Poverty Prevention Programme.

- Attendance at a range of groups and organisations, eg, Parent Panel for BAME Londoners, uniform banks.

- Partnership working eg, Parentkind, NEU (England and Wales), Anti-Poverty Coalition, Cardiff University, National Parent Forum of Scotland, Bevan Foundation (Wales), The Children's Society.

- Undertaking additional research eg, school clothing grants for Greenwich LA, Public Health Wales Task and Finish Group, the educational experiences of children and families during school closures.

- Literature reviews eg, on education during the pandemic.

- Contributed to National Policy eg, submissions/briefings to the Education Select Committee (England), the Welsh Senedd Research Service; a range of Scottish government consultations.

- CoSD evidence base used in national strategic planning eg, Children's Service Plans and Local Child Poverty Action Reports (Scotland), the Scottish government's refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge (2022), The Welsh government's 5-year programme: Building a Healthier Wales strand (2021),

- Reports eg, The Cost of Learning in Lockdown June 2020 and an update report in March 2021, The Cost of Having Fun at School (March 2022), The Cost of the School Day in England; pupils' perspectives (March 2022), Supporting families in times of financial hardship (Dec 2022).

- Training (in-person and online): schools (teaching/non-teaching staff, governors, NQTs, INSET days); local/national governments; and a range of organisations eg, Northern Alliance (Scotland), NEU (England and Wales).

- Sharing good practice/project findings eg, Reconnect London, head teacher meetings, NATSEN conference, Child Poverty Summit (London) Greenwich Governors' conference.

- Development of resources, toolkits and publications: CoSD toolkit, Talking about Costs and Money at School, CoSD Ideas Bank and eLearning course (Scotland), CoSD Calendars, 'Affordable School uniforms: A guide' (in partnership with the Children's Society and Children North East), Turning the Page on Poverty (in partnership with the NEU and Children North East), 'Unravelling the price of Poverty' (in partnership with The National Governance Association (NGA), 'Tackling Poverty Together (in partnership with NEU Wales).

Why Cost of the School Day approaches are needed

Children from families living in poverty experience multiple barriers to participation in education. Within a system of free education, parents are nevertheless expected to provide resources such as clothing and uniforms, access to the internet and digital devices for homework, fees for extra-curricular activities, trips and events, and either a packed lunch or money for food. Parents on a very low income receive some help, such as free school meals, but support doesn't always match the costs. Many more families struggle with meeting costs than those eligible.

In a survey of 1798 parents undertaken in participating schools prior to undergoing a CoSD audit, parents of children entitled to free school meals were significantly more likely than other parents to agree that schools asked for too much money (p=<0.0001). Parents of children entitled to free school meals were also significantly more likely to state that they found it difficult to afford all of the things children needed for school (p=<0.0001). Nearly a third of all parents responding to the survey felt that it was difficult to afford everything, indicating that many parents (and not just the very poorest) find the cost of the school day a strain on their family finances.

A parallel survey of 662 staff asked about whether, in their experience, they felt that lower family income affected areas of children's school lives. 78 per cent of staff felt that lower family income affected children's attainment (30 per cent of those significantly) and their participation in learning and extra-curricular activities, and more than half had noticed an increase in families struggling financially since the pandemic (55 per cent). A large proportion of staff also believed that lower family incomes have an effect on health and wellbeing, behaviour and friendships with peers. Many staff felt, however prior to the project work, that nothing more could be done in respect of poverty or were not sure whether anything could be done.

3. Summary of evidence: schools, young people and families

CoSD audits whether online, or in person, were overwhelmingly very positively received by all. Schools agreed to be involved due to their values in making a difference to children and their families, interest in hearing what their children had to say, the importance of equity, the value given to having an independent perspective and the fact it was cost-free (considered important in times of constrained budgets). The schools that took part welcomed the CoSD approach and valued the support to challenge and change their practice in relation to poverty. Schools noted the impact on their organisations in making them think more deeply about how their actions, assumptions and decisions affected the experience of poverty for children.

The experience of the CoSD process

1. The voice of children and families at the centre

One of the most valued aspects of the CoSD project for schools, local authorities and other organisations was the opportunity to hear directly from children, young people and parents. This is often something that schools and other organisations do not have the time or capacity to be able to do themselves (particularly on this scale) and was welcomed as a way of checking their assumptions and current knowledge about families. The relationship of the practitioners with the pupils during their interviews was described as very good, resulting in the children being *'able to speak quite openly and freely about the school'* (head teacher, primary school).

It was often the case that schools heard new things, sometimes information that contradicted their previous understandings. One deputy head teacher described how some aspects of the report *'initially hit us as a bit of a shock',* but acknowledged that *'if that's the true reflections of pupils and some parents too then there's things that we need to put into place'*. Hearing directly from children could be emotive and was a powerful driver for change.

