

ROCKET SCIENCE

North of Tyne Combined Authority – Child Poverty Prevention Programme: Schools-Based Poverty Interventions Scoping Exercise



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1. Background and introduction

The North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) have committed over £880,000 to addressing child poverty through the Child Poverty Prevention Programme (CPPP). Included in this is £350,000 assigned to supporting poverty interventions within schools across the combined authority area. To inform the funding, in January 2021 Rocket Science were commissioned to scope existing school-based poverty interventions across the combined authority area and to determine the nature, extent, and success of these in reducing the impacts of child poverty. Our scoping research has included:

- The use of an online survey to all schools within the North of Tyne area
- Mapping of the pupil premium allocation across the combined authority area
- 11 interviews with Headteachers/Principals and Assistant Heads/Principals
- A good practice review from existing national and international evidence.

This report outlines the scoping exercise and makes a series of recommendations based upon our findings.

2. Mapping exercise of pupil premium allocation 2021-22

The following maps show the percentage of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (PP) in 2021-22 for the following schools across Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland:

- State funded primary and secondary
- Maintained special schools
- Non-maintained special schools
- Academies
- Pupil referral units
- Alternative provision academies.

Full details on the schools included can be found [here](#).

Map colours correspond to percentage of students on roll eligible for pupil premium. **Darker colours illustrate higher percentage of students eligible for pupil premium (e.g. dark blue = highest rate of PP).**

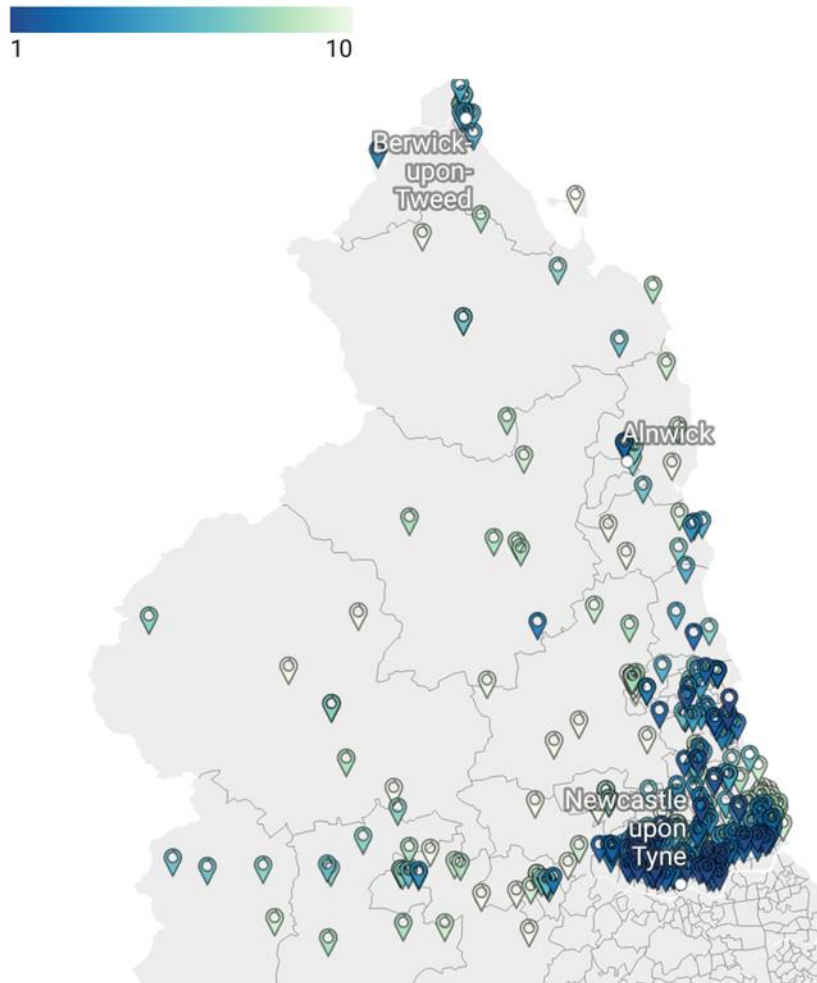
Figure 1 below shows all schools in the NTCA area, including:



- 97 schools in Newcastle Upon Tyne
- 78 schools in North Tyneside
- 164 schools in Northumberland.

Figure 1 NTCA schools by pupil premium allocation

Illustrative percentage of pupils per school eligible for the pupil premium in 2021-2022
1= highest percentage pupil premium allocation (most deprived)
10 = lowest percentage pupil premium allocation (least deprived)



The interactive version of this map shows the following information for each school:

- Number of pupils
- Percentage pupil premium
- Pupil premium decile (where 1 = top 10% highest proportion of students eligible for pupil premium)
- Pupil age range



- School type.¹

This interactive map is available at: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/Rneu7/3/>

Across the whole NTCA area, on average, **29%** of students per school were eligible for the pupil premium in 2021-2022. The map demonstrates highest proportions of students receiving pupil premium in Newcastle (average of **41%**), followed by North Tyneside (**30%**) and Northumberland (**22%**).

Data on the percentage of students eligible for pupil premium was broken down into deciles, where 1 = schools in the top 10% levels of pupil premium eligibility across NTCA (e.g. most deprived) and 10 = schools in the lowest 10% for eligibility across NTCA (least deprived).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of schools across these deciles in the three local authority areas. **24%** of schools in **Newcastle** are in the lowest decile, and **over half** are in deciles 1-3. While fewer schools in **North Tyneside** are in the lowest deciles for pupil premium, **58%** are in deciles 1-5, indicating that many schools in this area have high proportions of students in poverty. Few schools in **Northumberland** have very high levels of pupils eligible for pupil premium, but around one third are in deciles 4-6, with average levels of deprivation, similar to the proportion for North Tyneside.

¹ Gov.uk (2021) Search for schools and colleges to compare, [Link](#)



Figure 2 – Proportion of schools in each pupil premium decile by Local Authority in NTCA

