



**MSP
BRIEFING**

**CHALLENGE POVERTY WEEK:
POVERTY & SCHOOLS
7 OCTOBER 2024**

Introduction

1. NASUWT - The Teachers' Union - in addition to the support we are providing to our members across the UK, is committed to ensuring that Members of the Scottish Parliament remain informed of key information impacting our schools and colleges.
2. The following briefing is provided both in support of Challenge Poverty Week - Monday 7th to Sunday 13th October 2024 - and also to inform any debate this Wednesday afternoon discussing priorities for the upcoming budget.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS IS DERAILING EDUCATION

3. A survey of teachers in Scotland from NASUWT has shown that poverty is decimating the lives of children and young people, affecting their ability to get to school and to engage in learning. It is also affecting teachers, with a massive 89% worried about their own financial situations.
4. The snapshot survey, designed to support Challenge Poverty Week, quizzed teachers on how the cost of living crisis is impacting them, their pupils, and essential provisions like school trips.

5. 92% of teachers said that pupil behaviour had worsened over the last year, 74% said more pupils were struggling with attendance and arriving late, and 70% said more pupils were lacking in energy and concentration.
6. There is concern for pupils' access to food and appropriate clothing, with 62% of teachers reporting that more pupils were coming to school hungry and 58% observing that more were attending school in unwashed or damaged clothes. A quarter of respondents said their school now hosts its own food bank; 70% have provided food or clothing on an ad-hoc basis.
7. There is significant concern over the future of school trips, with 68% of teachers reporting that their school has been forced to limit trips due to cost.
8. It is both heart-breaking and infuriating to see poverty shrinking the opportunities available to the next generation. A teacher's job is to enable children and young people to achieve their full potential but, instead, schools are forced to stretch funds to make sure their pupils do not go hungry, and teachers are spending precious time sourcing basic items like clean clothes.
9. A world-class education affords equal opportunities to every pupil, no matter how much money their families earn. The Scottish Government must think seriously about how it can alleviate the financial pressures its schools are facing and act urgently to make sure that every child and young person in their care is able to realise the kind of ambition our society is built upon.
10. Poverty is having a catastrophic impact on our schools. Nevertheless, there are measures the Government can take now to improve outcomes for struggling pupils and their families. 17% of teachers say their schools are using Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) money just to keep

lunch provisions going, so universal free school meals and improving access to breakfast clubs would be a crucial first step.

11. Many young people are missing out on enriching experiences like school trips. A trip should not be a privilege – there is a plethora of evidence to suggest that school trips build essential skills. But unless our schools receive the financial support they desperately need, trips will soon be a thing of the past for most children. That is a disgrace.

12. The bottom line is that our schools don't have a bottom line. They are in the red and sinking fast. Over a third of schools appear to be using family fundraising activities to support core educational business, and if a school has to rely on charity to stay afloat, it goes without saying they do not have the resources to survive. Our schools can't be expected to limp along for much longer without extra funding from the Government.

SURVEY DATA

13. NASUWT Scotland's snapshot survey on child poverty and the cost of living crisis surveyed 163 teachers and was carried out over two weeks in September and October 2024. The full data set is below.

Impact on Pupils

14. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had seen any of the following in their pupils by the end of the last academic year:

More pupils coming to school hungry	62%
More pupils who are lacking in energy/concentration	70%
More pupils with behaviour problems	92%
More pupils unable to afford school uniform	40%
More pupils wearing clothes that are unwashed or damaged	58%
More pupils who do not have the appropriate footwear	43%
More pupils who do not have the appropriate equipment for lessons	58%
More pupils anxious about money/costs	25%
More pupils arriving late or with reduced attendance	74%
More pupils wishing to access breakfast clubs	35%

15. Respondents were asked to indicate if they or their colleagues had done any of the following for their pupils in the last year:

Lent or given money	19%
Given food or clothing	70%
Made referrals to external agencies	33%
Hosted a foodbank within the school	26%
Helped a pupils' family get assistance from a foodbank	24%

A selection of comments from respondents

“Children actually say ‘my mum has no money’.”

“I supply spare pants/socks when wet and do not get them returned so I don't chase it up, assuming items may be needed for whatever reason.”

“Anecdotally, I and some colleagues feel that some students are experiencing anxiety caused by parents' mental health issues which are exacerbated/caused by the cost of living crisis.”

“Teachers not having the extra money to fund resources for the classroom; something that shouldn't have to happen but every single teacher does. Personally I've severely cut back on purchasing extras for cooking, science experiments etc, because I cannot afford it.”

“Access to resources and support even through local community projects/initiatives also an issue - reduction in things like libraries or community centres puts additional pressure on schools in areas of high areas of deprivation”

School Trips

In the last year:

68% said their school/authority had to limit the number of school trips they would like to run
54% said their school/authority provided financial support for trips
44% said their school/authority had revised their school trip policy to take account of the cost of living crisis
93% of respondents said they saw a benefit to school trips for children and young people

A selection of comments from respondents

“I remember taking a class to the beach. A child told me it was the best day of his life. He had never been to the beach before. You can't put a price on these things.”

“For some children it may be their only experience of certain places like historical buildings, trips widen pupils' views of the world of learning, leisure and work and allow children the opportunity to experience with peer support and encouragement to empower them to try new skills and ideas.”

