

# Beyond the Pandemic – Poverty and School Education in Scotland

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## Abstract

The introduction of Universal Credit and the effects of the economic crisis precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, compounded by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have all contributed to a rise in the levels of poverty and child poverty in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom. The rise in child poverty will have an impact on an increasing number of children and young people and their effective engagement with school education. This article presents a series of research findings and insights by leading researchers from Scottish Universities on key themes in Scottish education that were highly relevant in the pre-Covid and pre-war era, themes that will continue to be highly relevant in the forthcoming years. The themes are: Education in Local Child Poverty Action Reports; Digital Poverty and Education; School Uniform; Challenges for music education in Scotland and Teacher preparation for educational inclusion.

## Keywords

child poverty – Scotland – pandemic – children and young people

## Introduction

Poverty and child poverty in Scotland and the United Kingdom have been rising and are predicted to rise even further. This is the result of a number of factors that have had a cumulative and profound effect on the lives of a significant number of people in Scotland: changes in benefits to Universal Credit; the economic crisis created by the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The invasion of Ukraine was within the context of existing supply bottlenecks and rise in inflation and brought about steep increases in oil and gas (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2022). Energy bills continue to rise, and this is pushing the country into higher inflation levels. This will have a serious impact of the standard of living for all, but especially for those on limited household incomes who are most vulnerable to price rises.

The Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) *Poverty and Education Network* was established in 2014 as an interdisciplinary body of researchers focussed on the impact of child poverty on school education in Scotland and in international contexts. Some of the leading researchers in the (SERA) *Poverty and Education Network* have been researching and tracking the different ways in which poverty has affected and disrupted the school education of children and young people in Scotland (Scottish Government National Statistics, 2021). This article presents a sample of research findings and insights on a variety of themes: Education in Local Child Poverty Action Reports; Digital Poverty and Education; School Uniform; Challenges for music education in Scotland and Teacher preparation for educational inclusion. All of the research findings and insights are positioned within this contemporary context of increasing child poverty and the serious implications for the future opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people. The themes that are discussed below were all areas being researched by members of the Network before the pandemic and the researchers provide an update of their work in this article. They all call for the pressing need for effective intervention, sustainable solutions and warn of the continuing grave consequences of the rise in child poverty in the post-pandemic era. The article will commence with a background section on Scottish schools and child poverty and will then address all of the themes listed above.

## Scottish Schools and Child Poverty

The latest Scottish Government statistics indicate that there were 2,461 publicly funded schools in Scotland in 2022. This can be broken down into: 1,994 primary (elementary) schools; 358 secondary schools and 109 special schools. There were also 2,606 children in Early learning and childcare (Scottish Government, 2022a). There were 704,874 pupils in Scottish state schools in 2022 (Scottish Government, 2022b). This figure includes primary schools, secondary schools and special schools; it does not include statistics for Early Learning Centres and Childcare. The Scottish Curriculum is called *Curriculum for Excellence* built around four fundamental capacities: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens and effective contributors (Scottish Government, 2023a). This is designed to be a coherent curriculum for ages 3–18. There are two phases to this curriculum. First, there is a broad general education across the curriculum areas for children from early years to S3 (secondary year three) This is constructed of planned experiences and outcomes. Second, there is a senior phase which provides opportunities for further development and study for awards and national qualifications.

The most recent figures indicated that approximately one in four children were living in poverty in Scotland in 2020 (24%) (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023a). This means that 240,000 children were living in relative poverty after housing costs (Scottish Government, 2021a). These statistics refer to the period 2017–2020 as the pandemic impacted on data collection for 2020/2022. There have been a number of priorities in the strategies to address the issue of child poverty in Scotland and a number of prominent areas in research have emerged.

In 2015, the Scottish Government launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge which aimed to raise the educational attainment of children and young people, targeting those who live in areas of deprivation. The goal is to close the equity gap and improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in Scotland (Education Scotland National Improvement Hub, 2023). The Scottish Government introduced the Child Poverty Bill in 2017 which set out ambitious targets to reduce child poverty by 2030 (Scottish Government, 2023b). This required the Scottish Government to produce delivery plans and annual reports and also required local authorities and health boards to jointly publish annual reports explaining how they were working to reduce child poverty in their area. Importantly, the Child Poverty Bill and action is integrated into wider measures to tackle poverty in Scottish society (Scottish Government, 2022c).

The OECD'S report on Broad General Education in Scotland, called for a *strengthened 'middle' operating through networks and collaboratives among schools, and in and across local authorities.* (OECD, 2015, p10-11). In response to this Scottish Government has overseen the introduction of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). These are forums where local authorities come together to support educational improvement within their region. The 32 local authorities in Scotland have organised themselves into six RICs. These vary in geographical and population size. The development of the RICs is seen as a key part of the Scottish Government's reforms to educational governance and are aimed at providing educational improvement support for practitioners; developing regional improvement plans and facilitating collaborative working across the region. RIC's are seen as playing a key role in tackling the poverty related equity gap. There are a number of ongoing evaluations focused on the efficacy and impact of the RICs.

