The impact of poverty on young children's experience of school

Goretti Horgan

This report explores how disadvantage affects children's experience of primary school education.

Improving educational attainment is vital if the goal of eradicating child poverty in a generation is to be met, but children growing up in poverty are rarely asked how this impacts on their school life. This study focuses on:

- what children themselves think about school

- how important education is to them

- what children know about the hidden costs of education, and

- how they experience school.

It looks at what conversations reveal about the impact of poverty on their school lives, as well as describing the different experiences of those living in poorer and better-off circumstances.

The researcher interviewed 220 children aged four to eleven in advantaged and disadvantaged schools in Northern Ireland, and talked to parents and teachers. This research will be of interest to policymakers, researchers, teachers and students interested in child poverty or education.

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About the author

Goretti Horgan is a Research Fellow in Policy Studies at the University of Ulster.

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Summary

This report is about the impact of poverty on children's experience of primary school. It focuses on: what children themselves think about school; how important education is to them; how children think schools work; and how they experience school. It offers a chance to look at life in primary schools from a child-centred perspective. It looks at what conversations reveal about the impact of poverty on their school lives, as well as about the different experiences of those living in poorer and better-off circumstances. It also includes the views of parents and head teachers.

What emerges from this study is a picture of children's school experiences that are shaped by their family background and the area in which they live. The children's views demonstrate that how children experience school is determined by the level of disadvantage they face. They suggest that poorer children get used to the fact of their social position from a very early age. They accept that this will be reflected in their experience of school – that they are not going to get the same quality of schooling or of outcomes as better-off children.

In all, 220 children aged five to 11 took part in group interviews in 15 schools – Catholic, Protestant and integrated, advantaged and disadvantaged, urban and rural – across Northern Ireland. Disadvantaged schools were those with between half and three-quarters of their pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSMs), while advantaged schools had between 3 and 14 per cent of their pupils eligible for FSMs.

Attitudes to education

The study found that children from all types of schools agreed that education is important. Younger children were more likely to think that school is fun, while older children were more likely to see school as a way of getting an education in order to get a good job. Older children in disadvantaged schools were less likely to describe learning as fun than older children in advantaged schools. Children demonstrated a desire to be more involved in directing their own learning and to have more 'learning by doing'. In the advantaged schools, children saw education as a way of ensuring a good life as an adult. Children in disadvantaged schools were more likely to view education as a way of avoiding problems in the future. All the children, whatever the school they attended, had relatively high aspirations for their futures, although children from advantaged schools were considerably more likely to aspire to a high-paying professional job.

There is clear evidence of boys as young as nine or ten becoming very disenchanted with school and starting to disengage. The evidence from this study points towards the interaction of educational disadvantage faced by children growing up in poverty, the difficulties faced by teachers in disadvantaged schools, and differences in the way boys and girls are socialised, leading to boys being particularly failed by the education system.

Worries about school

The children worried a lot about testing generally and the Eleven Plus (which remains in place in Northern Ireland at least until the end of November 2008) in particular. Children in the advantaged schools were considerably more likely to be worried about the Eleven Plus. They were more likely to be under pressure from parents to do well in the test and to think that how they did in the test would have implications for the rest of their lives.

All the children worried about a range of issues but only children in the most disadvantaged schools worried about being beaten up on the way to and from school, and about their school being vandalised. Children and parents shared views about the real costs of schooling. Both saw school dinners, uniforms and school trips as the biggest costs associated with school. Children in disadvantaged schools were considerably more aware of all the costs associated with school and of the difficulties parents face in meeting those costs. Such children clearly worried about asking parents for even small amounts of money, such as the 50p or £1 that is usually charged by schools for no-uniform day.

Cost of schooling

Despite government policy towards keeping the cost of primary school uniforms as low as possible, they remain an unwelcome expense. When schools adopt an inflexible attitude to uniforms, they can exacerbate the social exclusion faced by children from families living in poverty. School trips also proved expensive and, while most families could find the money for trips during school hours, residential trips, particularly those outside Northern Ireland, were seen as too expensive by all the parents interviewed, even those who are relatively well off.

As an interim measure, extending uniform grants to primary schoolchildren is urgently required. And the question of the cost of school trips for children whose

families depend on benefits or who receive in-work tax credits must also be addressed. But the findings presented here suggest that part of the fight against child poverty and its impact on children and their education should be the introduction of the 'Free School Day' proposed by the children in *Bread is Free* (Willow, 2001). This policy would mean that education would be really free, with no family having to worry about the cost of any item a child needs to attend school and participate fully in every aspect of school life.

Overall, this study suggests that poverty impacts considerably on children's experience of primary schooling. It indicates that the children growing up in families with very low incomes are disadvantaged because of the lack of income. But, as the older children in this study understood, the more money a family has, they spend relatively less on education and their children are more likely to be able to enjoy a rounded education. For children from families living in poverty, their understanding and experience of school is narrower and they cannot be sure of having a good education.

1 Introduction

Motivation/rationale

This report is about the impact of poverty on children's experience of primary school. It focuses on: what children themselves think about school; how important education is to them; the impact of advantage/disadvantage on how children think schools work; and how they experience school. It offers a chance to look at life in primary schools from a child-centred perspective.

The role of education in providing a route out of poverty has been well established and is at the centre of many of New Labour's policies to end child poverty. Gregg and Machin (2000) examined data for two birth cohorts, to explore the relationship between deprivation in childhood, educational attainment and later labour market performances. They concluded that disadvantages faced during childhood have a persistent (negative) association with the subsequent labour market success of individuals. In particular, they found that poor school attendance and growing up in a family in financial distress have more of an impact on economic success as an adult than family formation, e.g. lone parent or couple family.

Blanden and Gregg (2004) reviewed a wide range of literature and quantitative information about the relationship between family income, the adolescent's decision to stay on in education beyond the age of 16 and his/her levels of educational attainment. Their research shows a consistent impact of family income on educational attainment in the UK, which has huge implications for inequalities in educational outcomes.

Research questions

This report seeks to answer the following questions.

- We know that poverty impacts on the school lives of teenagers and leads them to exclude themselves from some school experiences (Ridge, 2002). To what extent, if at all, does poverty impact on the school experiences of younger children aged five to ten and at what age do the effects of poverty start to bite?

- We know that children from better-off families are more likely not to get into trouble at school, to stay on at school and to gain qualifications (Blanden and Gregg, 2004). Are there differences, even in primary school, in the school experiences of children living in low-income families and those living in better-off circumstances?

- Government has introduced a range of policies, discussed further below, to try to break the link between child poverty and educational disadvantage. To what extent have these made a difference to the school experiences of children from families experiencing poverty?

- What recommendations for changes in policy and practice to alleviate the impact of poverty on children's school lives can be developed based on the views of children, parents and teachers who participated in the study?

Scope of research

The Labour Government's policy commitments on child poverty have seen measures to support education, including Early Years education. The Government has also committed itself to involving children and young people in decision making, particularly in relation to education. Yet, it is still the case that little is known about the extent to which children are aware of the impact of poverty on their education. We have little understanding of how children from families living in poverty experience school, as opposed to children from better-off families. As Tess Ridge (2002) points out, we know little about how growing up in poverty affects children's relationships with schoolmates and with teachers or 'the problems of social inclusion facing poor children themselves'.

Ridge talked to children and young people aged ten to 17 and found that children living in low-income families were more likely to be socially excluded, or to exclude themselves, within school. They expressed concerns about having the right clothes, particularly for non-uniform days. Even with school uniforms, they were concerned about having the 'right' shoes or trainers. Many young people whose families lived in poverty were unable to participate fully in school life, because their parents simply could not afford it.

Save the Children and the Children's Rights Alliance in England (Willow, 2001) and Save the Children in Wales (Crowley and Vulliamy, 2002) talked to children and young people about the effects of poverty and found that even children as young as

seven were aware that poorer children often do not have the full school uniform and may be excluded from school trips because of lack of money. The problem of stigma faced by children who live in low-income families is not addressed in all schools, nor does the existing literature tell us how early children start to feel this social exclusion.

The study was funded as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Education and Poverty Programme. The findings of two other studies in that programme support some of the findings reported here. Sutton *et al.* (2007) looked at children's views of social difference by working with two groups of children aged eight to 13 from contrasting social backgrounds. They found that most of the children with whom they worked did not see themselves as 'rich' or 'poor' but as average. However, they found the better-off children had a more positive attitude to education and access to a wider range of after-school activities. Wikeley *et al.*, (2007) explored educational relationships in and out of school and compared those experienced by children in poverty with a matched sample of those in more affluent circumstances. Their study also found that children living in poverty had little access to the out-of-school activities that more advantaged children take for granted.

Policy context

The impact of poverty on educational attainment is well documented (DENI, 2001; DfES, 2002; SEU, 2004). The unambiguous link between social disadvantage and education performance is clear from the yawning gap in the performance of pupils in the most advantaged schools as compared with the most disadvantaged schools, and between pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSMs) and those not eligible for FSMs. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate this pattern using UK and Northern Ireland Key Stage assessment data for 2002/03. International evidence demonstrates that these disparities are found across all developed countries, although some countries do not have the same level of inequalities as the UK (UNICEF, 2002).

Table 1 Percentage of pupils achieving performance criteria in the most advantaged schools and the most disadvantaged schools in Northern Ireland

	Most advantaged	Most disadvantaged
Key Stage 1 maths (% level 3)	50	21
Key Stage 1 English (% level 3)	42	12
Key stage 2 maths (% level 5)	46	15
Key Stage 2 English (% level 5)	25	2

Source: Gallagher (2006).

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Table 2 Percentage of pupils achieving performance criteria by eligibility for Free School Meals in England

	Non-FSM	Eligible for FSM
Key Stage 1 maths (% level 2 and above)	93	80
Key Stage 1 reading (% level 2 and above)	88	70
Key Stage 2 maths (% level 4 and above)	78	55
Key Stage 2 English (% level 4 and above)	81	58

Source: DfES (2005).

Improving the educational attainment of children who grow up in poverty is important for the individual child, to ensure that they do not grow up to bring up children in poverty themselves. But it is also vital if the Government's goal of eradicating child poverty in a generation is to be met. There is considerable evidence that education in childhood and youth improves one's chances in adulthood. As Hirsch (2006) points out, this applies to both employment effects (how much time one spends in paid work as an adult) and wage effects (average pay when in employment). Further, research findings are clear that the return on education in terms of employment and wage effects are high at the margin for the most vulnerable groups (Gregg and Machin, 2000; Blanden and Gregg, 2004).

Socio-economic context of schools

The impact of poverty on children's school experiences cannot be explored, or explained, without taking into account the social, economic and educational context in which the schools are situated.

There is considerable evidence of a link between areas with high levels of deprivation and lower levels of educational attainment. Wheeler *et al.* (2005) studied the relationship between poverty, affluence and area. They found that those areas with the highest proportions of young people with no qualifications tend to have the fewest teachers available. By contrast, those areas with a higher proportion of qualified young people tend to have many adults (around the age of these young people's parents) with degree-level qualifications. Lupton (2004, 2005) found a strong relationship between levels of deprivation and the 'quality' of schools in an area. Lupton does, however, counsel caution in relation to the definition of 'quality' in schools, since many of the 'quality' measures are measures of outcome and do not take account of progress made by pupils who start with high levels of disadvantage. Nor do such measures always value the work that schools in disadvantaged areas have to do to promote children's 'welfare and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' (Lupton, 2005, p. 590).

Thrupp's (1999) detailed study of schools in New Zealand showed the many ways in which the context of disadvantage impacts on school life. Teachers have to spend more time on welfare issues, discipline and engaging children and parents; they face more difficulty planning and financing out-of-school activities such as school trips; more time has to be spent ensuring that pupils have access to the equipment needed for music, sports and so on.

In the course of this study, the context in which the schools are operating was seen to have a huge impact on the children's experience of school life and on the ability of teaching staff to give children similar experiences to their counterparts in more advantaged schools and areas. All the most disadvantaged urban schools were situated in areas that have very high levels of child poverty and that score high on most deprivation indicators. They were also in areas that had suffered most in the course of the conflict. Two schools still had visible bullet holes in their walls. Living in an area that had been at the heart of the conflict has an ongoing effect even on children born five or six years after the 1994 IRA ceasefire. Head teachers and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) reported that many children came from families who had suffered loss and trauma in the conflict. Many of these families are still dealing with physical, but particularly mental, ill health as a result. Indeed, there is growing evidence that mental distress is growing as Northern Ireland moves towards a post-conflict situation (Cairns *et al.*, 2005). The impact of growing up in a family where a parent has chronic mental illness is well documented. Some children withdraw into themselves, become anxious and find it difficult to concentrate on their school work; others display behavioural problems; others may start to suffer from depression themselves. While considerable publicity is given to Northern Ireland's very high suicide rate among 15–24 year olds, it is rarely mentioned that such suicides are almost three times higher in the lowest-income groups than in the other groups combined (GCCNI, 2002).