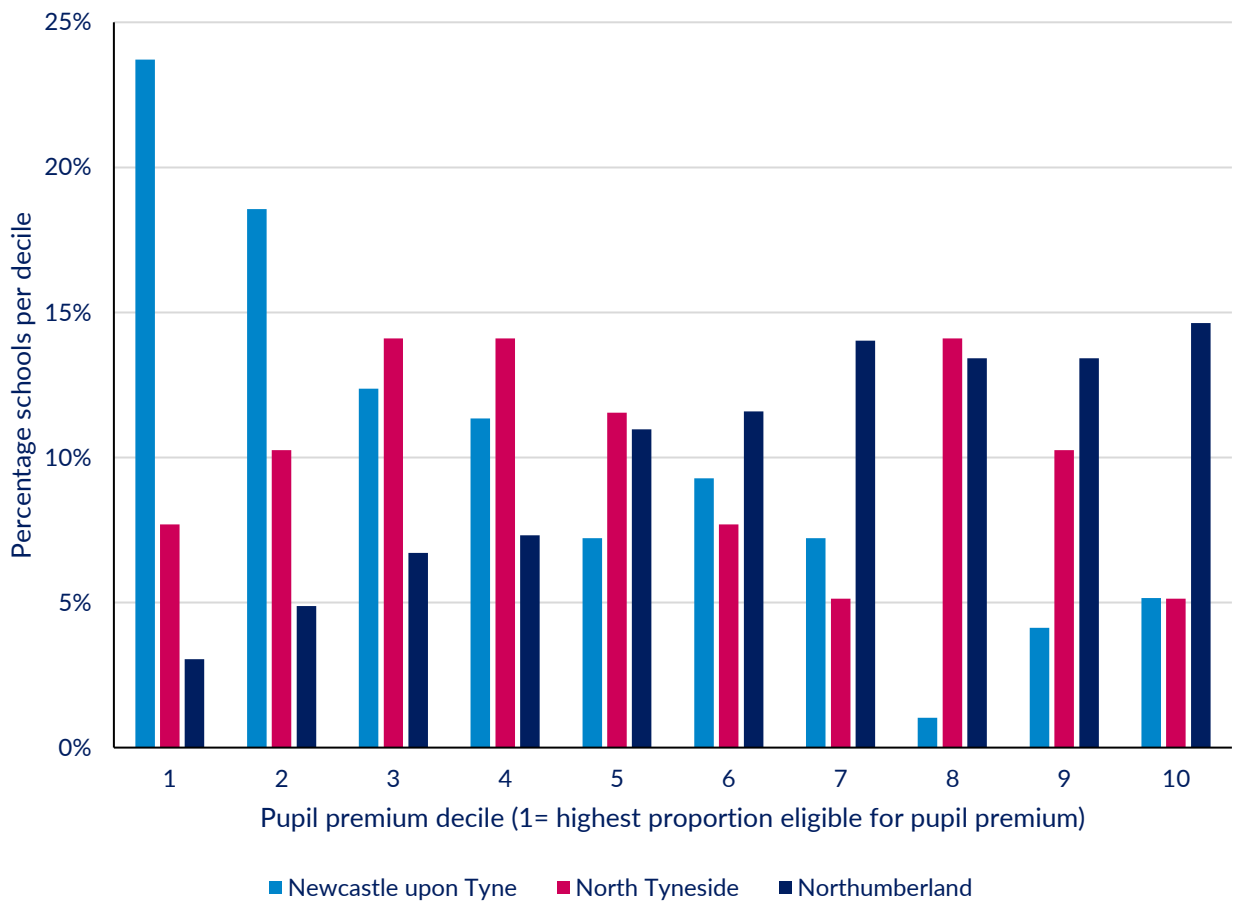


Figure 3,

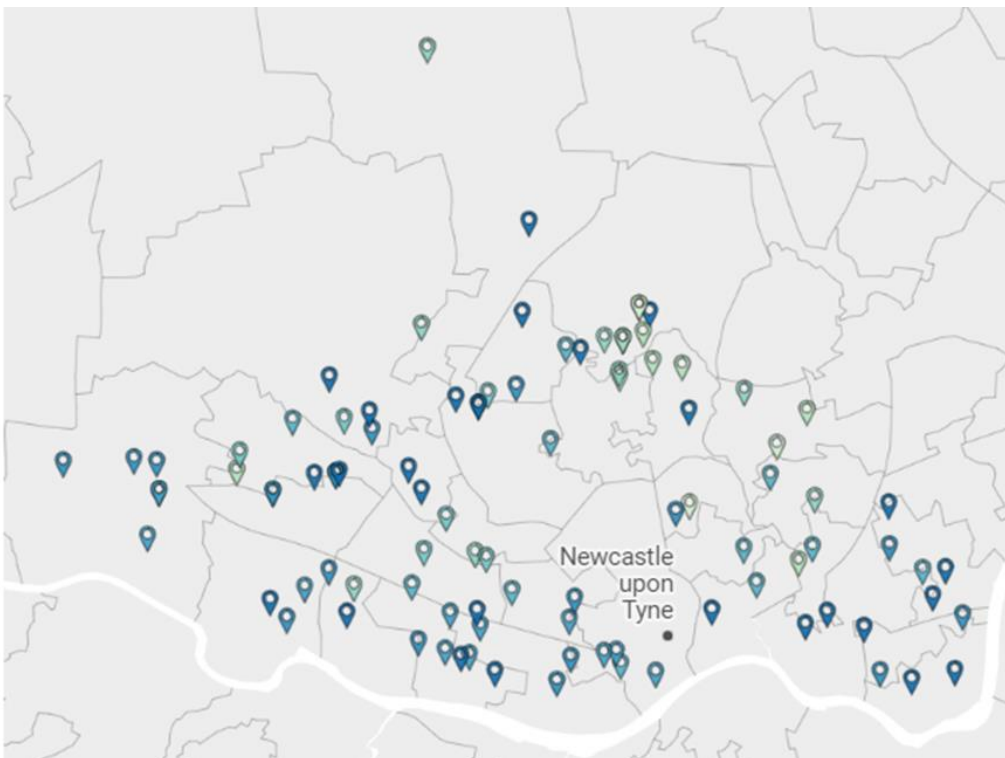
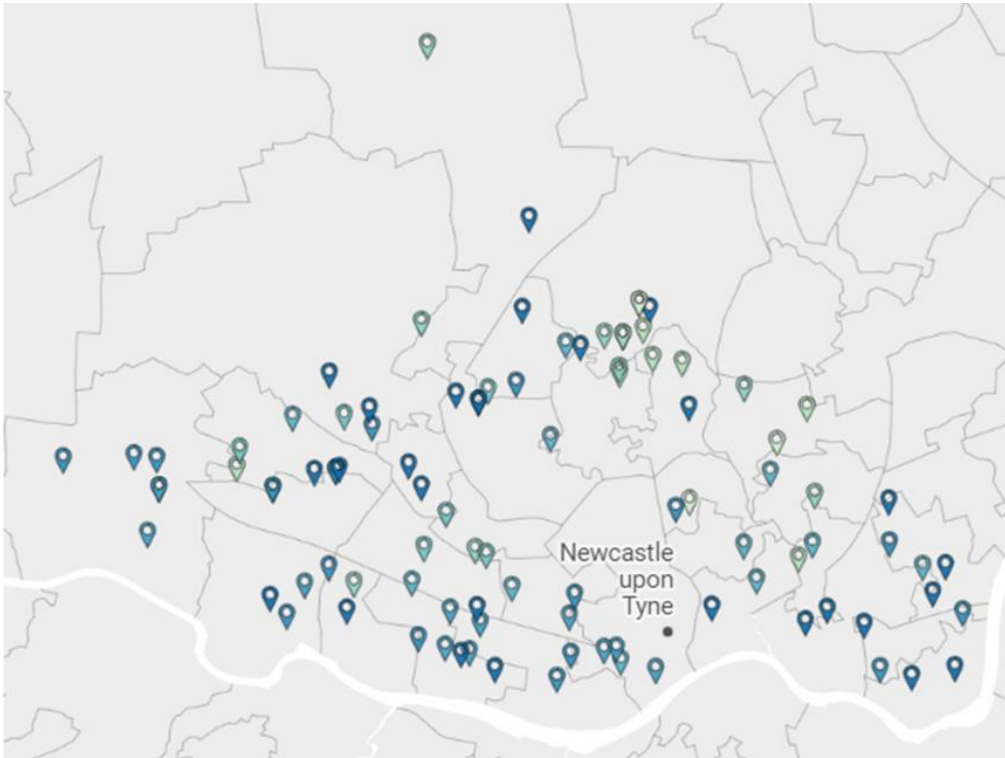
Figure 4 and Figure 5 below zoom in on each of the three local authority areas to show the geographic distribution of schools and areas with high pupil premium eligibility in each area.

Most areas in Newcastle have higher levels of pupil premium eligibility, with particularly high levels around **Byker, Denton, and Walker**.



Figure 3 – Newcastle schools by pupil premium allocation

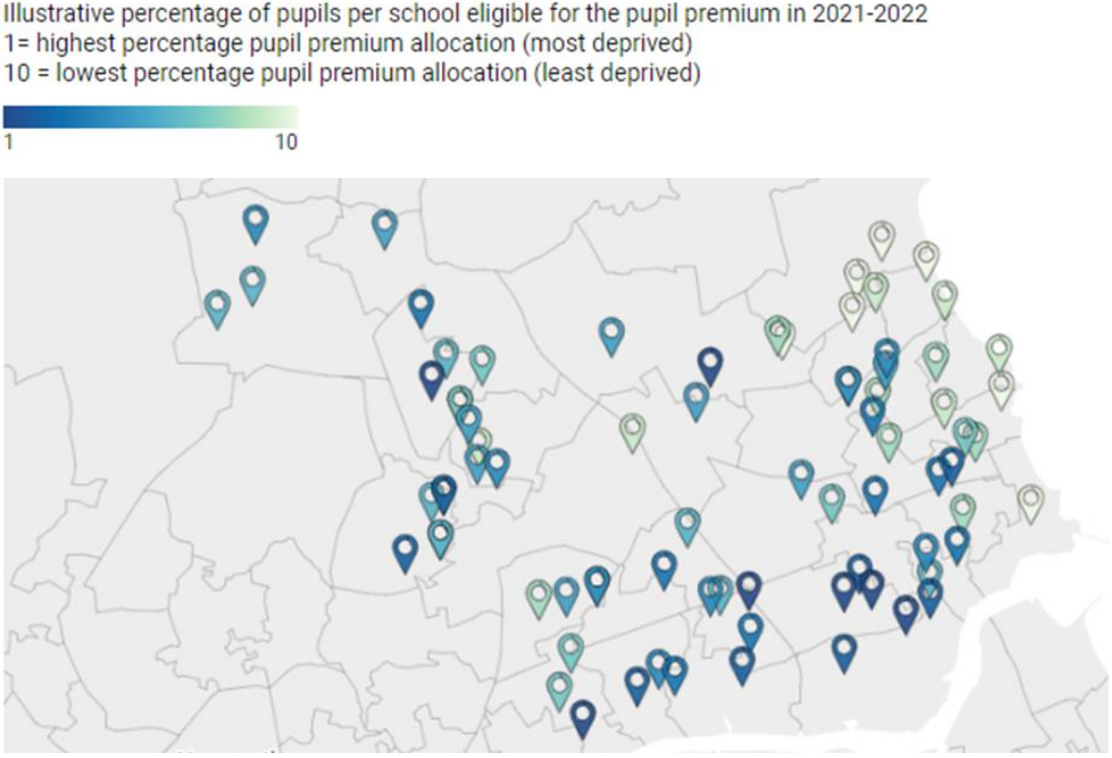
Illustrative percentage of pupils per school eligible for the pupil premium in 2021-2022
1 = highest percentage pupil premium allocation (most deprived)
10 = lowest percentage pupil premium allocation (least deprived)





As can be seen in Figure 4 below areas of North Tyneside with higher rates of pupil premium include Chirton, Percy Main and along the riverside.

