



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

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Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

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25<sup>th</sup> January 2019

Dear John,

### **Attainment and Achievement of School-aged Children Experiencing Poverty**

The Committee considered COSLA's substantive response to the Committee's inquiry report at its meeting on 23 January. The Committee cross-referred between this response and the responses from Education Scotland and the Scottish Government received in September 2018.

The Committee notes that the Government response, in relation to Committee recommendations on the cost of the school day, states that 'In light of the Committee's recommendations we will explore these challenges further with COSLA.'

The response from COSLA does not reflect discussions on these challenges and so the Committee agreed to write to you to seek assurances that work in response to these recommendations is being taken forward.

Specifically, the Committee seeks clarification as to whether it is the Scottish Government or COSLA that is responsible for taking forward the Committee's cost of the school day recommendations. Namely: the recommendation that all education authorities should be surveyed to establish which authorities sanction charging for in-school activities and the level of these charges; and the recommendation that a review is undertaken into which elements of the experiences offered by schools may attract a charge and the cumulative impact of these charges.

The Committee would also appreciate details of the work being taken forward in response to these recommendations. I attach the relevant extract of the report which sets out the evidence that these recommendations are based upon.

I would be grateful for a response by 25 February,

Yours sincerely

**CLARE ADAMSON MSP**  
**CONVENER**

(cc Councillor Stephen McCabe, Spokesperson for Children and Young People,  
COSLA)

## **EXTRACT OF COMMITTEE REPORT ON ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN EXPERIENCING POVERTY**

### **Barriers to participation - Cost of the school day**

One of the key issues raised in this inquiry was barriers to participation in education. This included a number of cost barriers.

Child Poverty Action Group Scotland ("CPAG") has done a great deal of work in identifying the costs of education and ways to reduce or eliminate them. John Dickie from CPAG said—

“Pupils are being charged for materials such as ingredients for home economics lessons and materials for art and design as well as for trips to the theatre as part of English and drama courses. [...] The reality is that pupils and teachers themselves say that pupils are making subject choices on the basis of cost. [...] their ability to enjoy participating in subjects is diminishing, because they know that their participation is causing stress for their families. Charging is also reducing the disposable income that is available to families to enable them to meet all their other needs—to pay the bills, buy food and all the rest of it—and to sustain their home. [...] The other big cost is school trips, particularly the primary 7 residential trip that local authorities across Scotland organise. The cost of the trip is well over £300 in some cases—the charge varies, but there is a charge—and there is evidence that children are being left behind and are not participating in the school trip. We surveyed schools in one local authority area and found that, on average, three or four pupils in every P7 class were not participating in the P7 residential trip. When we hear young pupils describe how big a part of P7 the trip is, we can imagine what a big impact being left behind must have on the young people’s sense of what school and education have to offer.”

Source: Education and Skills Committee 18 April 2018, John Dickie, contrib. 5983

Kevin Lowden from the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change ("ROC") took up this theme and said that research shows that participation in enrichment activities, such as cultural activities, museums or outdoor activities, can help to close the attainment gap. He continued—

“[It is] all the more crucial that they are part of the repertoire that schools, local authorities and Government use in tackling the issues that we are talking about. If the cost of the school day impacts on schools’ ability to provide enrichment opportunities, that is a key issue.”

Source: Education and Skills Committee 18 April 2018, Kevin Lowden, contrib. 6084

Andrea Bradley from the EIS said that her members are reporting that costs for practical subjects are increasingly being passed on to families due to departments' budgets being squeezed. EIS' view is—

“All things that are essential to children and young people’s participation in day-to-day learning have to be met by school funds.”

Source: Education and Skills Committee 25 April 2018 [Draft], Andrea Bradley, contrib. 2085

The impact on children of well-meaning but exclusionary practices was made clear by a child quoted in CPAG's submission—

“There’s nothing to do at the summer fair if you don't have money. Even throwing a sponge at the teacher costs about £1. Sometimes you just have to sit in class if you don't have any money, that’s happened to me. You get made fun of.” (Learner, P5)

Source: CPAG Scotland, 201886

Brian Scott, a commissioner at the Poverty Truth Commission also highlighted the costs of non-uniform days and dressing up for events. Mr Scott said that poverty can limit access to other activities, even if they are free.

“For pupils who have to rely on the school bus to take them to school, there is very rarely the possibility of later travel, after the school day is done, which means that they cannot access homework clubs and other after-school activities.”

Source: Education and Skills Committee 02 May 2018 [Draft], Brian Scott, contrib. 4787

CPAG's Cost of the school day project and the City of Edinburgh's 1 in 5 project are two examples of these issues being highlighted and addressed at the local authority level. These projects are also working to bring home to teachers the pressures of life in poverty. One of the outcomes identified of the on-going 1 in 5 project was "attitudinal and cultural change and increased empathy" in the schools.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 ("the 1980 Act") states, "school education provided by an education authority shall be provided without payment of fees" and while there are exceptions to this, fees should not be charged if they prejudice "the adequate provision of free school education" (s.3 of the 1980 Act). In addition, education authorities must provide education materials free of charge that “are necessary to enable the pupil to take full advantage of the education provided.” (s.11 of the 1980 Act). Ministers have the power to take action if an education authority fails to perform its duties under the 1980 Act. (s.70 of the 1980 Act)

During the inquiry there was some discussion on what core education should be, that is, what should not be charged for. The 1980 Act defines school education as "progressive education appropriate to the requirements of pupils, regard being had to

the age, ability and aptitude of such pupils" (s1. of the 1980 Act). The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 ("the 2000 Act") provides for every child to have the right to education (s1. of the 2000 Act) and education authorities have a duty to ensure that education "is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential." (s.2 of the 2000 Act).

Education has changed since the passages of the 1980 and 2000 Acts; Curriculum for Excellence ("CfE") has a broad definition of education. One of the foundational documents of CfE, Building The Curriculum 3, says—

“The curriculum is the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated. It includes the ethos and life of the school as a community; curriculum areas and subjects; interdisciplinary learning; and opportunities for personal achievement.

Personal achievement provides children and young people with a sense of satisfaction and helps to build motivation, resilience and confidence. The experiences and outcomes include opportunities for a range of achievements in the classroom and beyond.”

Source: The Scottish Government, 200889

**The starting point to address this issue of charging for access to school education is to assess the extent of this practice. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government surveys all education authorities to establish which authorities sanction charging for in-school activities and the level of these charges.**

**The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government undertake a review of which elements of the experiences offered by schools may attract a charge and the cumulative impact of these charges.**

## **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Scottish Government is aware of the challenges related to some schools and local authorities charging for some educational experiences. That is why we fund the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland to investigate and respond to this issue. In light of the Committee's recommendations we will explore these challenges further with COSLA.