Other contextual issues raised by the head teachers included poor provision of speech and language therapy; parenting skills; and changing family life. There is considerable evidence of underprovision of speech and language therapy (SLT) across the UK (RCSLT, 2006). A review of SLT services for children carried out by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY, 2006) found children were waiting up to ten months for assessment and up to 24 months subsequently for therapy.

There was also a very high level of children with special educational needs (SEN) in the most disadvantaged schools, with several schools reporting almost half the children having some SEN and one 60 per cent of the children. Most, but not all, of these children were on the SEN register[1] as head teachers reported that the Individual Education Plan, which is the minimum intervention for a child on the SEN

register, takes up a lot of teachers' time. The integrated schools also reported high levels of children with SEN, with up to a third of their pupils on the SEN register, some of them with very significant additional needs.

All the head teachers in the most disadvantaged schools acknowledged the levels of poverty and deprivation faced by most of their pupils. They were aware of which children came to school hungry and most of the highly disadvantaged schools ran breakfast clubs to ensure that the children were not too hungry to be able to learn.

The combination of the legacy of the conflict and behavioural problems associated with poor language development and poor nutrition meant that teaching staff in some of the most disadvantaged schools were often working in highly charged atmospheres. This was particularly the case in the most disadvantaged schools where the poverty in the surrounding environment sometimes led to the school being vandalised. But, in all the poorest schools, there was a significant minority of children who were unhappy, anxious, angry and generally in need of care more than teaching, and a smaller minority who had significant behavioural difficulties. While the legacy of the conflict has clearly exacerbated this situation, Lupton (2005) reports similar environments in schools in the poorest neighbourhoods in England.

Across the UK, a range of initiatives, policy levers and Public Service Agreements have been developed to address educational disadvantage. Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, attainment targets, reduction in class sizes, Excellence in Cities, the School Support Programme – the number and range of such initiatives makes it difficult to enumerate them all. These educational policies are intended to be supported by policies aimed at reducing, and eventually eliminating, child poverty.

The Action Plan accompanying the Anti-poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006–08 has several Department of Education targets or actions aimed at tackling educational disadvantage. These include increasing by four percentage points the proportion of Year 12 pupils who attain five or more GCSEs at Grades A*–C and the number of Year 14 pupils who achieve more than three A levels at grades A–C between 2003 and 2008. It also aims over the same period to increase by five percentage points the number of Year 12 pupils in the most disadvantaged post-primary schools who gain one or more GCSEs at A*–G.

The Department of Education is also the lead government department working to draw up a programme of measures across a range of areas to best target the Children and Young People Funding Package of £100 million over 2006/07 and 2007/08. The overall objective of the Children and Young People funding package is:

> … to reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children
> and young people by enhancing their educational development and
> fostering their health, well being and social inclusion through the
> integrated delivery of the support and services necessary to ensure that
> every child has the best start in life.
> (DENI, 2006, p. 3)

The Extended Schools Initiative is to be funded under this package. It should be noted, however, that anti-poverty campaigners and teachers' unions argue that there is little new money available in the Children and Young People Funding Package.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy for Northern Ireland includes initiatives to tackle child poverty, with an emphasis on raising educational attainment and promoting healthy eating. The Strategy also aims to mobilise poorly used resources within Neighbourhood Renewal areas, such as schools, which could be used as community meeting places and for adult education.

Listening to children's voices

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for children's right to express their views on all matters concerning them; to have their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity; and to participate effectively in decision-making processes concerning them. Since children are the main users of education services, they have a right to have their views heard in relation to improving educational experiences and outcomes. While there is a growing amount of literature giving voice to the views of teenagers, much less is known about the views of younger children. The Government says it is committed to involving children and young people in decision making. For example, the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) at Westminster states that:

> We want to hear the voices of young people, influencing and shaping
> local services … feeling heard, feeling valued; being treated as
> responsible citizens.
> (CYPU, 2000, p. 27)

At school level, the introduction of citizenship lessons to the National Curriculum and proposals to consult pupils in the course of Ofsted inspections brought with them hopes that children would get a chance to influence the education debate (Smithers, 2001; Riley and Docking, 2004). Yet, despite the discourse about partnership in

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education, children and young people tend not to be included in lists of 'partners in education' in government consultations (DENI, 2005; DfES, 2005). Finding out the views of children on the issues that directly affect them is one of the least meaningful levels of participation, but it is a start.

Methodology

The research was designed to be child-centred and to elicit information from both poor and non-poor children without reinforcing stigma. Fifty-six groups were held, with (generally) four children in each. The research took place in Derry-Londonderry, in the Greater Belfast area and in rural areas of Northern Ireland. Because of the segregated nature of most schools in the region, the schools' sample included equal numbers of Catholic schools and state (Protestant) schools, as well as two integrated (mixed-religion) schools. Teachers and parents were also interviewed.

In order to avoid stigmatising children living in poverty, the study compared children in the most disadvantaged and most advantaged parts of Northern Ireland. Child poverty in Northern Ireland is highly concentrated and primary schoolchildren usually attend their nearest school, so there is a high level of homogeneity among pupils at primary level in urban areas of Northern Ireland. By focusing on the schools, rather than the individual pupils, there was no question of an individual pupil's relative poverty being exposed to his or her peers. The schools in the most disadvantaged areas had between half and three-quarters of their pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM),[2] while schools in the most advantaged areas had between 3 and 14 per cent of their pupils eligible for FSM. The level of FSM entitlement in the schools was confirmed by head teachers as a good indicator of poverty levels among children in the school. In those schools with high levels of FSMs, head teachers said that almost all children in the school are entitled to Free School Meals at some time in their primary school career and many move in and out of FSM entitlement several times in those years.

In all, 220 children took part in group interviews; most said they enjoyed the experience and many of the older children wanted to continue their discussions beyond the time allotted by the school. For five to eight year olds, a cartoon character asked the children questions about the experience of education for children generally. For nine to 11 year olds, open-ended questions and a series of vignettes about children living in three different kinds of houses – photographs of which were shown to the children – explored those issues that previous research had shown concern children living in poverty.

A full paper on the methodology used in the study is available on the University of Ulster website at http://www2.ulster.ac.uk/staff/g.horgan.html.

This report focuses on what the children had to say about their school experiences and what those conversations reveal about the impact of poverty on their school lives, as well as about the different experiences of those living in poorer and better-off circumstances. It also includes the views of parents and head teachers about the cost of primary schooling today. This chapter has introduced the research and the context in which it took place. Chapter 2 reports on what children think of school, how important they think it is, aspirations for their futures and differences in these views between children attending advantaged and disadvantaged schools. Chapter 3 explores some of the worries children have about school and differences in the worries between children from different backgrounds. Chapter 4 examines views on the cost of schooling. Chapter 5 looks at broader school relationships and Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for policy and practice.

2 What children think of school

The impact of family income on children's ability to learn, even to acquire the language that allows them to learn, is now well established (Hoff, 2003). Studies show that children who live in persistent poverty have slower cognitive and social development, and poorer physical or mental health, than those who live in poverty for a short time only (McLoyd,1998; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sacker *et al.*, 2002). The role of maternal educational levels is particularly important, especially in the child's early years. Currie and Moretti (2003) show that maternal education can affect children through a range of health outcomes, while Chatoor *et al.* (2004) demonstrate the impact of maternal education on a child's cognitive development – and hence his/her ability to learn. For the poorest and most socially excluded children, like those from the travelling community, the lack of culturally appropriate education can make these difficulties even greater. So, it is inevitable that children from families that are living in poverty will find different challenges at school to those faced by those children coming from families that are not living in poverty or are well off.

Why go to school?

Younger children (four to six year olds) all saw school as a place to learn for learning's sake or, as many of them put it, 'to get smarter'. This view was expressed across urban and rural, advantaged and disadvantaged, Protestant, Catholic and integrated schools. Even at this age, the children seem to have an understanding of learning as a cumulative experience: that learning one thing makes learning another easier. They are fairly clear about what it is that they learn. The list of reasons why they go to school given by this group of five year olds is typical:

Why do you go to school?

Boy 1:   To learn.

Girl 1:   You go to school to learn.

Girl 2:   To learn to read and to write.

Boy 2:   And to spell.

Girl 1:　　And to play.

Girl 2:　　And to learn how to know your name.

Boy 2:　　And spell it.

The idea that you go to school to make friends and to play was mentioned by all the groups of younger children. In fact, making friends, meeting friends, playing and 'having fun' is the best thing about school for the youngest children. The worst thing about school for them is 'work' and 'getting scolded'. This was the age where both boys and girls are most likely to say that they 'love school'. By 'work', the children meant learning their spellings, numbers and writing. Asked why they got scolded, it was usually for not concentrating on their work. Girls tended to say it was for talking to their friends in class, while boys were more likely to say they were scolded for 'messing'.

The differences between the children in more advantaged and more disadvantaged schools[1] at this age was less about how they experienced school and more about their readiness to learn. The poor level of speech and language development among some of the youngest children in most of the schools, but particularly in the most disadvantaged schools, was shocking. While it was clear that they understood the questions the alien[2] was asking, and they had something to say, some struggled to express themselves even in the shortest sentences. These children were different to shy children, who were slow to speak but, when they did say something, were able to put together three- or four-word sentences. The question of speech and language is discussed further below.

As the children get older, their understanding of why they go to school develops. So seven to nine year olds still tend to see school as about learning and having fun. But, in this age group, they started to say they go to school to learn so they can get a job when older. While the social side is still important, it is mentioned less as one of the reasons to go to school, although it is still cited as one of the best things about school. This age group, and boys in particular, are much less likely to say they 'love school' or 'enjoy school', although there are still those who see school as fun.

For most ten and 11 year olds, school is all about getting a good education in order to get a good job:

It helps you learn stuff and when you grow up you'll get a better job.
(Ten-year-old girl)

> It helps with your education and it helps you get a better job if you understand things better.
> (Ten-year-old boy)
>
> I think it's very important because it helps you get a good education or else you wouldn't be able to get a good job, not just a paper boy all your life.
> (Eleven-year-old boy)

Some children see that education is important for more than employment, but for the overall development of a person and to ensure competence in other areas of life:

> I think it's important because you have to learn things for your future.
> (Ten-year-old girl)
>
> When you're older then you'll appreciate like danger and stuff as well, like going on school trips and like stay away from strangers and stuff.
> (Ten-year-old boy)
>
> Very important, you need to learn. You need to be smart and if you don't learn about personal hygiene you'd be very smelly and you couldn't play football or anything.
> (Eleven-year-old boy)

Again, the social side of school remains important but is somewhat taken for granted, except in relation to the move to post-primary school. Apart from the most 'soccer-mad' of boys, socialising is cited as a reason for going to school, or as one of the best things about school, mainly by girls. At this age, only a few of the girls and no boys say they 'love' or 'enjoy' school. Some of those about to move to post-primary school talk about how they enjoyed school when they were little, but not any more:

> I wish I was back in nursery, cos you got to play and you didn't have to do any work.
> (Eleven-year-old boy)

In the younger classes, it is hard to see much difference between what children in the most advantaged and most disadvantaged schools have to say about why they go to school and how important school is. But, by the time the children reach Year 6 or 7, there is – generally – a marked difference between the view of school taken by children depending on the level of advantage in the school. Table 3 gives some examples of these contrasts.

Table 3 Is school important?

Advantaged schools	Disadvantaged schools
'It's very important to get a good job and so you can grow up and be a good person' (ten-year-old girl).	'You need to get a good education to get a good job so you can have enough money to live' (11-year-old girl).
'So you know things so when you have your own kids you can explain things to them and help them with their homework' (11-year-old girl).	'You need to go to school in case you get a good job and you wouldn't be able to write or anything' (ten-year-old girl).
'School is important. On a scale of one to ten, school is about eight-and-a-half … It's important because we have to get a good education and if you want to go to university you have to get good GCSE and good A-level marks' (ten-year-old girl).	'Well if you didn't go to school you wouldn't be able to learn. You wouldn't be able to know anything when you grow up. Every time you go to speak to somebody, you'd be, like, d'oh!' (11-year-old girl).
'To learn so you can get a good job and have a good life really' (ten-year-old boy).	… because, if you're playing football for some team, and you go to call somebody's name out and say they'd been really stupid you would call them dauber [truant]' (11-year-old boy).