The Child Poverty Action Group has focussed on the hidden costs of the school day and has produced a series of invaluable resources (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023b). This initiative highlights the need to identify and address the 'hidden' financial barriers to full participation in schools in Scotland. Some of these barriers have been identified as the costs involved in: travel to school; school uniform, fun events and school clubs, equipment and home learning resources. The Educational Institute of Scotland, the main Scottish teaching union, launched an anti-poverty campaign in 2015, entitled, *Face up to Child Poverty* (Educational Institute of Scotland, 2022). This has served to heighten awareness of the impact of poverty on the daily lives and schooling of young people.

There have been a number of prominent areas in the research on child poverty and the impact of poverty on education in Scotland. These are often attempts to explore the distinctive nature and implications of the 'attainment gap' in Scotland (Sosu & Ellis, 2014; McCluskey, 2017). For example, the early years of children have been identified as very important, both in terms of educational development and progression and potential health inequalities (Treanor, 2012, 2017; Macdonald et al., 2013; White, 2017). Some important research has been conducted into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people who live in poverty and how this can affect their engagement in school and attainment in national qualifications (Mowat, 2019, 2020). The limited number of young people from lower income backgrounds accessing university level education has been a recurring focus for research studies (Forbes & McCartney, 2015; Sosu et.al., 2018). There is increasing research interest in the effects of rural poverty (and isolation) on children and their education (Glass and Atterton, 2022).

## Education in Local Child Poverty Action Reports

Education is everyone's business. It is an end and a means to an end. This implies that education connects with wider policy agendas and societal aspirations. The focus on educational equity in Scotland would appear to connect the work and purpose of school education with broader goals to eradicate child poverty in Scotland. Here, we focus on the extent to which education is acknowledged in Local Child Poverty Action Reports, which articulate the contribution of local action in each of Scotland's 32 local toward the national ambition of eradicating child poverty by 2030.

Scotland's aspiration to achieve educational equity in schools is most closely associated with the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), the programme – launched by the Scottish Government in 2015 and managed by Education Scotland – which has a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Set for a re-launch in 2022, the early years of the SAC have been widely discussed and regularly appraised. The consensus opinion is that some progress has been made in narrowing poverty-related attainment gaps, but not as much as would have been desired given the scale of public investment (Audit Scotland, 2021; Robertson and McHardy, 2021; Scottish Government Social Research, 2021).

The spectre of any progress being unravelled during the disruptions of Covid-19 is a concern of the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group and all other stakeholders in Scottish education.

However, promoting equity in education is not the preserve of the education sector alone. Since 2005, education has featured in the National Performance Framework (NPF), first introduced in 2007 to provide focus for actions to achieve the kind of country to which Scotland aspires. Education is at the heart of the NPF's purpose (e.g., *give opportunities to all people living in Scotland*), National Outcomes (e.g., *are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society*) and National Indicators (i.e., education is one of the eleven themes which are used to group together the 81 National Indicators).

Significantly, in the NPF, educational attainment – comprised of seven sub-measures which measure performance from Primary 1 to SCQF Level 6 – is part of a much broader positioning of education. The other National Indicators of 'education' seek to measure confidence, resilience, engagement in extra-curricular activities, and education in adulthood (workplace learning, participation of 16–19-year-olds, skill profile, skill shortage vacancies and skills underutilisation).

The positioning of school education in relation to wider Scottish Government agendas is particularly interesting in relation to the national

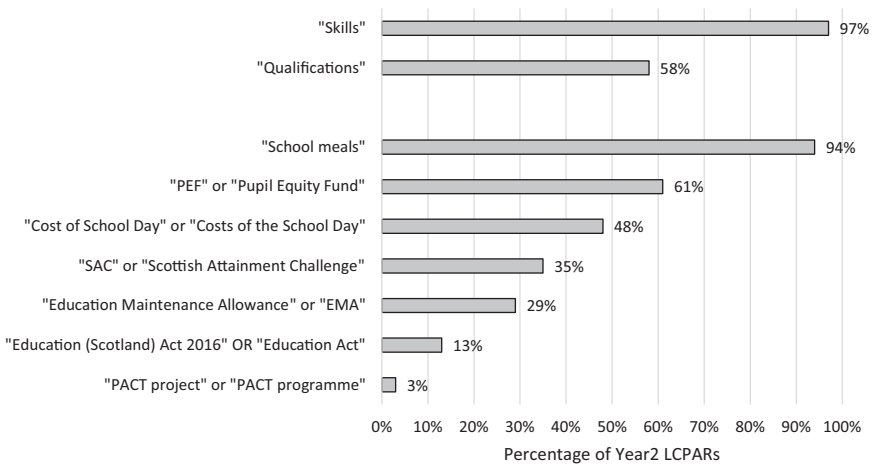
ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2030. Enshrined in legislation through the *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017*, Scotland has established four metrics to appraise interim progress and end goal achievement. Each of these metrics is based – either entirely or largely – on household income, with the headline target to reduce the proportion of children living in relative poverty to less than 10% (where this equates to less than 60% of median household income, equivalised for household size and composition). Each of Scotland's 32 local authorities, in partnership with its local NHS Board, is obliged to produce an annual Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR) to review local actions, plans and progress using the local resources at their disposal. These LCPARs are encouraged to focus attention on the three drivers of poverty, defined as increasing income from employment; increasing income from social security or benefits in kind; and reducing costs of living.