> *'It really pulled at my heart strings because I was sat listening. One of the boys in Year 6, it was just before the Halloween disco, and there are three of them altogether and he said his mam had got to go and buy three tickets and three outfits and it's a lot of money and he was very open about it and as soon as I heard it I thought straight away this is something we need to look at because we've got lots of sets of 3 or 4 siblings in this school so we're going to introduce a family ticket so if you pay for one you pay for them all.'* (Deputy head teacher)

That audits involved speaking to many more pupils and parents/carers than schools felt able to manage was cited as one of the important features of the CoSD audit process. A head teacher whose school took part in the in-person CoSD audit commented that whilst their school typically gathered pupil voice,

> *'The fact they actually spoke to every single child in every single year group, you know, it gave a really well rounded view of what was happening in school which is something that we, as a leadership team, would not be able to do on a normal week to week basis'.* (Head teacher)

CoSD modelled a new way of ensuring the participation of children and young people, involving engaging them in dialogue and listening carefully to them. This model moves away from only involving a few children, for example, those on the school council or who are in receipt of free school meals, towards one where all children are enabled to participate.

It is important to point out that the evaluation found that the online model (which included as many children as possible, but for practical reasons, not necessarily all), did similarly represent the voice of the children and families which was valued by the schools involved.

2.   Staff and student awareness of poverty

Training for school staff was well received and resulted in an increased awareness of poverty and enabled the sharing of resources and good practice. In the course of the busy school day, it is often difficult for schools to find those spaces to reflect and having an external 'critical friend' can facilitate that process. Schools talked about the impact of hearing the effects of poverty and school practices from their own pupils and families and this evoked an emotional response that they felt compelled to act on, one CPAG practitioner commented that three head teachers had told her that they '*had cried reading our report*'. One head teacher called the CoSD report '*incredibly powerful*', another stated that '*when I had the feedback I was quite choked up*' and a teacher described '*how hearing what the pupils were saying really pulled at my heart strings*'. Schools welcomed having their assumptions challenged and having the space and time to reflect on their practices.

> '*It made us as a staff think about the costs of the school day and have some good professional discussions.*' (Teacher)

Schools regularly spoke about the value of CoSD for staff development. Several of the schools stated that the report came up with things that they hadn't thought of and that they provided '*rich evidence*' which made many staff '*look at things in a different perspective*' and led to the start of important discussions. They also felt that students' thinking had been challenged by the project, so that they were much more aware of the effects of poverty during the school day.

> '*At the time of the consultation some of them* [young people] *said that they were thinking about things that wouldn't have occurred to them that were a barrier for other people, and then they started talking about discrimination within the school community and how people noticed what other people were wearing, making comments on brands and things and where they maybe thought that wasn't an issue but then when they started talking about it they were thinking "well aye that's not right", aye it just made them think about things, it was quite thought provoking for them.*' (Deputy head teacher)

3.   Having an 'independent' 'external' perspective

The audits and reports highlighted much existing good practice in every school which demonstrates how schools can and do mitigate poverty in their contexts. However, each school also valued external support and challenge. This independence was considered important because the schools were aware that they might be making assumptions about their families, and how well their policies and practices were supporting them.

> '*I like its neutrality. I like its supportive nature. I like the way it facilitates good conversations amongst our stakeholders and I love the way the information is presented. I think it's very, you know, very user friendly to us as a local authority and to schools. It gives a school a clear direction of actions.*' (LA representative)

> '*CPAG gives an insight into different stakeholders' perceptions of a school from varying angles. Each perspective may be different from each stakeholder but it allows you to think, deliberate and adopt policies from these differences to combat poverty within your school.*' (Head teacher)

CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP

4. Focus on practical actions

A combination of support and challenge was provided by the CoSD project to schools, and schools appreciated hearing about what they were doing well, what areas could be improved, and the fact they were given 'specific really clear and tangible suggestions' on how to make these improvements. This meant that schools not only heard what they needed to improve but how they could go about doing that. Schools often talked about some practices that could be quickly actioned, 'low hanging fruit', and others that required a longer-term approach to change, often involving consultation with staff, children and young people and families.

5. Youth participation

Many of the school staff interviewed described how well the pupils responded to being interviewed. One head teacher described how taking part made the children *'feel special,* and that it was '*a positive for them to have somebody to talk about their experiences'* because they often '*don't get a chance to sit and talk to somebody about how they feel about their life and what the school does to support that.'*

Trained peer researchers added value to the audit process in secondary schools, being people children could easily identify with. They enabled more children to be listened to and provided a supportive reference group for change in schools. Having the young people themselves as part of the data collection and recommendation process has the potential therefore to create a more collaborative, co-constructed report, compared to one purely written by the CPAG practitioners. The use of peer researchers worked well. Students had deep contextual knowledge of their schools and were closer in age to those they were consulting with, leading to a less formal approach, but it is a big commitment for those students and their schools.

