

# EEE NEWSLETTER

## ELIMINATING ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

VOLUME 2  
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### Welcome to the second edition of the HFL Eliminating Economic Exclusion Newsletter.

As we head deep into winter, a common theme coming out of our work with schools, settings and trusts around Eliminating Economic Exclusion (EEE) is the number of families struggling financially with the costs associated with sending their children to school. This extends far beyond those eligible for free school meals (FSM). Comments like the following from parents are typical of the feedback we are hearing when conducting interviews and surveys.

- I have had to use credit cards and borrow money from family to pay for school and extracurricular activities. I do not want my child to miss out so there is pressure to do this.
- School costs equate to almost the entirety of our spare income. So as a mother, I go without hobbies or new clothes, to allow my two children to take part in all the trips, activities, sports and music lessons on offer.

We hope that the practical ideas and suggestions and the inspiring stories contained in this newsletter are useful to you in your ongoing work to support all children to enjoy and benefit from the full breadth of educational experiences you provide. As always, your feedback (to [rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org](mailto:rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org)) is welcomed.

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## PUPIL PREMIUM GAP UPDATE

We wish we could share some cheery news regarding the size of the disadvantaged gap, both nationally and in Hertfordshire, but the reality is that it remains stubbornly sizeable. [Click here for further details.](#)

In terms of comparison to other local authorities, Hertfordshire remains in the lowest quintile by most measures, with some exceptions at KS4.

## SHARING GREAT PRACTICE

### ROOTS FEDERATION (NURSERY)

**At The Roots Federation of Nursery Schools we believe that carefully thought-out education is the vehicle to promote social mobility. We do not underestimate our part to play in removing economic disadvantage and providing an equitable offer.**

Eight Strategies we have implemented to Eliminate Economic Exclusion in our schools:

#### 1. Staff Deployment

Children from affluent backgrounds are statistically likely to achieve more highly than their peers from poorer backgrounds. The government policy of offering 30-hour provision to the former group of children has inadvertently disadvantaged those from poorer backgrounds. To try to address this injustice, we ensure that our staff with the highest levels of education themselves and greatest teaching experience are deployed to teach our children only eligible for 15 hours.

#### 2. Developing Staff Awareness

We need our staff to be fully aware of the impact of poverty, the barriers this can pose to achievement and the inequity that this can cause. All staff in the Federation receive training on the effective use of funding to support our families from less affluent backgrounds and this is now an embedded part of all inductions. We have introduced an 'Equality and Diversity' section to the weekly staff update to keep staff fully briefed on headlines from research, raising awareness of how poverty can impact individual achievement.

#### 3. Reading

Every child receives the gift of a school bookbag when they start with us. To support families with access to books we have developed community book sheds that are accessible to all families. We provide high quality picture books for the children in our schools as well as a basket of books for older siblings and a basket of books for grown-ups. Many families visit our book sheds over weekends or in the evening!



#### 4. Home Library

The national literacy trust reports that 1 in 5 children do not have a book of their own in their home. We make significant financial investment in gifting books to all children across the year and make a commitment that each child will leave us with a home library of at least 5 high quality books.

#### 5. Affordable Uniform

When our three schools federated, we reviewed our branding and introduced a dark green uniform. This not only better reflected our ethos of a natural approach and our commitment to sustainability but also

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY OUR EEE AGONY AUNT



**1. Do you have any advice to support a family which is just about managing financially but needs help to pay for prescriptions? The parent has been prescribed three items each month, which total £38. To give you some background, the parent believes they are not entitled to free prescriptions and the injury they are being treated for could take up to six months to heal.**

The NHS offer a Prescription Pre-payment Certificate (PCC) link [here](#). The certificate covers all NHS prescriptions for a set price, so although there is an initial outlay, the family will save money if, as you have suggested, they need more than three items in three months, or eleven items in twelve months.

The prescription charge in England is £9.65 per item. A PPC costs: £31.25 for three months or £111.60 for twelve months.

It would be worth advising the parent to check to see if they are entitled to free NHS prescriptions using the [eligibility checker](#).