School education sits awkwardly in this national project to eradicate child poverty in Scotland by 2030. With success to be determined according to household income levels, school education would appear to be on the margins. Only one action makes a direct contribution to this goal, i.e., the Educational Maintenance Allowance payment to 16–19-year-olds in education, which counts toward household income. However, other actions in school education, in theory, are possible. For example, finding funds to remunerate everyone who works in school education to a level that would raise employees above the poverty threshold would be a concrete income-oriented action, although this would be based on the assumption that many of those employees have household incomes that are currently below the threshold and that they have children: such an action would be targeted at cleaners, catering staff, support staff, clerical staff and transport staff (many local authorities are already working toward Living Wage accreditation for these groups), rather than full-time teachers who are already remunerated at levels above the threshold. Similarly, it could be argued that immediate actions to improve the skills and qualifications of secondary school pupils could impact on child poverty levels by 2030 if improved outcomes enabled them as young adults to secure income from paid employment that was at a level above the threshold. However, once more this would only be impactful if it delivered adequate remuneration for those who become young parents or contributed to these young adults not becoming parents living in poverty with young children. Clearly, the direct impact of school education on reducing child poverty when defined according to household income is uncertain and is likely to be marginal given the scale of the challenge.

However, many actions for school education are outlined in *Every Child, Every Chance, the first child poverty delivery plan 2018–2022* (Scottish Government

2018). Although not directly increasing household income, a central thrust of anti-poverty action is to reduce the costs of living for households experiencing poverty. This involves increasing provision of after school and holiday childcare (with an objective of enabling parents of school aged children to gain more income from employment), reducing the hidden cost of the school day, setting a new minimum level for School Clothing Grants, introducing the Young Scot National Entitlement Card to enable children living in poverty to access in-kind support in non-stigmatising ways, and increasing free access to some basic essentials (i.e., sanitary products) in schools. The Child Poverty Measurement Framework – which measures the impact of actions beyond household income – includes aspects of school education, i.e., school leaver attainment gaps, uptake of free school meals, and level of school clothing grant.

Figure 1 summarises the incidence of educational equity themes in the second round of LCPARs (for 2019–2020). It is drawn from a larger body of work that is reviewing local approaches to addressing national goals across LCPARs. The education themes on which we focus are those that feature in *Every Child Every Chance* – to reflect the established vision of equity in the first child poverty delivery plan. It should be acknowledged that other aspects of educational equity emerged in these reports, such as the concern with tackling digital exclusion during the Covid-19 pandemic. Every LCPAR made at least one reference to school education, although it is much less prominent in some



**FIGURE 1** References to educational equity and related issues in year 2 local child poverty action reports  
**Cases:** 31 Local Child Poverty Action Reports  
**Note:** One Year 2 LCPAR had not been submitted at the time of writing (March 2022)



areas (e.g., North Lanarkshire) than others (e.g., North Ayrshire). Furthermore, some aspects of educational equity are much more central to LCPARs (e.g., school meals and the Pupil Equity Fund) than others (e.g., Educational Maintenance Allowance and the EIS' PACT programme).

We draw five conclusions from this analysis. First and foremost, school education is a feature of local plans to tackle child poverty across Scotland. Second, and on the other hand, there is much variation across local areas in the extent to which education is viewed as central to these local efforts to tackle child poverty, the ways in which educational equity is being pursued, and the ways in which progress is measured (with some areas being much more data driven, e.g., City of Edinburgh). Third, the prevalence of school meals affirms the importance of inclusion in the delivery plan in shaping subsequent action, a point for consideration as the second iteration of the child poverty delivery plan is being prepared. It will be interesting to consider whether breakfast provision in primary schools – a recent Scottish Government commitment for primary schools – is conceived as wraparound care to facilitate parental labour market participation. Fourth, education has also been nimble in contributing to the wider tackling poverty agenda – this was evident in how free school meal provision was adapted in lockdown and with the emergence of action to tackle digital inclusion in response to the inequities that became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, education has the potential to encourage transformations in how child poverty is tackled more generally: some of the education-based anti-poverty interventions in the Year 2 LCPARs adopted a cash-first approach, wherein provision entailed providing families with income to dispense themselves, rather than granting access to in-kind resources to be claimed – such an approach is championed by many anti-poverty organisations, such as the Child Poverty Action Group. On the other hand, much of the potential for education to contribute to tackling child poverty is not yet being realised, e.g., very few reports showcase the potential of promoting financial inclusion and welfare rights through working in partnership with Education.

Although there is a need for further analysis and critical reflection we have affirmed that school education is already integral to wider work that aims to tackle child poverty locally across Scotland.