CoSD changes in schools

All schools implemented changes, from small tweaks to practice that could be enacted quickly and easily, to planning longer-term changes. While small changes were relatively easy to enact, developing a longer-term legacy from the CoSD project in schools required several factors in order to be successful. The complete support and drive of the senior leadership team was an important enabler, in addition to assigning responsibility for driving actions to a specific named member of staff. This member of staff could be a teacher, or a non-teaching member, but had time in their workload and role to be able to continue to implement change.

Some schools formed CoSD working groups (some involving school staff only, others school staff and pupils and others school staff, pupils and parents) in order to ensure that the recommendations made in the reports remained a priority. Maintaining the relationship with the CoSD team was also important in planning out change. Embedding CoSD priorities into School Development Plans or linking them to other priorities such as parental engagement could be a way to ensure change happened and CoSD recommendations remained visible and dynamic.

Changes to school policies and processes

- Changes to School Improvement Plans eg, CoSD report priority areas being included in plans under the Health and Wellbeing priority and the development of action plans to help address each area.

- The creation of working groups/poverty action teams made up of teaching and non-teaching staff, governors and in some cases pupils, that focussed on implementing the CoSD report recommendations.

- The introduction of prepayment plans to pay for trips, changes in the amount of notice given before a trip takes place allowing families to budget.

- Allowing the free school meal daily allowance to be used at break times and not just lunch times.

- Professional development opportunities for teachers focussing on the impact of poverty/cost of the school day - provided by CPAG or done in-house.

- Addressing the issue of low take up of free school meal entitlement through changes in the food offered, the dining environment and parent food taster events.

Changes to school communication

- The creation of calendars outlining all fundraising events, trips etc. allowing families to plan and budget.

- Providing more information on the school website eg, local authority and VCSE organisations and resources, financial help, and health and wellbeing services and initiatives; and in handbooks and in letters which are sent out more frequently so that changing circumstances do not impact on access to support eg, free school meals.

Changes to actual costs

- Creating a uniform without logos or providing the option to buy one with or without.

- Providing opportunities to donate and purchase preloved uniforms.

- Providing opportunities to donate and purchase preloved dressing up clothes.

- Changing dressing up days to just wearing colours, or enabling the pupils to create outfits in school.

- Introducing cost-free trips eg, Fresh Air Friday or through asking organisations eg, theatre groups to come to the school.

- Changes to the number and timing of charity days where families are asked to make donations.

- Developing a range of strategies to fund trips and extra-curricular activities eg, writing bids, asking charities for support, seeking out bursaries etc.

- Providing learning resources in school eg, IT equipment, creative stations where craft items such as scissors, glue, bubble wrap etc. are available.

- Asking for a one-off up front contribution for food technology lessons so that the school provides all of the ingredients, and families are not having to find money weekly.

- Providing free fruit for all pupils.

- Providing a family disco ticket so that families with more than one child do not have to pay large sums of money.

- Providing free breakfast clubs to encourage pupils to attend school on time.

Changes to stigmatising practices

- Changes to the way that donations on charity days are collected to ensure that families do not feel under pressure to donate eg, online, links to main charity websites, buckets not shaken or passed round the class.

- Changes in language. For example from 'second hand uniform' to 'recycled'/'preloved' uniform and focussing on the environmental benefits; how the pupils in receipt of free school meals are spoken to in the canteen; how class rewards are described.

- Providing opportunities to buy preloved uniform in places away from the main school site.

- Changes to how school photographs are given out ie, no longer in front of the whole class.

- Taking breakfast round to all classes and offering it to all pupils so that those who have not eaten are not singled out.

- Ensuring all pupils receive any products being offered on fundraising days eg, all pupils get one cake at a cake sale with subsequent ones purchased using money, all pupils receiving a book on world book day, all pupils receiving tokens to enable them to access the school summer fair.

- Not splitting up pupils who have a school dinner from those who have packed lunches. This ensures that those in receipt of free school meals do not feel the need to have a packed lunch in order to sit with their friends.

Impact of the CoSD on pupils, families and schools

Impacts on pupils

There was significant evidence that the pupils became aware of policies and practices that destigmatise poverty (all age groups) and they were able to articulate this:

- The introduction of uniforms that can be bought in supermarkets: '*For PE we wear these tops (points to old T-shirt with logo) but they don't give them out any more because they cost too much, we just wear white T shirts'.* (Year 3 pupil)

- Providing opportunities to buy/borrow preloved dressing up clothes for celebration events: '*It's a good idea because you don't want to be going to a shop to be buying a child an expensive outfit that they're only going to wear once'.* (Year 5 and 6 pupils)

- Providing one cake/book to all children on charity days, providing tokens for all to attend school fairs*: 'We are going to have a token. Our maximum is 5. The number of gold tokens we have is how many free things we can have'.* (Year 2 pupil)

- Limits on spending money for trips or the introduction of pre-payment plans for trips: *'You already have to pay for the trip, so if you said you could bring any amount of [spending] money, some people's parents can't afford that, but if it's 5 to 10 pounds then everyone's going to be around that'.* (Year 5 and 6 pupils)

There was also evidence that participating in the CoSD process challenged some pupils' thinking. For example one peer researcher stated that she had been '*surprised*' to hear from pupils that *'they didn't eat at school'*. In another school the peer researchers followed up what they had learnt about pupils in receipt of free school meals not being able to spend their allowance at break times, ensuring that the deputy head teacher did not forget about it and did make changes.

