



# Poverty Proofing® Case Study Wednesfield Academy

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## Introduction

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For Wednesfield Academy, understanding disadvantage has always been a priority. With around 46% of pupils eligible for pupil premium and students arriving from almost 50 feeder primary schools across Wolverhampton, school leaders are acutely aware of the diverse experiences and challenges facing their community.

However, while pupil premium data provided one part of the picture, leaders wanted to understand more about the experiences of families whose circumstances might not be reflected through traditional measures of disadvantage.

As Vicky Hayward explains:

**"We've got lots of structures and systems in place for our pupil premium children, but what we were really interested in was how much that was touching the other families that maybe don't qualify for that particular bracket of support."**

Mark Haywood, the Strategic Education Lead for Families First commissioned a Poverty Proofing the School Day audit to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers affecting pupils and families and to explore whether existing support was reaching the right children in the right ways.

## Seeing the School Through Different Eyes

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The audit provided an opportunity to gather detailed feedback from students, families and staff, offering an external perspective on school life.

For a busy secondary school, the scale and depth of the work proved particularly valuable.

**"That level of detail was invaluable. As leaders, being able to unpick it strategically was really helpful because gathering that information in the same way ourselves would be difficult."**

The process itself was straightforward and manageable, with Children North East working closely alongside the school to ensure minimal disruption while capturing a broad range of views.

Importantly, the findings prompted reflection not only on what support was available, but also on how effectively it was being communicated.

Several comments from pupils suggested that opportunities and support already existed within school but were not always visible to everyone.

While some perceptions did not always match reality, leaders saw this as a valuable finding in itself.

**"We'd sometimes find ourselves saying, 'I'm surprised someone said that because actually we've got this, this and this in place.' But then it raises the question: do people know about it?"**

## Challenging Assumptions About Disadvantage

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One of the most significant findings related to perceptions of fairness around pupil premium support.

The audit highlighted concerns from some pupils, parents and staff who felt that support was sometimes focused too heavily on those formally identified as disadvantaged, while families experiencing financial pressures but not eligible for pupil premium could feel overlooked.

For leaders, this was an important moment of reflection.

**"Pupil premium as a definition is quite broad anyway, and there are families who sit just above the threshold who may still face significant challenges."**

The findings reinforced the need to think beyond labels and take a more personalised approach to understanding need.

Rather than assuming eligibility for a particular funding stream automatically determines the level of support required, the school began exploring ways to develop a richer understanding of individual circumstances.

This has influenced future planning around pupil premium spending, ensuring resources are targeted more carefully based on need and impact.

## Turning Insight into Action

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The audit has already led to both immediate improvements and longer-term strategic changes.

One of the first areas addressed was food provision. Following feedback from pupils about lunchtime experiences, the school organised tasting sessions with students and catering staff, creating opportunities for pupils to discuss food choices, portion sizes and their overall dining experience.

Other changes have focused on practical support for families.

The school has strengthened its approach to uniform provision and is exploring ways to make greater use of pre-loved uniform, helping to reduce costs while widening access to support.

A dedicated staff role has also been expanded to focus specifically on helping families experiencing financial hardship, including signposting parents to community resources, funding opportunities and external support services.

**"Sometimes it's not about the school directly providing financial support. It's about helping families access the support that's already available."**

## Building a More Personalised Approach

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Perhaps the most significant impact of the audit has been on the school's strategic thinking.

Rather than focusing solely on headline indicators such as pupil premium eligibility, leaders are developing new ways of understanding the lived experiences of pupils and families.

This includes piloting pupil and parent surveys designed to build a fuller picture of home circumstances, learning environments and barriers to participation.

Questions explore areas such as access to study space, support with homework and daily routines, helping staff understand factors that may influence a child's experience in school.

The information will be used alongside existing pastoral, safeguarding and academic systems to ensure support is targeted more effectively.

**"It's about finding out more about the child and the family rather than making assumptions. We want to understand what's really going on."**

The school has also reviewed how interventions are implemented, including expanding support for younger pupils who need help with foundational numeracy skills and refining processes for identifying and supporting underachievement.

## Creating Sustainable Change

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For Wednesfield Academy, one of the most valuable outcomes of the audit has been the opportunity to think beyond short-term solutions.

While some changes have had an immediate impact, leaders believe the greatest benefits will come from the longer-term shift in culture and decision-making.

**"The audit gave us the opportunity to think really carefully about the things that are going to have the biggest impact over a longer period of time."**

Rather than reacting to challenges as they arise, the school is increasingly focused on identifying need earlier, tailoring support more precisely and ensuring resources are used where they can make the greatest difference.

As Vicky reflects:

**"It's not necessarily impact in terms of facts and figures. It's impact in terms of how we think about the school, how we use information and how we make sure we're supporting the right children at the right time."**

## Looking Ahead

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The school plans to continue building on the findings and is already exploring opportunities for future Poverty Proofing work.

For leaders, the process has provided valuable insight, challenged assumptions and strengthened their understanding of the community they serve.

Asked what advice they would give to other schools considering an audit, the response was simple.

**"Just do it. We got a lot out of it."**

Through Poverty Proofing, Wednesfield Academy has not only identified practical improvements but has also developed a deeper understanding of disadvantage in all its forms, helping ensure support reaches those who need it most.