Figure 4 – North Tyneside schools by pupil premium allocation

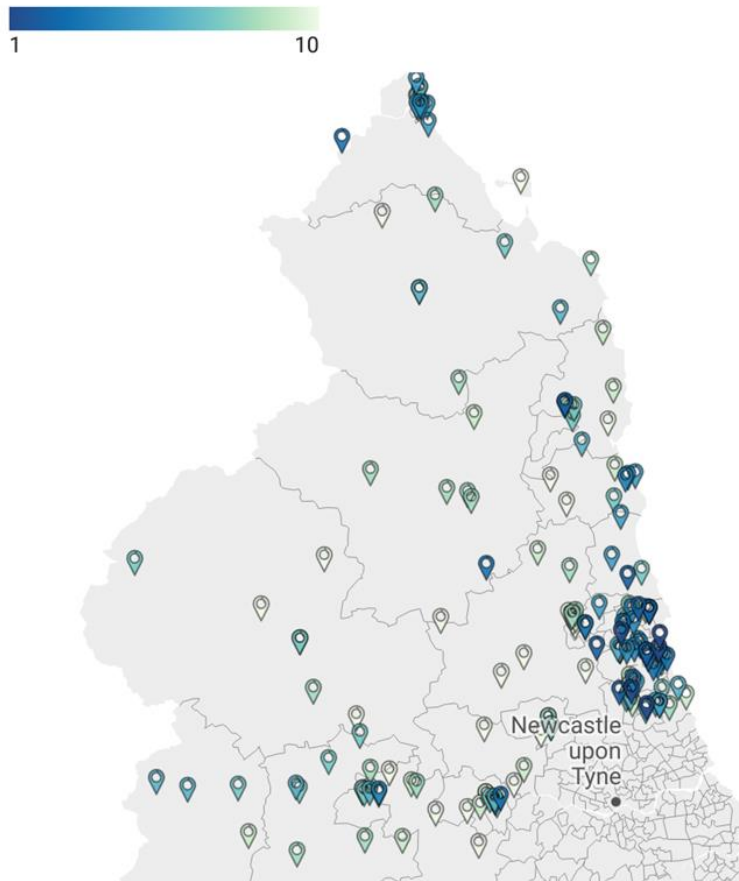


Finally as can be seen in Figure 5 the greatest rates of pupil premium in Northumberland are around Blyth, Ashington and Berwick upon Tweed.



Figure 5 Northumberland schools by pupil premium allocation

Illustrative percentage of pupils per school eligible for the pupil premium in 2021-2022
1 = highest percentage pupil premium allocation (most deprived)
10 = lowest percentage pupil premium allocation (least deprived)





3. Mapping exercise of schools based poverty related interventions

School survey and interviews

Rocket Science sent out a survey to all schools in the North of Tyne area enquiring about current child poverty interventions they were delivering. The survey asked what interventions are currently working well, what might be working less well and where there are gaps in provision within the local area.

A total of 24 responses were received. Most responses to the survey were from school Principals (63%), Assistant Principals (13%), although a range of other types of school staff also responded to the survey. They included Director of Inclusion, Pastoral Manager and Safeguarding Officer. Most schools that responded were located in Northumberland (59%), 27% of schools were located in Newcastle, 14% were located in North Tyneside.

The remainder of this section outlines the findings from the survey and interviews in relation to poverty proofing, interventions to reduce the effects of poverty and perspectives on effective practice and gaps.

Poverty proofing resources

Poverty proofing refers to identifying and removing barriers to learning and engaging in school that children experiencing poverty face. This can include practical and resource considerations as well as stigma and unseen inequalities. From our survey (Figure 6), 55% of respondents reported using the poverty proofing the school day toolkit before, 23% stated they had not used anything before, and one response had used the Turning the Page on Poverty toolkit². One response stated they had used resources from Children North East, but were not specific about what resources they used, two respondents did not answer this question.

² [Turning the Page on Poverty | NEU](#)

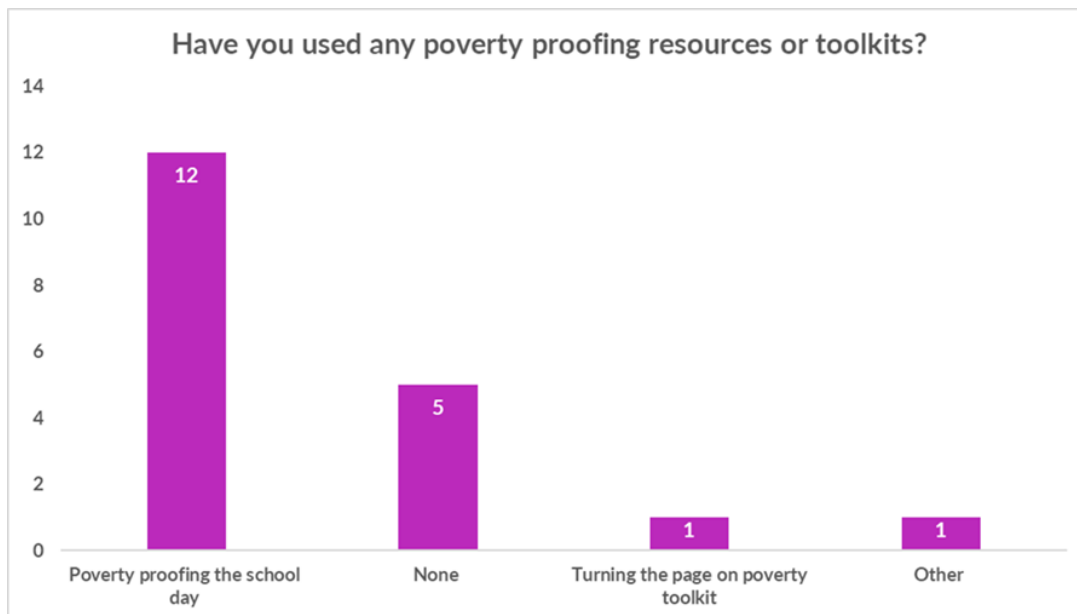


Figure 6 – Use of poverty proofing resources. Source: Rocket Science survey

When asked if they found these resources useful, of the 18 responses, 39% said they were “extremely or very useful”, some of the reasoning behind this answer are highlighted below:

“We already had many of these aspects in place, but an external eye made us consider other aspects.”
(Primary school)

“Very useful in allowing us to see how children can be affected by poverty and what as a school we can do to try and balance things out during the school day.” (Primary school)

“Extremely useful, it highlighted issues raised by students that we were able to address and change easily to improve their experience of secondary school.” (Secondary school)

Other responses said the toolkits have been supportive for school and families, some were just in the beginning of the process in their school but thought the resources would be useful for them. One response said it was ‘a little’ useful and another said the resources looked good but would not be applicable to their school setting.

Poverty-related interventions currently being delivered

Figure 7 below shows the different types of poverty-related interventions schools are currently delivering. On average responding schools delivered 8 different poverty related interventions (range 2-14). The most commonly provided resource being uniform banks were the most common



intervention (n=20, 84%), free after school clubs were next (n=19, 80%) and support/therapeutic services for children delivered in schools was the third highest response (n=17, 71%). The least common response was holiday hunger activities (n=5, 21%). 10 (42%) of schools reported providing **support for families** through a range of methods including, family support workers, support via email from teachers, pastoral support acting as a signpost for known services within the locality to help parents, help with fuel payments, extended nursery hours for some families and 'food advent events' delivered to families most in need rather than to local foodbanks.