While all agree that school is important for their future, the children in the more advantaged schools tend to see school attendance as a positive in their lives, to enjoy school and to say they enjoy it. Their reasons for saying that school is important tended to be positive ones – to ensure a good life as an adult. Children in the more disadvantaged schools, however, are more likely to say that school is important for more negative reasons – to avoid problems in their adult lives. Sutton *et al*. (2007) found similar differences between the attitudes of children from well-off and disadvantaged backgrounds in their study. For example, the former placed more emphasis on gaining careers while the latter emphasised avoiding 'ruining' their lives.

Fun or hard work?

In some of the schools, generally (but not always) the more advantaged ones, school was seen as both fun and hard work. Children recognised and appreciated that they learnt better because teachers were trying to make learning interesting and fun. Children who saw school like this were also more likely to see the social side of school as part of the learning experience. The older ones, in particular, knew that they were lucky to be in a school that made learning fun:

> I love seeing my friends and I like my teachers cos they're really fun and I like coming to school because they make the work fun.
> (Nine-year-old girl)

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> I like school because I get to see my friends and I like my teachers
> and they don't make work boring all the time, sometimes they do but
> sometimes it's really fun and I like science.
> (Ten-year-old boy)

Children who were as positive as this in the latter years of primary school were, unfortunately, the minority. While many of the children had examples of good teachers who provided interesting ways of learning, there were far more examples given of boring lessons that turned the children off and made learning a chore. The children appreciated lessons where they were able to 'learn by doing'; in fact, their definition of a good teacher was one who had 'plenty of games when you're learning'. These children from one of the most disadvantaged schools, and who themselves said 'this is a poor school', were bursting with enthusiasm when describing a science class:

> It was about electricity and we learned all about it but it was really fun. We
> got batteries and we got wires and wee bulbs and we stuck them and lit
> the bulb up.
> (Ten-year-old boy)

Several of the children, all of them boys, suggested that classes should be broken up with short breaks to maintain interest and concentration:

> Like, take them out for a while and bring them back in for work and then
> let them sit down for a while and then go back to work.
> (Nine-year-old boy)

All of the children appreciated teachers who involved them in their own learning, who consulted them regularly about what they wanted to do and who 'asked us every day what we wanted to do'. Several children complained of teachers interrupting learning to meet timetabling requirements, such as the literacy hour:

> What I hate is whenever we're in the middle of doing something and the
> teacher says pack up and then she makes us go back to it later, she
> should let us finish it and then do something else.
> (Ten-year-old girl)

These comments suggest that children endorse the views of teachers and other educationalists who think that the demands of the curriculum have reduced the ability of teachers to tailor their classes to meet the needs of the particular group of children with whom they are working.

In most of the disadvantaged schools, there were many complaints when the children were asked what they thought was 'the worst thing' about school. 'Hard work' was also mentioned in these schools but so were a range of issues from the compulsory nature of school, through the length of the school day, the quality of the food, glass and other rubbish in the playground, to the attitudes of the teachers. The pressures that teachers in the most disadvantaged schools work under – dealing with welfare issues, hungry children, angry parents, behavioural problems and so on – clearly have an effect on the teachers on occasion, since many of the children complained about being 'shouted at' in these schools. Children attending the more advantaged schools did not complain about being shouted at. The disadvantaged children in Sutton *et al.*'s (2007) study also complained about the quality of the teaching they received and that they were often shouted at.

Boys across the range of schools, but particularly those in the disadvantaged schools, complained about the amount of time they have to spend in school, the length of the school day and how brief they found break times, especially lunch hour. The complaints were related to the length of time that they had to spend with their friends and to play – whether this was inside or outside school. There was a general view among boys that six hours a day was too long to spend in school and that the best time in school was the start of summer because 'you have the long holidays ahead'. While some girls disagreed with boys about the length of the school day, no girls disagreed about not having enough time to both eat their lunch and have some time to play:

> It's too long. From quarter to nine o' clock to quarter to three, we're in school six hours … we waste half our day … By the time you eat your dinner and you're getting all excited to go out to play, out in the yard but you have to go to your class instead and do work.
> (Ten-year-old boy)

Aspirations

All the children, whatever kind of school they attended, had relatively high aspirations for their later lives. At this age, they were not always realistic about their potential to meet these aspirations – particularly all the boys who wanted to play football for Liverpool or Manchester United. What is important, however, is that their high aspirations demonstrate that children from the most impoverished backgrounds do not start out expecting little from life. Rather, they start out with dreams and hopes not very dissimilar to those of children from better-off families. This is demonstrated

in Table 4, which is a comparison of the list of things that children from advantaged and disadvantaged schools say they want to do with their lives. It is worth noting, however, that these lists do suggest that children in disadvantaged schools are less likely to aspire to highly paid professional jobs than children attending the advantaged schools.

The one group who had very different aspirations to the rest were the children from travelling families. They, too, had high aspirations but those aspirations, especially for the girls, were bounded by the cultural norms of their families. So, they all had ideas about jobs that they would like to get but were not always sure that they would be permitted by their families to follow the path they chose.

Table 4 What do you want to do with your life?

Advantaged schools	Disadvantaged schools
A lawyer.	A footballer for Man U [sic].
Play football for England.	A hairdresser.
I want to be famous.	A shopkeeper.
Either an actress or a scientist.	I want to join the army.
A hairdresser.	I want to play for Linfield.
An advice columnist, an agony aunt.	An architect or a footballer.
A footballer or a janitor.	I want to be a clown.
I want to be rich!	I want to be famous.
I want to invent a Sims game.	I want to be a ballerina.
I want to be a vet.	A teacher or a hairdresser.
Footballer.	I want to be a palaeontologist, they dig up dinosaur fossils.
I'd like to have kids.	A wrestler!
A forensic scientist.	A teacher, I like bossing people around!
I want to be a doctor.	I want to go to university and study forensic science.
I'd like to be a hairdresser, or else a dancer.	I want to be a rapper, I want to be famous.
I want to go to university.	I want to be a nurse like my Mum.
I'd like to be an actress.	I'm going to be an electrician.
I'd like to be a kind person, a good person.	I'm going to study hard to be an archaeologist.
I want to be a teacher.	I want to be a fashion designer and design clothes and all.
Pilot.	I want to be a singer.
I want to work in Asda.	

It is worth noting the impact that television programmes and 'celebrity culture' have on many of the children, regardless of background. By far the most common career aspiration cited was 'forensic scientist'. This, it transpired, was because of the popularity of the *Crime Scene Investigation* TV series. There are positives about this, as it was clearly seen by the girls as a scientific career that is open to girls. The other most popular aspirations – in both advantaged and disadvantaged schools – were to be 'rich' or 'famous'.

Children's awareness of social difference

All the five to seven year olds were asked whether school would be the same for the child from each of the three differently sized houses or would it be different? All said that school would be the same; there would be no difference between the different children. Some seven and eight year olds talked about differences between the houses – how many rooms each might have, how many windows – but they found it difficult to say whether there would be any difference made between the children from the different houses at school.

A handful of seven year olds, most eight to nine year olds and many ten to 11 year olds suggested some superficial differences between the school experiences of the children from each of the different houses. These were mainly to assert that the child from the mansion would not attend their school, but would go to 'a big fancy school', a private school, a boarding school, or have a private tutor who would teach him/her at home. When pressed on how the child would be treated if s/he did attend the school where we were having the discussion, two messages emerged. The first was that the child from the biggest house might be 'very popular' because s/he has 'lots of stuff', or not so popular if s/he was 'a bit snobby'. The second is that it wouldn't be fair on the child from the mansion to make her go to an ordinary school 'because she's rich'.

All the older children could see that life at school would be easier for the child from the big house. All agreed that school would probably 'be more fun' for him/her and they would 'enjoy themselves more' and be 'more popular'. These ten year olds attend a school with high FSM entitlement:

> *Boy 1:* I think school would be more fun for them, maybe because they enjoy themselves more.

> *Girl 1:* They'd be popular and nobody would hate them, nobody would, like, bully them or anything.
>
> *I:* Why?
>
> *Girl 1:* Because they're rich, they'd be popular.
>
> *Girl 2:* People could be jealous and they mightn't be popular.
>
> *Girl 3:* Their life would be great, with no one hating them, cos if someone hated them they could bribe them with money.

All the children suggested that the child in the largest house would likely go to the best school and would 'go really good places on her school trips', while the child in the smallest house would go to a school that wasn't so good and 'you wouldn't get very good places to go on your school trips'. There were clear parallels drawn in almost all the groups between the type of house the child lived in and the type of school they were likely to attend:

> Because the house is not that rich and the school wouldn't get that much money.
> (Nine-year-old girl, low FSM school)

Even the oldest children found it hard to accept that there was any chance of the child from the mansion going to an 'ordinary' school. All agreed that the child in the biggest house would be 'very smart' and go to a 'really good school':

> You have to be rich to live in a really big house so he'd be kind of smart.
> (Ten-year-old girl, high FSM school)

Children in the rural schools were much more like younger urban children in their assumption that there would be no difference in the school experience of the children from the different houses. This may reflect the fact that house size cannot be taken as a proxy for family income in rural areas to the same extent as it can in urban areas.

When really pushed to imagine that the child from the mansion attended *their* school, only the children from the most disadvantaged schools thought that 'they'd treat them different':

Boy 1:   They'd be treated better than us.

I: Do you think so? Why?

Boy 1:   Cos they're rich! They'd probably have to pay for their dinners and stuff, more than us.

Girl 1:   Yes, they'd give them, like, good lessons, more than us. They'd probably move them up *[a class]*.

Boy 2:   They could just buy the school!

(High FSM school)

Among the older children in the more socially mixed and the disadvantaged schools, the children from the two smaller houses were seen to be 'the same', 'normal' or 'average' and little difference was made between them. But the word 'poor' starts to be used, mainly by children in the more advantaged schools, about the child living in social housing who, they think, 'might get picked on for being poor'. The idea of this child getting 'picked on' emerged in several of the older discussion groups:

> In the big house the child would be really well off so she'd be like really popular and the child in that house would be really unpopular and on the very bottom of the scale and might get picked on as well.
> (Ten-year-old girl, low FSM school)

Several of the children talked about how the child from the smallest house might feel. They said things like 'he might be the nicest of them all' but might feel shy and 'left out' because of knowing that s/he comes from a poor background:

> They might be like they might feel they didn't fit in because, say, those two *[from the two 'ordinary' houses]* were in the same class, they'd be thinking oh, they've got a better house than me and I'm poor and all and it would be quite rough for them.
> (Ten-year-old boy, moderate FSM school)

Children from a range of schools could see the difference between the types of families in the three houses: 'rich, not so rich and paupers'. But only in the two schools that had less than 10 per cent of children entitled to FSMs did stereotypes of poor families emerge. It was also in these schools that a difference was made between the *children* (as opposed to the feelings they might have) from all three of the houses:

Boy: I think they would go to, like, a school that their parents would pay for, like a private school. And they have stuff.

I: And what about the children in the other two houses?

Boy: *[Small house]* they might be like, rushed, or lose stuff …

I: Why would they lose things?

Boy: They just look like children who lose their stuff *[laugh]*. And that one *[semi-detached]* just normal.

Girl: I think they would go to a school like us.

I: And what about the children in this *[small]* house?

Girl: They would go to a school like us … maybe not such a well-off school.

I: Is this school quite a well-off school?

Girl: Yes.

(Ten year olds in school with very low FSM entitlement)

This discussion illustrates both the children's awareness of social difference and the stereotypical belief that children from disadvantaged homes have individual traits ('lose their stuff') that make their lives more difficult.

Early disengagement from school

One of the more concerning findings of the study was the number of pupils – all of them boys – attending schools in the most disadvantaged parts of the region who were already starting to disengage from school at the age of nine or ten. The exception to this was the school attended only by travellers. In this school, there was no evidence of boys starting to disengage from school, although there is a tradition of early school leaving among traveller boys (Mongon, 2002).

The extent of disengagement by the boys emerged when they were asked what they saw as 'the worst thing about school' and also in the exercise with the photographs, when they were asked what school would be like for children in the different houses. The extent of difference in how boys experience school in the more advantaged schools and the more disadvantaged ones can be seen from the kind of things these boys say about school generally in Table 5.

As noted above, children had a range of complaints about school, but being 'shouted at' was raised only in disadvantaged schools. Girls, as well as boys, complained about being shouted at by teachers, but only with boys was this used as a justification for hating school. Older boys in the disadvantaged schools were the only children to talk in a positive manner about truanting. Older girls in disadvantaged schools spoke disapprovingly of boys who 'tell their Mummies they're going to school but they don't really, they just stay off'. There was no discussion of truanting in the advantaged schools. Boys in the advantaged schools complained more than girls about the amount of work they have to do, particularly homework. In all schools, boys seemed more concerned than girls about being able to get outside to play both during and after school hours. But it was only in the disadvantaged schools that the length of the school day and the amount of work, combined with teachers shouting at them, made the boys say they 'hated' school or be vehement about not liking it.

