

Addressing Poverty by Supporting Parents and Families in Schools

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Introduction

Parental engagement with schools can impact attainment, as well as social and emotional wellbeing. If school engagement does not reach all families, it can widen the gap between disadvantaged and more advantaged students (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014). Engaging with the wider school community, including parents and families, is most effective when it is completed collaboratively and on parents' own terms (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013).

In the Poverty Proofing© the School Day Bradford sample by Children North East, they raised several points that need further work within this area.




In 84% of schools, parents were **not sure who to speak to in school for support** - "Letters say ask for help, but I'm not sure who to ask?" (parent)

In 76% of schools, parents were **unaware of financial support or signposting available** - "No information given regarding this." (parent)

In 61% of schools, parents were **not comfortable or to ask the school for help** - "It soon adds up, I'm not always comfortable asking for help." (parent)

Use this document to consider your school's support for parents and families through an income inequality lens.

Questions To Ask Your School

	Question	Page
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we have an accurate understanding of how much money families are asked for at school over a year? How effectively do we avoid assumptions about family incomes and what families can afford? Do we sign post to external/community support? 	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does our communication with all parents explain what help is available with costs? What opportunities, formal and informal, allow parents to engage with the school setting? 	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well do all staff members understand the impact of costs on children and their families? Is the support we provide for children and families non-stigmatising and unlikely to single them out? 	6



Relieving Costs and Pressures

What Citizens Say



'The letter says voluntary contributions, but it's worded as though you have to contribute.' (parent)

'After school clubs are expensive... children always want to do more than one club which can be difficult sometimes depending on how many kids you have.' (parent)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

Parents **don't know how to get support** around the costs associated with school.

- **Encourage all families** who need financial support to approach the school.
- Create a **financial support document** specific to the school. It could include local organisations, support and strategies.
- Ensure it clearly highlights a **main point of contact**.

Costs requested by schools do not consider the **number of children** families have.

- When working out the budget for events and activities, **factor in how many children there may be**.

Payments are **asked for immediately or at the last minute**, which makes budgeting hard.

- Provide support through payment plans and savings **schemes**.
- Allow **enough time** when requesting money for activities.

Payments coincide, which makes it difficult to cover them.

- **Spread spending out across the year.**
- **Consider other pressures, such as Christmas.**
- Use Gantt charts to ensure there are no financial pinch points for families across the year.
- Use the **Cost of The School Day Calander** to plan ahead.



Barriers

Families are unable to pay the full amount to participate in trips, extracurricular activities, or charity/school events.

Families are struggling with costs outside of school and don't know where to get help. They may feel isolated because of this.

Guidance

- **Have a pay as you feel approach.** Whilst there is an acceptance that families may pay only what they can afford.
- **Signpost to local support for example**
 - [Cost of Living Bradford](#)
 - [Warm Homes Healthy People](#)
 - [Bradford Citizens Advice](#)
 - [Bradford Food Banks](#)
 - [Family Hubs](#)
 - [FYI Bradford](#)
 - Local community groups of charities

Case Study



Food parcels are given to families. *'Our families have a card so they can be discreet about it, they bring it in, I ask them what they need/ want and give it them' (staff).* The **card is given to those who regularly need support**, other support is given through email requests or by other staff throughout school having rapport with families.

To further embed this consider having an email such as support@Bradford.School for families who are nervous about reaching out to access support.



Parental Engagement

What Citizens Say



"Sometimes you want to talk in private, but the office is too open." (parent)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

Families are **unaware that financial support is available** for trips and extra-curricular opportunities.

- **Include a paragraph at the end of letters** sent home that states that: 'no child from this school will miss out on any key educational trips and opportunities because of money. If you are unable to pay for this trip, please contact [named person], and our school will make sure that your child is able to attend.'

Parents feel intimidated about asking for help as they don't feel their issues are valid.

- **Create informal situations for families to talk**, such as Stay and Play or coffee mornings.

Parents feel like teachers are too busy to talk to them.

- Create **drop-in support sessions** that give parents the chance to get support and talk to teachers.
- Or ensure at least **1 member of staff is always available before and after school** as a gateway to additional support.

Families don't engage or aren't able to come to school during normal hours.

- **Parental ambassadors** who help you spread the word about support across families.

Case Study



There is a **weekly walking group** for parents to join, along with support staff. It is a way for parents to get some exercise and chat to other parents; staff have **also invited a local ex-police officer to join in**, as well as local councillors, enabling parents to discuss issues within their communities and meet community role models. It also helps to develop their English, as many parents who join are not fluent.



Supportive Environment

What Citizens Say



'It's not all about money, money, money, school know when things are tight.' (parent)

'You can approach any member of staff for any reason at any time.' (parent)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Guidance

Parents do not feel comfortable talking to the school about financial issues.

- **Promote an open-door policy.** An inclusive and welcoming atmosphere helps break down barriers and encourages parents to seek help.

Working parents feel that they may not be understood or that they may not be able to access help.

- Ensure the school understands the issues that the community **faces**.
- **Communicate this to parents and offer support through various means** (website, newsletters, texts).

Families do not know **who they can go to with their issues**.

- Having **committed pastoral staff** to build positive relationships further and trust.

Parents feel like school is just a space for their children.

- Have a **designated space** for families, such as a parent room or community hub within schools, to increase engagement.

Parents don't talk to teachers because they are **worried, they will be told they are not good parents** or that they are doing something wrong.

- **Respect and be nonjudgmental:**
- Recognise that **parents are the experts on their own children** and actively listen to what they have to say, as well as their concerns and anxieties.

Parents have a **negative perception of school** as they only hear from them when their child has done something wrong.

- **Communicate positive information and children's successes** as an everyday practice to build relationships.



Case Study

'We had a **cash lending system**, one family would ask when they need money for gas, some people might say well you don't know what they are spending it on, but who are we to judge.' (staff)

Bradford School



The school is open and **welcoming to everybody** and the majority of parents support this view:

'... is an outstanding school & go above & beyond for pupils inside & outside of school hours ensuring the whole family is ok & not just the pupil. They are caring and compassionate. I'm thankful my daughter has a place in this school. The head teacher Miss is a wonderful person & goes above and beyond to help students & families. **She makes me feel human and not embarrassed about any outside issues I feel I can always come to her with any troubles** that may affect my daughters school day without judgement.' (parent) '... are always supporting children and their families without any judgement and always there to help. The staff are approachable and if there ever was an issue can happily speak to school.' (parent)



References

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013). Educational aspirations: How English schools can work with parents to keep them on track | Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [online] Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/educational-aspirations-how-english-schools-can-work-with-parents-to-keep-them-on-track>

Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2014). Cracking the code: how schools can improve social mobility. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e4fdbe5274a2e87db0ea0/Cracking_the_code_Final.pdf



If you have any feedback on this document or good practice that your school is doing, **we would love to hear from you.**

Please email schools@mylivingwell.co.uk.