Impacts on families

Parents/carers and families appreciated how participation in the CoSD project impacted directly on the costs associated with schooling and resulted in practices that destigmatise families:

- The introduction of prepayment plans and more timely notice for school trips, '*payments are detailed in letters and parents can come into school and pay off the trip.'* (Parent, England) *'You can pay £2 a week if you want to.'* (Parent, Wales)

- Changes in the way that donations on charity days are made: '*They haven't asked for donations. It's up to us to make donations directly to the charity.' 'That's recent. I've got two children in the school and I didn't feel pressured into doing it'.* (Parents, Wales)

- Changes to the amount of dressing up days there are and what parents/carers are asked to do for them: '*there's never an expectation [to dress up], it could be at our previous school but here it's a more flexible approach.'* (Parent, Scotland)

- Activities that supported them in encouraging their children to attend school. For example, in a primary school in London that introduced a free breakfast club, a parent described how one of her children in particular had not liked leaving for school every morning, but since starting the club she now always leaves home on time.

- Changes to uniforms to make it cheaper and easier for families to buy.

Impacts on schools

There was significant evidence that teaching and non-teaching staff and governors:

- Made significant changes to policies and practices.

- Began a process of self-reflection '*It made us really look at what we do' and 'made us all so much more aware.'* (Pastoral manager, primary school)

- Were moved to immediate action because they were hearing the actual words of their pupils and their families.

- Began to 'think differently'.

- Appreciated hearing what they were doing well, as well as what could be improved (all case studies).

- Set up and participated in working groups to address the issues raised in the CoSD reports and took part in a variety of poverty awareness professional development activities (CPD, webinars, practice sharing events).

Barriers to change in schools

Interviews with school staff after they had received their audit reports identified a range of barriers to enacting some of the recommendations made. The following are some of the key barriers highlighted with examples of how some schools tried to overcome these.

1. **Funding:** The ability to pay for events and trips entirely from school budgets, even with any additional PEF/ PDG/ Pupil Premium funding, was not considered possible for many schools. Although some schools had staff that had the time to look for external grants, this was not typical. Schools felt the need to balance cost and asking for voluntary contributions with wanting to provide their pupils with rich experiences (the development of cultural capital).

   > Schools made use of the many free opportunities available for their students to experience the environment and cultural institutions. This involved walking or using local transport (often subsidised by the Council) eg, Fresh Air Friday in one school included walks to the local beach and a second school used local buses to visit London landmarks. In one school the students were supported to do fund raising together thereby reducing the overall cost of a trip.

2. **Information:** Many schools were mindful that they needed to ensure that parents/carers were made aware of financial and practical support, but that this had to be done in a sensitive way that didn't create stigma. This was considered by some schools to be a complex issue.

   > One secondary school decided to provide information more regularly about free school meal entitlement having realised that circumstances for families can change quickly. These regular updates normalised the process and information.

3. **External factors:** Some aspects of the areas raised in the audit reports were often out of a school's control. This was particularly in relation to the cost of transport to and from school and school lunches- specifically portion sizes. However, the majority of schools did welcome the raising of the issue seeing it as evidence to use to advocate for their pupils.

   > Three primary schools worked with their lunch providers to discuss the food, portion sizes and how it was served, in order to increase the uptake of school lunches generally and thereby for those children entitled to free school meals. In some schools taster days for parents/carers were arranged so that they would be able to discuss the food on offer with their children.

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

4. **Time:** Staff did not always have time to meet to discuss the reports and enact any changes. This was particularly difficult during the pandemic when there were many restrictions on teacher working hours and conditions and many schools were experiencing high staff absences. Some schools already had their CPD plans in place, with no capacity for additional meetings.

> Schools where a specific person was given the remit to put the report recommendations into place, or where working groups were created, were more successful in ensuring that positive action occurred.

5. **Parent views:** Many parents/carers did not want changes to take place, which some schools often accepted without considering which parents may not have contributed to consultation activities.

> In one school research was undertaken to explore the cost of the school uniform. Parents/carers were consulted and although those who responded wanted the more expensive logoed uniform to remain, the school opted to offer a choice to parents.

Despite the barriers faced, schools can have a powerful influence on how the structures and systems around them operate and impact on their children and families. Schools can be supported to see where they can influence change, even where that change is out of their direct control, and there are established methods and models for doing this. Sharing the information gathered as part of the CoSD process with partners, networks and other organisations is an important first step.