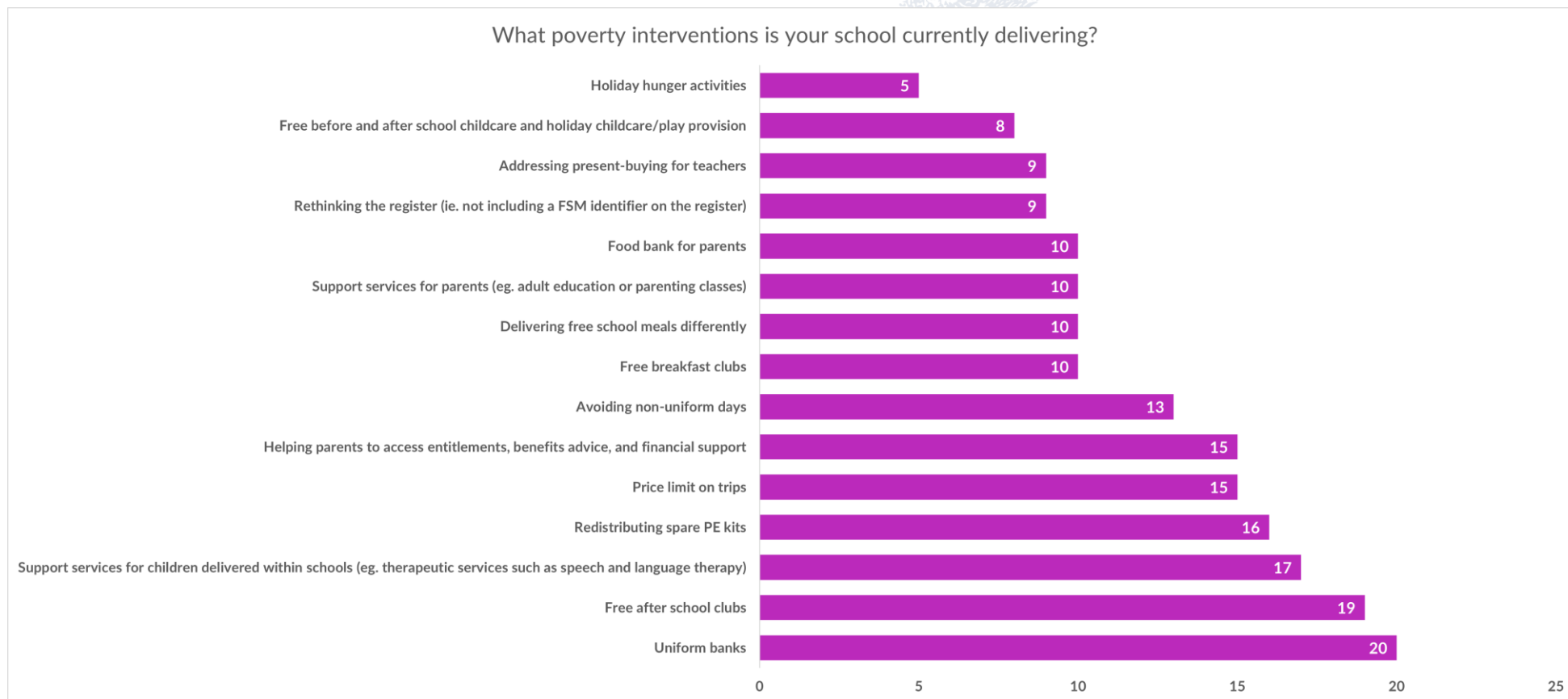


Figure 7 - Poverty interventions delivered in respondent schools. Source: Rocket Science survey



Rocket Science also conducted 12 one-to-one interviews with school leads to delve deeper into existing provision, what's working well and less well, and where they felt there were current gaps in their own schools. Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and the findings are highlighted below.

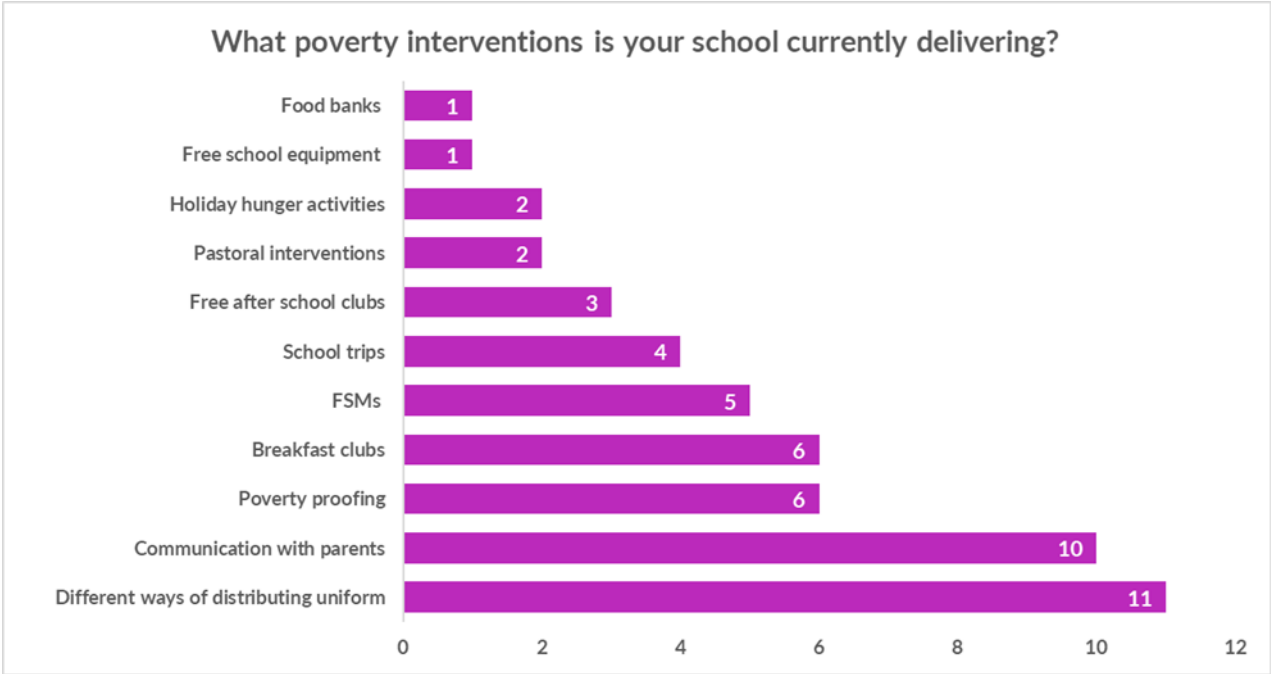


Figure 8 - Rocket Science analysis of interviews

Figure 8 shows the main interventions being delivered in the schools were different ways of distributing uniform and communication with families. Holiday hunger activities, food banks in schools and free school equipment were least mentioned in interviews.

What's working well?

Different ways of distributing uniforms

The school leaders interviewed most commonly cited the **distribution of free uniform** as a particularly effective intervention. Responses acknowledged that there can be stigma attached to the use of uniform banks and that to reduce this, several schools have given uniform banks an environmental purpose by offering an opportunity recycle uniform to help the planet. Survey responses stated this has seen utilisation of uniform banks increase significantly in their schools.

“All our interventions have worked well. The uniform bank is particularly useful, it's helped that we put an environmental spin on the reuse of school jumpers. It encouraged most students to utilize it more, not just those who maybe need to use it.” (Primary school)



Other schools have removed or significantly reduced the number of items with school logos, so families can source cheaper garments, for example, from supermarkets, and other schools are now providing free items of clothing which are badged to help relieve some of the financial burdens of buying branded uniforms. Schools stated by giving everyone free embroidered uniforms and not just to children who may need it more, any stigma is eradicated and normalises free pieces of uniform in schools.


“It’s been good since we got rid of all the branded uniform, much cheaper for parents, we now only have a branded blazer and school jumper which every child gets when they start school.” (Secondary school)

92% of school leads discussed how they distribute uniforms in a poverty informed environment. There is a mixture of school leads buying uniform using funding (e.g. pupil premium) to provide for children who do not have the correct uniforms, some schools have uniform banks or ‘swap shops’ where children can come and get a piece of uniform they do not have, and it is pre-owned. One way of reducing stigma that was discussed by school leads was taking an eco-friendly approach to swapping and donating uniforms, instead of saying it is for families who cannot afford to buy them.