## The Digital Divide and School Education

### *The Digital Divide*

The digital divide is a worldwide phenomenon and one that is attracting increasing attention in contemporary societies and educational systems. This



focus of attention has accelerated as a result of the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. The digital age and the digital divide are often framed within the emergence of the fusion of technologies in the fourth industrial revolution and digital exclusion serves to deepen inequality and limit future opportunities (Gov.UK, 2019). Let us take the UK as a whole: if the digital divide is not adequately addressed in the UK, there will be four million adults by 2024 who will not possess the digital skills for employment in this new age (Unicef, 2021). This means that these adults are not able to fully participate in society. Unicef (2021) has commented that ‘is a matter of social justice and opportunity that we ensure all children and young people are digitally empowered’.

There are, of course, serious challenges in the expansion of the digital world and digital inclusion. Caution must be exercised, for example, over the rise of ‘surveillance capitalism’ and there are many examples of online abuses (Bevan, 2022; NSPCC, 2022). Nevertheless, the United Nations understands the elimination of the digital divide as key to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Secretary General has produced a Roadmap for Digital Cooperation that emphasises *Connect*, *Respect* and *Protect* (United Nations, 2020). *Connect* refers to the target to attain ‘universal, safe, inclusive and affordable access to the internet for all by 2030’. The aim of *Respect* is to ensure that human rights are protected online as they are protected offline. *Protect* reinforces the need for online security, especially for the most vulnerable.

### *The Digital Divide in Scotland During the Period of the Pandemic*

The move to online and hybrid learning and teaching in Scotland during the period of the pandemic was fraught with challenges for school pupils, teachers and parents/guardians and also highlighted the effects of digital exclusion. It is important to recognise, however, that the digital divide existed before the pandemic and digital inclusion for children and young people had been identified as a priority and was being addressed by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government digital learning and teaching strategy of 2016 was conceived as part of the improvement agenda for school education formalised in the National Improvement Framework and the Scottish Education Delivery Plan (Scottish Government, 2016).

Children and young people living in poverty and deprivation were most affected by the move to online learning and teaching because of the ‘digital gap’ (Audit Scotland, 2021). It is simplistic to conceive the digital gap as a binary distinction between digital inclusion and digital exclusion. The digital gap exists in different ways and to different degrees (Coleman, 2021). We have identified five key areas that exemplify the digital gap in Scotland in relation

to the learning of children and young people: (1) access to devices; (2) learning space; (3) connectivity; (4) digital literacy and (5) parental engagement. First, it is manifested in *access to devices* and suitability of devices. For some children and young people, there can be no access or limited access to a device, for example, devices have to be shared with family members. A device can afford limited engagement with online learning activities or be unsuitable for some aspects of online learning. The device being used can be incompatible with the online platform used by the school. Second, there is an issue about *learning space*. There can be no access or limited access to an appropriate private space for online learning. There can be limited rooms in the house, overcrowding in the house and there can be lack of furniture, such as table, desk or chair (The Educational Institute of Scotland, 2021). The third key area is *connectivity*. There can be no access or limited/intermittent access to the internet. The family may not be able to afford constant internet access and the access may be limited. Fourth, Digital inclusion is not simply access to devices and the internet, it also includes *digital literacy* – the knowledge and skills required to access and effectively operate digital technology (Sanders and Scanlon, 2021). Children and young people can have limited digital literacy. Kirschner and Bruyckere (2017) argue that the pre-covid myth that the *net generation* children were digital natives, and teachers were digital immigrants, was a dangerous oversimplification. This obscured the complexity of the different levels of digital literacy and the digital divide. The fifth key area is *parental engagement*. The parents/guardians can have limited digital literacy, or limited free time when working at home, which means they are unable to provide guidance and support in home online learning (Audit Scotland, 2021; The Educational Institute of Scotland, 2021). Digital poverty in some households meant that some parents/guardians were unable to engage online with the school and access meetings and support.

Audit Scotland notes that the Scottish Government has taken measures to bridge the digital gap. The Scottish Government is working with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) on a place-based approach to digital inclusion (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2022). Some councils have been able to provide devices and access to the internet during the pandemic. This has taken some time to implement across the country and, in some places, progress has been slow (The Educational Institute of Scotland, 2021). Providing devices is only the beginning of a solution as they have to be maintained and in good repair to function properly and be replaced when necessary. Many of the households experiencing poverty and deprivation are unable to replace faulty or broken devices (Includem, 2020). Further, there remain connectivity issues in some rural areas which exacerbates

the experience of rural poverty. These issues are often about the speed and efficiency of the connection in rural areas, rather than a lack of connection, and the continuation of a division between the ‘urban digital fast lane’ and the ‘grural digital slow lane’ (Wilson and Hopkins, 2019).