Recommendations for schools

- Provide space, time and opportunities to discuss poverty with children to raise awareness and address poverty-related stigma. Engage children and young people in helping to destigmatise poverty in the school.
- Plan all teaching, events and activities with affordability, accessibility and the needs of children and young people from low-income households in mind. Take practical steps and develop initiatives, tools and resources to reduce the cost of the school day for parents and families.
- Ensure that all staff working in schools have undertaken training on child poverty and how to address it within their own roles and classrooms.
- Provide space and time for school staff to reflect on their own practice and share practical ideas on how to mitigate the impact of poverty in their own schools. Schools should establish working groups and create time as part of staff CPD programmes, as well as engaging with LA and national networks and forums.

4. Summary of evidence: local authorities

The local authorities involved in the CoSD project identified a variety of reasons for becoming involved:

- The value of working with an independent organisation with expertise in this area.
- The value and importance of hearing the actual words of children and their families when discussing their experience of poverty and how this could enrich local authority statistics. Several local authorities commented on the lack of capacity they have to do this themselves.
- Their belief in the need for all schools to understand and consider the impact of poverty on their pupils, and how it affects learning and participation.

- Their support for the CoSD audit model – speaking to all pupils, speaking to parents and staff and providing a bespoke report with clear recommendations and ideas for change.

- To learn about the best practice across the country.

The role that the local authorities have played across all of the countries and regions with respect to the success of the CoSD project, has been extremely significant. Existing relationships and networks and shared agendas were important in providing the contacts, credibility and trust needed to implement this new initiative and share good practice. In those where the project was particularly successful, the agendas aligned, focussing typically on reducing inequality and child poverty, but they had also incorporated CoSD within the school improvement remit.

The evidence from the evaluation would suggest that where the CoSD project was most effective, the local authorities and consortium:

- Identified schools to work with based on their knowledge of their boroughs, wards, etc.

- Recruited the schools using a range of methods including bulletins, newsletters and their networks eg, presenting at head teacher meetings.

- Introduced the leads and practitioners to relevant people and organisations both within the councils and externally. This both raised the status of the project, but also led to important partnership working.

- Saw value in the findings arising from the CoSD audits and used the evidence to support their own data collection and reports. Typically, this involved using the qualitative data – the voice of the children, young people and their families in order support their statistical data thereby giving it more meaning.

- Disseminated the findings of the CoSD audits and wider CPAG research to different audiences so that it could impact on both practice and policy eg, to schools, local government.

Local authority level changes

In terms of the legacy of the Cost of the School Day project there have been significant policy and practice changes at local authority and government level:

- At least two local authorities (Moray and Neath Port Talbot) have identified staff members who now have a CoSD-related remit and will carry parts of the work forward. In one instance, a CoSD practitioner has been recruited by the council to continue CoSD-related work in-house.

- City-wide pre-loved uniform provision across Coventry is now in place.

- Better information on financial support for families is being shared council wide in most areas.

- CoSD guidance has been developed and shared with all Moray schools Our research is being used as foundational evidence to establish Neath Port Talbot's Community Focussed Schools project.

- Following our work, local authorities have carried out, or are looking to commission, further analysis to better understand the links between poverty and education eg, participation of free school meal-eligible pupils in breakfast clubs and how to effectively measure poverty in schools.

- Councils are using CoSD evidence to develop and support their own anti-poverty strategies, as well as using the research to call for national policy changes that they know would benefit families in their areas. For example, The Royal Borough of Greenwich Council have called for a government expansion to free school meals.

- LAs have also made a commitment to exploring further pupil voice projects and programmes seeing the value in this work.

- CoSD resources have been disseminated to all schools in local authorities eg, in Moray and Neath Port Talbot, alongside other relevant resources to help support families with costs.

- Cost of the School Day evidence and voice from pupils and families has influenced L.A. emergency response during the pandemic eg, survey data used in Rhondda Cynon Taff, and while planning on how to support residents during the cost of living crisis.

- In Greenwich, the local authority is looking to support the establishment of school-led practice sharing network, to ensure all schools in the borough have the opportunity to share practice in relation to money saving ideas.

Recommendations for local authorities

- Local authorities should think of new ways to listen to children, young people and parents about issues that matter to them. They should seek to provide meaningful opportunities for all pupils and families, including those living on a low-income, to give feedback on their experience of education. Resources should be developed to support them to be able to do this effectively.

- The evaluation has shown the impact of CoSD on the policy development of local authorities. Authorities should embed CoSD as a policy priority and find ways for the learning from CoSD to inform policy and strategy development which aims to tackle child poverty.

- Local authorities and MATs should establish networks and forums for school staff to come together and discuss these issues.

5. Summary of evidence: national policy and practice

Impact on national policy: the wider impacts and partnership working

The sharing of good practice across schools became a key part of the project with a variety of events organised. Disseminating the findings from the audits and exemplifying change and best practice was a key part of the final months of the 2021-22 academic year. The intention was to spread this information as widely as possible. Partnership working and the publication of key research and resources throughout the CoSD project have ensured its continued influence on both policy and practice. Evidence from the project has fed into campaigning and led to the creation of new resources for schools and further pilots across the country.