“We have a ‘reuse, reduce, recycle’ method with an environmental message, this helps to reduce stigma because children think they are helping the environment by taking these clothes, it means some families can afford to put the heating on at night.” (Primary school)

“I met with someone from the council, and we’ve been given a grant to help with uniform cost and we’re going to set up a swap shop where people can donate pre-loved uniform that their children have grown out of, running on a term-by-term basis. We are also marketing it with an eco-friendly lens, instead of for financially struggling families. The plan is also to run it somewhere outside the school setting.” (Secondary school)

One interesting method which is working well in a school is a uniform loan system whereby students go to the area of school at the start of the day, collect the piece of uniform they are missing and then hand it back at the end of the day. Where used this has reportedly become the norm in the school for all pupils to use without stigma attached.



“We have a loan system in place whereby we have built up a range of goods over time and if a student needs something they can come and get it, so they look the same as everyone else. The idea is if they come without a tie, they go get one and then hand it back in at the end of the day.” (Secondary school)

The uniform loan system is currently being used in all 22 of the academies in the trust and although initial investment in uniform and staff resource to deliver the scheme can be obstacles for schools.

“They know the procedure; they would say it’s a benefit to them because everyone looks the same and no teacher nags them throughout the day for not wearing the correct uniform.” (Secondary school)

Support for families

The diverse range of support for families which is being offered in schools is having a positive impact. A support email service between teachers and families is working well as it allows families who might be struggling to inform school teachers of their worries and get help or advice from the school whilst maintaining confidentiality. Help offered includes provision of supermarket vouchers, helping families access entitlements and hardship funding.


“All of our incentives and support works well; the school has seen a rise in engagement from our parents and a willingness to accept help.” (Primary school)

“The family support email works really well, families can ask for help whenever they need it. Provision of ALDI vouchers during covid for children who were on free school meals helped families a lot, we still give some out to those who need it the most.” (Primary school)

Schools-leads are finding ways to communicate with struggling families and offer them help in any way they can. Some schools discussed how they use social media and email to help build relationships and have discussions with families about need.

“We set up the family support email which gets a lot of responses, we also tweet out every half term offering support for families, and we get a lot of responses to that as well. The online support includes help with buying uniforms and help with applications for free school meals and bus passes.” (Primary school)

One school-lead told us about a method they use to try and engage with parents by using homework communications online to open a dialogue with struggling families.



“For homework, we don’t rely on using resources, and if we do, we won’t ask parents to pay for them. For example, we ask the children to grow a plant at home and we’ll ask the parents to take pictures of doing it and send them in to us, this can open up a targeted dialogue with parents we think are struggling. This allows me to then signpost them to different services which may be available to them.” (Primary school)

What’s working less well?

Food banks for families

13% of responses stated that food banks for families were not working well in their school. This was due to the logistics of keeping food fresh, health and safety restrictions and a struggle to build storage for the provision. Finding staff who have the time to take out of their day to run it was also an issue.

“We were accepted onto the fare share scheme but are struggling to build storage or staff the provision.”

(Secondary school)

Hard-to-reach families


Although family engagement is well received from most school-leads we interviewed, there are still some families that are disengaged with their children’s schools and are hard-to-reach.

“There is a link between students who come to school and their parents engage well, and those who have poor attendance, we have real difficulty engaging their parents.” (Primary school)

“A family liaison role is missing, we could do with someone who is not a teacher or social worker but whose job role is to be a link to parents and schools.” (Secondary school)

There were mixed responses about the benefits of approaching families at the school gates to offer help. Some schools find it useful talking to families which often opens up conversations and is an easy way to communicate. Other said they provide benefits and debt advice but not at the school gate as it creates stigma and can make families feel uncomfortable and increase their barriers.

Location was also thought to be an issue when trying to reach families, particularly in rural schools with families who live far away.



“Parental engagement is another thing we’ve struggled with, and it’s been reinforced by covid-19. Because our school is located in a rural area, we sometimes never see any parents at all so we wouldn’t know as much if they are struggling or not.” (Secondary school)

Another issue for school leads is the struggle to engage families who will not take what they perceive to be ‘handouts’.

“When I first came to the area [costal town] FSM intake was low because families didn’t accept help, it is a proud community, and they are proud people. It’s the same when I offered a clothing allowance for children, I had wardrobes full of uniform, but they won’t take the hand-outs.” (Primary school)

Gaps in provision

Free breakfast clubs

Some responses stated they would benefit from a free breakfast club, but they do not meet the thresholds for the incentive by not having enough pupil premium children to warrant external support, even though they feel their school needs it. Other responses stated it would be useful to get funding for students to have healthy snacks provided for free throughout the school day. Many felt there should be a national free breakfast club programme available to all children, which runs year-on-year.

More support for families


Although it was reported that schools were helping families as much as they could, more support is needed. Courses for families, more education and support were all mentioned to be of a benefit to both the family and children but there is little funding in place for this.

“We want to support whole families, for the school to be a hub of service/information support that supports our direct school-based family but also their extended families.” (Primary school)

“We tried to get her on a course we had been signposted to, but they wouldn’t take her and then we were completely stuck with what to do.” (Secondary school)

Other responses

Some other ways of tackling poverty in schools that were mentioned in responses included free residential trips and ICT provision for learners at home. Some responses highlighted health care



provision such as haircuts for children, access to dental care through school and help with their laundry. Others discussed further general financial support and holiday hunger activities.

Timescales of funding available

Many schools were able to access additional funds to support activities in school but reported difficulties in having time and recourse to secure this, and that the funding is often a one-off donation or available for a limited period of time. In the past, food parcels that have been on offer have been for a limited time.

One head teacher reported that there are funding subsidies for school trips and experiences in place for pupils, for 3 years, but after this school will have to charge for trips. Many schools reported that time limited funding was difficult, as it didn't enable them to employ staff, and others said if they had a business manager who was keen, they had more of a chance of securing external funding. Corporate funding was also an area of interest for some schools.

To what extent do you think your school is adequately tackling the issue of child poverty?

We also asked survey respondents *"to what extent do you think your school is adequately tackling the issue of child poverty on a scale of 1 to 100?"* This is a useful question to ask, as future research and scoping exercise can repeat this question and use this as a benchmark.

The lowest response was 22%, the highest response was 98% and the average score was 62%.

Those on the lower end of the scale stressed the difficulty of helping families who are unwilling to receive help and that they feel there is only so much that can be done in a school setting for families.

"We do what we can in school, but it does not compensate for the social inequality our families face."

(Secondary school)

"Parents are often reluctant to inform the school when they need additional support." (Secondary school) Other responses that scored at the top end of the scale also referred mainly to the work they were doing in schools for parents. Responses discussed the help they were giving to parents to access support/services in the local areas, gave support in applying for grants to support families and using poverty proofing to ensure there is no financial burden on their children's carers.



"We ask our parents what support they feel would be best, we don't make assumptions that we know the best way to help, only they know what will make the biggest difference to them." (Primary school)

"We have a good understanding of pupils needs and the impact of the home environment. We help pupils and parent/carers access the support and services they need." (Primary school)

"We offer a wide range of solutions and apply for many grants to support families, they feel as though they are able to approach us to ask for help." (Primary school)

"We are more aware than we ever have been of poverty proofing our school day and we ask ourselves if we had done enough to ensure that there's no financial burden on our parents/carers." (Secondary school)



4. Good practice review

Introduction

This section explores good practice in school based child poverty prevention and intervention across local, national, and international examples. The key themes which have emerged from this review are around early childhood interventions, child food poverty and the impact on families. The evidence of national and local initiatives which are positively impacting are identified below.

Early intervention

There is evidence to suggest that effective early intervention can substantially reduce the impact of poverty on children's development when it is sufficiently intensive and reaches to families who need it the most.³ Early intervention is a public policy approach which aims to identify and support children and families at an early stage to prevent problems developing later in life (e.g. poor physical and mental health, low educational attainment, crime and anti-social behaviour).⁴ Early interventions tend to focus on areas such as health, educational and social development, and benefits and finance assistance for families. Prevention in early childhood is a long-term investment with positive benefits for children, the economy and wider society.