Table 5 Boys already disengaging from school

Advantaged schools	Disadvantaged schools
'I don't think there is very many bad things about school' (ten-year-old boy).	'I don't like school, cos you have to work. I think it's too long' (ten-year-old boy).
'I think you need to go to school and I really like school but I think we need more sports' (ten-year-old boy).	'No one likes it in our class, none of the boys like it, don't they not?' (ten-year-old boy).
'See, if you want to have a good job, you have to have a degree in maths and English and science and everything' (ten-year-old boy).	'All the boys in our school, all the boys in the school don't like school. I wish school wasn't invented!' (ten-year-old boy).
'You get a good education and all so you can get a good job when you're older' (nine-year-old boy).	'You see, if I was getting shouted at every single second about something, I'd just lift my schoolbag and go out. And if they tried to stop me, I'd just go and get my Dad up, and my Ma. I'd just walk out, I don't care about them' (11-year-old boy).
'It can be good to learn if they make things fun to learn' (ten-year-old boy).	'I hate school, doing work and teachers shouting at me' (ten-year-old boy).
'I don't like school so much, for one reason that every kid doesn't like school, there's too much work but a bigger reason is I don't like taking work home because … it's hard work and you don't get out to play' (ten-year-old boy).	'If you don't go to school, your Dad will go to jail' (11-year-old boy).

Summary

Children from all schools agreed that education is important. Younger children were more likely to think that school is fun, while older children were more likely to see school as a way of getting an education in order to get a good job. Older children in disadvantaged schools were less likely to describe learning as fun than older children in advantaged schools. Children across schools and age groups demonstrated a desire to be more involved in directing their own learning. They wanted more 'learning by doing' and for teachers to have more flexibility about teaching methods and timetables. The impact of poverty on children's experience of school is evident in Year 6 and 7 pupils' reasons for saying that school is important. In the advantaged schools, children saw education as a way of ensuring a good life as an adult. Children in disadvantaged schools were more likely to view education as a way of avoiding problems in the future. All the children, whatever the school they attended, had relatively high aspirations for their futures, although children from advantaged schools were considerably more likely to aspire to a high-paying professional job.

Most of the children, but particularly the boys, thought the school day was too long. Both boys and girls thought that break time, especially lunchtime, was too short to allow children to eat and enjoy playing with their friends.

Children younger than seven were aware that the houses were different and that people living in the mansion were rich, but they were, without exception, adamant that school would be the same for the children coming from each of the three houses and that there would be no difference at school. While a few seven year olds and more eight to nine year olds thought school would be different for the child from the mansion, they could not develop that thought any further. The older, nine- to 11-year-old children were quite united in the idea that – unless the child from the mansion was terribly spoilt and 'snobby' – school would be more fun for him/her and that s/he would be more popular and have more friends. There was also general agreement that someone that rich would be very smart and would do well in school, although, for most, this was seen in the context of attending a private school and/or having a tutor. Only in the most disadvantaged schools did children say that the teachers would treat a rich child differently and that, were the rich child to attend *their* school, s/he would get better treatment and better teaching.

There is clear evidence of boys as young as nine or ten becoming very disenchanted with school and starting to disengage. There is an ongoing debate about whether boys are now being failed by the education system in the way girls were until the 1980s (Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Myhill, 2002). This debate has centred around the impact

of teaching styles, learning styles, the feminisation of the teaching profession and differences in socialisation of boys and girls. The evidence from this study points towards the interaction of educational disadvantage faced by children growing up in poverty, the difficulties faced by teachers in disadvantaged schools and gendered socialisation of children leading to boys particularly being failed by the education system. As Tables 1 and 2 earlier in this report show, the impact of poverty on educational outcomes is stark. In the course of this study, only children from advantaged schools did not complain about teachers shouting at them. Girls were as likely as boys to complain about being shouted at, but only boys concluded that this led them to hate school.

3 What worries children about school?

All the children were asked if they ever worried about school and, if so, what they worried about. The older children had a range of worries, which are discussed in detail below. The younger children were less likely to say they worried about school and, when they did, they mainly worried about falling and hurting themselves, or being kicked or pushed by someone in the playground. A few mentioned worrying that they would be left standing if their Mum failed to collect them from school on time. A small number of the younger children said they worried about bullying but could not say why and all said they had no experience themselves of being bullied. Most of the younger children seem to understand 'worrying' as meaning not liking, or being dissatisfied with things to do with school, as much as being anxious about it:

> *Girl:*   I worry about school because I don't get to watch my TV.

> *Boy:*   I worry about having to go to services because I hate staying in church so long. It gives me goosebumps.

> (Six year olds, disadvantaged school)

The Eleven Plus and testing

For the majority of the children we spoke to, whatever kind of school they attended, the final years of their primary education were blighted by the looming shadow of the transfer test (see box below). Over 100 of the children we spoke to were in classes that either had done or were anticipating the Eleven Plus. Whether the children intended to take the test or not, it was the single most cited reason for worrying about school. Much has already been written about the impact of the Eleven Plus on children's self-esteem, on how much children worry about it and on how preparations for it dominate the curriculum in the final years of primary school. The findings of this study reiterate those of earlier studies (Gallagher and Smith, 2000; Save the Children, 2001).

Academic selection

Because academic selection is more formalised in Northern Ireland (NI), it makes NI an ideal place to study the effects of academic selection. The region provides statistics that should be factored into the debate on selection in Britain, as it is the region where the effects are more visible and more universal.

The Eleven Plus was created as part of the 1944 Butler Education Act, which envisaged an education system that included an academic, a technical and a functional strand. Prevailing educational thought at the time argued that testing was an effective way of finding which strand a child was most suited for. When the clear class biases in the test were exposed and most schools became comprehensive, the examination disappeared across most of Britain. However, the Eleven Plus is still the principal way in which decisions are made about which kind of school children in Northern Ireland will attend at second level.

In 1997, the Department of Education commissioned a huge research project into 'The Effects of the Selective System of Secondary Education in Northern Ireland'. The project was headed up by Tony Gallagher (Queen's University) and Alan Smith (University of Ulster) and carried out by a team of almost 20 researchers. The research explored every aspect of selection and its effects, and concluded that selection increases inequality between the social classes, and is divisive and competitive. It also found that teaching and learning in Years 6 and 7 is adversely affected; that pupils not undertaking the transfer test may receive less attention; that out-of-school coaching is common among pupils whose parents can afford it; and that pupils who do not gain entry to grammar schools see themselves as 'failures' (Gallagher and Smith, 2000).

Studies of children's views of the Eleven Plus found that children saw doing well or not in the test as evidence of being 'clever' or 'stupid' and the competition for grammar school places led to even the best secondary schools being seen as 'stupid schools' (Save the Children, 2002).

The children who planned to do the Eleven Plus said that they found it 'stressful'; that they worried about their parents' expectations – they would 'let them down' by not doing well enough; some had even been told that they would be punished if they did not do well in the test:

> I'm worried cos I'm not that smart. My highest *[practice test]* has ever been 29 and my lowest has been 12. It's very worrying.
>
> I: Why are you doing it?
>
> To see if I can get through, to get better marks.
>
> I: Do your Mum and Dad want you to do it?
>
> They say I can do it, that they have faith in me.

All the children, whether they were doing the Eleven Plus or not, were aware of the distorting effect that the test had on how they and others in the school were taught in the year before it (Gallagher and Smith, 2000). In particular, those preparing for the test complained that their curriculum had narrowed considerably and they were no longer included in some school trips and missed out on music, art and PE lessons. Those who were not doing the test complained that they were often set work to do by themselves while the teacher concentrated on those taking the transfer test. This discussion between P6 pupils at a school that has moderate levels of FSMs, and is fairly socially mixed, sums up the way most of the children perceived the impact on them all:

> Girl 1: I think they just need to pay attention to everyone. Like the way you know sometimes you might have different people doing different things, you really want everyone to be learning the same, not have some people learning more than you are.
>
> I: Is this happening because of the Eleven Plus?
>
> Girl 2: Yes, because, when we're doing the tests, other people are doing easier stuff and we're working hard but they aren't working as hard as we are. I mean they should still be learning, they're just doing stuff that they've already done and it's not as if they're learning any more.
>
> Boy: The transfer group gets no PE or art and stuff like that. So, the transfer group has to work while the ones who are not doing it have a good time.

One of the final acts of the devolved Assembly of 2000–02 was to abolish the Eleven Plus and academic selection generally. A review group was set up to devise an alternative process by which children would transfer from primary to second-level schools. The popularity and oversubscription of grammar schools results in competition for places in them. Therefore, simply sending children to their nearest school is not a solution. One generally accepted entry criterion, which is included in all proposals for future transfer processes, is siblings already at a school. This seemingly innocuous proposal can impact on older siblings, however. One of the more disturbing anxieties revealed were from two children in more advantaged schools who were the eldest children in their families. Both felt under severe pressure to do well in their transfer test and achieve a place at one of the most prestigious grammar schools in Northern Ireland. By doing so, it was felt they would ensure that their younger siblings, who may face another form of transfer procedure, will also gain a place at that school:

> My Mum wants me to do the transfer test because I'm the oldest in my family and we'd have a better chance overall because *X* and *Y*, they're my brothers, would have a better chance of getting into *[grammar school]*, if I could go to *[grammar school]*. But I don't have anybody older than me. (Ten-year-old girl)

Although the final Eleven Plus examination is scheduled for November 2008, the question of academic selection has become embroiled in a sectarian wrangle. Dr Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) insists that retention of academic selection is a prerequisite to the DUP entering a power-sharing government. The London Government has acquiesced in this demand. At the time of writing, it is unclear what the future will hold for academic selection and the children who suffer it.

Other worries about school

While the Eleven Plus transfer and other tests were overwhelmingly the main cause of worry about school among the children with whom we spoke, many other issues were also raised. The next most frequent issue cited as a worry was fear of bullying. This was the fear most often expressed by the younger children who had not yet become aware of the transfer test. Very often, those who expressed fears about being bullied had no experience of being bullied and knew no one who had been bullied. This suggests that the bullying awareness and anti-bullying programmes in schools are having an impact. When asked what they could do about it if they were bullied, none of the children said 'nothing'. All knew what to do and were confident

that it would make a difference:

> Tell a teacher or your Mum or Da and they'll sort it.
> (Eleven-year-old boy)

Getting away from bullying was the main reason that traveller children cited for liking their school. Several of them had attended other schools where most of the children were from the settled community. All of these reported bullying by the children and discrimination by the teaching staff who, they said, 'blamed travellers for everything bad that happened in the playground'.

Bullying was one of the issues raised by children in the last two years of primary school when they thought about going to second-level school. Other fears they had included getting lost around the new school, which they knew to be a lot bigger than their primary school. They worried about not knowing which classroom to go to for various subjects and they worried about not being able to make friends. They agreed that some of the worries they had were those that every child has at the start of each school year – getting to know new teachers and new classmates. However, some felt that it would be much worse, not only because of the size of second-level schools and the fact that they move from class to class, but also because they would now be the youngest in the school instead of the oldest:

> … we'll be the youngest ones while here everyone looks up to us.
> (Nine-year-old boy)

While tests, bullying and moving into a new class or a new school were expressed as fears by children in all kinds of schools, only children in the most disadvantaged urban schools raised fears about their school being vandalised and themselves being assaulted. The fears about the school being vandalised were based on experience. Some of the most disadvantaged schools in the study were surrounded by high fences, some with barbed wire. Some were in interface areas, near 'peace walls', and all were in the middle of areas that had been hardest hit by the 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland and are still struggling to recover from conflict.[1] These schools are attacked on a regular basis by local youths, most of them past pupils of the school and some still pupils. One of the schools had to postpone the researcher's visit by several months because of a serious fire that had affected several classrooms.

It was in these disadvantaged (and therefore in the conflict-affected areas) schools that children talked about the fear of being beaten up on the way to or from school. In schools where children had to pass through the 'other side's' area on the way to and

from school, this fear was even greater and was a fear of sectarian assault:

> They're walking to school and then the big bullies from a different school comes up and ask them their religion and then starts fighting with them because they're different.
> (Nine-year-old boy)

September back-to-school worries

The older children were asked to imagine that it was September and the families in each of the three houses were getting ready for the return to school after the summer holidays. What might the parents be worried about and what might worry the child? The overwhelming response was that the parents' main worries would be about the Eleven Plus, the child doing well at school, being able to make friends and not being bullied. Belief that the parents' main concern would be the Eleven Plus came in particular from children in the most advantaged schools:

> They're worried because the Eleven Plus is coming up so they're going to have to work them hard.
> (Ten-year-old girl, low FSM school)

Children in the more socially mixed schools and the most disadvantaged schools were united in an awareness that the parents' main thought as September approached was 'happy days!'. This phrase was used by children in several schools to convey the parents' delight at seeing their children back at school so 'they have peace and quiet and they can sit down and have a cup of tea'.