The research conducted by CPAG and the CoSD teams over the timeframe of the project has also had a significant impact on policy agendas across the three countries. The combination of large survey data and on-the-ground case studies, which have pupil and parent/carer voice at their heart, has enabled CPAG to provide reports and briefings to national governments, select committees and the National Audit Office. It is the expertise and knowledge of the CoSD teams and CPAG more widely that is cited as the rationale for CPAG's involvement.

- The Children's Society worked with CPAG to develop practical resources for schools and parents after their successful campaign to bring into law an affordable uniform act. This resulted in 'Affordable School uniforms: A guide'. A representative from the Children's Society described why they approached CPAG to work with them on this:

> *'We really value everything we've had from CPAG. Their knowledge of the schools they've worked with, what's worked, what hasn't and what people are thinking and feeling'.*

At the time of the interview with the representative there had been over 1000 downloads of the resource.

- The National Education Union (NEU) runs several 'priority campaigns', one of which is 'No Child Left Behind' and focuses on child poverty. The aim of this is to *'try and engage members of the public and MPs with tackling poverty but through an education lens'* (NEU representative). The NEU, CPAG and CNE worked collaboratively to produce the toolkit 'Turning the Page on Poverty', a practical guide for education staff to help tackle poverty and the cost of the school day. CPAG, as *'specialists'* who understand the nuances were considered important partners to create the resource.

- The National Education Union (Wales) worked in partnership with CPAG throughout the CoSD project and produced a joint publication entitled 'Tackling Poverty Together'. This has been published in English and Welsh.

- The National Governance Association (NGA) supports governing bodies and trustees, providing training and resources. They also work with the DfE and parliamentarians. One focus of their work is 'Disadvantage 360' which aims to highlight children in poverty who may not be 'recognised by pupil premium' NGA representative). They wanted to signpost their members to appropriate resources on their website and in training webinars and drew on the work of CPAG as *'they have the expertise'*. Links to the resource 'Affordable School uniforms: A guide' are on the website and an article written by CPAG and drawing on the CoSD project was published in the Association's magazine entitled 'Unravelling the price of Poverty'. Collaborative research is also taking place.

- Parentkind is a national charity and 'trusted voice for parents in education and the membership association for PTAs in schools.' The charity has worked collaboratively with CPAG on several surveys sent out to parents and which have been fed back to the Department for Education, England, and the Department of Education and Skills, Wales. The input of CPAG was considered to have *'huge benefits'* because they *'bring slightly different perspectives',* a *'different lens to the debate'* making the surveys that Parentkind sends out *'more valuable'* (Parentkind representative).

- Northern Alliance (Scotland) is a regional improvement collaborative who set up their own CoSD network with four themed sessions addressing: talking about costs; CoSD and PEF; Rural CoSD; and Vulnerable Groups and Poverty.

  > *'It's hugely important for schools, the impact of CoSD, everyone deserves the opportunity to engage with education, poverty shouldn't be impacting upon education and educational choices.'* (Northern Alliance)

- Public Health Wales set up a Task and Finish Group to address the free school meals aspect of 'the Building a Healthier Wales strategy. The work of CPAG was considered vital by Public Health Wales as it has:

  > *'a strong evidence base... a very clear understanding of the issues specific to Wales and Welsh policy'* and *'a deep understanding of those people who are actually on the ground.'* (Public Health Wales representative).

The results of this collaborative working fed into a final report that was presented to the Minister for Health in the Welsh Senedd.

Headline finding in each nation

- In Wales the CoSD project has influenced national policy, teacher development and has informed curriculum development.
- Scotland has adopted CoSD as a national policy priority, with the result that LAs and local partner organisation are actively seeking to learn from the findings of the CoSD project. CoSD in Scotland has supported the strategy and policy development locally and nationally and resulted in a range of resources.
- In England, partnership working and the publication of key research and resources throughout the CoSD project have ensured its continued influence on both policy and practice.

National policy changes

Policy area	Progress made
Addressing school costs	This year: • One-off grant of £100 was made to families in Wales to in March 2022 to help with school costs as part of the response to the cost-of-living crisis. • The PDG-Access Grant (which supports eligible families with school costs in Wales) was extended to children in all year groups as opposed to just certain ages and the amount available to eligible families has increased. • In Scotland, the government has provided funding so that charges have now been removed for practical subjects like food technology and music. • Cost of the School Day continues to feature as a recommended intervention in the Pupil Equity Funding for schools and Strategic Equity Funding guidance for local authorities in Scotland. • Estyn, the inspectorate body in Wales, have highlighted CoSD as good practice in their materials. • In England, the DfE has proposed reforms to improve school attendance some of which reflect positive approaches shared with the DfE from the CoSD project eg, emphasis on supporting families, having a point of contact in the school and working to identify and remove the barriers that contribute to absenteeism. In previous years: • In Scotland, the national school uniform grant available to eligible families has been increased to a minimum of £120 for primary and £150 for secondary. • Commitment to supporting schools to provide inclusive trips and activities for all and ensure consistent practice across Scotland. • The new Education Minister for Wales has announced an additional £10m will be invested in PDG-Access grant 'to help families with the costs of the school day'. Changes to this policy have enabled 30,000 more children to access the Pupil

