NHS
**Health
Scotland**

Evaluation of the Cost of the School Day programme (2018–19)
Summary report

Blake Stevenson Ltd and Associates
(ASK Research and Hopwood Research and Evaluation Ltd)
August 2019

This resource may also be made available
on request in the following formats:

Background

Cost of the School Day (CoSD) is a programme developed by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland. Its aim is to encourage local authority and school-level action to lessen the impacts of poverty on schoolchildren and contribute to equity in education, by reducing or removing financial barriers to full participation in school; and by addressing poverty-related stigma that some children may experience.

Children are considered to be living in poverty if they live in households with less than 60% of median household income. In 2015–18, 24% of children in Scotland (240,000 children each year), were living in poverty after housing costs. Child poverty is caused by a wide range of factors that result in inadequate household resources. The Scottish Government has identified three main drivers of child poverty in Scotland, which are rooted in the structures and institutions of Scotland, rather than individual choices or behaviours. These include:

- income from social security and benefits

- income from employment

- the cost of living.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017[1] committed Scottish Ministers to ambitious targets to reduce child poverty by 2030, and tasked local authorities (LAs) with taking action in this respect. Many LAs have focused on how to reduce the cost of attending school for their children.

To date, CoSD activity can be described as having developed in three waves.

Wave 1 involved CPAG in Scotland staff working intensively with a number of schools in Glasgow City Council (GCC) and Dundee City Council (DCC)

---

[1] Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.
www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/pdfs/asp_20170006_en.pdf

areas, engaging with pupils, parents and school staff to identify financial barriers to full participation in school and develop actions to reduce and/or remove these barriers.

Wave 2 involved CPAG in Scotland staff working with LA staff in GCC and DCC to disseminate the learning from Wave 1 to other schools and provide training and resources to encourage these schools to take action on CoSD.

Wave 3 involves CPAG in Scotland disseminating the learning further, to other LAs across Scotland, through providing resources, consultation and training. This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the impact and sustainability of the CoSD programme.

Aim

With CoSD in its sixth year, the evaluation was designed to address two overarching aims:

- Understand the impact CoSD has had on removing cost barriers for participation in school.

- Understand how to improve the programme and encourage effective wider adoption of a sustainable CoSD approach.

Methodology

The evaluation involved a preparatory stage including a review of existing data sources and fact-finding calls with GCC, DCC and Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) to inform the development and testing of an extensive set of research tools.

Primary data collection was then conducted using the following methods:

- Online survey sent to senior staff in all local authority nurseries and schools in Dundee and Glasgow.

- Interviews with classroom teachers and head/depute head teachers in Dundee and Glasgow.

- Interviews with parents, parent council representatives and pupils in Dundee.

- Interviews with local authority stakeholders in DCC and GCC.

- Interviews with national stakeholders and representatives from other local authorities across Scotland.

Summary of key findings

Understanding the impact CoSD has had on removing cost barriers for participation in school

There was evidence that CoSD activity had resulted in practice changes at school level, policy changes at LA level and changes to awareness, understanding and attitudes towards poverty, and as such had contributed towards several intended short- and medium-term outcomes.

Practice changes at school level

The findings from the evaluation provide many examples of practice change in schools prompted by CoSD, in areas related to:

- **Uniform** – e.g. uniform recycling and use of non-branded jumpers/blazers.

- **Food at school** – e.g. breakfast clubs, breakfast boxes, encouraging uptake of free school meals (FSMs) and provision of FSMs during school holidays.

- **Learning in and out of school** – e.g. use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) money to remove curriculum costs, providing starter packs for pupils and setting up lunchtime homework clubs.

- **Clubs** – e.g. reducing or removing cost.

- **Fun events and trips** – e.g. creating costume swap-shops for dressing-up events, limiting costume events, reducing cost to 20p or making cost a suggested donation rather than compulsory, supporting payment in instalments, covering costs of curriculum trips and sourcing cheaper destinations.

- **Transport –** e.g. using public transport and sharing bus hire with other schools.

- **Promotion of entitlements and support –** e.g. signposting to other agencies and encouraging uptake of FSM and clothing grants.

Practice change was taking place at a whole-school level and at an individual teacher level.

Policy changes at local authority level

At the LA policy level, there were several examples of change including:

- Covering the costs of school trips from LA budget, rather than school budgets or schools having to source external funding.

- Embedding CoSD actions into school action plans: e.g. all schools in the LA catchment committing to address CoSD actions, rather than individual schools.

- Automation of school-related entitlements to increase uptake of FSM and clothing grant – meaning parents who need support have ease of access to financial support for new clothing, rather than relying on secondhand clothes through school swap-shops.

- LA-wide provision of breakfast, meaning all children in the LA area will have access to something to eat at the start of the day.

- Sourcing affordable school uniform through securing cheaper suppliers.

