

Research finds link between reducing stigma of poverty in schools and improved math, reading skills

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The effect of the intervention on educational outcomes of pupils (KS2 Scores and Progress) and absences presented as an event study. Blue points and bars are the lead school years and the red points and bars are the lag school years. Credit: *Economics Letters* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.econlet.2024.111614

Researchers from Newcastle University have identified a link between reducing the stigma of poverty in schools and the reading and math attainment of pupils.

One in three U.K. children are currently living in [poverty](#). While the report acknowledges that schools alone cannot tackle poverty, they "can implement policies that tackle the stigma of poverty and ensure that the school day is more equitable."

The finding comes from the [article](#) "Does tackling poverty related barriers to education improve school outcomes?" published in *Economics Letters*, which analyzed the impact of Poverty Proofing the school day. The work was led by Dr. Morgan Beeson and Professor John Wildman, from Newcastle University Business School, and Dr. Josephine Wildman.

Poverty Proofing the school day is a nationally recognized program that works with schools to remove barriers for students living in poverty.

The research team looked at primary schools in the North East, comparing 38 primary schools that had recently undergone Poverty Proofing, to the region's other 292 [primary schools](#).

They found that pupils from all financial backgrounds benefitted from improvements in attainment. Over a two-year period after schools took action to remove barriers for those living in poverty, scores improved by approximately 5%.

To confirm this trend, the team separately analyzed groups of children who received free school meals and therefore most likely to be living in poverty, and those who were not. The research pointed to a potential

improvement in engagement in learning as a result of a reduction in disruptions caused by the consequences of poverty.

John Wildman, Professor of Economics at Newcastle University said, "Poverty is a trap that weights heavily on children. If schools can make sure that poverty is left at the school gate, our results suggest that educational outcomes can improve and perhaps, in the long run, help pupils escape that trap."

Morgan Beeson, Research Associate at Newcastle University, said, "What makes this research exciting is that by supporting children most impacted by poverty, the school environment can be made better for every child. The substantial impact on children's learning underscores the urgent need for [policy makers](#) to consider interventions like Poverty Proofing."

Lorna Nicoll, Operations Lead at Children North East, said, "Every year our teams speak to over 30,000 children, families and staff about the impact finances have on their experiences of the school day. Time and time again we see [financial pressures](#) impacting pupils' opportunity to thrive, whether through hunger, lack of learning resources, bullying or missing out on special moments. It is a huge milestone for researchers to demonstrate the link between our work removing those barriers and the educational outcomes and attendance of children in school."

Changes schools have made as part of Poverty Proofing include making it harder to identify [children](#) accessing free school meals, ensuring that all cost-related support is given discretely, minimizing or eliminating curriculum and after school clubs costs and giving families long notice periods about costs so they can financially plan.

More information: Morgan Beeson et al, Does tackling poverty related barriers to education improve school outcomes? Evidence from the North East of England, *Economics Letters* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.econlet.2024.111614](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2024.111614)

Provided by Newcastle University

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