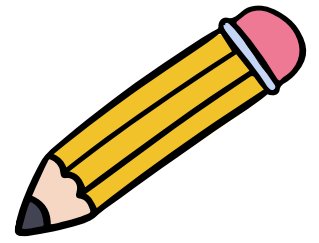


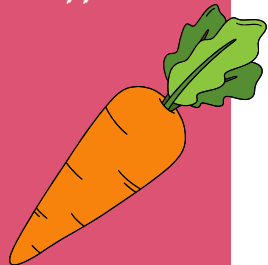
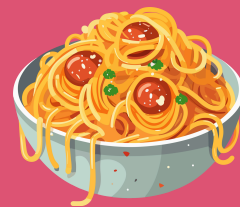
Poverty Proofing the School Day in Suffolk



This is a summary document of Suffolk's Poverty Proofing the School Day - Common Themes Report. It brings out the three key themes that came out of the project (Food, Celebrations and Rewards, Behaviour and Attendance), and then summarises a further theme - Uniform.

Tackling Food Poverty

The key issue identified in the Common Themes Report is the ongoing challenge of food poverty. The seven schools who we worked with have responded by implementing a variety of good practice initiatives to support students who may struggle to access sufficient nutrition. For example, fruit is provided in some schools at no cost during break times, ensuring that all children, regardless of their financial situation, have access to snacks. Two of the primary schools also offer second portions at lunch for children who remain hungry after their first meal, recognising that for some, school lunch may be their only substantial meal of the day. The Food in Schools Survey identified a further 13 schools that offer second portions, half of which use Vertas as their catering provider.



Breakfast provision is highlighted as crucial, with two schools of the seven offering this service to all pupils. Access to breakfast ensures students are well-prepared for the day ahead which can better aid concentration. However, challenges persist, including the affordability, perceived small portion sizes of school meals and how items are priced. Cost can sometimes lead to either a reliance on less healthy snack foods or an inability to spend the full FSM allowance (which in many schools cannot be rolled over to the next day). Again, these concerns were highlighted countywide in our Food in Schools survey. Additionally, some students in a high school we worked in were easily identifiable as being on Free School Meals (FSM), raising concerns about stigma. This concern was shared with the school. It is recommended that schools work towards more discreet methods of delivering FSM and public Health Suffolk are exploring how schools can roll over unspent FSM money when a child is absent and transfer it to another day. This would allow students more flexibility and could make a real difference, particularly if a student is just a little short financially on a particular day to buy the food that they needed. For further strategies on handling food poverty, see page 16.

Celebrations

Inclusive celebrations were a highlight across the seven schools, with efforts made to ensure that events like Christmas and end-of-year activities are accessible to all students, regardless of their economic background. Examples of this include giving free leavers' hoodies and Year 6 yearbooks, and ensuring that birthday celebrations do not revolve around bringing in cakes and sweets, which might exclude students from lower-income families. This approach promotes equality, as no child feels left out due to their family's financial situation.



Certain holiday traditions, such as gift-giving to teachers or questions about holiday experiences, can unintentionally highlight financial disparities between students. Schools are encouraged to incorporate alternative, non-material ways of celebrating, such as encouraging pupils to reflect on their experiences and learn about different cultures in their lessons as opposed to "what did you do at Christmas?". This creates a more inclusive environment that is sensitive to students' diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. For more ideas on celebrations, see page 10.

Rewards, Behaviour, and Attendance

Reward systems are widely understood and celebrated by pupils, with achievements being recognised in school assemblies, including values-based rewards such as celebrating compassion. However, inconsistencies in the delivery of reward systems were noted, which can frustrate students who feel unfairly treated when rewards or punishments vary between teachers, or when children are rewarded for doing particularly well at reading because they have a reading culture at home.

Attendance remains an important focus, with some schools holding whole class attendance awards. For those children living in poverty and / or can't help being absent, they feel bad that they are letting their peers down and it can be stigmatising. Many schools take a supportive approach. For instance, some schools offer 'soft starts' for pupils who struggle with attendance due to social anxiety, poor mental health and being overwhelmed in the playground with other children. Other schools recognise improved attendance rather than just rewarding 100% attendance. For example, in one school, all pupils school receive a raffle ticket for a prize, yet children may receive more tickets upon improved attendance or 100% attendance. By looking at pupils individually, a child can then be motivated to attend school for 10 or 20 continuous days. This strategy ensures that students who struggle with attendance, often those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, do not feel penalised. See page 29 for more on supporting attendance and behaviour.

Uniform

Uniform costs remain a barrier for some families, with five of the seven schools reporting concerns about affordability. Flexible policies, such as allowing students to wear non-logod items and not punishing those without the correct uniform, were praised. The seven schools have embraced pre-loved uniform schemes, with some presenting second-hand items on clothes rails, reducing the stigma for students in need.

The Government's statutory guidance for educational settings on [Costs of school uniform](#) (issued November 2021) and their non statutory guidance on [How schools should develop their uniform policy and procure uniform supplies](#) (last updated April 2024) clearly communicates the intent that the cost of school uniforms is reasonable and secures the best value for money. The guidance also specifically covers;

- The provision of second-hand uniform
- Other support with the cost of school uniforms



For those in hardship, the above is particularly important. Leading up to the summer holidays, school communication with families on accessing affordable uniform is vital, as families traditionally spend on uniform in August, when schools are closed and there is no-one available for parents to ask about support schemes. More than 30 schools have arrangements with uniform provider Coes, where some families have discreet voucher codes to purchase uniform for free between June and November. For guidance on how to set up pre-loved uniform schemes and implement flexible uniform policies, see page 34, as well as our top tips for [school uniform](#).

“

Despite guidelines aimed at reducing school uniform costs, families are still struggling with the high prices of sending their children to school in the correct attire. We urge schools to reduce the number of branded items required, which could significantly lower expenses for parents. School uniforms offer many benefits, but they must be affordable. It's time for schools, parents and governors to collaborate on uniform policies, and work with suppliers, to ensure that undue financial strain is not placed on families.

Mark Russell, chief executive of the Children's Society

”

More information on the Government guidelines (keeping it affordable, use of branded items to a minimum, single supplier contracts to be avoided and those contracts giving high priority to cost and affordability) can be found at www.gov.uk

and to summarise...



Key Recommendations for Tackling Food Poverty, Celebrations, and Rewards

The Poverty Proofing the school day project main report findings recommend:

- **Food Poverty:** Ensure that breakfast is available at a reasonable cost for all students and that portion sizes meet nutritional needs. Introduce discreet ways to manage FSM to reduce any stigma.
- **Celebrations:** Implement inclusive practices for holidays and milestones that don't rely on material contributions, allowing all students to participate without feeling excluded.
- **Rewards, Behaviour & Attendance:** Ensure consistency in the delivery of behaviour rewards and take a holistic approach to attendance that recognises improvement, not just perfection.
- **Uniform:** Set up or expand pre-loved uniform schemes and communicate these options to families. In high schools, senior leaders should ask themselves what items of uniform must have a logo, and which is preferable yet not needed e.g. logos on a blouse under a jumper and blazer, on a skirt, or PE socks. Reduce the must list for families. Some East Suffolk high schools do not have blazers.