Changes to awareness, understanding and attitudes towards poverty

The surveys and interviews highlighted that involvement in the CoSD programme contributed to:

- raised awareness of the consequences of child poverty

- raised awareness of the costs associated with participation in school

- an improved understanding of child poverty and the cost of participation among school staff

- pupils experiencing less income stigma and exclusion

- parents experiencing less financial pressure

- families having a greater awareness of financial entitlements.

However, while there was an improved awareness, which had led to better understanding and changes in practice, attitudes towards poverty among some staff, pupils and parents presented a challenge that still needs to be addressed.

Contribution to achieving CoSD intended outcomes

Currently there is no systematic collection of data and information carried out to evidence changes that CoSD has had on the cost barriers identified for children to full participation in school. However, school staff were clear that the practical changes had led to positive outcomes for their children and families.

This evaluation found evidence that the delivery of the CoSD programme contributed to the following intended short- and medium-term outcomes:

- Changes in the understanding of the drivers and consequences of child poverty and school costs among school staff and some parent councils.

- New school policies and practices that are more poverty sensitive.

- Reduced or removed cost barriers to participation in school and after-school activities.

- Supported schools or parent councils to secure and use available funding to lessen child poverty within their setting.

- Increased participation in school and after-school activities.

- Reduced school-related financial pressures for families.

- Promotion of entitlements and financial supports available to parents.

- Increased uptake of entitlements.

Understanding how to improve the programme and encourage effective wider adoption of a sustainable CoSD approach

Most of the LA areas consulted were in the first year of the programme and identified various future priorities, including maintaining involvement and encouraging wider participation, addressing negative attitudes towards poverty, and monitoring and assessing actions taken by schools.

For areas with longer involvement with the programme, LA stakeholders said they were looking at strategic actions to sustain activities, such as securing external funding. Schools and local stakeholders also emphasised the important role that resources and funding play in maintaining the work.

Despite individual local circumstances, there are a number of key factors which influence the extent to which CoSD is successful:

- Dedicated resources to support schools to identify needs and actions to address them – some schools continued to have challenges in finding the capacity to engage with the programme.
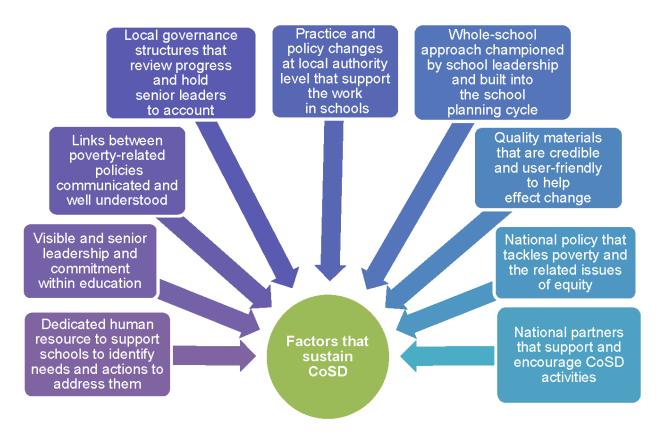
- Visible senior leadership and commitment within education services – visible senior leadership at school and local authority level was crucial in championing CoSD.

- Links between poverty-related policies are communicated and well understood – it was crucial that local areas had connected local policies with national policies across a range of partners (not just education services).

- Local governance structures that review progress and hold senior leaders to account – local governance structures must be in place so that progress was monitored, impact was understood, and senior leaders were held to account. These were not sufficiently robust in some LA areas.

- Practices and changes at LA level that support the work in schools – some practices and changes can only be effective if they are LA-wide to avoid strategic opportunities being missed. There was a risk that if actions were carried out by individual schools they would remain isolated pockets of activity.

- Whole-school approach championed by school leadership and built into school planning cycle – whole-school approaches championed by school leadership to understand the needs of the school family and address attitudes to poverty were most effective in building CoSD within the school policy and practice.

- Quality materials that are credible and user-friendly to help effect change – actions to further enhance the range of learning materials developed through CoSD will continue to ensure these are credible and user-friendly and will be instrumental in effecting change.

- National policy that tackles poverty and the related issues of equity – policies that reinforced the adoption of the CoSD and aligned different

policy areas, such as referencing CoSD in Fairer Scotland Action, and the use of PEF monies to support CoSD actions, will further encourage schools to consider poverty-proofing actions.

- National partners that support and encourage CoSD activities by developing complementary information, endorsing or referencing the programme within existing policy and enabling and empowering schools.

The factors that have supported implementation and delivery of CoSD in Wave 1 and 2 are also key factors of success to rolling out and sustaining CoSD initiatives. These are summarised in figure 1.

Figure 1: Key factors that sustain CoSD

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings and discussion, the full report proposes a number of key actions that stakeholders can take to support CoSD work at school, local authority and national levels.