	Development Grant. This grant can be used by eligible families to pay for uniform, learning materials and laptops. • The Welsh government announced an additional £15 million for education technology for schools; this includes providing more devices, software and internet access for learners. • The Welsh government has extended the Discretionary Assistance Fund flexibilities through to March 2022, including a new eligibility criteria for people affected by the UC/ tax credit cuts.
Free school meals	This year: • Rollout of universal primary free school meals in Wales commenced with the youngest years groups receiving a meal each day first. This will soon be rolled out to the rest of primary school pupils. This policy shift was heavily influenced by CPAG analysis and evidence. • Universal free school meals have been rolled out to all pupils in P4 and P5 in Scotland following our campaign work on this issue. And there is commitment to universal free school meals for all children in P6-P7, starting with those eligible for the Scottish child payment. • Welsh government agreed to continue providing free school meal payments through school holidays for the rest of the financial year. • The UK government made the temporary extension of free school meals to families with NRPF permanent for families within an income threshold. • Consultation and review of free school meals eligibility is taking place in Northern Ireland with CPAG involved in the Stakeholder Steering Group. • The London Mayor announced universal primary free school meals to begin in September 2023 for one year. • The Welsh Education Minister, Jeremy Miles, sent a letter to all head teachers in Wales about the cost of the school day and specifically with guidance about how school lunch debt should be handled to avoid further stigmatisation of pupils and families. In previous years: • In Scotland, we advocated for cash first approaches to free school meal replacement during lockdown resulting in the number of local authorities providing cash increasing from 9 in the first lockdown to 31 out of 32 in the second. • 100,000+ children received cash in lieu of free school meals in Wales during the national lockdown, a policy we have strongly advocated for throughout the pandemic.
Uniform policies	• The Scottish government has committed to introducing statutory uniform guidance this year, which aims to address equalities issues around uniform policy and reduce the cost of school uniform.

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

	• In England, the statutory guidance on school uniform came into effect in September 2022 with schools now having a statutory responsibility to prioritise affordability. • Consultation and review of school uniform guidance and grants is taking place in Northern Ireland with CPAG involved in the Stakeholder Steering Group.
Holidays	• 3-year funding has been agreed for the Holiday Activities and Food fund in England which provides free holiday programmes for those eligible for free school meals.
Extended and Community schools	• Scottish government have pledged to roll out a universal free breakfast programme for primary pupils. • In Scotland, the government has committed to building a system of 'wraparound' childcare, providing care before and after school, all year round. Those on the lowest incomes will pay nothing, and others will make fair and affordable contributions. • Welsh government announced their plans for investment in Community Focused Schools as a way to lessen the impact of poverty on children – citing CPAG's work in this area. • Welsh government have committed to taking on CPAG's recommendations around school breakfast provision, following a joint report with Parentkind which surveyed over 7,000 parents in Wales. • The Labour party have committed to universal breakfast provision in England as part of their programme for government if they are successful in the next general election.
Increasing family income	• The Welsh Winter Hardship Fund was launched by the Welsh government which offers families cash-support for their needs over the winter period in line with CPAG recommendations. • The Scottish child payment was increased from £20 to £25 a week per eligible child aged under 16.

Recommendations for policymakers

• Ensure that schools are funded properly so they can offer a truly free and inclusive education, where every pupil can fully participate in school activities and money is never an issue.

• Increase support for family incomes to end child poverty.

• Enhance entitlement of families to support for the most significant school costs ensuring that all children are able to make the most of their time at school.

• Ensure that training on poverty and what can be done in classrooms to support pupils and families experiencing low-income is included in initial teacher training.

• Include the voice of children, young people and families living on low incomes in all policy development.

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6. Learning for future CoSD development

1. Developing and strengthening partnerships, including local authorities and other organisations

National jurisdiction policies could facilitate successful audits taking place, or alternatively, work against them but were not the only, nor the most important, factors. National, local authority and school factors could all help and hinder finding schools able to have an audit and could make it both easier and harder for positive changes to happen.

These partnerships were easier to develop where existing relationships existed, and where CPAG had established a good reputation. Finding shared agendas and values helped people to work together, as did demonstrating a good understanding of the local context in which the project took place. This led to credibility and trust being developed, where information could be shared, and whereby partners could broker relationships with schools and facilitate the sharing of good practice. Co-location proved helpful in some circumstances but finding the right people in an organisation was crucial. Where partnerships were not already existing, extra time was needed to establish the project.