> In this *[smallest]* house, they'd be like 'oh yes, they're away, bye, see you later, don't come back until you're 18!' In that *[middle]* house, they'd be sort of 'I like spending time with them', but they'd still be happy and in that *[mansion]* one, they mightn't even know they're gone because the house is so big!
> (Ten-year-old boy, moderate FSM school)

This awareness reflects the reality of family life for those living on low income. Many have to share a bedroom with one or more siblings, there is a general lack of space in the house and often a lack of affordable summer schemes and other leisure activities in the area. Sutton *et al.* (2007) also found that the disadvantaged children they worked with preferred to play outside because of the lack of space at home.

The relative nature of poverty and wealth is grasped by many of the ten to 11 year olds. Children from all the schools demonstrated an understanding that the family of the child in the big house would not have to worry about the cost of returning to school in September, or about the cost of even the most expensive school trip:

> I think the rush for the school uniform, it won't be as much a problem for the rich kid because they have a lot of money but it's going to be hard for the person in the small house.
> (Ten-year-old boy, low FSM school)

> They don't have to pay as much for their school trips and all.
>
> *I:*   Why?
>
> Well, it won't seem so much because they have a really big house and lots of money.
>
> (Eleven-year-old boy, high FSM school)

No-uniform day

The responses of the children to the question about whether the child in the three houses would be worried about anything on the day before a no-uniform day at the school were interesting. When the children were asked about no-uniform days in the course of the general conversation, they all said that there was no pressure about the clothes they'd wear on no-uniform day and in only one – socially mixed – school did anyone admit to there being any pressure about the kind of trainers children might wear. However, when they were asked about the worries of the child in each of the houses, the children clearly showed there is some anxiety and pressure surrounding no-uniform day. In the most disadvantaged schools, several children mentioned that the child in the social sector house might have problems asking for the 50p or £1 that is usually charged by schools for no-uniform day:

> They'd be relieved because it'd be a fun day and they're not wearing uniform, so they don't have to sit and do their tie up, but they wouldn't be so happy because they'd have to pay just for no uniform, they'd pay 50p.
> (Ten-year-old boy)

The most common worry expressed, though, was that children, especially girls, from less well-off families would be teased or even bullied if they did not have 'fashionable clothes'. On the other hand, in almost every school, girls identified someone in the school who 'goes to town' on no-uniform day and there was a definite view that it is considered almost as bad to be a 'show-off':

Girl: I think, if they didn't have stylish clothes, maybe they would get teased in that *[smallest house]* family, maybe they wouldn't have as much stylish clothes. And maybe, in that family *[middle-size house]*, they'd just be worrying about how they look. And in that family *[mansion]*, they might tease other families about their style of clothes.

Boy: Sometimes no uniforms are unfair for children who can't afford like really fancy clothes.

I: And do people come in, in really fancy clothes or …

Girl: In our class *X* does …

I: She dresses up a lot, does she?

Girl: Yeah … she's not like really rich or anything, she's just average, but she's an attention seeker.

(School with very low FSM entitlement)

But, for children who were entitled to FSMs, whatever kind of school they attended, there was clearly a concern, which was only voiced in the third person, that the child in the smallest house might be worried because s/he 'might not have as nice clothes as anyone else'. It was also in relation to this question that several groups made their only mention of the type of trainers a child might be wearing:

I think the children in these two *[ordinary]* houses will be worried about the clothes they choose because the person in this *[mansion]* house goes to their school and they have fancy clothes and style and like really, really nice trainers. Say they got them from a really good sports shop and they got them from like Lidl or something.

I: Does it make a difference what trainers people wear?

Sometimes because sometimes bullying starts.

(Socially mixed school)

Fairness and lack of participation

A good deal of the reason why children stop 'loving' school and start to see it as something they are forced to attend seems to be the way they feel they are treated in school. Only three of the 15 schools in the sample had a school council, yet children at every school wanted to talk about what was 'fair' and 'unfair' about the way the school was organised, how they are taught, the school uniform, the way in which the teachers speak to them and how the playground and break time is managed.

Several areas of unfairness were returned to again and again by children across all kinds of schools. These included how unfair it is when someone is blamed for something they did not do, even when they assert that they did not do it. Being kept inside the classroom during break or lunch time as a punishment 'when you need the break, you need the fresh air' was mentioned in several schools. Only in the most disadvantaged schools, and one school with more of a social mix, did children complain about being shouted at by teachers. The children, however, were scrupulously fair and one commented about a teacher who occasionally shouted at them: 'I think it's fair a wee bit because you haven't done your homework'. But the most frequent complaint that 'it's not fair' was forcing children, who need to play, to spend long hours in school each day and then to do homework in the evening:

> If people are telling you to go outside and get more exercise, we can't, we have that much homework. And see, when it's winter, you're sitting there doing your homework and it's really hard but then you're really, really rushing it because you want to go outside and then it turns dark and you can't go outside. It's just really unfair.
> (Ten-year-old boy)

The unfairness of so many tests and of the selective education system for children who have difficulties learning was also raised in several different kinds of schools. It is interesting that the children should raise this objection to selective education, since quantitative studies would back up their views that selection is bad for children with

disabilities (Special Education Needs Centre, 1998):

> I think all these tests are really unfair. I mean some people have
> disabilities with learning problems and all and they would find the tests
> even harder than we do and it's not fair that they don't get to go to the
> same school. I mean let them have help but in the same class.
> (Ten-year-old girl)

This discussion of unfairness was particularly prevalent among children over the age of about eight. None of the issues that the children raised was in any way unreasonable or silly. Many, if not most, made sense and some things they wanted – girls in all the schools that did not allow them to wear trousers raised this as an issue – are their legal right under equality legislation. Yet, even in some of the schools with a School Council, the children did not feel that they could be sure that their voices would be listened to by the teachers. Most of the schools did not provide any mechanism for children to make their voices heard. Although several had a suggestions box, in only one school did both pupils and head teacher agree that pupils were encouraged to use the suggestions box as a way of changing things; this school also had a School Council.

The children's sense of unfairness extended beyond the school gates; children from all backgrounds commented on the unfairness of large families having to live in small houses, such as the social sector one. The children's sense of social justice was keen, such that some argued it should be possible for the housing authorities to take very large houses from small families to give to those who needed the space more:

> You should only have only a small house if you've only got three people
> in a family. I mean I know people from other countries and they need a
> big house because they have a big family and they should be allowed to
> move into that house and the Housing Executive should be allowed to
> take it and give it to a big family.
> (Ten-year-old girl)

Summary

The children worried a lot about testing generally and the Eleven Plus in particular. They recognised the distorting effect of the Eleven Plus transfer test on their final years in primary school. Those sitting the transfer test worried a lot about how they would do, while those not taking it tended to explain this in terms of not being 'smart'

enough to do it. Children in the advantaged schools were considerably more likely to be worried about the Eleven Plus. They were more likely to be under pressure from parents to do well in the test and to think that how they did in the test would have implications for the rest of their lives. By contrast, children in the disadvantaged schools were less likely to be sitting the Eleven Plus and, if they were doing it, to be less concerned about their results.

Barton and Slee (1999, p. 3) have argued that the UK was witnessing the 'simultaneous press of education policy towards greater levels of competition, selection and exclusion and rhetorical commitment to inclusive education'. That trend appears to have intensified over the course of the last ten years (Ozga, 2003). It could be argued, then, that, while individual schools do their best to reduce stigma and inequality within the school, the education system itself is contributing to and reinforcing social disadvantage and exclusion. The current position in Northern Ireland is that the evidence about the impact of academic selection on children is being ignored. Rather, it has become a political football. If commitment to evidence-based policymaking and inclusive education is to be more than empty rhetoric, then decisions about academic selection must be based on evidence, not political expediency.

All the children worried about a range of issues, including bullying and going into a new class or new school. However, only the children in the most disadvantaged schools worried about being beaten up on the way to and from school, and about their school being vandalised. In the most disadvantaged schools, children clearly worried about asking parents for even small amounts of money, such as the 50p or £1 that is usually charged by schools for no-uniform day. Older children in all schools, but especially girls and those in disadvantaged or socially mixed schools, worried about being teased or even bullied if they did not have 'fashionable clothes'.

There was a keen awareness among the children of a lack of fairness in the way schools are organised and run, and the children had realistic ideas about how to improve the organisation and ethos of their schools.

4 The cost of school

While education is theoretically free in the UK, the cost of sending children to school remains relatively high, especially for families who are living on low incomes. For example, the 'School Sums' survey conducted in England and Wales in 2002 on behalf of Norwich Union found that parents paid, on average, nearly £10,000 over the 11 years their child was in state education.[1] The survey identified a number of key items that contributed to the real costs of state education, including clothes, books, school trips, lunches, transport, sports kit and after-school clubs. Average spending on clothes and shoes specifically for school was £178, while spending on school lunches averaged £324 annually or £9 per week. Transport to school was the next highest expenditure, costing £3 each week or £108 per school year. School trips were the next most significant expense at £84 per year, followed by spending on sports kit (£57), after-school clubs (£45) and books (£31). Total spending per year for primary schoolchildren averaged £799, compared to £968 for secondary schoolchildren.

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) noted that uniforms, equipment for classes and school trips were particularly important and seen as essential for shared school life (CPAG, 2003). In the CPAG survey, a quarter of the respondents who did not qualify for Free School Meals reported a difficulty in meeting the costs of school meals. With regard to additional costs, CPAG found that, where parents were struggling to meet costs, some were reluctant to seek help for fear it would stigmatise their child.

A DfES survey carried out in 2004 found that the average annual cost of sending a child to primary school in England and Wales was £563.15 (DfES, 2004). Interestingly, that survey found that parents/carers on higher incomes were *less* likely to pay for their child's travel to school than those on lower incomes.

In this study, head teachers in all the most disadvantaged schools were keenly aware of the fact that virtually all the children in their primary school came from families that were living in poverty or were just above the poverty line. They emphasised that the proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals does not give a true picture of the level of disadvantage in the school. They said that some parents do not apply for FSMs, even though their child(ren) may be eligible, either because 'their children don't want it or don't like' or for fear of stigma. Those whose children are not entitled to FSMs may nonetheless be living in poverty while in employment. Indeed, over half of all children living in poverty in NI, and in the UK generally, now live in households where at least one adult is in paid employment. Such children would not be entitled to FSMs.

Do you have to pay to go to school?

The question, 'Do you have to pay to go to school?' was asked of all the children. The youngest (five to six year olds) all answered 'no, you don't have to pay for school'. Only when prompted did they mention school dinners, juice or school trips. Seven and eight year olds still started by saying no but then, unprompted, mentioned school dinners and occasionally school trips. Only at about age nine did the children respond to the question of whether you have to pay for school by listing the various things for which parents have to pay. See Table 6 for a list of the items that have to be paid for at school identified by eight to 11 year olds in more advantaged and more disadvantaged schools.

When they were asked 'how free do you think education is?', parents with just one child, even lone parents, were least likely to complain about the costs associated with school. Parents with more than one child at school (particularly those with larger families of three or more children) talked about the constant demands from their children for 'a pound for this, £3 for that' – even if they were relatively comfortably off:

> I suppose education is free but there always seems to be something. You always seem to be handing out something. Now it mightn't be large amounts of money, but I do feel that you are constantly handing out.

Table 6 Items for which eight to 11 year olds pay, by type of school

More advantaged schools	Disadvantaged schools
School dinners	School dinners
Juice money	Juice money
Water bottles	Fruit
Fruit	Swimming
Swimming	Non-uniform days
Non-uniform days	School trips
After-school activities	School uniform
Music lessons	School shoes
Irish language	School bag
Dance class	
School trips	
School sweatshirt	

School meals

Free School Meals (FSMs) were introduced by the Education Act of 1906 in order to ensure that children were not prevented 'by reason of lack of food to take advantage of the education provided for them'. As CPAG (2004) points out, it is ironic that 100 years later we still need to provide school meals for some children for the same reason. The war years of the 1940s saw school meals based on minimum nutritional requirements of one-third of the recommended daily intake of calories. However, the Education Act of 1980 removed this requirement. Since 2000, new nutritional standards have been introduced, although these have been criticised for being food, rather than nutrient, based. Further, McMahon and Marsh (1999) found that the stigma attached to FSMs, together with the quality and choice of food and the way meals are managed, were key factors in explaining why up to a fifth of children who are entitled to an FSM do not eat them. The young people in Ridge's (2002) study identified FSMs as 'a very specific and visible issue of difference which clearly leads to fears of them being labelled and bullied' (Ridge, 2002, p. 83).

