Addressing Poverty Through Pupil Support in Schools

Contents

Introduction

Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience increased anxiety, low moods, and lower concentration levels, which can impact their school life (Action for Children, 2024 & Mind, 2021). This can be due to additional responsibilities and burdens at home, for example, taking on caregiving roles or feeling guilty or ashamed (Action for Children,2024; N8 Research Partnership, 2024). Sometimes, these struggles in school may be interpreted as bad behaviour (Mind, 2021).

Pastoral care provided to pupils and families is the foundation of other anti-poverty efforts (CPAG, 2020). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage with and, therefore, benefit from activities aimed at supporting those with mental health concerns (CPAG, 2020). Engagement relies on relationship building, trust, and effective communication with the school, which is an integral step in providing pupil support (CPAG, 2020).

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

In **46%** of schools, pupils were **uncomfortable speaking to staff about worries** – 'It's too hard saying how you feel to a teacher.' *(Pupil)*

In **30%** of schools, it was identified that there is a **greater need for specialised counselling support**. Pupils do not feel as if they have an allocated time within the day or a nominated person to speak to about their feelings.

Use this document to consider how your school's offer of pupil support is experienced through an income inequality lens.

Questions To Ask Your School

Accessing Support

What Citizens Say

'[My sister] told them but nothing happened.' (pupil)

'Wellbeing stopped talking to me because I wasn't bad enough.' (pupil)

'It's not very discrete, everyone can see you go there.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Pupils are **unaware of the support offered, or the support** offered is at **unsuitable times.**	• Consider **specialised counselling** support for children who need extra time and communicate this directly. • Consider when **allocated support time is throughout the day**. Does it clash with learning or religious activities? • **Define drop-in times** for children to see members of staff, so children know when they can speak to staff.
The pupil's **demand for support outweighs staff capacity.**	• Allow **more staff to be identified** as touchpoints for children to share their concerns. • Consider **training pupils to become peer wellbeing ambassadors**. This can feel less intimidating for pupils than selecting a member of staff to contact. • Find out how to develop a peer support programme on the **Anna Freud website**.
Those with **additional needs** may benefit from **further support** from the school.	• SENDCos are encouraged to have a clear strategy for understanding how pupils with SEND or Pupil Premium are vulnerable to the effects of poverty. • Consider creating **workshops** for **parents on specific SEND aspects** with signposted support. • Conducting **whole school screening** for identification of specific SEND needs.

Barriers

Guidance

Families are unaware of the support the school might be able to offer through Pupil Premium.

- Clarify to pupils and parents that they **can approach school if they need financial support.**
- This should be **communicated again when discussing any trip** or request for uniforms or resources.

Case Study

Bradford School

The Libarian offers a 'safe space' for more vulnerable pupils. She runs a range of groups to support pupils and help to build confidence. **The library is open from 8.00am, breaktime, lunch time and after school**. The Librarian keeps an eye on the pupils who always need new equipment because they have lost theirs. If it becomes a regular problem, she will let the Pastoral Team know.

There is good communication between LSAs, the Libarian, teachers and the Pastoral Team. If needs be, conversations will be held with pupils and support put in place if necessary.

Sharing Concerns

What Citizens Say

'It's too hard saying how you feel to a teacher.' (pupil)

'The teachers sometimes tell me to come back later when I go to see them, then I'm not sure where they are at breaktime.' (pupil)

'Shout at us, can't trust them, can't go to them.' 'Stop shouting…. listen first.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Pupils can be **uncomfortable speaking to staff** about their worries.	• Consider an **anonymous method of reporting worries/concerns** through the website or a reporting email address. • Consider a '**Worry Box**' in each classroom and around the school. • If a name is included on the paper, a staff member can talk directly to the pupil. If no name is **on the paper, the teacher can address the whole class.** • Ensure all staff are **aware of the process** which should be followed if a pupil shares a concern with them.
Some pupils found navigating the **staff's dual role in providing support and managing behaviour difficult.**	• When a pupil discloses something, **clarify who will be told and when phone calls home** is made to help build trust. • Consider training **pupil ambassadors to provide peer support** and mentoring if pupils do not want to talk to staff.
Pupils do **not want to draw attention to themselves** in front of friends and other teachers.	• Ensure **designated rooms** for accessing support are not located in busy areas or where it is quickly pointed out where someone is going.

Case Study

Bradford Schools

All children could say who they would talk to if they had issues, and many pupils in KS2 could name at least five. *"They care about you a lot at school and they really mean it."*

The **Year 6 buddies are excellent role models** and encourage kindness and support between pupils: *'they will help you find someone to play with if you are being left out'* (pupil).

Pupils Emotional Wellbeing

What Citizens Say

'Wish they taught more about mental health.' (pupil)

'The staff tell us that we can talk to any adult, that we trust in school.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Pupils **do not know about mental health support** or feel like it is not a priority for the school.	• Ensure that **open conversations are encouraged**. To avoid stigma around talking about mental health. • Talk about emotional well-being and the **importance of accessing support in assemblies** to promote a supportive environment at school. • **Display boards** can remind pupils to be kind as they move around the school. • Consider having **photos of the school nurse, who is available and has a role within the school,** to ensure pupils are aware.
Behaviour and pastoral matters are not separated.	• Consider creating **small, portable resources** to help pupils with behavioural issues identify their emotions and choose strategies to self-manage. • Consider the creation of a '**pass' that allows pupils to go to a room** and speak to staff about their feelings. • Consider **extracurricular activities** such as boxing to channel pupils' emotions in a healthy way.
A small number of pupils stated that they feel **under pressure** about their SATs.	• Consider some **specific sessions** with pupils in preparation for their SATs. • Reflect with **staff on the feedback of Year Six pupils** regarding their SATs and the significant pressure they are feeling. • **Free Breakfast Club access for all Year Six pupils** in the run-up to SATs. • Share a range of free resources to all pupils.

Case Study

Bradford Schools

The majority of **pupils know that there is support available to them if they have worries or concerns**. There is also Mental Health support for pupils who are struggling.

The theme of **mental health is often used in assemblies with the names of staff made visible** that pupils can contact if they need support. *"Every assembly they tell us who we can talk to."*

References

Action for Children (2024). How poverty affects children's mental health. Available at: https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/blog/how-poverty-affects-childrens-mental-health/ [Accessed 27 September 2024].

Child Poverty Action Group (2020). Tackling Child Poverty: A guide for schools. Available at: https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/Tackling%20child%20poverty-%20a%20guide%20for%20schools.pdf [Accessed 27 September 2024].

Mind (2021). Young people failed by approach to mental health in secondary schools across England. Available at: https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/almost-two-thirds-of-young-people-receive-no-support-from-school-for-their-mental-health/ [Accessed 27 September 2024].

N8 Research Partnership (2024). An evidence-based plan for addressing poverty with and through education settings. Available at: https://caer.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CoTN_Poverty_Report_2.pdf [Accessed 27 September 2024].

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**.