### *Beyond the Era of the Pandemic*

As has been noted, access to the internet is linked to the ability of the household to pay for the constant supply of electricity required for the use of the internet and for using and charging devices for online learning and engagement. Poverty has increased as a result of the pandemic and will increase further as a result of the war in Ukraine. Fuel prices have recently risen dramatically. There is now a danger that more households will experience fuel poverty, and this will increase digital poverty. The Scottish Government is introducing a series of measures to prevent fuel poverty through greater energy efficiency and support for those who experience fuel poverty (Scottish Government, 2022d). The effect of the increase of fuel poverty on digital poverty will have to be monitored very carefully to evaluate the impact on households that experience poverty and deprivation and on the opportunities for children and young people. There is also the compounding issue of digital and financial literacy which can exacerbate the challenges faced by those in poverty when trying to access affordable internet deals (Lucas et al., 2021). While the education system has developed innovative technological strategies in response to the pandemic that can, in principle, improve teachers’ ability to reach learners, the persistent issues highlighted here pose a significant challenge for promoting educational equity.

### **School Uniform**

The ubiquity of school uniform in most parts of Scotland can make people forget about its cost and its affordability for families living in poverty. While the cost is the amount of money needed to buy uniform items (school clothing and PE kit), its affordability is the cost relative to the amount that the family is able to pay. In Scotland the Child Poverty Action Group has done much to highlight the cost of school uniform in its Cost of the School Day work (Child Poverty Action Group, 2021). At secondary school level in Scotland compulsory uniform is very much the norm. Of the 357 publicly funded secondary schools in Scotland, 96% (n=343) have a compulsory school uniform (Shanks, 2020). Many people take it for granted that school uniform is beneficial. However, there is no firm evidence that school uniform does make a difference in terms

of behaviour or learning outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, Reidy, 2021). In Scotland and the other nations in the UK the wide income differences mean that school uniform does help to reduce stigma and also reduce non-attendance (Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019).

When the national minimum clothing grant was introduced in Scotland in 2018 (first set at £100 per year per pupil for those eligible) the aim was to reduce living costs for families with the lowest incomes. The eligibility criteria were left for local education authorities to determine, and these criteria are similar but not always identical to those for free school meals (Shanks, 2022). While the grant makes uniform more affordable it does not currently cover all the costs involved. The Scottish Government sets the minimum payable and the 32 local authorities not only administer the grant but also have discretion on the eligibility criteria, and they can provide a higher amount of grant. The issue is that while the school clothing grant minimum is currently £150 for a secondary school pupil, it has been found that on average £337 is needed to buy uniform for a secondary school pupil for a year (The Children's Society, 2020). The cost-of-living crisis has led to some local authorities increasing their clothing grant. In the 2021–22 school year only one local authority provided more than the national minimum of £150 for secondary school pupils but in 2022–23 there are five paying more with two paying £300 (Shanks, 2022). Therefore, if the cost of school uniform and PE kit is more than twice as much as the clothing grant that means that families living in poverty must divert other income to buy school clothing, hence the dilemma of food or heating becomes one of food or heating or school clothing.

Research undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic showed that it became more difficult to source and afford school uniform for families living in poverty (Page, Power and Patrick, 2021). During the first national Covid-19 lockdowns school buildings were closed and teaching and learning was moved online. This meant that school uniform was no longer needed but when buildings reopened there were not the opportunities for hand-me-downs to be given out between friends and family and second-hand clothing that schools might have provided was no longer being organised (ibid). The Edinburgh School Uniform Bank (2021) reported an increase of 27% in the number of referrals for uniform packs in 2020 and uniform banks have reported increased demand during the cost-of-living crisis from 2022 onwards.

During the pandemic, schools in Scotland were trying to ventilate classrooms as much as possible meaning that windows were open in many classrooms, and thus pupils needed to wear extra layers to stay warm. Some schools also required pupils to be outside during break and lunchtime in order to reduce the spread of Covid-19. This led to further expense for families in order for their

children to keep warm and/or the possibility of young people being cold both inside and outside during the school day.

Recently, concerns about the cost rather than the affordability of school uniform have gained attention in England where there is less clothing grant support from local authorities and fewer schools under local authority control. New statutory guidance for schools in England means that all publicly funded schools must consider the cost of their uniform and organise second-hand uniform (UK Government, 2021). The Welsh Government's (2019) statutory guidance emphasises the use of generic items that can be bought in multiple outlets. The Scottish Government (2021) has made a commitment to introduce its own statutory guidance on school uniform stating that: 'during this Parliament, we will introduce statutory guidance for schools; increasing the use of generic items of uniform and reducing costs for families' and a consultation on this guidance was conducted between May and October 2022.

As others have noted (e.g., Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019) the priority should be on poverty at source rather than trying to fix its effects through proxy help such as free school meals, school clothing grant and school uniform banks. However, while families are on low incomes, schools could ensure that their uniform requirements do not exceed the national minimum clothing grant and that uniform for girls is not more expensive (Mallen, 2021). Schools could also provide support to families and ensure that they do not give out punishments or stigmatise pupils because of their clothing (Dosa, 2019). Schools can review their uniform policies with pupils and parents and make sure they consider affordability, comfort (see Reidy, 2021) and the environment. Finally, the effects on attendance from non-uniform days should be checked and acted upon if necessary (Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019).