**2. At my school, we subsidise trips for pupils eligible for Free School Meals but we know that there are parents who are not eligible who cannot afford to pay trip costs. What can we do to support them?**

The findings from our EEE reviews show clearly that there are many parents across the county who are really struggling

ensured that uniform without branding could be easily purchased at local supermarkets. For those wanting branded items, we have an embedded system whereby parents donate their uniform back to the school when children leave. Families can now access a 'Preloved Uniform Stand' with no price tags; just a request for a small donation if they can.

## 6. Outdoor Spaces

A growing number of our children live in flats with little communal space. Safe outdoor spaces are starting to disappear as more affordable housing is being built. For many of our families with more than one child under five or who have children with additional needs, an open park can bring a range of challenges. We ensure that we maximise the use of all outside areas; we invest in staff training, we provide children with access to high quality wellies and waterproofs so that all outside areas space can be accessed in all weathers.

## 7. Community Outings and Enrichment Experiences

In our schools we choose not to book a big, annual trip. Instead, we plan regular trips into the community or fund visitors into the schools to give children cost-free, real-life experiences. From our youngest babies all the way through to our Nursery school children there are a range of offsite excursions which teach them about their community alongside learning skills about staying safe.

## 8. Educational Resources

Our home visits have informed us that, whilst there are very few children with no toys in the home, many of our families are not always sure which items are the best educational resources for their child. We provide information, through our recorded sessions, on how to use familiar items round the house to achieve learning outcomes rather than using what could be deemed 'specialist equipment.' Any resources that are not available in the house we provide; such as our lending library for fine motor control activities and our story sacks. These are all fully resourced bags including guidance on how to use as tools for learning. We provide parents with visuals used successfully in school so they can be used to support routines and learning at home.

## MARLBOROUGH SCHOOL (SECONDARY)

### The 'M' Store

The 'M' Store is a relatively new initiative, developed by the Family Engagement Worker in October 2022. Through it, we are providing items like coats, shoes, sanitary wear and hygiene items to families. We are aiming to support in a kind, discreet and dignified way.

We took our inspiration initially from 'The Vineyard', a Christian-based foodbank in St Albans. We are lucky to have their support in stocking the M store. The St Albans Hygiene and food bank has also generously provided us with specific items that are geared to our families' individual needs such as deodorants, toilet rolls, shower gel, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Accessing local Free Cycle sites has enabled us to provide families with fridges, freezers, beds, cabinets, books, tables, irons and kitchen items. Our biggest source of items is 'Maverick Humanity' (a Homeless Charity); they supply items ranging from food, coats, televisions and shoes. If our families can benefit from it, we'll have it!

Access to the Store is as discreet as we can possibly make it. We have presented it as an extension of the second-hand school uniform provision to remove any stigma. Staff, particularly younger staff, are welcome to access our 'store'; the cost-of-living crisis is hitting everyone and not just the underserved. We are going to increase the size of our current 'shop' to make it more accessible, modern and friendly.

to make ends meet, for whom enrichment and trip costs present a great challenge. We even heard from one mother who had taken out a bank loan to pay for trip expenses. Some schools are letting parents know what a trip costs per pupil but then encouraging anyone who has the capacity to pay extra to do so, to support another child. Online payment systems make this easy and non-conspicuous to action. The school then adds these funds to a JAM or Hardship fund and administers subsidies to parents not on the PP register as requests come in / they become aware of hardship cases. Other miscellaneous donations to the school can also be added to the Hardship Fund.

**3. We have a wonderful PTA at our school. The parents who run it give so much time to support the pupils and they are always thinking up new ideas for fundraising to help the school budget. But I'm worried that not all families are able to access the events they run due to the costs. The other week, they put on a disco for Year 7s to help them settle in. But it cost £6 and then snacks and drinks were charged on top of that. I don't want to dampen their enthusiasm and the extra funds are really useful. What do you advise?**

This is a sensitive area. It's great that you have parents giving freely of their time and it sounds like they are organising some really enriching experiences and events. But it sounds like they might be so keen to raise funds that they are not considering the



Some of the feedback we have received includes:

*"Thank you so much for my food parcel. I can't tell you how much difference it makes... my son can now have his boxing lessons this week... it's only £5 a session, but having these items means I can free up that cash for him!"*

*"The hygiene bag is really helpful. Everything is so expensive...you start to have to make choices you don't want to have to make, like between food, bills, school dinners, uniforms and so on."*

*"Thanks so much. Having things like deodorants and shower gels available at school really helps as I struggle to afford these extra things and I don't want kids saying things about him at school."*

*"This just really helps me to cook better food for my children. I have a large family and it's so hard when you go to supermarkets these days. Everything costs so much more. I would lose sleep worrying that they don't have big enough dinners or enough snacks."*

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## LESSONS LEARNED FROM POVERTY PROOFING IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL

A year on from a deep dive into Poverty Proofing at The Valley (a Special School for students with Learning Difficulties), Taney Howarth, Deputy Head, reflects back on a very illuminating experience.

### **Q. Why did you decide to be one of the schools in our Poverty Proofing pilot?**

A. I had done the HFL training on Pupil Premium the previous year and the presentation from Lorna at Children North East (CNE) really struck a chord. I had always been interested in social justice issues and my own experience in a wide range of schools really highlighted the inequitable experience for many children. In our setting the barriers are even more acute. For example, with children coming from a very wide geographical area, many parents cannot travel to the school easily. I wanted to explore those barriers in more detail to be sure that we were doing everything possible to address them.

### **Q. What was the most impactful element of the training from CNE?**

A. For me it was the questions like, 'Can you tell if some students have less than others?' It felt like an intrusive question and I remember we all felt a bit alarmed about asking students what seemed like such a personal question. However, on further reflection I felt that this was exactly the type of question we should be asking so that we could really understand the issues for our community. I brought this back to SLT and we agreed as a team to ask braver questions, to be more curious and not shy away from difficult conversations. We felt that this would allow us to have a more precise understanding of the exact nature of the difficulties faced by our school community.

### **Q. How did you find the Poverty Proofing experience itself?**

A. We had made a good start prior to the team coming in. For example, we already provided a universal breakfast, we had removed logos from the uniform and ensured that there were sanitary protection products freely available in the bathrooms. However, we still felt apprehensive about whether we had done enough.



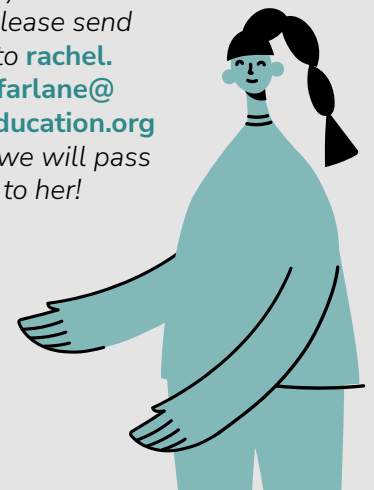
challenging financial position that many parents find themselves in. This is important as they exist to represent all families.

How many of your PTA members are eligible for PP funding themselves? If the answer is none, you might like to give some thought as to how you can encourage less economically advantaged parents to come forward and serve on the PTA so that the voice of families like theirs can be heard.

Did you keep a register of the Year 7s who attended the disco? If you did, and those from economically-disadvantaged families were underrepresented, why not share the figures with the PTA as a means of opening up a discussion? Clearly their aim was to help the new pupils settle in and make new friends; if a certain percentage of the cohort was priced out of the event, the discos did not fulfil its aim of inclusion.

As head, you could make it clear to the PTA that your challenge to them is to organise fully inclusive events, with a great uptake from underserved learners and that you will be gauging the success of the activity through this lens. (You will, of course, need to be careful not to disclose any confidential personal data to members of the PTA).

