

## Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey Findings 2023:

### School Transport: Summary

The following information provides a summary of school transport issues in relation to poverty, as identified by practitioners and professionals across Wales. This information has been provided to Children in Wales through our [Annual Child & Family Poverty Survey Findings report 2023](#). The report looks at the impact of poverty across many aspects of children's lives, not just education. Crucially, through these surveys, children, young people, practitioners and professionals are able to share their views and experiences of poverty in Wales and to highlight the current impact and issues that are being faced on a daily basis in Wales.

**Transport costs and availability** are identified as one of the top 5 poverty related issues in the survey. This affects not just those in rural areas, but also those in more populated locations. The most common areas of impact cited in the surveys, relate to **education**, employment and childcare.

*"Transport costs affecting parents abilities to take children to school. Not all homes are within the school catchment areas and many schools have closed leaving villages without a school and then the public transport is not arranged around school timetables etc. It is impossible for many families."*

With families struggling financially to meet even their basic needs, increasingly, families are reducing the number of days that their children attend school, thus reducing transport costs and therefore increasing their budget for other areas, such as essential items including; food; energy; and rent.

*"Sharp increase in families not being able to transport their children to school....families are unable to afford to take their children to school 5 days a week".*

In relation to **associated costs of education**, practitioners and professionals identified the affordability of school transport as increasingly difficult for families. In 2022, just 5% identified this as having the greatest financial impact on families, however, in 2023, this figure significantly increased, with 12% of practitioners identifying that **school transport costs are difficult for families to manage**.

Practitioners and professionals noted that there is a tangible **inequity of opportunity** for children and young people living in poverty. For many, **getting to school was difficult** as not all children are entitled to free school transport. These costs directly correspond to the **rise in flexible schooling requests**, or in some cases, full-time home schooling. With families increasingly unable to afford transport, practitioners identified this as one of the reasons for more children being absent from school. This was cited as reducing access to educational opportunities and a cause of inequity. Practitioners identified that school provides more than *"just education"*.



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*“Families are requesting a flexible schooling plan (a mixture of mainstream school and home schooling) in order to try to overcome this”.*

The impact of these costs are tangible, resulting in an increasing number of children being absent from school. This is also likely to affect the emotional health of children as they may feel increasingly isolated, have reduced access to peer support or fall behind with their school work. Those in receipt of free school meals are also impacted by reduced school attendance, as are those who receive educational support or additional learning provision.

*“Families are simply not sending children to school if they cannot afford the transport costs.”*

The cost of getting to school for disabled and additional learning needs children, is also cited as difficult or prohibitive. Whilst some are able to access funded, individual transport, others do not meet the current criteria and this cost is borne by their families.

The impact of reduced school attendance may also affect parents. For example, increased food costs; increased stress and anxiety; and reduced availability for work whilst home schooling.

Whilst the cost of living increase has exacerbated this situation, it should be noted that our previous surveys show that school transport costs have always been an issue for many families living in poverty or on low incomes. This is not just a post-pandemic issue.

**Practitioners are calling for school transport to be addressed:**

- Free transport for all learners in full-time education
- Increased accessibility to school transport
- Increased availability of school transport for those living in rural areas.

**Children and young people themselves, also stated the need for free school transport.**

**For further information, please contact:**

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