



(Crosshouse Primary School and Communication Centre, 2023)

HOW CAN SCHOOLS HELP?

Within the guidance published by the Child Poverty Action Group (2023), a suggestion was made of four key ways in which 'schools can help to address the impact of child poverty' to ensure equality of opportunity. Of these four goals, a need to treat families and these learners with 'compassion, dignity and respect' were of the upmost importance through preventing poverty-related stigma. Additionally, a need to reduce 'the cost of the school day' was highlighted in lieu of relieving struggling families financially.

The Child Poverty Action Group (2023) also suggests that a human rights approach to ensuring inclusivity is a useful approach to this practice, by providing all students, regardless of their economic background, equal opportunity to participate in their education.

This means addressing the barriers to participation that disadvantaged learners and their families face in schools. For example, a survey conducted in 2024 (McFarlane, 2024) underlined the cost of uniform, trips and material equipment as the greatest financial barrier to the disadvantaged child's participation in education.

EFFECT OF POVERTY ON EDUCATION

As Gorski (2018, p.99) expounds on the Principles of Equity, he suggests that principle 6 highlights the importance of understanding the barriers that learners face as a result of poverty before they can recognise 'the relationship between poverty and education'. It is therefore evident that several barriers exist for these learners due to the current education system in Wales, as is summarised in this useful quote from an educator in the Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey of 2024 (McFarlane, 2024):

"Hungry children equals tired children, equals lack of concentration, equals lack of retention, equals lack of inclusion, leads to failing, leads to loss of confidence, leads to anger, leads to exclusion, leads to isolation."

This quote underlines the 'knock on effect' of poverty on a child's wellbeing, and consequently their experience in schools. Moreover, the importance of inclusivity in schools for these individuals is of the utmost importance when considering the United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC), as a number of these rights are denied to children living in poverty. According to McFarlane (2024), these restricted rights include Articles 6, 24, 26, 27, 28 and 31. Of these rights, a teacher's primary aim should be to ensure that every child's right to an education is fulfilled 'on the basis of equal opportunity' (UNICEF, 1989).



(BBC, 2017)

SUPPORTING LEARNERS LIVING IN POVERTY

Inclusive Practices for Primary School Teachers

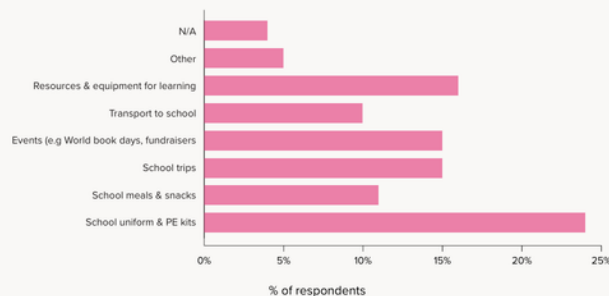
POVERTY IN WALES AND THE UK

Poverty has been a prevalent issue in Wales since the 1990s, however recent studies have highlighted an increase in the percentage of the population who are living in deep poverty as of 2025. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025), 'over 1 in 5 people in Wales (22%) live in poverty', with 20,000 of these being children who 'have consistently faced the highest poverty rates' of any age group. This scale does not improve on a UK basis as a third of the children in the UK, that is 4.5 million children, face poverty as of 2026 (Save the Children, 2026). With poverty comes many struggles that both directly and indirectly effect a child's education, from affording educational resources to concentration deficiencies (Save the Children, 2026), which therefore often result in 'low academic achievement' (McFarlane, 2024).

COST OF UNIFORM

According to a 2024 Survey (McFarlane, 2024), the greatest cost that low-income families face is school uniform, a persistent struggle that is regularly raised regarding costs and accessibility. The survey also discusses how students who arrive in the wrong or incomplete uniform (as a result of costs) are often penalised for it or receive grief from other learners (McFarlane, 2024). Discussing money is often considered a 'taboo subject', especially in the UK, as 50% of the population say they feel 'uncomfortable talking about money' (Barclays, 2026). Therefore it is important to consider how to best communicate with the parents of these learners to gauge a greater understanding of their situation in order to support them, while implementing discretion and sensitivity regarding the topic. This may support the maintenance of a good relationship with parents and minimises the risk of potential embarrassment. The same approach to discretion may also benefit the learner in question, as public comparison to other pupils and public punishment singles out the learner and puts them in an uncomfortable situation that may result in social exclusion from their peers (McFarlane, 2024).