*Do you have a question for our agony aunt? If so, please send it in to [rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org](mailto:rachel.macfarlane@hfleducation.org) and we will pass it on to her!*



The best thing was hearing the students' views. We were worried given the nature of some of the learning needs that students would feel intimidated but it was exactly the opposite. The students were more vocal than usual. They felt proud to be part of the process and knew that their opinions really mattered. The research team commented on the high-quality student interactions, on the students' politeness and the seriousness with which they approached the discussions. Poverty is a tough topic but the students were sensitive and respectful in their answers and I felt very proud of the student body. For example, one student clammed up and another student said, 'Don't worry, you can do this'. Another student had to explain to the researchers that his friend, 'found it difficult' and then made a helpful suggestion so that the conversation could move on.

**Q. How did the training session land for staff?**

The staff felt really valued. It had not previously been acknowledged how much they do to help combat the effects of poverty. The survey also gave them a voice and they made some helpful suggestions.

**Q. What about the parental survey?**

A. We were surprised by the relatively low level of response. This made us look again at how we are sharing information. We introduced more visuals in our newsletters. We also made a conscious effort to remove the stigma from FSM. We asked our Family Engagement and Therapies Lead to support families with paperwork. We re-thought how we go about delivering food parcels as we realised that these had not all been well received. We now send out flyers with visuals rather than long letters and we are much more targeted in our communication. We have started to drip feed information and we have engaged a Mental Health Support Lead to run mini workshops on sleep, wellbeing etc.

**Q. Has anything else changed in school?**

A. We are a little more challenging in our approach and we ask more direct questions, even if this sometimes feels awkward. As a result, we obtain better information and this enables us to better support our students and their families. Poverty is much more on our radar but we accept that we can't poverty proof everything. However, we do help students to deal with their feelings about situations where they may have less than others. For example, through the rewards system students can earn money to spend at the Tuck Shop. It can be frustrating for some students who have less reward currency to spend. We explicitly explore these feelings of having more or less with our students.

We also reviewed the curriculum in the light of cultural capital and now do more local trips for example to the library.

**Q. Anything else?**

A. It was great to work as part of a collective and everyone involved in the pilot felt passionately about making a difference in this arena. It felt meaningful, purposeful and hopeful to address child poverty which doesn't really get talked about very much. There is a power in our collective voice and collective endeavour and it felt as if with enough of us working on this issue we would make a difference.



## COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY CALENDAR RESOURCE FROM CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP (CPAG)

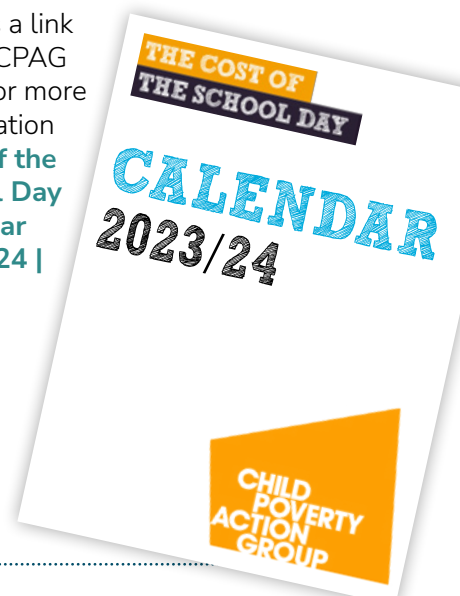
During our work on Eliminating Economic Exclusion we have seen how schools have tried to manage the Cost of the School Day by ensuring that there is sufficient time and notice for parents to organise funds or other items so that their child can participate fully in school activities.

The Cost of the School Day calendar aims to help schools identify possible cost barriers during the academic year and think about some alternatives to make sure all children and young people can fully participate in education.

The calendar is another lens through which to consider the school experience and is a practical resource for schools which are seeking to be as inclusive as possible. It could be a helpful school New Year's Resolution as we ring in 2024.

There are lots of good ideas and good practice that might help leaders better manage the cost of the school day in their setting.

Here is a link to the CPAG page for more information [Cost of the School Day calendar 2023-24 | CPAG.](#)



## SUPPORT FOR GOVERNORS

Governing boards have a crucial role to play in ensuring that pupils in their schools and trusts who are economically disadvantaged receive the support they need to achieve great outcomes. Governors and trustees are expected to “consider how the school is going to raise standards for all children ... [including] ... those receiving free school meals and those who are more broadly disadvantaged.” (**The Governance Handbook**)

We have come across two sets of resources that we think are useful in providing support for governors and trustees in doing this.