The Healthy Child Programme (HCP)

The HCP is a universal, NHS funded programme targeted at increasing the physical and mental health of children aged 0-19. The programme focuses on identifying children at risk of problems later in life and families with mental health or other needs. The programme aims to help families develop a bond with their child, protect children from disease (through screening and immunisation) and to identify problems in children's development that may relate to neglect or other issues.

The programme takes a **needs-led approach** to its services and interventions by suggesting all interventions should be personalised to respond to children and their family needs over a period of time. Although most family's needs should be met by the universal offer of the HCP, more targeted or personalised interventions are offered when needed. The offer also recommends using health

³ Molloy (2019) Child poverty and early intervention. Early Intervention Foundation, [Link](#)

⁴ Powell et al (2021) Early intervention: policy and provision. House of Commons Library, [Link](#)



visitors, and/or school nurses **specialist health skills** to work with families, which in turn will help determine and address individual needs.⁵

Case study:

One city successfully implementing the HCP approach is the [Manchester Healthy Schools Project](#). This project has worked across the Greater Manchester region for over 20 years and has aimed to tackle inequality and improve health and wellbeing in children and young people. The project works in partnership with a Schools Nursing Service to help support a **whole-school approach** to health and wellbeing. They cover seven key areas which are taught to young people, including healthy lifestyles, social and emotional health, mental health and wellbeing, relationships and sex education, drugs and alcohol education, unintentional injury prevention and PHSE.⁶

Key recommendations for early childhood interventions:

- Input from political leaders is essential to ensure the correct resources are made available, and that a long-term approach can be developed
- Working in partnership with healthcare services promotes a joint up approach and minimises the risk of teachers not spotting the signs that a child might need help
- A universal approach needs to be developed for all children, this should be combined with targeting their most vulnerable young people and their families. Reaching out to families most at risk is also important
- Working with parents and carers is essential for effective prevention and early intervention
- The specialist skills of healthcare professionals (such as nurses) should be utilised to help spot the signs that a child may be struggling.⁷

Child food poverty interventions

Child food poverty is an increasing issue in the UK and the pandemic has exacerbated food security for millions of households. The use of foodbanks has increased 74% over the past five years and 1 in 4 mothers with dependent children do not work in the UK.⁸ A recent report by The Resolution Foundation found that under the current policies and forecasts, child food poverty is likely to rise to the highest level in 30 years by 2023/24, this will equate to nine in every class of 30.⁹ School may be

⁵ Public Health England (2021) Health visiting and school nursing service delivery model. Gov.UK. [Link](#)

⁶ Healthy Schools Manchester (2022) Leading local care, improving lives in Manchester. Resources, [Link](#)

⁷ Molloy (2019) Child poverty and early intervention. Early Intervention Foundation, [Link](#)

⁸ Nomis (2019) Labour market profiles. Official labour market statistics, [Link](#)

⁹ Resolution Foundation (2019) The Living Standards Outlook 2019, [Link](#)



the only place some children get a healthy, nutritious meal every day, therefore interventions to aid food security are of the highest importance.

Breakfast clubs

A report produced by the [Department of Education in 2017](#) evaluated placing breakfast clubs in schools with high levels of deprivation across England. The criteria of eligibility included 35% of pupils in the school needed to be eligible for FSMs and the school had to have had no existing breakfast club. The charity [Magic Breakfast](#) was recruited to provide schools with advice, support and organise free food deliveries. A six-month set up phase followed by 12 months of free food was delivered to each school and aimed to reduce the number of children coming to school without breakfast, improve children's punctuality and behaviour and increase their concentration during the morning.


A process evaluation was undertaken to identify barriers and enablers of establishing and sustaining the provision. The delivery model was popular with schools and the programme was successful in terms of the number of schools recruited, the high proportion of schools continuing the breakfast club and the positive impacts which schools perceived for their children. 184 schools were recruited and 96% sustained the breakfast club after their contract had finished.

Magic Breakfast clubs project

The charity Magic Breakfast also commissioned an [independent project](#) which provided 106 schools with support and resources to offer a free, universal breakfast club to targeted year groups (year two and six). The project's aim was to improve attainment outcomes by increasing the number of children who ate a healthier breakfast. The schools involved in the project were from targeted areas where there were high levels of deprivation and disadvantaged pupils. The support and resources available included free food, support from a school change leader (provided by Magic Breakfast) and a £300 grant per pupil. The intervention was delivered by school staff and volunteers.

Key findings from the project:

- Year two children experienced two months additional progress compared to year two children in other schools in the trial who had not had the breakfast club implemented in their schools
- For year six children in the breakfast club schools, results for the main outcomes (e.g., reading and maths) were positive, but not statistically significant. On other measures of writing and English they experienced around two months progress compared to the other year six children who had not had the breakfast club implemented in their schools

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- The findings of the project suggest that it wasn't just the nutritional benefits of breakfast that contributed to children's improvements, but also other social/educational benefits of attending the club
 - A survey of teachers concluded pupil behaviour improved in breakfast club schools and the impact of this was wider than just those children attending the club, **it had a ripple effect on other children in the school**
 - Promoting the breakfast club to families and encouraging all children to attend (whilst also targeting pupils most likely to benefit) increased the take-up of children in attendance.¹⁰

Holiday Club Pilot

The [Holiday Activities and Food Programme](#) was set up by the UK government in 2016 in collaboration with Charlton Manor Primary School in Greenwich. The pilot offered a summer club which included breakfast, lunch and a range of different activities on offer to children. It was free for any child to attend (but the school particularly encouraged children who they thought would benefit most from additional enrichment at a safe place to spend time at over the holidays). The school monitored the effects of attending the holiday club on children's attainment through an initial assessment all children took at the start of the school year. The design was an informal assessment to try and be non-pressuring for children, it included a series of exercises in a non-classroom environment. The results showed that in previous years, the school had seen many of the disadvantaged children slipping back academically after the summer holidays, but since the introduction of the holiday club, those children who took part began to maintain, or even improve their scores.¹¹


Case study: [Reach Academy Feltham](#)

At the start of the pandemic, it became apparent that many children and families at Reach Academy would be adversely affected. A survey was sent out to families and around a third of respondents raised concerns about being unable to secure basic essentials or pay their mortgage or household bills. In addition to providing financial support to families to help them address the economic impact of the pandemic, the Academy provided additional support to children and families over the summer holidays:

- 25 activity sessions were delivered over the summer holidays, reaching nearly 100 children in the early years. The sessions were most useful to families who were part of the incoming

¹⁰ Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Magic Breakfast Evaluation, [Link](#)

¹¹ Child Poverty Action Group (2020) Tackling Child Poverty: A guide for schools: Greater London Authority, [Link](#)



nursery cohort. They reported that they valued the opportunity to meet staff ahead of September, connect with other parents and familiarise their children with the environment

- Over 1,000 activity boxes were delivered to children over four weeks in the summer, which contained early learning resources to support development and encourage play
- 77 children received weekly meal packages through the Good Grub Club, an initiative organised by the local foodbanks in Feltham, over 500 packages were collected over the summer holidays.¹²

Key recommendations for child food poverty interventions:

- Research suggests breakfast clubs increase concentration in children, however they can enhance stigma between groups of young people. Universal, free breakfast clubs should be offered to all pupils to eradicate stigma and become commonplace in all schools
- Promoting interventions like this to parents increases participation and retention in children
- The social and educational benefits of children attending breakfast clubs has been proven to increase attainment and improve the classroom environment
- Holiday clubs are beneficial to children living in poverty because they offer nutritious food, promote exercise, and increase the chances of children living a healthy lifestyle.

The impact on families

The cost of going back to school

Mike Amesbury MP has been leading the [Guidance About Costs of School Uniforms Bill](#) through the houses of parliament, with the aim of introducing national guidance on the cost of school uniforms in England and was passed in 2021. Wales have already set out statutory guidance with the aim to limit the cost of uniforms and have Pupil Development Grants ranging between £125-£145 per student, Northern Ireland have standardised measures where families are able to apply for a clothing allowance between £35-£56. In Scotland, the standard is to give grants of at least £100 to eligible families and both Northern Ireland and Scotland use FSM as a benchmark for uniform grant eligibility. The standard is to give grants of at least £100 to eligible families and both Northern Ireland and Scotland use FSM as a benchmark for uniform grant eligibility.

