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“At risk of exclusion”? A study of the experiences of and support provided for ten young people aged 14-16 in two large, urban secondary schools.

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

University of Warwick

Centre for Education Studies

February 2018

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to many people who have helped me over several years with my study and the thesis writing that followed, but especially Dr Hartas, whose advice and support was important in many ways throughout the period, from inception and discussion of the original ideas to completion of the final document. Her patience, perseverance, challenge, encouragement and empathy, when needed, have been vital. Thanks to Dr Hammond, too, in this respect, for giving up many hours, providing essential support at a critical time.

The staff and students who welcomed me into their schools, gave up their time, answered my questions and took an interest in the project, made the process of data collection enjoyable, as well as thought-provoking. Thanks especially to the senior staff, without whose support and help with organising visits, interviews and meetings, I would not have completed it.

My wife, Jane, has provided a priceless combination of emotional and academic support, as we have gone through the health and project-related challenges of the past few years. Thanks to her for that and to Chris and Clare, whose interest in and support for what I have been doing have also been invaluable.

Finally, for the students, the following lines from a song by John Grant are dedicated to them. The lines have helped me enjoy many a walk and I think several of the students would have been quite amused by them too:

“I’m sorry that they didn’t hand it to me on a silver platter like they did to you. I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to become, the man *you think* I should aspire to!”

I hope they all became the people *they* aspired to!

DECLARATION

The work in this thesis was developed and conducted by the author between October 2012 and February 2018. I declare that, apart from work whose authors are explicitly acknowledged, this thesis and the materials contained in this thesis represent original work undertaken solely by the author. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

This study explored how and why some young people are considered “at-risk” of school exclusion, focusing on the implications for a cohort in the latter stages of compulsory education in two large urban secondary schools in the Midlands. Interviews, undertaken with students at four points during one academic year and with staff, alongside detailed data from records and files, were analysed with the interpretivist techniques of Constructivism and Document Analysis to identify the characteristics that influenced the students’ status, their schools’ provision and policy response processes and their experiences in the school environment and wider. A review of existing literature showed that whilst those “at-risk” share common characteristics, especially low socioeconomic status, the combination, extent and even timing of their influence is difficult to assess, such that response and intervention panaceas are unlikely to be found. This research showed that whilst the cohort completed their compulsory schooling, they were, perhaps, less successful in core academic outcomes and were also subject to variability and inconsistency in school responses and interventions, related to the influences of interpretation and dispositions on staff roles and policy implementation. The study concludes that deeper understanding of needs, staff training, a more relevant curriculum and greater involvement of young people “at-risk” and their parents/carers, in school life and decisions directly affecting them, could improve outcomes. The ramifications are potentially significant, suggesting that schools and policymakers can and should do more to avoid marginalising young people, with improvements that need not involve structural change, new schools, or extensive costs. The suggestions also implicitly challenge the mantra of recent national policy

and developments in secondary education, that raising young peoples' aspirations and diversifying provision are preconditions for improved social mobility.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 AIMS

For a group of young people “at-risk of school exclusion” this study set out to find out why they were regarded as “at-risk”, how the implications of their status affected their experiences and progress through the educational provision made for them and any outcomes emerging at the end of the period of their compulsory schooling. It aimed to identify the characteristics inherent in a cohort of such young people at two schools, comparing and categorising them to establish, if possible, any concurrence between these and others considered “at-risk” in different settings and circumstances. A further aim was to show how they were supported towards amelioration or mitigation of “at-risk” status, whether it was consistent, how and why variations in support were manifest and, if possible, how it appeared to influence outcomes.

Overall, the intention was to explain how planning, actions and the decisions being taken by and for the students related to events and influences in their daily lives and more widely, through the processes and outcomes of their educational provision, including the progression opportunities available to them. A group of 10 young people “at-risk of exclusion”, aged 15-16, were studied during one academic year, 2012-13. Using their previous records, consideration was also given to earlier events, experiences and decisions made by and for them. The following is a list of the central questions that were considered.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What characterises a young person as being at risk of exclusion from school? Is it possible to identify a range of characteristics or factors that place young people “at risk” of exclusion and assess the extent to which they are evident?
2. Can “at-risk” factors in the school environment and beyond be mitigated through interventions and the provision of support?
3. Can “at risk” status be ameliorated or mitigated by the curriculum, achievement and opportunities to make choices?

1.3 PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH INTEREST

The questions to be addressed initially arose from my professional work, having had responsibility for planning and implementing an inclusive curriculum in a large, mixed urban secondary school. My perception was that some students were not provided for consistently and effectively, especially those for whom their initially established curriculum was subject to temporary or permanent modification. The decisions and pathways made available for such students seemed to be too open to chance, depending upon which colleagues dealt with them, often those with pastoral responsibility. Their subjective understanding of the students, along with personal interpretations of the policy and planning options available, appeared to underpin

decisions, with varying degrees of involvement from external agencies, other colleagues, parents and, most important, the students themselves. I wanted to find out if this was a valid perception and, more broadly, to understand and explain the complexity of factors that worked in combination to produce actions and decisions that were influential in the students' development during the final stage of their compulsory education, so that recommendations could be suggested and future improvements made.