“Huge benefit outside the curriculum that they wouldn't always get at home for their mental wellbeing.”

“Taking the learning outside the classroom is the single best way to engage learners and these experiences can sometimes be formative ones that inspire them to choose a particular career later in life. This is what school is about: engaging young people and trying to make them productive and successful individuals.”

“We have seen coach prices double in the last couple of years, seriously impacting school budgets and the opportunity for young people to go out, explore, challenge themselves and learn in new environments.”

“The cost is ridiculous”

“Pupils may not have family that can take them out, school visits attempt to close the gap between those that can and cannot. Excursions are an opportunity to raise aspirations and improve relationships.”

“For children in areas of high deprivation the experiences offered by going on trips massively contributes to increased confidence in learning, developing vocabulary and engaging with new contexts/building resilience.”

“I had to leave students behind in school as the funding was not available for them to take part even though I put money in.”

“Rural poverty is an issue for us. Travel for trips is harder to organise due to greater costs involved.”

16. Evidence on the benefits of school trips can be found in our [recently submitted consultation response](#)¹ to the Education, Children and Young People Committee Schools (Residential and Outdoor Education) Scotland Bill 2024: it can also be found in this [recent CPAG report](#).²

Impact on Teachers

In the last year:

89% of teachers are worried about their financial situation
54% cut back on expenditure on food
73% cut back on expenditure on clothing
36% cut back on expenditure on essential household items
48% have increased their use of credit cards
49% are delaying household repairs
20% are delaying paying bills
11% have taken a second job, such as care work, food delivery at night and hospitality work, as well as tutoring and SQA marking.

¹ <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/static/d73e7b0f-f55f-481d-ae33538a50d95c79/Consultation-Response-Education-Children-and-Young-People-Committee-Schools-Residential-Outdoor-Education-Scotland-Bill.pdf>

² <https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/resources/big-question>

A selection of comments from respondents

“Staff stress at providing resources from their own money. Constant talk about fundraising for school resources.”

“Staffing is so low that it is becoming dangerous for the school to remain open.”

“Resources are scarce, teachers and support staff are purchasing snacks and resources for daily lessons. Areas within the school are run down, unappealing and dull.”

“Short term contracts for staff which is leading to instability for the children and the teachers. I myself have not been paid since July as I was put on a supply contract.”

“I think more should be done to support staff. Many staff are asked to support local families and pupils. We are happy to do this. However, it is not often, if ever, that we are asked if we require support. There are many teachers experiencing the same challenges as those we are asked to help”

“Due to the lack of jobs both permanent and temporary I have had to sign on to Universal Credit to support my income and it is likely I will have to seek alternative jobs outside of teaching. I did not spend my own money training at university, my time and effort passing my probation year and my own wellbeing to have less stability and financial security than when I worked a zero hours contract in a bar.”

“The state of employment options for newly qualified teachers is an absolute joke and the Scottish and UK governments need to take a serious look into how to improve this rather than pumping out endless streams of Probationers who are unlikely to find employment in the following year”

ACTION REQUIRED

17. Poverty is harming education. It is undeniable that schools are working hard to pick up the pieces of rising levels of child poverty, caused by the worst cost of living crisis in half a century but this cannot sit with schools alone. Scottish Government must:

- a. Expand Universal Free School Meals. It is difficult to square the First Minister's stated focus on eradicating child poverty with the decision to drop the commitment to introducing universal free school meals. We know there are many struggling families who do not qualify for free school meals whose children will now miss out. Ensuring all children get a nutritious free meal each day would have both educational benefits and ensure that no child goes hungry. It would represent an investment in the wellbeing of our children now and offer rewards long into the future.
- b. Provide greater support to ensure pupils can access a nutritious breakfast. A strategic roll-out of breakfast clubs would start to make a real difference for all children. We know that when children are not hungry they have improved attendance, behaviour and an increased capacity to learn. Childhood hunger is blighting education. We want to see a future where no child is hungry, where all children are ready to learn and where schools are supported fully to deliver the very best education for children.
- c. Ensure national funding levels are sufficient: local authorities and schools must receive the funding which they need, and funding must support the provision of good terms and conditions for teachers. Against a decade of real-terms cuts to school funding, teachers and headteachers have battled to deliver the very best education possible for children and young people. Our members report that they are increasingly swimming against a tide of cuts and a lack of resources. Schools also need to be able to access central support from local authorities. For example, 44% of our survey respondents noted that

families in their school did not have access to an Inclusion Support Officer.

- d. Foster a joined-up approach to outdoor learning, learning for sustainability and outdoor residential education and, further, ensure this is underpinned by appropriate access to professional learning, practical guidance and sufficient funding. NASUWT recognises that education outside the classroom can provide valuable educational experience and curriculum enrichment, providing it is planned, properly resourced, linked to the curriculum and has clearly identified intended learning outcomes. When they are properly organised and relevant to the curriculum, educational visits and learning outside the classroom activities can enable pupils to be more engaged and enthusiastic learners. The evidence from our survey chimed with similar evidence from CPAG who found that '*Young people's calls for national trip support include funding to help schools run trips equitably and avoid embarrassment, worry and exclusion*'. Currently, support and access to trips varies enormously across Scotland.

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