

# School Shouldn't Cost

The Young People's Poverty and Education Manifesto 2026-31

school shouldn't cost



***“Every child deserves an education; it shouldn’t only be if you can afford it.”***

NO!



St Joseph's Primary, Argyll and Bute

# We have some questions for you.

**“Why do we have families in Scotland that can’t afford to buy the basic things they need for school?”**

Craigie High School (now Greenfield Academy), Dundee

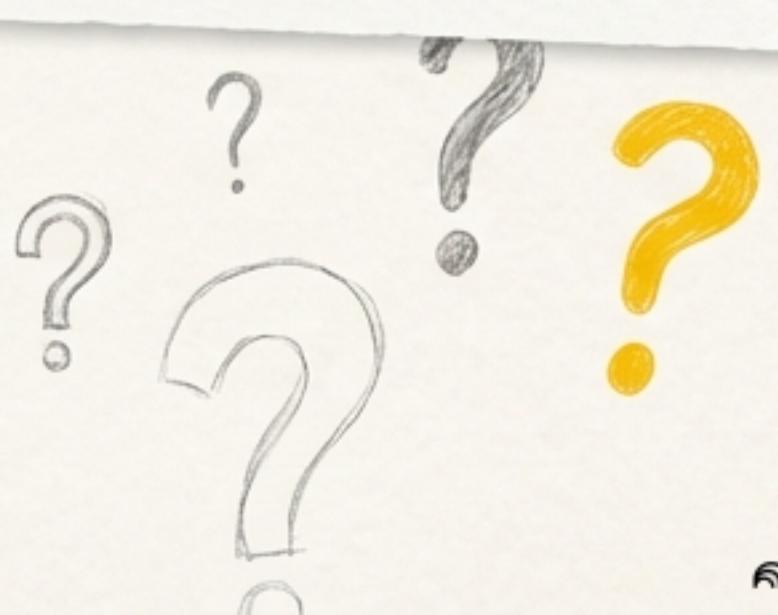
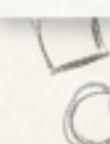


**“Despite Scotland being a developed country, some children are still living in terrible poverty, why is this?”**

Dunlop Primary School, East Ayrshire

**“Why is it taking so long to help children and teens struggling with the cost of the school day, when it’s been happening for years?”**

Trinity High School, South Lanarkshire



For us, the cost of school creates a feeling of exclusion or inclusion.

Poverty can affect how ready we feel to learn, what equipment we have, and whether we can access trips that spark a passion for subjects. It can have a detrimental effect on our learning and can hold us back.



# Thousands of us from across Scotland are asking you to listen.

The calls in this manifesto are based on engagement with young people in schools across Scotland. Your decisions affect our lives.

**350**

schools in the Cost of the School Day Voice network

**5000**

respondents to the Cost of the School Day Big Question

**400**

young people in Challenge Poverty Week consultations

**80**

young people at the Cost of the School Day Young People's Summit 2025

Speak out!

# We have five calls to action.

These are the things that will help everyone take part, learn and feel included at school. We want all parties to commit to these in their manifestos for the 2026 Scottish elections.

1. End child poverty.
2. Fund every school.
3. Help us with the basics.
4. Opportunities for all.
5. Involve us!

FAIR

equity

# 1

## **End child poverty. Make sure our families have what they need so we can come to school ready to learn.**

*“We have the right to a nice home and food but we need money to have it.”*  
– *St Mary’s Primary School, West Lothian*

### **Our Ask**

#### **Increase support for families on low incomes**

Ensure all families can afford essentials. Young people want more money for families who need it, mentioning an increase to the Scottish Child Payment.

#### **Make sure families know about and access support**

Families need to be aware of help like free school meals, clothing grants, and Education Maintenance Allowance. A suggestion from a teacher is to “Ensure schools have a welfare rights officer”.

# 2

## **Fund every school to fully remove cost pressures and help us overcome poverty-related barriers.**

*“We have a youth support worker who encourages opportunities for students that may be at a disadvantage... It means that there’s extra support.” – Young person*

### **Our Ask**

#### **Provide funding to consistently remove cost pressures**

Ongoing additional equity funding (like the Pupil Equity Fund) is crucial. Support needs to be consistent across all schools, not reliant on fundraising. As one young person said, “It should just be like the same quality for everyone. Doesn’t matter what school you go to.”

#### **Invest in the staff who support us**

Teachers, counsellors, nurture staff, youth workers and family link workers are vital. This support helps us feel “more confident, valued, and encouraged.”

# 3

## Help us with the basics we need to learn, take part and feel included at school.

### Food

**97%**

of young people said food is very or quite important in feeling ready to learn at school.



### Our Ask

Urgent progress on universal **Free School Meals** for all Primary and Secondary pupils to remove stigma and ensure nobody misses out.

*“Can school meals be free for all children and young people across Scotland - not just up to P5?”*  
– Fintry Primary School, Dundee

### Uniform

**Our Ask:** Keep uniform costs down by ensuring the government's guidance is used effectively (e.g., no exclusive suppliers, no mandatory blazers). **Extend the school clothing grant to reach everyone who needs it.**

# 3

(continued)

## Help us with the basics we need to learn, take part and feel included at school.

### Digital Access

**Our Ask:** Provide 1:1 personal digital devices and connectivity across the country to end inconsistent provision.

**Supporting Data:** In a poll of 100 pupils, only **55%** said all young people they knew could access a device to learn. **26%** said no.

*“Some schools have given out iPads but not everyone at home has Wi-Fi so they can’t use it.”* – Young person

### Curriculum Costs

**Our Ask:** Ensure funding is adequate to remove all curriculum costs and provide consistent access to resources like calculators and art supplies.