In this study, the cost of school dinners, which was £1.90 a day at the time the fieldwork was carried out, was the item most identified by the children as having to be paid for by parents. In the most disadvantaged schools, many of the children reported that they used to take dinners but, 'now my Mum is working', they take packed lunches or only take dinners on a particular day of the week as a treat. Children in the most disadvantaged schools were far more likely to say they liked school dinners. These six year olds attend a school with a very high level of Free School Meal entitlement:

> *I:*　　　　What's the best thing about school?

> *Boy 1:*　　Mine is the dinner, the dinner's lovely.

> *Boy 2:*　　I get gravy and carrots.

> *Girl 1:*　　I love roasties.

Discussions about school dinners, how tasty or otherwise they are, what the puddings are like and what's on the menu on which day of the week took up quite a bit of time in the more disadvantaged schools but tended to be skated over fairly quickly in the more advantaged ones. This is in line with Ridge's (2002) findings in secondary schools where young people whose families relied on benefit explained that the school meal was an important part of their diet. Parents interviewed as part of this study (see below) also confirmed the importance of Free School Meals to the family's food budget.

It is perhaps understandable, then, why children in the better-off schools were more likely to complain about the quality and taste of school dinners. They were less likely to be hungry, less likely to depend on the school dinner to provide vital nutrition and, perhaps, more likely to have sampled a wide range of food. Certainly, any time they spent talking about school meals, it was to say how 'disgusting' they are. These nine- and ten-year-old children attend one of the most advantaged schools in the region:

> *Girl 1:*   The chicken curry was disgusting, it tasted like bleach.
>
> *Girl 2:*   Sometimes the meat was overcooked, it tasted like leather.
>
> *Boy 1:*   And the chicken nuggets that you get and stuff, it's not really chicken.
>
> *Boy 2:*   And there's a lot of microwaved stuff, it's not great.
>
> *Boy 1:*   See, when I was eating chicken nuggets, I bit into it and it was all this here slimy stuff. That's when I started taking packed lunches.

Large numbers of children in all schools, including some who were eligible for Free School Meals, chose to bring a packed lunch to school because they preferred this to the school dinners. In the most disadvantaged schools, it was fairly unusual for a child who is eligible for a free meal to say they bring packed lunch. However, in more advantaged schools, especially those that have yet to address stigmatisation issues in relation to school meals, it was quite usual to find a child who is eligible for a free meal saying that s/he brings a packed lunch. It is difficult to disentangle whether this was because of the quality of the meal, the fear of stigma or just the general culture of the school where the majority of children bring a packed lunch.

Several parents who were living on benefits said that, although their child(ren) was (were) entitled to FSMs, they sent packed lunches because the quality of the food was so poor. For parents whose children attended the school with a cash cafeteria there was a fear that, despite the school's systems to ensure the children eat what their parents say they ought to, the child might get around this and choose only the least healthy options on the menu. This, combined with the perceived higher cost, led many of these parents to send packed lunches for their children, since 'at least you knew what they were eating when they brought home their rubbish'.

Asked about fear of stigma, all the parents whose child was entitled to FSMs knew precisely the system in their child's school and the extent to which their child's FSM

status was identifiable. In the more advantaged schools where parents felt their children could be identified as entitled to FSMs, the parents admitted that avoiding stigma was part of the reason for sending a packed lunch. In the more disadvantaged schools, however, the decision to give a child entitled to FSMs a packed lunch was more likely to be social:

> It just depends what her friends are doing at school. If one is going to the canteen, they all want to go. And sure then they get fed up with it.

For some parents, FSMs played an important role in ensuring the family did not go hungry. These tended to be parents with several children and, while not saying directly that they depended on FSMs to provide their children's main meal of the day, this was implicit in their comments about the long summer holidays and how much they missed the children having their dinners provided at school.

In the most disadvantaged schools, and in integrated schools, there is very good practice in ensuring that there is no stigma surrounding school dinners. All these schools administered school meals in such a way that those who are taking FSMs are not identified: 'Nobody knows – you join a dinner queue. They wouldn't know who was and who wasn't.' However, head teachers in some of the more advantaged schools admitted that their procedures probably did mean that the small minority of children within their school who received FSMs were 'fairly obvious'. However, given the changing social mix within many of the most advantaged schools (see below), head teachers did express a desire to learn about best practice in relation to reducing stigma surrounding all aspects of the school experience for children from poor families.

Healthy eating

Almost all the schools visited had a healthy eating policy for the children. The more disadvantaged schools had been part of the Fruit for Schools initiative and had been able to provide free fruit for the youngest classes for three years. This had proved a real success and the children said that they liked the fruit they got at school. These children, who lived in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Britain or Ireland, were able to list an impressive range of fruit that they had sampled, including more exotic fruit like kiwi. However, the initiative was a pilot and has since ended, so the schools that had provided free fruit were having to charge for it, although they did their best to keep the fruit as cheap as possible.

The schools that had been part of the pilot initiative tended to be stricter about the healthy eating policy than other schools. Children were allowed to bring only fruit for break. Other schools allowed children to bring fruit, yoghurt or cheese for break, while some schools continued to allow crisps but to ban sweets and chocolate. Some schools allowed children to bring anything in their packed lunch, while others had a healthy eating policy for lunch also. Some insisted on children never bringing sweets or chocolate as part of lunch; some allowed a 'treat' once a week.

The children understood why healthy eating policies were in place and did not object to them – although some older children did tell me that it was possible to sneak some sweets and fizzy drinks into school 'as long as the teachers don't catch you'. The question of fair treatment of children was raised again in relation to healthy eating policies. Children in the schools with the strictest healthy eating policies objected to what they saw as double standards among the teaching staff. They complained that teachers and classroom assistants would confiscate sweets, chocolate bars and biscuits if they found the children with them, but then they would stand in the playground eating a chocolate bar themselves! Some of the children even alleged that the teaching staff ate the confiscated items:

> *Girl 1:*   This school is meant to be a healthy eating school but see, when the teachers is getting their break, they're allowed biscuits and all. Because Ms A brings them into the staffroom and she's making us hungry and all.

> *Girl 2:*   We can see into the staffroom and they are sitting there eating biscuits and chocolate and all.

> (Both nine years old)

Asked about school meals, parents referred to the poor quality of the food their children were receiving. Jamie Oliver's campaign for healthier school meals was mentioned by several of the parents and they all agreed with him about the poor quality of what is on offer for the children, even in schools that are supposed to be 'healthy eating schools':

> … the school meals, make them a wee bit more healthy because I think they are terrible. There was one day I was looking at the list of stuff and there wasn't one thing that my children would eat.

School uniforms

The cost of school uniforms, including shoes and bag, was mentioned by some children as one of the costs of schooling. Children in more advantaged schools were very much less likely to mention school clothes, shoes or school bag. Children in the most disadvantaged schools almost always included these in their list of things for which parents have to pay. Many of the older children in the more disadvantaged schools were able to say exactly how much school uniform items like sweatshirts cost. Some knew that, while a grant is available for post-primary uniforms, there is no help available for buying primary school uniforms. Clearly, they had heard their parents complain about the cost of primary school uniforms:

> … if you don't wear your school uniform, you get a mark against your name and primary schools shouldn't have to wear their school uniforms, they should be just allowed to wear their own clothes. It should only be high school because primary schools don't get a school grant.
> (Ten-year-old girl)

School uniforms have long been recognised as helping to reduce stigma for children living in poverty. However, more and more primary schools have sweatshirts and polo shirts with the school crest, and these mean that parents cannot buy generic ones in cheaper stores. And, as the girl above points out, there is no help for parents living on benefits to buy these, although most of the schools in the study – including some of the most disadvantaged – were quite strict about children having the full uniform.

The two lists that make up Table 6 earlier in this chapter show some interesting differences between poorer and better-off children in relation to the cost of providing everything a child needs for attending school. The children in poorer schools were far more likely to include school uniforms in their list of items for which parents have to pay. They were the only ones to mention school shoes and school bag. This suggests that they are more aware of the pressures on their parent(s) to provide these basic items.

While the parents generally approved of school uniforms because of the ease in getting children ready for school, and their equalising effects on the children within the school, most of the parents were critical of the cost. All put the cost down to the way in which schools contract with particular shops to stock their polo shirts and sweatshirts. This means that, rather than buying generic sweatshirts and polo shirts in one of the chain stores, parents end up having to pay about £50 just for two sets of uniform for even the youngest child. And this does not include shoes or school bag:

> … there's only the one shop down in *X* Road that sells the school
> sweatshirt and the polo shirt. And I do find them expensive. The polo
> shirts I think last year … were about £7 each. It's just because they've
> got a wee logo on the side of them. Whereas you can get them, maybe
> in Dunnes or Marks and Spencers, for £5 for two … And the sweatshirts
> now, they're expensive as well. I think they're about £11 each.

Parents further complained that the quality of the sweatshirts available in some of
these shops was not as good as it might have been if they had been bought cheaper
in a chain store. In particular, there were many complaints about how badly some
sweatshirts washed.

But it is the cost of school shoes, especially for boys, that caused the greatest
anxiety for the parents to whom we spoke. There was general agreement that there
was little point in paying less than about £25–30 for a pair of shoes, as anything
cheaper would 'fall apart' within weeks. For parents with more than one child, shoes
were the item that made the biggest hole in the household budget. And, no matter
how good the shoes, or the trousers, boys in particular were likely to go through them
in a few short months:

> You don't get a grant like and you're talking… say if you have a boy, you're
> talking three, four pairs of trousers, three, four jumpers. I change his
> clothes every day … And he would go through about four pairs of shoes
> in the school year, in one year.

The cost of school uniforms was an area where head teachers and parents differed
considerably in their views. All the head teachers said that the school uniform was
cheap, while most of the parents – even those not living in poverty – found that the
trend in primary schools towards sweatshirts and polo shirts with the school crest
makes uniforms more expensive. Several parents of boys also expressed concern
about their child's school insisting on black school shoes, no matter what. They
pointed out that boys can go through shoes really quickly and sometimes the choice
is for the child to wear trainers going to school or not to go at all. Yet some head
teachers, even in the most disadvantaged schools, reported that they are quite strict
about all aspects of uniform, even shoes, and that 'they don't get taken out on trips if
they don't have them on'.

School trips

The cost of school trips has been raised by both parents and young people in other studies relating to child poverty. School trips are important in broadening outlooks and providing new experiences, especially for the third of children in Northern Ireland who do not get a family holiday. However, their cost can vary a lot; some families may struggle to pay for even the cheapest school trips, particularly if they have several children in school. While the younger children did not think too much about the cost of school trips, the older children were aware that they could be a drain on their parents' budgets. Discussions about how much school trips cost did not feature with any children younger than eight and, with few exceptions, amounts of money tended to be discussed only by the older (nine- to 11-year-old) children.

This group of 11 year olds in a school with a high level of FSM entitlement talked in April last year about the trip to London the school was planning for June. In response to being asked if they were all going, this exchange took place:

Boy 1: Yeah.

Girl 1: Well, whoever wants to go but they have to pay £180.

Boy 2: Last year it was only £150.

Boy 1: I'm only £20 away, so I am.

Boy 2: I've £130 to pay still.

Girl 1: I've £35 to pay.

Girl 2: I've got £15.

Even in the better-off schools, the cost of school trips caused some discussion among the older children and the trips clearly contributed to social differentiation within the school. These children attend a school in one of the wealthiest parts of Northern Ireland; only a handful of children in the school are entitled to FSMs. Boy 1 in this conversation, who emphasises how much fun the ski trip is, had not been on the trip:

Boy 1: In the winter, you get to go on the ski trip, which is really fun and in the summer there's the Share Centre.

> Girl 1:   Some people don't go because it costs a lot of money.
>
> I: The ski trip must cost a lot of money.
>
> Boy 1:   Yeah. It's always really, really good though.
>
> I: How much does it actually cost?
>
> Boy 1:   [Boy 2] should know, he's had two ski trips.
>
> Boy 2:   I think it was £500 for the adults and £300 for the children.
>
> I: And what about the Share Centre, who goes on that?
>
> Girl 1:   Everyone who wants to go. It's the same as the ski trip, but it doesn't cost so much.

In almost all the more advantaged schools, there was at least one child – not always one entitled to FSMs – who said that they 'couldn't be bothered' with school trips. The young people interviewed by Ridge (2002) indicated that this was often a cover for not wanting to ask struggling parents for yet more money.