¹² Child Poverty Action Group (2020) Tackling Child Poverty: A guide for schools: Greater London Authority, [Link](#)



Case study:

[Covid Realities](#) is a research project which collates experiences of families on low-income during the pandemic. Parents and carers submitted diary entries by responding to 'one big question per week' between June 2020 and August 2021. Virtual discussion groups were also set up as an opportunity for families to share their problems and frustrations during the pandemic. The impact of covid-19 has meant that school uniform banks have depleted or become unavailable, charity shops have closed, and the 'hand-me-down' culture has stopped because lockdown measures prevented friends and families seeing each other face-to-face. Participants reported being driven to 'choose between heating or eating, and uniform'.

From 2020 – 2021, Covid Realities asked over 100 parents and carers to submit diary entries to document their experience of everyday life during the pandemic and seven key themes emerged around the burden of school uniform costs:

- The financial cost of uniforms – It was reported that school uniforms in the summer costed participants 'much - even most' of their monthly incomes, and the inadequacy of social security for covering the costs of uniforms was a persistent theme, specifically since children are growing out of uniforms every year
- Affordability – For many participants, uniforms were the costs that 'put them over the edge' and this meant that they were turning to debt to balance back the finances
- Trade-offs – The debate between eating healthy food or buying school uniform was a significant choice for participants in the lead up months before term started, and other participants reported deciding whether they would have heating or buy uniforms
- Additional costs of lockdown – The impact of covid-19 had already imposed extra financial burdens on participants, meaning the already 'tight squeeze' had become even more of a struggle
- Time and energy to secure – The use of 'school uniform banks' is beneficial in theory, however it was noted that banks were unlikely to have every item in every size in stock and participants reported going to the banks as taking up a lot of time and energy
- The school uniform grant – Although Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales all have some measures in place to help parents on low-income with school uniforms, it was reported that the funds available barely covered costs. The price of a uniform blazer was highlighted as a particularly severe financial burden alone.



Key recommendations from this study:

- Remove the need for badged uniforms
- Improve the promotion of school clothing grants and vouchers to parents/carers
- Hold uniform recycling days
- Source and recommend cheaper uniform supplies to parents/carers
- Take the 'give the benefit of the doubt' approach when children come to school not in full or correct uniform.¹³

Case study: School Gate Employment Support Initiative

This [intervention](#) was a pilot project led by central government's Child Poverty Unit in 2011 and was funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). It has since been rolled out in 25 counties with the highest levels of deprivation in the UK. The initiative offered parents one-to-one support with the delivery of a six-week programme run in their child's school including workshops on confidence building, personal development, employability and skills, and networking events where parents could meet and sign up with other local provision.


Key findings from the evaluation found that making employment support in schools available was not enough to engage parents and help them into employment. There is a need for a range of different, proactive techniques to engage parents (e.g. written letters, signposting or referring to another service by verbal conversations before or after school with targeted parents). This highlights the important role that trusted school staff and word-of-mouth have in facilitating engagement. Parents stated that offering a personalised, **tailored, and flexible service in an environment where they felt comfortable** was essential in making sure the pilot had an impact on parent's journey into work. The most effective aspect of the approach was conducting a multi-agency response to moving parents towards work, this includes Jobcentre Plus and local authority employment advisors. The partnership working avoided duplication and ensured the barriers to employment were not addressed in isolation by different agencies.¹⁴

Key recommendations for supporting families:

- Uniforms are a significant cost for families, by removing badges from uniforms, families can source clothing easier and cheaper

¹³ Child Poverty Action Group (2020) Tackling Child Poverty: A guide for schools: Greater London Authority, [Link](#)

¹⁴ Marangozov & Dewson (2011) Study of the School Gates Employment Support Initiative: DWP, [Link](#)

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- Schools should support families in sourcing cheaper uniforms and need to eradicate the stigma around parents using uniform banks, and promote school clothing grants and vouchers
 - Government institutions should work with schools to help support parents out of work, but this should be done sensitively, and the information should be passed on through trusted members of school staff.¹⁵

Global good practice

The [Child Friendly Cities Initiative](#) (CFCI) in partnership with UNICEF was launched in 1996 and has been adopted by over 100 cities worldwide. It supports local governments and organisations in realising the rights of children at regional level. Building a child friendly city requires clarity on who bears responsibility for implementing a particular law, policy or programme, as well as transparency in decision-making processes. It demands local as much as national commitment to responding to the needs of children to the maximum extent of their available resources.


Of the six cities taking part in the initiative in the UK, **Liverpool was the only one located in the North**. The city committed to a five-year programme of action and partnered with public sector institutions and charities. The key action points from the programme included:

- Delivery of comprehensive training on children's rights (in context)
- Enacting child friendly policies and procedures that are informed by children's experiences
- Ensuring a proportion of local budget is allocated to children's services.

Key recommendations from the initiative include:

- Increase government investment in welfare, health and social care systems which support children's health, particularly in deprived areas and areas' most affected by covid-19 (this includes areas where PP and FSM are more prominent)
- Tackle the negative impact of the pandemic in the North through rapid, focused and targeted investment in early years services, such as the Health Improvement Fund. This can include investing in health visiting, family hubs and children's centres
- Introduce universal FSM's, make the [Holiday Activities and Food Programme](#) scheme permanent, and extend support to all low-income families. Promote the provision of Healthy Start vouchers to all children under five and make current government food standards mandatory in all early year's settings

¹⁵ Goodall et al (2010) Review of best practice in parental engagement. Department for Education, [Link](#)

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- Increase child benefit by £10 per child per week, increase the child element in Universal Credit and increase child tax rates
 - Maternity and early years services commissioners need to consider the impact of the pandemic related service changes on inequalities in families and children's experiences and outcomes. This must shape service delivery during the recovery.

Case study: Child Friendly Cities, Finland

Child participation is at the heart of building a child friendly city or community, The active engagement of children is essential if the policies, services, and facilities will be affecting them. Children can be involved in different ways, through social media, surveys, petitions, focus groups or schools, youth councils or youth parliaments.

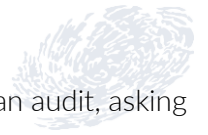
An example of this is a [Child Friendly City in Finland](#), in Hameenlinna, 14- and 15-year-old students vote on key initiatives that they want to influence in local planning or budgeting. Each school has child representatives on a local youth council which has an annual budget to be used on a project with the highest number of votes. The youth councillors also contribute by drafting the local CFCI action plan. The key success of the pilot was the adoption of 10 '[building blocks](#)' and development of new ones which adapted to the Finnish reality, were all developed in the pilot phase. Some of the results achieved from the pilot include:

- Child and youth participation gained more visibility within the municipalities
- Child impact assessment gained more visibility and new practices were proposed/piloted
- Overall awareness of the CRC within the municipal organisations increased
- The difficulties concerning the organisational culture were identified (e.g., cross-sector cooperation)
- There is a need to adopt a child rights-based approach to programming
- There is a need to carry out further evaluations of the situation of children, especially equality and non-discrimination-related issues.

Local good practice

Poverty proofing the school day

Children North East's Poverty [Proofing the School Day project](#) was created to support schools to identify and overcome the barriers to learning faced by young people from families with less financial resources than others. The aim of the initiative is to 'remove barriers to learning which exist because



of the impacts of living in poverty'.¹⁶ The poverty proofing team support schools with an audit, asking students, staff, parents and governors how they think poverty affects the school day. The resulting action plan is tailored to each school to address any unintended stigmatising policies or practices, and to share good practice between schools. An independent evaluation of the project conducted by Newcastle University found:

- Schools were able to make changes quickly in relation to action plans (e.g., reorganising the administration of FSMs or setting up breakfast clubs and providing more access to ICT facilities for children)
- Improved attendance and attainment, a greater take-up of FSM recipients and more effective use of PP funding
- Reduced school day costs for students and parents, increasing the uptake of school trips and music tuition for the most disadvantaged pupils
- The report highlighted some barriers for continued engagement with schools because of the difficulty in meeting challenges of reducing stigma around poverty. It was also discussed that schools are only one element of wider society with contribute to children living in poverty.¹⁷

The cost of missing lunchtime

CPAG, Children North East (CNE) and the North East Child Poverty Commission (NECPC) carried out a research project based on the [October 2020 school census data](#) which found one in four North East children living below the UK poverty line are not currently eligible for free school meals and one in ten North East Children (11%) who are eligible for FSM do not take up the offer.