Which of the following has the biggest impact or is most difficult for families to manage?



(McFarlane, 2024)

COST OF TRIPS

Considering the Curriculum for Wales (Hwb, 2023), providing learners with a broad range of experiences is a priority, however running trips or even particular activities in the classroom may exclude students who cannot afford the additional cost. School trips are particularly difficult as they are more likely to exclude the pupils who would not gain this experience elsewhere, where a potential sense of exclusion or embarrassment around money may negatively impact the learner (Child Poverty Action Group, 2022). Regarding the current policies for School Trips, good practice in Wales looks like giving advanced notice to parents for trips, giving them more time to consider the cost or to potentially raise funds over a period of time (Welsh Government, 2018). However, a 2024 survey suggests that 10% of the UK population are not in a position to save money (Financial Conduct Authority, 2025), which suggests that offering notice alone does not ensure inclusive practice.

In response to this issue, one strategy that has been utilised is the use of 'online live interviews' which allow learners a virtual experience that will cost them nothing, which removes the economical barrier (Child Poverty Action Group, 2022). Alternatively, UK and Wales based companies such as Technquest (Lloyd and Mulraney, 2014), RSPB Outreach (RSPB, 2026) and The Drama Hut (2026) offer in-school educational workshops which reduce the costs of transport and the risk of exclusion for learners who cannot afford trips, allowing them to have the experiences afforded to them under the Curriculum for Wales. In exploring alternative experiences for learners, teachers may reduce cost-related barriers to education.

The Poverty Proofing Programme piloted in the North East of England (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2017) sought to identify areas in which schools may become more inclusive for learners from low-income families, as they set out a series of actionable advice for schools to implement. For example, they suggest that schools consider what trips are being run throughout the year to assess whether they are asking for parents to contribute a realistic amount of money towards further educational experiences (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2017). Additionally, discretion regarding payments was identified as an important factor in showing respect to these learners, as it was noted that some teachers would announce to the whole class who had or hadn't made payments yet for activities (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2017), which effectively singles out learners who may struggle to make the payments on time due to financial strain.



(The Devonshire Hill School, 2026)



(British Nutrition Foundation, 2026)

Addressing food poverty in the classroom through food and health education may also help to raise awareness of the struggles that these learners experience in an indirect way, removing stigma from the issue while educating all learners on how to make healthy decisions regarding food in the future (Rutland and Seabrook, 2024). This strategy benefits the disadvantaged learner alongside the rest of the class to develop healthy habits and to become more educated citizens in the future, which suggests that inclusive practices not only benefit the disadvantaged, but the entire class.

In the same way, simple practices such as encouraging hydration throughout the day may benefit these students' concentration, as hydration improves cognitive performance and memory, as well as their mood and attention (Boak et al; 2025). Water is a resource that is accessible in all schools in the UK, yet despite being a human right, water poverty is still prevalent as '15.6 per cent of households lived in water poverty in England and Wales in 2022/23' (Bradshaw and Castro, 2025, p.3).

ACCOMODATING TIREDNESS AND HUNGER

Teachers may also consider that factors such as tiredness and hunger may particularly affect a learner's concentration in school (McFarlane, 2024). And while, like many of these matters, there is no national policy on how teachers can make the classroom a more inclusive space for students facing tiredness, there are strategies that are recommended or used for other similar conditions. For example, medical advice given for teachers working with learners who suffer from chronic fatigue suggest the creation of designated spaces where affected learners may rest when they are too tired to contribute to the lesson at hand (Nottingham Children's Hospital, 2013), or a system may be designed to track what activities have the highest impact on the learner's energy levels (Devon County Council, 2026). Through utilising the collected information (within the context of a primary classroom), teachers may initiate inclusive practice through creating a class curriculum which would not exclude the learner, by adhering to their needs and organising timetables around their capacity.