The Education Endowment Fund (EEF)'s recently updated Pupil Premium resources now include **discussion prompts for governors and trustees**. These are designed to help governing



boards champion strategic Pupil Premium spending by asking questions and initiating purposeful discussions. They follow the EEF's five-point plan around devising an effective Pupil Premium strategy (diagnosing, planning, monitoring, implementing, and sustaining).

The National Governance Association (NGA) has produced a suite of resources called **Widening**

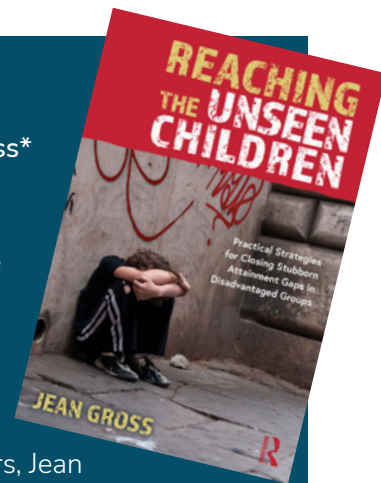
## BOOK REVIEW

Reaching The Unseen Children by Jean Gross\*

Jean Gross is an expert on the causes of underachievement and strategies to close attainment gaps. She has years of experience working with disadvantaged communities. Jean is a specialist in SEND and is a qualified Educational Psychologist. The book is full of practical strategies and examples of inspiring practice from a range of schools and settings up and down the country. In the early chapters, Jean explores the data, theory and research around the gap. She then goes on to devote a chapter each to considering the word gap, the literacy gap, the maths gap, behaviour, SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) and successful parental engagement. There are references to useful resources and organisations supporting teachers and families.

Arguably the most powerful section of the book is the chapter about self-efficacy. Gross presents a compelling argument that underserved learners feel that the locus of control of their lives lies outside of them. She gives some excellent advice for educators as to how to build the self-efficacy of their pupils to enable them to become more confident and powerful learners.

\*Jean Gross is one of our keynote speakers at the HFL Better Serving Underserved Learners Conference on 17th January 2024. You can get your tickets for this event [here](#).



the **Lens** to support governors and trustees in exploring what disadvantage means in their context and in identifying pupil groups who may need additional support. **The Widening the lens on disadvantage** guidance includes '25 Top Tips for addressing educational disadvantage', developed from the work of Marc Rowland. The **Poverty Toolkit** has been produced in conjunction with the Child Poverty Action Group and provides governing boards with a wealth of resources to use to ensure that all school leaders are considering how poverty in its broadest sense, beyond pupil premium eligibility, impacts their school or trust community.

## GRANT AND FUNDING AGENCIES/ ORGANISATIONS

Joanna Di-Bella, District School Effectiveness Adviser at HFL Education has created a useful document containing details of grants and funding support offered by a range of organisations and agencies. **Find out more.**

HFL Education		
GRANT AND FUNDING CONTACTS		
NAME OF ORGANISATION	WEBSITE	DETAILS OF SUPPORT OFFERED
James Marshall Foundation Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, and University	<a href="http://www.jamesmarshallfoundation.org.uk">www.jamesmarshallfoundation.org.uk</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment and travel for work experience/trips</li> <li>• Further education courses</li> <li>• Apprenticeship/College/University costs</li> <li>• Extra-Curricular activities: sport, music, creative arts</li> <li>• Seniors/Graduate and DUE</li> <li>• Bursaries and grants</li> <li>• Residential school trips</li> <li>• School uniforms</li> </ul>
Severage Community Trust Coverage of the surrounding villages of Acton, Birmingham, Coventry, Edgbaston, Greenley, Kingsbury, Little Wymondley, Old Kingsbury, Walsley, Winton, at Stone, Winton, and Winton Green.	<a href="http://www.severagecommunitytrust.org.uk">www.severagecommunitytrust.org.uk</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training grants</li> </ul>