The ability of CoSD teams to work successfully in schools was enhanced by having a demonstrable understanding of the area, having built up relationships over time with those involved in tackling poverty more generally, working in partnership with other organisations tackling poverty (eg Citizens Advice, key VCSEs in an area such as Orbit Housing (Coventry)), or physically working in the same location as one or more of those organisations (such as co-location in council offices). Time therefore needs to be given to building up relationships, a knowledge of the area, partnership working, trust and credibility.

2. Enhancing the role of young people

There was some good practice in schools around the sharing of information and involving pupils in planning and enacting change through working groups, but this was not the case in all schools. The inclusion of peer

researchers in the secondary schools worked really well. The students involved had deep contextual knowledge of their schools and were closer in age to those they were consulting with, leading to a less formal approach and more open responses, but was a big commitment for the students and their schools. This is an area that has potential to be developed in future, with some thought as to how audits can be truly co-produced with young people and the training that they receive.

3.   Addressing gaps in staff training and development

School staff need more training in poverty awareness, including in initial teacher training, since most school staff (80 per cent) before the audit process thought that their schools were doing all that was possible to tackle the effects of poverty. There is a need to work with teachers on their knowledge of the impact of poverty on parents and of the readiness of parents to approach them. Whilst the audit process did change attitudes it is not clear how far the audit process addressed this issue.

Recommendations for CPAG/ future work on child poverty and education

- Pupil voice was a powerful mechanism for change in schools, future work should retain a focus on hearing directly from children and young people. The development of recommendations and solutions should continue to be created in partnership with children and families.

- Explore further how to involve children and families in all stages of bringing about change in schools including the sharing and dissemination of findings, development of action plans and planning of next steps so that the whole school community remains engaged with and involved in the design and implementation of Cost of the School Day approaches.

- CPAG and their partners working to tackle child poverty should commit to sharing the resources, tools and ideas, developed in partnership with children and families, with schools and local authorities and others to ensure maximum learning from CoSD.

- More learning about models of peer research will be valuable in utilising peer researchers in co-producing change. Ways of supporting them to gain the skills to do this effectively should be explored.

- The in-person model of delivery appeared to be preferred by schools and young people. Where an online model is used, care should be taken to ensure this does not exclude schools and individual pupils due to issues with technology.

- The in-person model of delivery that puts children's voices at the centre should continue to be used as the most effective model. Care should be taken to ensure a wide representation of children in cases where it is not possible to consult with all children.

- Where schools have been unable to enact change due to factors beyond their control, CPAG and other campaigning organisations should amplify and campaign on issues which are impossible for individual schools to influence and need a national response. In addition, schools can be supported to be able to challenge external organisations to enact change based on CoSD recommendations.

- Partnership working with a wide range of local and national organisations was impactful and future project development should include continuing to develop, maintain and strengthen partnerships with others across the poverty and education sectors. Time to do this should be factored into project planning and workloads.

7. About Us

1. Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need. We also carry out high profile legal work to establish and protect families' rights. CPAG is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number 294841) and in Scotland (registration number SC039339), 30 Micawber Street, London N1 7TB.

2. Children North East

Children North East (CNE) is a large North East regional children's charity, with some of our work extending across England, Wales and Scotland. CNE exists because growing up can be hard. We have a strong children's rights ethos and believe that real social change is achieved when those who are, or have, experienced issues lead the change. CNE deliver services, support and initiatives that provide a platform for children, young people and families to work through issues, take action and provide them with the tools to reach their full potential. This includes; therapeutic services, mental health support, youth work, domestic abuse support, family support, community-based initiatives, participation and consultation activities and our UK wide Poverty Proofing© initiative. Children North East is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England, charity registration number 222041, company registration number 90288. Head Office 89 Denhill Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 6QE.

3. Newcastle University Community for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT)

Newcastle University is a research intensive university in the North East of England that aims to work collaboratively with our many external partners to shape brighter futures, grow the economy and champion social justice. Liz Todd, Karen Laing, Ulrike Thomas and Lucy Tiplady are members of CfLaT (Community for Learning and Teaching), a collaborative research group in education with a focus on innovative pedagogies, professional learning and practice and educational justice. Their work is interdisciplinary, cross-sector, collaborative and aims to advance research and practice about addressing inequalities. Karen and Liz are also Trustees of the West End Children's Community a long-term more strategic place-based initiative with community members, schools and VCSEs. Lucy Tiplady works on participatory research into outdoor learning and Ulrike Thomas works on innovative curriculum and pedagogy.

4. The National Lottery Community Fund

This project was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest community funder in the UK. It awards grants to strengthen society and improve lives across the UK. National Lottery players raise over £30 million a week for good causes across the UK. Thanks to them, The National Lottery Community Fund will distribute at least £4 billion by 2030, supporting activities that create resilient communities that are more inclusive and environmentally sustainable.