*“People are able to find their passions and explore subjects without the worry of money.”* – Young person

# 4

## Opportunities for all. Help all of us benefit from life-changing school trips and activities.

**“If you miss out because you can’t afford it, you could miss out on something you’re really passionate about, something that you want to do later on in life.”**

– Auchenharvie Academy, North Ayrshire

### Our Ask

- Fund equal access to ‘rite of passage’ residential and Secondary trips.
- Take action on trip transport costs, especially for rural and island schools.
- Invest in free and low-cost opportunities in and out of school.

# 48%

of Primary children said they didn’t think or weren’t sure that everyone in their school would be able to attend a big ‘rite of passage’ trip.

# 5

# Involve us! We can help make our schools and Scotland better.

**“We are the ones going and experiencing it... It’s important you hear from us so teachers and the government can improve on things that are affecting people. We might have new ideas you didn’t think about.”**

– West Calder High School, West Lothian

The Right to feel  
safe, healthy and  
secured...

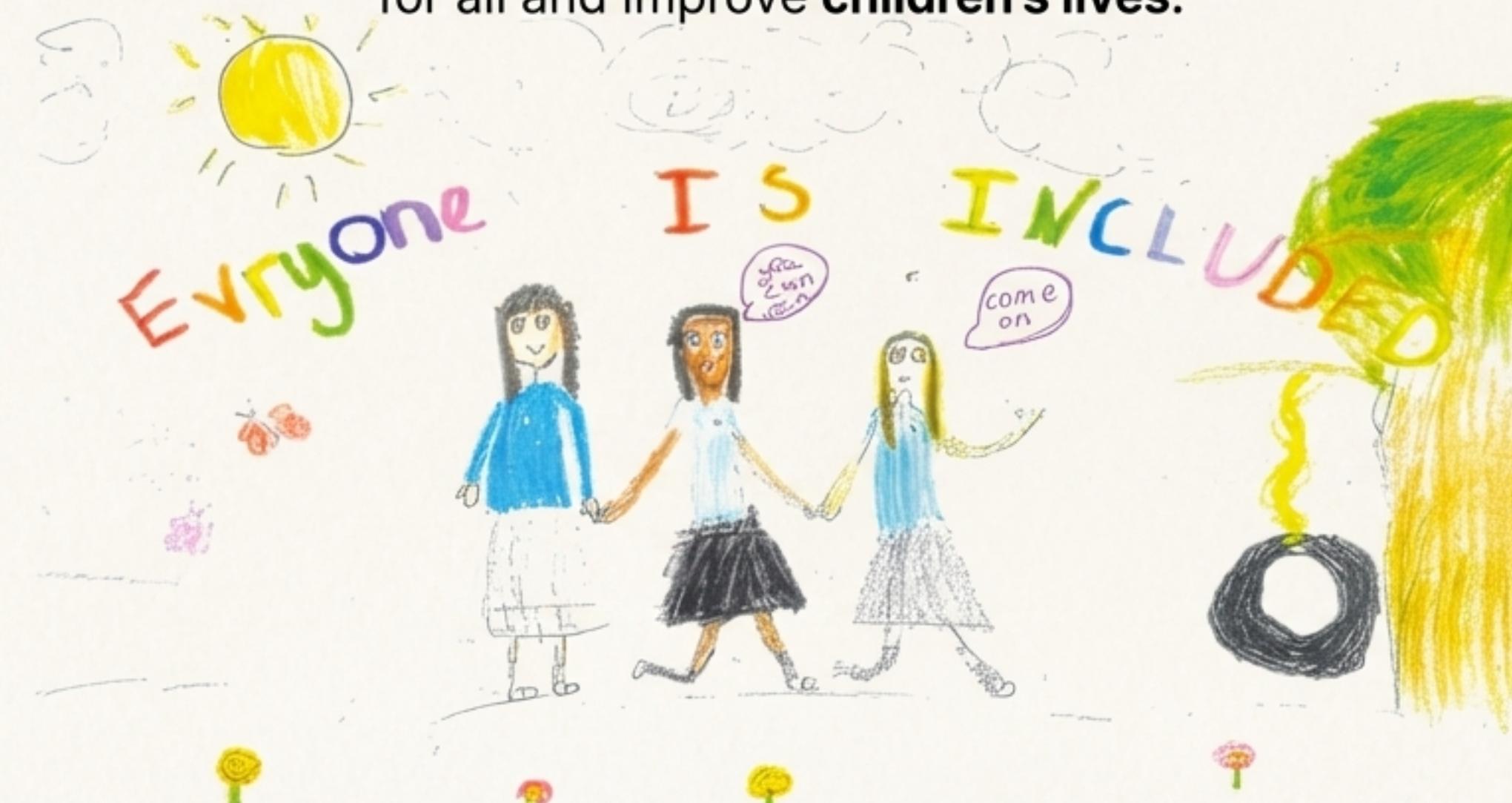
A chance to have  
their voice heard  
and valued!

## Our Ask

- Be ambitious about youth voice. Build systems to hear from a diverse range of young people on an ongoing basis.
- Create a **clear pipeline from schools to government** so our views genuinely influence the policies that affect our daily lives.

# This is your chance to build a better future with us.

We feel strongly that money shouldn't affect our educational experiences. Poverty is still affecting our education in so many ways. The cost of the school day needs to be fixed everywhere, for everyone, as soon as possible. By adopting **these five calls**, you can remove cost barriers to education once and for all and improve **children's lives**.



# Show us that you care about our future.

Yours sincerely,

*Skye, Struan, Daisy, Mollie, Hollie, Chloe, Liv, Brooke and Evie  
on behalf of the Cost of the School Day Voice Network*