Parents recognised the importance of school trips in broadening children's view of the world. All parents wanted to ensure that their children were able to go on school trips, but some found it difficult to meet the costs, which, as most parents agreed, 'seem to be dearer every year'. The parents showed no sign of realising that schools are not allowed to charge for trips during school hours. Most saw the 'donation' that was asked for as a charge, not a donation and struggled to find the money to ensure their child could participate.

All the parents said that they are able to find the money for these in-school-time day trips that took children to farms, museums or parklands across Northern Ireland. However, those with more than one child at school frequently criticised the cumulative cost for their family.

The residential trips that many primary schools take, bringing children to Britain or France, cause parents most anxiety. While some of the schools have residential trips within Northern Ireland, which keeps the cost below £100, other primary schools organise very expensive trips, such as the skiing trip discussed by the children above. For parents living on benefits, raising the money to send their child on a residential school trip can be a nightmare:

> They go to Manchester and it costs something like two or three hundred pounds and I just don't know where you would get the money for that. Although … they're able to pay up throughout the year, but still and all, it's a lot of money, like. You could go on a family trip for that … I might end up taking a loan from somebody and then paying for maybe two or three years.

The most disadvantaged schools were well aware that they can only ask for a donation towards educational trips during school hours. Head teachers went to great lengths to raise money to subsidise trips, to ask for the smallest possible donation, to allow parents to pay 'by instalment' and to waive the cost for any child who is unable to pay. As a result, the time expended in organising a school trip for the most disadvantaged schools was clearly much longer than it would be for a better-off school. This included the time and energy that goes into raising funds; the time taken to explore all the cheapest options; and the additional administration required to facilitate a savings scheme for parents, even for relatively small amounts:

> We stopped going over to Scotland. It was becoming too expensive, and then it was becoming exclusive as well, so a lot of the children didn't get a chance to go. So we only go on local trips now. We would operate savings schemes for all the trips, even the day trips, which might cost five or six pounds, which is quite a lot for parents. Again they can bring in a pound a week or something, and the teachers don't mind doing the administration for that.

Out-of-school activities

The study by Wikeley and others (2007) as part of the JRF Education and Poverty Programme supports the findings of, for example, Lauer *et al.,* (2006) of the importance of out-of-school activities for educational outcomes. Lauer *et al.* carried out a meta-analysis of out-of-school provision in the US; they found that all students, but in particular at-risk ones, benefited academically from inclusion in out-of-school social and academic interventions. Wikeley *et al.* (2007) interviewed 11 and 14 year olds, and found that all children gained from being involved in out-of-school formal activities in a variety of ways that made them learning experiences. Their study showed that children from families in receipt of Free School Meals participate in fewer formal out-of-school activities for several reasons: costs, access, limited knowledge about how to become involved and perceptions of self as an attendee. They argue that this exclusion increases the disadvantage faced by children from poorer families in more formal learning environments like school.

Returning to Table 6 earlier in this chapter, children in the more disadvantaged schools did not mention after-school activities, although some of the schools did offer them. Probing this seeming anomaly with the head teachers, we found there seemed to be two reasons for it. The first is the lengths that the schools go to in order to provide as much as possible for free – so much of the after-school activity in the poorest schools was free, although scarce. The other reason is transport. Because school transport is fairly inflexible and their parents were unlikely to have a car, only those children who lived within walking distance of the school were able to take advantage of some of the activities in the poorer schools. By contrast, in the better-off schools, parents, relatives or other carers picked the children up in cars from after-school activities.

In the more advantaged schools, some children were able to recite a list of out-of-school activities for each day of the school week:

> I go to netball on Monday, and dance class on Tuesday, piano on
> Wednesday and then on Thursday go to choir.
> (Nine-year-old girl)

It is easy to see how children from poorer families would not be able to join in these activities. The dance class mentioned above cost £30 for a 12-week term and the money had to be paid all at once at the start of the term. As one girl explained:

> … in dance class, some children started doing it but then when they had
> to re-enrol they just dropped out.

Several ten- and 11-year-old children in the more advantaged schools said in response to being asked about out-of-school activities that they 'couldn't be bothered'. These children, most though not all of whom were entitled to Free School Meals, were also among those who said that they 'couldn't be bothered' about going on school trips. The children seem to be experiencing what Ridge (2002) terms 'exclusion from within'.

Head teachers in the more disadvantaged schools, including the rural ones, were concerned to ensure that activities that can enrich a child's life, such as art and music, were available to all. Some head teachers reported not using the allowance they receive to replace their teaching time in order to do administrative work and instead using the money to buy in art classes or to pay for music lessons for which they are expected to charge. Schools went to great lengths to make sure that children who had some musical ability would get music lessons without having to pay for them:

> We've bought the flutes and we give 19 children an opportunity each year
> to play a concert flute. Tuition's free, exam's free – everything's free, they
> have nothing to do only practise.
> (Head teacher, disadvantaged school)

By contrast, head teachers in more advantaged schools, especially those schools
that are now starting to take poorer children, expressed concern that so much that
used to be free to children – like sports and music – is now subject to a charge.
Because these schools are not used to working to ensure that children from deprived
backgrounds get a full range of experiences, they are fatalistic about the effect of
these charges:

> … the music's an interesting one because it's expensive. The music
> tuition that we have through the Board does require a fee. Each year it's
> quite high. Board finances for education are going down the tubes. It's
> getting higher and higher. So it's not really accessible, practically not
> accessible, to children from lower-income backgrounds.
> (Head teacher, advantaged school)

School fundraising activities

All the schools had some fundraising activities each year but parents whose children
attended the more advantaged schools felt these as more of a pressure than
the parents of children at the most disadvantaged schools. This may be because
the most disadvantaged schools strive to ensure that none of their events, even
fundraising ones, excludes those who have the least. But even this parent, who was
interviewed in a detached house in a leafy suburb, felt the strain at times:

> … then there's Christmas and there's the Christmas fête and the stalls,
> and you're having to take things into the stalls and then you go and buy
> them back again!

While even those who are comfortably off feel the financial strain occasionally, for
parents who are living on benefits, some of the school fundraising activities can take
a large proportion of their weekly income. Some parents said they preferred events
where they knew exactly how much the night was going to cost, such as an event
where the only cost is the admission. But other events have a range of activities that
must all be paid for, which makes planning the level of financial outlay difficult:

> … they're always collecting for something and you feel that you have to contribute towards it, and then you feel as if you do have to support the school, you know, the family fun nights, and things like that there. Which we enjoy as a family, but you know you can't really go and not come home without spending about £10 at them.

Summary

Children and parents shared views about the real costs of schooling. Both saw school dinners, uniforms and school trips as the biggest costs associated with school. Children in disadvantaged schools were considerably more aware of all the costs associated with school and of the difficulties parents face in meeting those costs. Such children showed a reluctance to ask their parents even for 50p to bring to school.

Children and parents generally welcomed healthy eating policies in schools but both felt that school dinners had not gone far enough towards ensuring that only healthy, but tasty, options were available. The poor quality of meals in some school canteens meant that children who might well rely on their school dinner as the main meal of the day refused to eat what was on offer. For families who are not entitled to FSMs but have several children at school, the cost of school dinners made them prohibitive.

Despite government policy towards keeping the cost of primary school uniforms as low as possible, all the parents interviewed reported spending about £50 on each child's uniform, not including the cost of shoes. Some of the older children were keenly aware of the cost to their parents of school uniforms. Some schools, even in highly disadvantaged areas, displayed an inflexible attitude to uniforms. Sending children home, or excluding them from trips, if they do not have the full uniform – or even worse, the correct shoes – cannot but exacerbate the social exclusion faced by children from families living in poverty.

School trips also proved expensive and few parents realised that schools are not allowed to charge for trips during school hours. Most saw the 'donation' that was asked for as a charge, not a donation. Residential trips, particularly those outside Northern Ireland, were seen as too expensive by all the parents interviewed, even those who are relatively well off. The older children showed an awareness of the relative nature of poverty, understanding that the family in the mansion would not need to worry about the cost of school uniforms or of school trips, while the family in the smallest house definitely would.

As an interim measure, extending uniform grants to primary schoolchildren is urgently required. But the findings presented here suggest that part of the fight against child poverty and its impact on children and their education must be the introduction of the 'Free School Day', an idea proposed by the children in *Bread is Free* (Willow, 2001). The 'Free School Day' would mean that everything that a child needs to receive a full education – from clothes, footwear, food and transport to stationery, schoolbag, school trips and out-of-school activities – would be provided free of charge to all children.

5 Broader school relationships

Blaming the parents?

One of the themes emerging from interviews with the schools' head teachers was that of poor parenting skills or, worse, parents who were not interested in their children's development or education. The approach of heads to speech and language problems among their youngest pupils illustrates this. All agreed that there were increasing numbers of children coming to school with very poor speech and language development. Some of the head teachers argued that not all the children starting school with poor speech and language skills come from materially deprived families. However, the research evidence is quite clear that socio-economic status is the main determinant of poor speech and language development, with levels of maternal education having a subsidiary role (Hoff, 2003).

Most head teachers blamed parents for not being proactive in demanding speech and language therapy (SLT) for their child and/or for not bringing the child to therapy sessions. As the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NICCY, 2006) review of SLT provision showed, however, even the most determined of parents find it extremely difficult to access SLT for their children. If it is the case that parents do not take advantage of therapy offered, then we have to ask why they do not. Research evidence – including in this study – suggests that parents are very concerned about their children's cognitive development and about their educational attainment (Lareau, 2000; SEU, 2004). It seems, then, that teachers and other professionals need to ask whether parents have mental health problems, or a lack of flexible working conditions, that prevent them from attending SLT appointments or parent-teacher meetings.

Parents, and poor parenting skills, were blamed by head teachers across all types of schools, not only for children's poor language skills, but also for their lack of 'emotional intelligence' and for simply not paying them enough attention. Of course, those children who live in 'chaotic' families suffer most – especially if they move home and/or school a lot in their early years. However, it did seem that parents could not win. If they were not in paid employment, teachers saw them as giving a bad example to their children but, if they worked long hours, they were seen as neglecting them. Head teachers in the more advantaged schools, in particular, mentioned the difficulties faced by children whose parents had to leave for work at 7.30 a.m. and did not return until late evening.

The context in which schools in the most disadvantaged areas work makes teaching and learning considerably more difficult. The combination of the legacy of the conflict and behavioural problems associated with poor language development and poor nutrition meant that teaching staff in some of the most disadvantaged schools spent much of their time 'fire fighting' rather than concentrating on lessons. The frustration that this must engender may go some way towards explaining the extent to which parents were blamed for many of the problems faced by the children in the most disadvantaged schools. Poor parenting practices and parents who work long hours and cannot spend much time with their children are seen by teaching staff as contributing to the difficulties they have in providing the best education possible to children in both advantaged and disadvantaged schools. The evidence demonstrates that, while parental involvement in education helps a child's development, no amount of parental concern can counteract the worst impact of poverty on children.

As with schools in disadvantaged parts of England, low attendance was an issue mentioned by some of the head teachers in the more disadvantaged schools, with head teachers complaining that parents allowed children to stay off all week if the school was closed for a day or two in the week:

> There is a huge swathe of children here who are emotionally neglected and that's got nothing to do with poverty. I could take you to kids in *[disadvantaged area]* whose Mums love their kids to bits and hug them every morning before they go to school. And I could take you to lawyers and doctors, consultants, who never see their kids and can't hug them, probably till a Saturday morning.

That many parents cannot see much of their children during the day was blamed by some head teachers for how late so many of the children seemed to stay up. The researcher was shocked by how many quite young children were able to talk about television programmes that are transmitted well after nine o'clock. The head teachers across all types of schools confirmed that this is a particular problem for children in families where both parents work outside the home. The only time the parents can have with their children is in the evening, at times when traditionally the child would be in bed, with the result that the children are all too often 'exhausted' at school.

Impact of falling rolls on children's experience of school

Changing demographics in Northern Ireland, with the resulting fall in numbers of children at school, is having a highly detrimental impact on the way children living in poverty experience school in some areas. This is the case whether the child is

attending a more disadvantaged school that is heading for closure or an advantaged school that is starting to take children who, traditionally, attended the more disadvantaged school. In both Belfast and Derry-Londonderry, pairs of schools that have a similar catchment area were visited. In both cities, one of these schools was situated in the middle of a very deprived housing estate and was heading for closure, while the other was in a more salubrious area and, due to falling rolls, was now taking for the first time children from the deprived housing estate. This head teacher puts the situation in a nutshell:

> HT: … up until the past two years, this school had never taken children from anywhere apart from *[well-off area]*. As the population has decreased our intake has gradually crept into *X* and *Y* – two very different areas from *[well-off area]*. This is the leafy suburbs, whereas *X* would be poorer, *Y* would be very poor.

> I: Is *Y* a Housing Executive estate?

