
Meeting of the Health Select Committee – 28th March 2024

Report of the Director of Public Health

Progress of Poverty Proofing the School Day

Purpose of report

1. To update on the purpose and progress of the Poverty Proofing the school day pilot programme.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Committee note the pilot programme and timescale.

Background

3. As a result of the pandemic and cost-of-living pressures, some households with children will have been pulled deeper into poverty, whilst some will be experiencing it for the first time.
4. The percentage of children aged 0-15 years living in Dudley who are in low-income families is 27% ⁽¹⁾, continuing to remain significantly worse than England since 2014/15 ⁽²⁾.
5. The ripple effect of poverty means it inevitably impacts school life. It can mean struggling with school-related costs such as uniform, resources and school trips as well as poorer health, social and educational outcomes, all of which impact a child's ability to fully participate in school life.
6. Working in partnership, the Children and Young People's Public Health team worked with members of the Child Poverty Working Group, including Virtual school and Education Outcomes colleagues, to evaluate packages available nationally to support children and families living in financial hardship.

7. The Children North East programme is a copyrighted, nationally recognised, evidence-based approach, striving to support education settings in making sure no activity in school identifies, excludes, treats differently, or makes assumptions about those with less financial resource.
8. Approval was given for a Dudley pilot scheme to commence from November 2023 - May 2024. The schools were selected due to their commitment to the scheme, their geographical location and deprivation data.
9. This externally facilitated audit process, including observation and sensitively interviewing pupils, staff, parents, and governors, reviews key themes such as attendance, lunchtimes, school trips and classroom experience.
10. Based on the audit findings, Public Health as the commissioner will receive alongside each participating school, verbal feedback and a written report highlighting both the school successes, as well as support measures personalised to the school's individual resource, ambitions and need.

Progress to date

11. The participating primary schools are detailed below, along with the scheduled dates of their Poverty Proofing audit. At the time of writing 4 x schools have completed their audits but not all reports are available to comment on.
12. The 8 x pilot schools:

	School name	Audit date
1	Quarry Bank	W/C: 20.11.23
2	Russell's Hall	W/C: 11/12/23
3	Caslon	15.01.24
4	Hawbush	22.01.24
5	Bromley Hills	05.02.24
6	Wallbrook	04.03.24
7	Blanford Mere	11.03.24
8	Ham Dingle	08.04.24

13. Good practice displayed by those who have participated so far includes;
 - having clear uniform policies whereby no one is disciplined for infractions and affordability is prioritised.

- supporting pupil voice through initiatives like having a Pupil Prime Minister and supporting Cabinet.
 - providing all pupils with resources at the start of an academic year such as a water bottle, pencil case and other stationary, to avoid highlighting those who cannot afford to provide these.
14. Recommendations from audits completed so far have included;
- finding alternative lower cost trips
 - clearly promoting to parents how the school can support with financial matters, including having an email mailbox, or a key member of staff overseeing this agenda
 - implementing an annual calendar which provides ample warning of trips/ charity days, so families can plan ahead and exploring the low uptake of free school meals.
15. The findings aim to highlight the importance for settings and professionals to continually take steps to reduce the exclusion and stigma associated with poverty, improving quality and altering everyday practice, basing all decision making on backing and including the poorest in our community.

Next steps/ future plans

16. Following the completion of the pilot, a full report of key findings can be shared with committee, including common themes identified and recommendations for improvement, to alleviate some of the struggles, shame and embarrassment felt by children and their families in financial hardship, in attending and taking part in everyday school life.
17. The children's team approach and service planning for mitigating poverty, will be further refined by the Children's Poverty Working Group and partners, this includes children's services education outcomes and virtual school. Using evidence and the reports gathered, we will consider sustainable options for continuing this work ensuring poverty does not exclude children from learning or engaging with their school life and peers. It forms part of our wider work to mitigate poverty across the borough.
18. The Virtual School want to work in partnership with Public Health and share learnings, so we can further determine common themes, successes and challenges for education settings in supporting families and children living in financial hardship across the borough.

Finance

19. The cost of the pilot is £26,700 from the public health grant.

Law

20. No legal implications have been identified from this report.

Risk Management

21. No risks have been identified from this report.

Equality Impact

22. This work is an inclusive offer for all families, children and staff in the pilot schools.

23. CNE Poverty Proofing Programme is an evidenced based programme.

24. This pilot scheme will have a positive impact on the most vulnerable people in our community. Those with the lowest incomes; including families with more than 3 children, multigenerational households and people living with long term conditions or disabilities.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

25. There are no Human Resources or Organisational Development implications from this report.

Commercial/Procurement

26. There are no commercial or procurement implications from this report.

Environment/Climate Change

27. There is no impact on the environment, impact is more likely to encourage the reuse of items.

Council Priorities and Projects

28. This programme of work supports the key Council priorities including the Borough Vision and Council Plan 2022-25, meeting the wider council priority around offering children the best start in life, increasing attainment and reducing poverty.

29. Dudley the borough of opportunity

- Children and young people benefit from the best possible start in life in our Child Friendly borough.

- Everyone, including our most vulnerable, have the choice, support, and control of the services they need to live independently.
- Dudley the safe and sound borough
- Poverty is reducing as we address all forms of inequality, improve social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing.

30. By working with partners, the aim is to share the learning from this group of pilot schools, to enable and encourage all schools to make minor adjustments to their working practice and be as inclusive as possible so every child can thrive.



Dr Mayada Abuaffan
Director of Public Health and Wellbeing

Report Author: Jill Edwards
Telephone: 01384 816265
Email: jill.edwards@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background information

- 1) Department for Work and Pensions (2023) *Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low-income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2021/22, Table 4_5db.* Department for Work and Pensions.
- 2) Department for Work and Pensions. (2023) *Children in Low Income Families: local area statistics, United Kingdom, financial years ending (FYE) 2015 to 2022.* Department for Work and Pensions