(Valley House Nursery, 2026)

COST OF ACTIVITIES

Additionally, considering what resources different projects or homework tasks would require could help to ensure that learners have equality of opportunity when it comes to the quality of their work, and therefore their academic achievement (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2017). Another point that was raised is the propriety of 'asking pupils to write about their holidays or presents', a common task in primary schools that may exclude learners who are from families who are not in the financial position to have these things (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2017, p.9). Following the Poverty Proofing Programme, Beeson et al. (2024) concluded that this audit led to positive outcomes in the schools that took part, as it statistically improved learners results in mathematics and reading, as well as in reducing stigma against those from low-income families. Moreover, this implies that it is through considering the accessibility of simple classroom tasks, and a teacher's attitude towards a learner's home life, that teachers may promote inclusivity.

DIGITAL INEQUALITY

Digital Inequality is another rising issue within education as digital technology has formed an essential role within schools and the curriculum, while not all learners have equal access to technology or the internet beyond the classroom (Miah, 2023). Doubtlessly, developing digital literacy skills is essential for learners today (Miah, 2023), so it stands to reason that a balance must be struck between encouraging learners who have access to technology outside of school to practice and hone these skills, as well as approaching an inability to complete work online at home with sensitivity. In this regard, Mazzoli-Smith and Todd (2017, p.9) suggest 'removing rewards for completing tasks online' at home, as to take the pressure off disadvantaged learners, while embedding more digital tasks in class where the technology is accessible.

ADDRESSING HYGIENE POVERTY

A lack of access to good hygiene has also been describes as a 'silent but powerful barrier to education, health, and social participation', as these statistics support the prevalence of the issue (The Hygiene Bank, 2025):

- 21% of children living in hygiene poverty avoid playing with others for fear of being judged
- 26% suffer from low self-confidence, and 17% feel embarrassed and ashamed

A helpful resource for teachers on addressing hygiene poverty is the guidance published by Suds in Schools, which provides practical guidance on several aspects of this discussion (Tes, 2026). This resource consistently emphasises the use of 'neutral, non-judgemental language' when discussing hygiene or a potential lack thereof, as well as respecting learners' privacy and dignity by maintaining discretion and kindness (Tes, 2026). Such an approach shows consideration for the feelings and dignity of learners facing hygiene poverty, while promoting their inclusion through encouraging whole class discussions and an understanding of the issue in a sensitive manner that encourages openness and respect (Tes, 2026). This resource also suggests utilising children's literature that addresses hygiene poverty, as it encourages empathy and is specifically framed in a way that is age appropriate. This approach may be beneficial in addressing all manner of poverty in the classroom as studies highlight the effectiveness of using children's literature when addressing social issues and in removing stigma from issues such as poverty (Ahmed, 2024).



(Whitehouse Primary School, 2026)

ADDRESSING LITERACY SKILLS AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

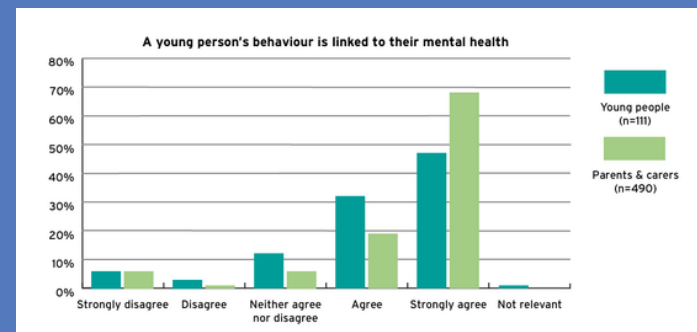
According to Gorski (2018), learners who are living in poverty are often at a disadvantage when it comes to their literary skills and abilities.

However, in classes where teachers have prioritised promoting literature and learners' reading skills across all subjects, studies have underlined a pattern of higher academic achievement (Gorski, 2018). With the view that good literary skills have the potential to support an individual out of poverty when they are older, creating a culture that encourages an appreciation for literature can be a great asset to learners (Gorski, 2018). Through 'bridging the gap' between the average learner's ability and that of the disadvantaged learner, teachers can support equal opportunity and inclusion in school.

In a similar fashion, studies suggest that children in poverty often live sedentary lives until they begin school, setting a pattern of low physical activity and therefore fitness (Bonvecchio et al; 2025). Moreover, Bonvecchio et al. (2025) suggest that being around other children often motivates children to partake in physical activity, primarily through play, while in primary school. Therefore, to encourage and support disadvantaged learners, teachers could facilitate opportunities for such activity during the school day to aid children in their physical wellbeing.