### Challenges for Music Education in Scotland

The sections below summarise some of the research we have engaged in over the past 9 years.

These summaries are followed by a short outline of the intended direction for our future research and development work. A case is made for introducing an iterative process of research and development that would seek to progress innovative and research informed forms of provision.

*Who gets to play? Investigating equity in musical instrument instruction in Scottish primary schools* (Moscardini et al. 2013) investigated the extent to which the opportunity to undertake instrumental instruction in Scottish primary schools was equitable. The study employed a mixed methods approach. Data

were gathered from 21 Scottish primary schools, a total pupil population of 5122 pupils of whom 323 pupils were receiving instrumental instruction. The analysis involved an investigation of the academic profile of this group, the representation of children with additional support needs and the nature of their additional support needs. A qualitative analysis of policy and guideline documents and interviews with Heads of Instrumental Services, headteachers and instrumental instructors served to explain and illuminate the quantitative data.

The study also found that in some Local Authorities there was a top-down deployment of instructors into secondary schools where pupils were being presented for leaving exams in music. Instructors were then allocated to related primary schools once the secondary provision had been addressed. This deployment process may be seen as a means to bolster music exam attainment and also explain the absence of instrumental instructors in primary schools in particular areas of deprivation.

The findings showed that there was an aspiration, at all levels, of equality of opportunity but this did not appear to have extended beyond the notion of ensuring a representation of children with additional support needs. There was evidence of disproportionality with an over-representation of children identified as dyslexic while other groups of children with additional support needs were significantly under-represented. Specifically, there was no evidence of any children with physical impairments or significant learning difficulties receiving instrumental music lessons. The study highlighted the challenge of realising the aspirational rhetoric of policy and the need to ensure more equitable access to instrumental music education for all children.

*What's Going on Now? A study of young people learning music across Scotland* (Broad et al. 2019) This research looked at music provision across three local authorities that were broadly reflective of the different local authorities across Scotland. In depth case studies of each local authority were undertaken. These included desk-based research and a series of interviews with a range of stakeholders in each local authority knowledgeable of the music opportunities for children and young people. The research was underpinned by the following research questions:

- *How is music provision organised in each of the case studies?*
- *What implicit perceptions of the value and role of music education shape this provision?*
- *How does this impact on equality of opportunity?*

The findings from this research asserted that, if left unchecked, current forms of music provision in Scotland will work to increase inequality. Despite the current focus on addressing inequality in Scottish Education, participation in



music is not a possibility for all children and young people and is becoming only accessible to those who can afford it and who can align with what is culturally valued in schools. Children and young people from working-class or poor households, disabled children and those with additional support needs are effectively excluded. The report argued that recognition of this issue is the first step towards effecting change. However, finding solutions is not simply a matter of resources and increasing funding, instead it requires an understanding and acknowledgment of the ways in which inequality persists. The dominance of certain perspectives on musical performance, valued genres and the potential intrinsic value of music to all pupils need to be considered.

*Music Education in the Primary School in Scotland* (Moscardini et al. 2021) aimed to gather background data on music education in primary classrooms provided by non-specialist primary teachers. It also looked to explore the content of music education in Primary school-focused Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in preparing Primary teachers for delivering this as part of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). At a time where there are a variety of challenges, including reduction of access to learning in and through the expressive arts in both ITE and curricular constraints and the status of music education within the Primary classroom we considered it highly important to gain insight into the experiences of practitioners at the chalk face of delivery.

Data were gathered through an online survey open to all general primary teachers working in Scotland as well as an audit of course material made available through ITE providers. In total 437 Primary teachers responded to our survey, with 6 of the 9 ITE providers also providing information on the content of their ITE programmes.

Of the 437 Primary teachers that responded to the survey 98% considered music education in the primary classroom to be important, yet while it was deemed to be important by such a significant number of respondents, 15% of these teachers indicated that music education was either ‘non-existent’ or ‘practically non-existent’ in their schools, with a further 9% reporting that children in their primary schools did not experience any music lessons at all. Indeed, only 3% of all respondents indicated that their schools had a whole-school approach to music education through a structured and coherent programme which was accessible to all children.

For many children, Primary school is the first formal experience of musical learning and development, but the responses gathered for this project paint a picture that access to music learning experiences is haphazard at best and non-existent at worst. Providing meaningful and high-quality learning experiences for children and young people requires teachers who have confidence and comfort in designing and delivering appropriate activities. Additionally, for



music and musical learning, the provision of high quality, meaningful musical learning requires teachers to have confidence in their own musical knowledge, understanding and skills.

This foundational confidence and competence in teaching Music for Primary pupils is fostered in the ITE phase of a teachers' development. This time is itself under pressure and has often competed for time with other curricular areas. The place of Music in the ITE Primary curriculum and the 'squeeze' on delivery was particularly evident in the responses from the ITE providers. Of the 6 responding ITE providers, undergraduate Primary programmes students experienced 9.5 hours of Music education across the duration of study, with the one-year Primary PGDE programme averaging 7 hours. There is a degree of commonality across these programmes, with the providers looking to raise awareness of and familiarity with the curricular requirements and Experiences and Outcomes, alongside some basic musical rudiments such as pitch, rhythm and using the voice. However, from the responses of the Primary teachers there remains a gap in knowledge, skills and confidence to enact these in the classroom context.