The recommendations of the report for schools in the North East to drive up the FSM intake include:

1) Identify and address any existing policies or practices that either prevent pupils taking up their FSM entitlement or further disadvantage them, by:

- On school trips, consider providing all pupils with lunches (as standard) so that those receiving FSMs are not identifiable
- Look into alternative ways to organise the dinner hall so that pupils' lunch choices are not influenced by whether they get to go in with and sit with their friends

¹⁶ Smith & Todd (2016) Poverty Proofing the School Day: Evaluation and Development Report. Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University, [Link](#)

¹⁷ Smith & Todd (2016) Poverty Proofing the School Day: Evaluation and Development Report. Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University, [Link](#)

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- Work with catering teams to offer flexibility around when pupils can spend their FSM allowance, enabling pupils to buy food at break time if they are hungry and spend time with their friends outside the school premises
 - Work with catering teams to ensure those collecting FSMs have the same food choices as their peers and do not have to opt for smaller portion sizes.

2) Review their FSM application processes to increase uptake and ensure there are no barriers to families claiming their entitlement. Schools should:

- **Identify and address the barriers families face when applying for FSM's** through consultation with families and identify ways to help parents apply (e.g. one-to-one support, computer access, access to a translator if needed and paper as well as online applications for the digitally excluded)
- **Regularly and consistently promote information about FSMs and advice families on how to apply.** Research from Children North East and CPAG shows families appreciate regular communication about what financial support is available to them and what they qualify for. Therefore, promoting FSM information through several different methods (e.g. school bag letters, social media, newsletters) can help the information reach as many families as possible
- **Encourage families to apply for means-tested FSMs even if they already receive school means as part of the universal infant FSM policy,** this is because research suggests families are less likely to register for means-tested FSMs if their children are already receiving free meals each day, in turn this means schools are missing out on PP funding. Schools should encourage families with infant children to apply to ensure the right amount of PP funding is allocated to that school.¹⁸

¹⁸ North East Child Poverty Commission (2021) The Cost of Missing Lunchtime: A briefing on free school meals in the North East of England, [Link](#)



5. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusions


This scoping exercise has demonstrated that there are many child poverty interventions being delivered currently, and these are **well developed and delivered sensitively**, but are often described by school leaders as ‘sticking plasters’. School leaders describe developing interventions in response to identified needs, and that the **importance of parents and children’s voices** in identifying these needs is a critical part of the process.

While the voices of parents and children were not included in this research, due to time constraints, it is clear that schools are actively listening to parents and children in developing interventions, and this should continue to be a central part of the development process in future. Schools reported successes in using online surveys, such as google forms, for gaining views from parents quickly, efficiently and anonymously. They were aware of the issues with digital poverty and were proactive in addressing this.

Whilst there is currently a range of poverty proofing and poverty related interventions in schools across the combined authority area these are **not consistent** and there are opportunities for more support for schools in delivering short-term poverty related interventions **more efficiently**, as well as longer-term initiatives to work towards the prevention of poverty.

The **shame and stigma** experienced by children and young people in poverty can lead to social exclusion and low self-esteem that could have wider, negative impacts. Further consideration should be given to understanding and avoiding stigma and shame. Schools do not currently see an issue with stigma in the delivery of poverty related interventions, and work hard to avoid this, often by providing either highly personalised support or universal interventions. It may be easier to provide poverty related interventions in primary / first schools than it is in secondary / high / middle schools, where parents are less often in schools, and children and young people are more aware of stigma. In developing interventions, NTCA should consider the different delivery routes in the different tiers of schools, to ensure these are appropriate.

In addition, consideration could be given to both the schools with current high levels of pupil premium, as well as those schools with lower levels of pupil premium, but where children and young



people are less likely to receive support because school awareness of poverty is lower and poverty related interventions are less well developed, and therefore could ‘fall through the gaps.’

Recommendations

From the scoping and evidence review we would make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Addressing food poverty through universal breakfast clubs and holiday hunger activities

There is robust evidence as to the positive impact interventions such as breakfast clubs have in relation to attainment, behaviour and social wellbeing for both those experiencing food poverty and their peers. A number of schools we spoke to described ‘just missing’ the criteria¹⁹ for breakfast club funding whilst short term funding has caused uncertainty and increased work to secure continuity funding. Our survey indicates that holiday hunger initiatives are the least used intervention in the area despite evidence of supporting young people experiencing poverty to maintain or improve attainment over the holiday period. For these reasons we recommend that the funding of breakfast clubs and holiday hunger initiatives in schools be considered. Funding should enable universal access for school children to remove barriers, such as stigma, from accessing this service.

Our scoping suggests that other food poverty interventions, such as food banks, may not be as effective within the school setting or may have mixed results.

Recommendation 2: Uniform banks/loan schemes

The use of uniform banks and loan schemes was consistently identified as effective practice by those we spoke to in the North of Tyne area. 83% of schools responding to our survey had this in place currently and described storage and laundering uniforms as challenges. Support for schools to resource uniform banks or loan schemes should be considered by the NTCA. Positioning these schemes as environmental initiatives will again reduce stigma as well as promote the use of the service.

Recommendation 3: Family engagement in wider support

Schools reported success in engaging families in need through a variety of means ranging from the funding of family support workers to emails and targeted support with homework (with the aim of

¹⁹ Criteria can vary dependent upon scheme from 40%+ pupils in bands A-F of the income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) to 40% free school meal eligibility.



engaging parents in additional interventions). Targeted use of family link workers in the schools of highest need may be effective in engaging families in the range of support that is available within communities. Direction and support in the use of other techniques such as email provide low cost/resource options for engagement, although is potentially limited in cases of digital poverty. The development of a directory of support that is available and provided by VCS and public sector services, would also support this engagement and signposting.

Recommendation 4: Enhanced staff training

Just 54% of respondents to our survey indicated the use of poverty proofing resources and whilst perceptions of these resources were mixed, specific staff training in poverty proofing and raising awareness is unclear.

An NTCA wide drive on raising awareness of poverty proofing – a poverty proofing introductory workshop - within schools would likely lead to an increased awareness of the need for and action to alleviate the impacts of poverty on young people in school. Funding for backfill of staff whilst receiving awareness training may increase uptake and should be considered.

For schools who have already completed poverty proofing, or who already feel confident in this area, trauma informed schools training may be a valuable and relevant alternative. Trauma informed schools training supports schools to focus on wellbeing and to become mentally healthy places.

Some schools expressed that ‘having hard conversations’ with parents and making referrals to other services for parents (such as debt advice) was difficult, and training to support this would be valued by school staff.

Recommendation 5: Fundraising support and training

A number of schools identified the burden of applying for, often short-term funding, with one school identifying the need for a business development manager to do this. We believe there is a role for practical support and training for school leaders in securing additional funding from trusts and foundations as well as securing corporate fundraising and support. Increasing discretionary funding in schools can support wider initiatives including the funding opportunities for enrichment experiences, holidays or digital inclusion for families experiencing poverty.

Longer-term early intervention and prevention of child poverty



In addition to the immediate alleviation of the impacts of poverty for young people and families our scoping has identified opportunities for other longer term interventions.

Recommendation 6: Raising aspirations and increasing opportunity

The introduction of quality careers advice and access to enrichment experiences will not only provide longer-term opportunities for social mobility in children experiencing poverty but also fit with other NTCA inclusive economy priorities. Consideration of how frameworks such as the Gatsby Benchmarks²⁰ which provide standards for good careers advice and was originally piloted in the North East of England could be adapted, particularly for younger children in years 6 and 7 would be beneficial as part of a long-term plan to break the cycle of multi-generational poverty. This could be combined with support for vocational qualifications (for example T levels) and engagement with local businesses through corporate support.

Recommendation 7: Enhanced family support

Rocket Science research suggests that young people's aspirations are most influenced by parents and care givers and that aspirations are more likely to be discussed within the family than with teachers. This combined with the evidence outlined above of the impacts of a whole family approach to addressing the impacts of child poverty indicate that this is a priority for long-term change. There are opportunities to learn from and invest in partnerships with anchor institutions within the NTCA, from initiatives such as the Manchester Health Schools project in developing whole family (not just whole school) approaches to early intervention. The provision of enhanced support for families to build economic and emotional resilience through mental health support, access to debt and welfare advice as well as skill development such as employability skills should be considered. These could be tested within the areas of greatest need identified in [section 2](#).

²⁰ [The Benchmarks \(goodcareerguidance.org.uk\)](https://www.goodcareerguidance.org.uk/)

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