> HT: Yes … huge social problems, huge social problems. And their school is in a rapid decline with a view to closure. So what's happened is, because we've now got space, they're starting to come to us – in ever increasing numbers. So you can see … I don't like to acknowledge it from the point of view that it could create a 'them and us'. But, at the end of the day, there are kids coming in who have difficulty getting a uniform, who, if they rip a hole in their trousers, can't change them. So they have a hole all year.

The head teachers in the advantaged schools admitted that their policies and procedures – even the type of social evenings organised by their PTAs – do little to help welcome children and parents from poorer backgrounds. However, there was an eagerness on their behalf to work to ensure that stigma will be reduced in the future.

> … our standards remain the same and our expectations remain the same. I would still expect children to come in school uniform, to have their homework done, you know all the norms are still the same. But we, as a staff, have to acknowledge that there are differences now. And one rule may have to be enforced in different ways, or accommodation needs to be made for some children … *[school trips]* we will take all the children who wish to go whether they pay or not. And there's a couple now, who don't pay … So there is a slight culture change.

Unfortunately, while children from poorer families attending the more advantaged schools can experience stigmatisation, those attending the disadvantaged schools that are heading for closure experience damaging levels of uncertainty and an increased awareness of the poverty faced by themselves and their school. Discussions with children in P6 and P7 groups in schools that are experiencing rapidly falling roll numbers suggested that the children are picking up on parental anxieties about their schools' futures.

> … like this school should be closed down because every other school has, like, over 100 pupils and this school only has 70 about.

Part of the reason for these parental anxieties is the fact that free school transport had been available to the more disadvantaged schools in the past, because the advantaged school had no places to offer the children from the housing estates. But, now that places are on offer, those who live close to them will not receive free school transport even if they are already attending the disadvantaged school or if they have siblings who already attend it. This can mean either that children walk relatively long distances to school or that the money is found from somewhere to pay for the school bus. One school has had to raise large amounts of money each year over the last three years to ensure that children can continue to access the school. However, the children have picked up on the financial squeeze faced by the school and have come to some inaccurate conclusions:

> *I:* And what do you have to bring money in for?
>
> *Girl 1:* For swimming, and money for the bus.
>
> *Boy 1:* It's because our school is poor.
>
> *Girl 2:* Like there's only something like 70 and that's not enough children, it should be closed down.
>
> *Boy 1:* She's making us pay for our buses now.
>
> *I:* And how much do you get charged for the bus?
>
> *Girl 1:* We don't actually pay to get on the bus but things like trips, she makes us.
>
> *I:* But don't children who go to other schools have to pay for school trips?

> *Girl 1:*   No, not always, just some of them. The school pays for it.
>
> *Boy 1:*   You have to pay for your non-uniform day.
>
> *Girl 2:*   No, you don't.
>
> *Boy 2:*   Not in other schools you don't.
>
> *Boy 1:*   They don't in *[advantaged school]* or any other school.
>
> *Girl 1:*   Every other primary school don't have to pay like ours.
>
> *Girl 2:*   Ours is like 50p or £1 a family.

The above conversation, and others like it, suggest that the school experiences of some of the most disadvantaged children are being blighted by the impact of falling school rolls.

Summary

In all but two of the schools – ironically, two of the three most disadvantaged schools in the region – parents, especially those living in poverty, were blamed by teachers for contributing to their children's educational disadvantage. It seemed as if parents couldn't win. If they were not in paid employment, they were 'giving a bad example' to the children. If the parents were working long hours, they were seen as neglecting their children emotionally. However this culture of blaming the parents must be seen in the context of teachers who are clearly frustrated that, in spite of their very hard work, their pupils often receive less than the best education possible.

The scarcity of speech and language therapy is a burning issue across the UK, as documented by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT, 2006) in Britain and by NICCY's (2006) review. Children cannot learn to think, read or write if they have not developed language skills. Making SLT available in mainstream schools, as it is in special schools, should be explored. Such provision would overcome problems caused by parents' inability – for whatever reason – to take their child to SLT sessions. However, this is unlikely to happen until the real shortage of speech and language therapists is addressed.

The most disadvantaged schools go to great lengths to ameliorate the impact of poverty on children's experience of school. Head Teachers in the more advantaged schools expressed an eagerness to adopt better practice in relation to children from poor families who are starting now to attend their schools. There is a danger that, when the more disadvantaged schools finally close, children from poorer families will miss out on some in-school activities such as music lessons. There is fairly clear evidence that, whether the children attend an advantaged or disadvantaged school, the school experiences of some of the most disadvantaged children are being blighted by the impact of falling school rolls. Children who have already started school (or have siblings in a school) that used to have free transport until recently when places have been freed up in previously oversubscribed schools should not be disadvantaged because of these demographic changes. How transport is to be provided for these children (and their siblings) until they finish their primary education has to be explored.

6 Implications for policy

What emerges from this study is a picture of children's school experiences that are shaped by their family background and the area in which they live. The children's views demonstrate that how children experience school is determined by the level of disadvantage they face. They suggest that poorer children get used to the fact of their social position from a very early age; they accept that this will be reflected in their experience of school – that they are not going to get the same quality of schooling or of outcomes as better-off children.

Older children in disadvantaged schools were less likely to describe learning as fun than older children in advantaged schools. There was general agreement among all the children that someone rich would be very smart and would do well in school, although, for most, this was seen in the context of attending a private school and/or having a tutor. Only in the most disadvantaged schools did children say that, were a rich child to attend *their* school, the teachers would treat him/her differently and s/he would get better treatment and better teaching.

In the advantaged schools, children saw education as a way of ensuring a good life as an adult. Children in disadvantaged schools were more likely to view education as a way of avoiding problems in the future. All the children, whatever the school they attended, had relatively high aspirations for their futures, although children from advantaged schools were considerably more likely to aspire to a high-paying professional job.

Because academic selection is more universal in Northern Ireland, the impacts it has on educational outcomes, and particularly on inclusive education, within NI should be of interest to educationalists in Britain. The region provides evidence that should be factored into the debate on selection in Britain. The children in the study were very worried about testing generally and the Eleven Plus in particular. Children in the advantaged schools were considerably more likely to be worried about the Eleven Plus. They were more likely to be under pressure from parents to do well in the test and to think that how they did in the test would have implications for the rest of their lives. While children in the disadvantaged schools were less likely to be sitting the Eleven Plus, and, if they were doing it, to be less concerned about their results, they also felt pressurised by it. Even those who were not sitting the test were impacted by it and likely to say that they were not 'smart enough' to do it. Putting these children's views together with the quantitative evidence for the detrimental impact of selection on disadvantaged children, there is strong evidence to support plans to end the Eleven Plus. Indeed, the evidence points towards the complete abolition of academic selection.

Children at the disadvantaged schools were less worried about the Eleven Plus but more worried about money. The children in advantaged schools were more focused on education, while those from the poorer schools were more focused on life. Children in disadvantaged schools understood the real costs of going to school and the struggle faced by parents to provide even small amounts of money. Thus, for children growing up in poverty, life itself is a struggle and their keen awareness and worries about non-educational issues – like clothes for non-uniform days, the walk to and from school, vandalism and so on – mean they have less energy to focus on their education. By contrast, better-off children can take life for granted and can concentrate on using education as a way to get on in the world without worrying about material things. This does have an impact on how children experience school. Children from better-off families are more likely to see music, dance and other out-of-school activities as part of the 'normal' school experience but, for the children from families experiencing poverty, they are optional extras.

In the course of this study, only children from advantaged schools did not complain about teachers shouting at them. Girls were as likely as boys to complain about being shouted at, but only boys concluded that this led them to hate school. There is clear evidence of boys as young as nine or ten becoming very disenchanted with school and starting to disengage. The evidence from this study points towards the interaction of educational disadvantage faced by children growing up in poverty, the difficulties faced by teachers in disadvantaged schools and gendered socialisation of children leading to boys particularly being failed by the education system. It seems that, for these children, school reflects – and reproduces – disadvantage in society generally. The poorer they are, the more likely their experience of school is to be impacted by their place in society. So, for example, the differences between boys and girls are sharper in the more disadvantaged schools, suggesting that the experience of school confirms and reproduces the position of women/girls in society.

These findings have implications for both the inclusive schools agenda and the Extended Schools programme. While Ofsted (2000) may have published guidelines on creating 'inclusive' schools, it is clear that the debate around inclusion has not taken sufficient account of how schools and teachers might include children living in poverty and/or in disadvantaged areas. Riley and Docking (2004) found that disaffected students at both primary and secondary level did see the work they were doing at school as worthwhile and as achievable. But, like the disaffected boys in this study, they found the combination of compulsion, lots of rules and 'boring' lessons to be demotivating.

Since the Extended Schools programme is aimed primarily at reducing disadvantage, the activities provided by Extended Schools have to take account of the views of most of the children in this study about the length of the school day. Otherwise, it is

hard to see how the children who most need out-of-school activities would be willing to stay beyond the compulsory hours. As Sutton *et al*. (2007) argue, 'the *quality* of what is provided is of equal or greater importance than the *quantity*'.

The frustration that the 'fire fighting' that occupies so much of the time of teachers in disadvantaged areas must engender may go some way towards explaining the extent to which parents were blamed for many of the problems faced by the children in the most disadvantaged schools. If positive school–home relationships are to be possible, teachers need to be informed of the difficulties faced by parents and the real interest that the overwhelming majority of parents have about their children's education.

For teachers in disadvantaged schools to be able to provide the kind of interactive 'fun' learning experience that the children say they enjoy, ways will have to be found to free up teachers from some of the caring and organising work they are forced into at present. Some of the more disadvantaged schools in London have piloted schemes that employ a dedicated welfare or care worker to improve attendance (Calman, 2007). The idea of a similar worker to deal with the additional caring work and administrative tasks associated with a high number of pupils growing up in poverty could be explored as a way of freeing teachers from constant stress to concentrate on lessons. If those lessons are to engage the most disadvantaged children, then the children themselves *must* be involved in decisions about their own learning (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004).

For families who are not entitled to FSMs but have several children at school, the cost of school dinners made them prohibitive. Despite government policy towards keeping the cost of primary school uniforms as low as possible, they remain an unwelcome expense. When schools adopt an inflexible attitude to uniforms, they can exacerbate the social exclusion faced by children from families living in poverty. School trips also proved expensive and, while most families could find the money for trips during school hours, residential trips, particularly those outside Northern Ireland, were seen as too expensive by all the parents interviewed, even those who are relatively well off.

As an interim measure, extending uniform grants to primary schoolchildren is urgently required. And the question of the cost of school trips for children whose families depend on benefits or who receive in-work tax credits must also be addressed. But the findings presented here suggest that part of the fight against child poverty and its impact on children and their education must be the introduction of the 'Free School Day' proposed by the children in *Bread is Free* (Willow, 2001). This policy would mean that education would be really free, with no family having to worry

about the cost of any item a child needs to attend school and participate fully in every aspect of school life.

In summary, it is clear that poverty impacts considerably on children's experience of primary schooling. It is also clear that, while initiatives like the Extended Schools programme may help to counter some of the worst of those impacts, the question of income adequacy for families with children has to be revisited. Education is notionally free. But, as the older children in this study understood, the more money a family has, they spend relatively less on education and the more their children can relax and enjoy it. For children from poorer families, their understanding of school and the education system will remain narrower and less rich as long as their families remain in poverty. It is clear that the possibility of a child experiencing an education that is likely to produce a fully rounded individual, developed to his/her full potential, is still dependent on parental income.

Notes

Chapter 1

1   Once a child is identified as having SEN, those needs are placed on a register. The level of assessed needs ranges from Stage 1 to 5. For children at Stages 1 to 2, Individual Education Plans are drawn up and the school tries to meet their needs within normal school resources. If the school concludes that the child's needs are so substantial that they cannot be met within the school's resources, then the head teacher will make a request for Statutory Assessment with a view to the child getting a Statement of Special Educational Need. Education authorities or LEAs have a statutory duty to provide resources to meet the needs detailed on a Statement of SEN.

2   Eligibility for Free School Meals is a good proxy for poverty, as these are now available only to the children of families receiving Income Support or means-tested Job Seeker's Allowance.

Chapter 2

1   Advantaged schools had very low levels of entitlement to Free School Meals, while disadvantaged schools had very high (between 50 and 75 per cent) levels of FSM entitlement.

2   The researcher used an alien character from another planet where there are no schools to ask the children about school.

Chapter 3

1   Most of the deaths in the course of the conflict were concentrated in fewer than ten postal code districts. These areas were, and remain, the poorest parts of Northern Ireland. A map of the areas where poverty is most concentrated matches very closely the map of areas where the conflict has been most intense (Fay *et al.*, 1998).

Chapter 4

1   See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/2239861.stm.

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