The findings from our project highlights several areas of concern for the state of music education in Scotland, none more so than the 'patchy' experiences of children in Scotland as part of their mandatory education. How can we promote access to high quality musical learning for all children? Likewise, how can ITE providers support their students in developing the skills necessary for designing and delivering such experiences?

### *Ways Forward?*

The literature review of research outlined above indicates the different areas for urgent consideration if provision of music education in Scotland is to benefit all children and young people. The evidence suggests that pupils with additional support needs and those from working class and poor households are increasingly isolated from opportunities to engage in and enjoy the benefits of music education. These challenges are not limited to Scotland with a report by researchers from the University of Bath (Donnelly et al., 2019) acknowledging similar and further issues around the complex relationship between poverty and access to and engagement with the arts and other activities. The Donnelly et al., (2019) report emphasises that not only is cost a barrier for some children but that additional factors such as gender and race can compound these difficulties, leading to further social isolation through a sense of 'not fitting in'.

This social dimension is important for music, with music often considered as a means of promoting or contributing to wellbeing. This connections between wellbeing, poverty and music is a large area of research and an interesting

project was undertaken by researchers in Hong Kong who sought to implement a one hour per week music education programme with early years children in an area of high disadvantage over a 12-week period (Cheung et al., 2019). The researchers reported a noticeable difference in the children's wellbeing and happiness through the child's participation in the music project. Similarly, Cheung et al., (2019) acknowledged an increase in quality of engagement between family members and the children. While Cheung et al.'s music education programme was short-term, the initial findings are encouraging and suggest that proactively pursuing opportunities in areas of high and multiple deprivation can lead to a number of social and emotional gains. Conversely the opposite could also be inferred, that if children are unable to access music due to any disadvantage it may have a domino effect on their general wellbeing.

New ways of working need to be developed to address the issues raised above. These need to be research informed and based on in-depth understanding of the contexts in which they will be introduced and developed. An iterative process of research and development is needed to ensure that change is occurring that effects the necessary impact. With close partnership working and a willingness to problem solve music education can be a possibility for all children and young people.

### **Teacher Preparation for Educational Inclusion in the Context of Increasing Child Poverty**

In the last decade, a relationship between child poverty and poor educational outcomes has been overtly acknowledged within political discourse (Ellis, Thompson, McNicholl & Thomson, 2016). Poverty presents multiple barriers to children and young people's participation and success at school (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). For example, high levels of poverty and material deprivation are associated with delays in young children's cognitive development (Bradshaw, 2011), underdeveloped social skills (Barnes, Chanfreau and Tomaszewski, 2010) and a perceived lack of 'readiness' for school (Goodman and Gregg, 2010). Therefore, calls within political discourse for schools to recognise and take poverty seriously and for schools to engage with and respond to the effects of poverty on their pupils' lives, should not be underestimated.

The preparation of teachers for *inclusive education* offers one way of responding to the challenges facing children and young people growing up in poverty to successfully participate and thrive in their education (UNESCO, 2020). In high poverty school environments, the role of the teacher is important in mitigating the effects of poverty-related attainment. Certain

pedagogical approaches that teachers implement can help alleviate the effects of child poverty on participation and learning outcomes (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Florian and Spratt, 2013). Surprisingly little is known about the effective preparation of new teachers to mitigate the effects of poverty and educational disadvantage (McNamara & McNicholl, 2016), despite recognition of the damage caused by poverty to children and young people's educational outcomes. Our work has focussed on the preparation of new teachers in this relation and has recently contributed to research undertaken as part of a larger three-year project supported by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education (SCDE, 2021).

Specifically, our work centred on researching teacher education pedagogies and teacher induction strategies that better prepare early career teachers to make a positive difference for pupils living in poverty. In Scotland, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), is the Government's standard approach for identifying areas of multiple deprivation. Our study focused on areas SIMD 1– 40% communities, which are considered to have high incidences of deprivation.

To begin with and given the complexity of poverty as a concept, we sought to understand student teachers' understandings of poverty within the context of rising rates of child poverty both nationally and internationally (Robson, Mtika, Graham and MacDougall, 2021). Our findings suggested that the student teachers recognised poverty as a real issue applicable to children and young people in Scotland's schools. Additionally, they expressed different views as to what constitutes poverty in the Scottish context, often seeing poverty in multi-dimensional and dynamic terms. They also anticipated the likelihood of working with children and young people affected by poverty in their teaching practice. However, they were less certain about how they would recognise such individuals in the classrooms. These findings offer a point of reference for thinking about how initial teacher education can be viewed as a key site for interrogating the variable nature of poverty in and for, the preparation of teachers.