CONSIDERING MENTAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIOUR

Concerning learners' wellbeing, a survey conducted in 2023 pointed towards 'deteriorating mental health' and 'increased anxiety' in children who are living in poverty (McFarlane, 2023, p.7), as 'the persistent challenges associated with poverty... can contribute to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and depression' (McFarlane, 2024, p.30). Meanwhile, Abdinasir et al. (2023) suggests that there is a correlation between a child's mental health and their behaviour, as 'mental health problems' are frequently mistaken for 'behavioural difficulties'. Additionally, trauma is often overlooked as the cause of behavioural concerns, as defiance or obstinance are often cited as the reason for the behaviour, which consequently places the blame on the child (Abdinasir et al; 2023). Regarding children living in poverty, evidence suggests that they at a higher risk of experiencing Adverse Childhood Traumas (ACTs) than their general cohort (Allen et al; 2024), which may place them at a disadvantage where they're needs may be dismissed or not recognised, and therefore not dealt with, and so may become a barrier to their education.



(Abdinasir, 2023)

As for educating learners on poverty in a helpful, age-appropriate and accessible way, the UK Government (2026) have released a 'child-friendly version' of their Child Poverty Strategy. This resource addresses the definition of poverty and its effects, while 'providing children the language to make sense of their own experience', and supporting their peers to develop a 'better understanding' of what their peers are experiencing.

INCLUSION FOR EVERYONE

While implementing these strategies, it is worth noting that "no set of scripted strategies will work for all economically marginalized students everywhere" (Gorski, 2018, p.124), and therefore flexibility and catering to individuals' personal needs is essential to making the classroom truly accessible for these learners. It is also worth noting that many of the ways in which disadvantaged learners may be supported will likely benefit the class as a whole, through broadening their understanding of social issues as well as supporting the development of essential skills (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020).

TACKLING PERSONAL STIGMA AND ADDRESSING IT IN THE CLASSROOM

It is also important that teachers educate themselves on their learner's experience of poverty so that they may provide earnest 'emotional support and understanding', and remove any unconscious or conscious stigma they may hold against those living in poverty (Children's Commissioner, 2025, p.10). It is a well-documented fact that those living in poverty will frequently face stigma, as the Children's Commissioner (2025) reported on its limiting influence on a learner's social life, particularly by their peers on the basis of their appearance or limited experiences. While teachers are unable to change an individual's circumstances outside of school, they are able to take practical steps to 'tackle the stigma of poverty and ensure that the school day is more equitable' (Beeson, 2024). This may be accomplished through addressing a teacher's innate bias and through using resources provided by the UK Government on how to discuss poverty in school with the intention to 'cut stigma'. Gorski (2018) expands on this first point by encouraging teachers to avoid making assumptions about the home life of disadvantaged pupils, but rather they should encourage their learners to achieve by holding them to a high standard while providing the scaffolding necessary for them to achieve these goals.

Through removing stigma, teachers may have a more positive impact on the learner's wellbeing and dignity, as they work in accordance with the Education Workforce Council's (2015) Code of Professional conduct and practice, which sets out the standard for teacher-learner interactions as the following:

- 'base their relationship with learners on mutual trust and respect'
- 'have regard to the safety and well-being of learners in their care'

Through operating with an awareness of these issues, teachers may be in a better position to explore the root cause of a learner's behaviour with a sense of compassion. By educating children on emotional regulation, teachers may remove the barrier that concerning behaviour poses to the learner's education. Moschener et al. (2019) also highlights the importance of 'school-based interventions' in regard to developing emotional regulation strategies that work for all learners, regardless of the reason behind their need. A number of 'school-based intervention programmes' and models have been developed for children in primary schools such as Social-Information-Processing theory (SIP), which allows learners to model the emotional regulation that their teachers display through role-play (Moschener et al; 2019). Alternatively, teachers may use the Making Choices (MC) intervention practice which encourages the 'recognition of one's own feelings and those of others', promoting not only emotional regulation, but empathy also (Moschener et al; 2019). This technique may be particularly useful as it supports the wellbeing (and therefore inclusion) of learners who are struggling as a result of poverty, but also as it supports the emotional development of other classmates.

Zones of Regulation

BLUE	GREEN	YELLOW	RED
			
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Good to Go Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Anxious Excited	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Out of Control I Need Time and Space

(Riverwalk Primary School, 2024)

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