In another related study, we explored student teachers' social capital relations during practicum in schools with high numbers of pupils living in poverty (Graham, MacDougall, Robson and Mtika, 2019). Recognising the complexity of practicum in and for initial teacher education and the additional challenges for schools linked to child poverty, this work explores the kinds of social relations associated with student teachers' practicum experience in high poverty school contexts. We used Forbes and McCartney's (2010) analytical framework for social capital to explore the bridging and linking of social relations between the student teachers and others in their practicum settings.

The findings from our study suggest that the design of practicum does not currently support the principles of social capital theory.

Specifically, practicum does not appear to systematically enable student teachers to develop an understanding of how to make connections, and develop the social relationships required to support positive educational outcomes for the children and young people in such contexts. We make the case for more effective ‘joint practice’ to better support student teachers’ professional learning within practicum settings. To enable this, we highlight the pressing need for further research into the re-design of practicum so that student teachers can gain knowledge and practice of relevant co-working skills to equip them to work collaboratively with professionals, specialist teachers, and, importantly, practitioners from other children’s agencies.

In our more recent study, we have been examining the experiences of student and probationer teachers to surface and highlight what they can do in terms of enacting educational inclusion in high poverty school environments. The principles that underpin our approach are based on the Inclusive Pedagogy Approach in Action (IPAA) framework (Florian and Spratt, 2013). Organised around 3 key principles: (i) difference is accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning; (ii) teachers must believe they can teach all children; and (iii) teachers continually develop creative new ways of working with others, the IPAA framework was developed in response to the methodological problem of context as a confusing variable in researching inclusive pedagogy. Applying the IPAA judgements about what inclusion is and whether it has occurred are replaced by an exploration of the extent to which a principled stance is enacted. In doing so, the IPAA aims to move beyond a description of observable actions toward a deeper analysis of the ways in which teachers can enact inclusive pedagogy. Using the IPAA we sought to surface what student and probationer teachers can do rather than what they cannot do in relation to educational inclusion within their classroom settings. Findings from this work provide concrete examples of how student and probationer teachers begin to modify their classroom teaching and learning environments by adopting pedagogical practices aimed at including all learners. Examples of their practice offer insights for initial teacher education in terms of preparing student teachers to enter their probationary year within the Teacher Induction Scheme (General Teaching Council for Scotland n.d.).

The probationer teachers demonstrated an ability to mobilise readily available teaching strategies, additional support resources and professional relationships, to support an inclusive pedagogy. Of particular note, were the intra-professional connections fostered by the probationer teachers with pupil support assistants. Such working with others relates to the third principle

of inclusive pedagogy which highlights the relational nature of an inclusive pedagogical approach in responding to learner differences (Pantić & Florian, 2015). This finding underscores the importance of foregrounding relationality as a key asset in, and for, enacting an inclusive pedagogy. Therefore, it would seem beneficial for initial teacher education to focus support on student teachers developing the capacities necessary for intra-professional working as a starting point for creating wider interprofessional working to support the inclusion of all learners.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent school closures and lockdown, the effects of poverty on the education of children and young people have exacerbated. For instance, at the height of the pandemic, school closures led to home schooling, which, notwithstanding digital and internet poverty, revealed challenges for families to support children's learning. In our on-going research, we are now designing a study with a focus on children and young people's voices in relation to teaching and learning pedagogies in schools located in high poverty environments. This work advances the idea of a participative approach (Taylor & Robinson 2009) and the importance of seeking genuine pupil voice as a right and as a need to gain insight into pupils' perspectives on teaching and approaches (Lundy, 2007). Eliciting a better understanding of pupils' voices and listening to and acting on their views, has potential to contribute a further important dimension to shaping preparation of teachers for responding to the challenges faced by children and young people growing up in poverty.

### Concluding Remarks

The different contributions from members of the *SERA Poverty and Education Network* provide valuable insights into the complexity of the important contemporary themes on the impact of child poverty on school education in Scotland. There are other themes that could have been addressed including: food insecurity; young carers; poverty proofing schools and attainment and achievement. Overall, this wide range of themes highlights the challenge for the Scottish education system; a system that was already struggling to tackle poverty-related inequity pre-covid.

There are some existing examples of good practice in collaborative and joined-up strategies. As has been stated, the Child Poverty Bill and action has been integrated into wider measures to tackle poverty in Scottish society (Scottish Government, 2022c). This is a recognition that poverty is an issue for society, not just schools and the impetus for the action on child poverty is

within the context of aims to increase viable employment opportunities for adults, support adults into employment and increase benefits. The Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) are a good example of an initiative that promotes focused and sustained collaboration among the local authorities for a common goal: tackling the poverty related equity gap.

There are possibilities for collaboration and joined-up strategies emerging from some of the contributions to this article. The research with student teachers described in the section on ‘Teacher preparation for educational inclusion in the context of increasing child poverty’ could be expanded to other universities and other parts of Scotland. There is the potential to raise the national minimum clothing grant to ease the hardship experienced by families on low incomes, and there is scope for other collaborative and joined-up strategies at all levels that recognise the underpinning relationship between poverty and inequity.

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