Much previous research in this field had focused on alternative education provision, concerned with its quality and perceived effectiveness, in the context of what happens after provision has been made, rather than why it was made or thought to be appropriate. This also applies to the reporting of official data and statistics by educational agencies. My contention was that if greater attention was paid to the events, activities and processes that gave rise to actions and decisions being taken, it could lead to a better understanding of whether the alternatives provided were the best, or even appropriate for the individuals involved. The evidence currently available suggests that it may not be either. Regarding post-compulsory education experiences, Strand and Fletcher (2014) explain that, "There is widespread consensus in the research literature that young people who are excluded from school are at far greater risk of a variety of negative outcomes, including poor educational attainment, prolonged periods out of employment; poor mental and physical health; involvement in crime; and homelessness (Gregory, Skiba and Noguera, 2010; Gazeley, 2010; Pirrie et al, 2011, DfE, 2010; Daniels and Cole, 2010; Maag, 2012)." (Strand and Fletcher, 2014: 4)

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study lies in the contribution it makes to understanding and potentially improving provision for young people “at-risk of exclusion” at the institutional level, focusing on how relationships, practice and processes work at school, in combination with operations and resources, to influence and affect their experiences and progression opportunities. As it affects the deployment of available resources in schools and, to some extent, culture and ethos, this has implications for the provision available to other children and the quality of their school life.

Although the research was intended to answer questions that might help improve provision to cater for the needs of those identified, these wider implications regarding behavioural issues or conflict between teachers and those considered “at-risk of exclusion” affect the learning environment of peers and can also take up a high proportion of support staff time. Alternative education provision (AEP) can be relatively expensive and disruptive to arrangements made for timetabling and the curriculum. Units provided for students withdrawn from classes can also be costly and require dedicated staffing, which sometimes may not be suited to their specific needs.

It can be argued that there are ramifications to these examples, considering their implications for schools in the light of educational policy in the last twenty years, that has encouraged increasingly diverse provision through the expansion of Academies, Free Schools and Studio Schools, for example, at first by a Labour government pre-2010 and subsequently the “Coalition” and Conservative governments. Concurrently, Local Authorities, who had hitherto overseen and

supported provision for students such as those “at-risk of exclusion” have seen their funding and capacity to exercise their responsibilities reduced. If total funding and resources available for schools becomes diluted and fragmented across a wider range of institutions, provision for those who are “at-risk” or marginalised, with specific needs requiring high-quality bespoke provision, could be squeezed, or at least limited. Current concerns surrounding provision for those with mental health issues could increase pressures further still. In view of these concerns and as the wider issues evolve, the study’s focus on provision at the institutional level, as outlined, is needed. In the Literature Review that follows, it will also be shown that the focus helps to distinguish the thesis from other work in the field which, although concerned with similar issues, has tended to look for policy resolutions to mitigate the difficulties faced by young people “at-risk” and their schools, rather than adopting an approach that encourages reflection on, and improvement in, school practices and processes.

Before going on to summarise the chapters that follow, a comment on using the term “at-risk” in the thesis, which other researchers have questioned, may be helpful to consider and clarify the emphasis given to issues raised. Although they continue to use “at-risk” as the most appropriate available “working” term, Archer et al (2010) challenge its use as a descriptor for young people, suggesting it is a value-laden, social construct, that influences research and the emphases of policy development. They contend that “marginalised” may be a more appropriate description in terms of what happens to those facing potential exclusion and the outcomes they might face, as suggested by Strand and Fletcher’s (2014) evidence, referred to above. However, whilst acknowledging that “marginalised” may be a

more accurate term, implying that rather than the needs of young people being fully addressed, those presenting challenges may be “put to one side”, this paper will continue to use “at-risk”, in line with convention, as Archer et al (2010) also concluded they would.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents a Literature Review of research in the field, which, as it explains, has been diverse in terms of the disciplines and methodologies deployed. The chapter attempts to convey the significance of this diversity, relating it to the aims and research questions of this thesis. Thus, consideration is given to the factors underlying “at-risk of exclusion” status, before considering various approaches that have been taken in responding to it and the contributions that researchers and authors have made towards understanding these and their implications. Alternative curriculum provision is given a specific focus before moving on to contrast broader approaches that have been taken in different international contexts, highlighting them to inform the later discussion. Similarly, focus is given to distinctive contributions of methodological approaches to show how they have contributed to knowledge and understanding of “at-risk” status and provide some context in terms of the benefits of alternative methodologies, their relationship to the different disciplines, and time at which they were produced.

Chapter 3

The Methodology provides details of the participants in the study, profiling the students and schools involved to introduce them individually and collectively, whilst

beginning to explore the relevance of data regarding them being considered as “at-risk”. After that, detailed consideration is given to explaining which methods of data collection were used, why and how they were deployed. The methods, types and processes of data collection, relationships between them and how they were collated and analysed, are explained and justified, along with the choices made as issues emerged and the primary research evolved. Diagrams and tables are presented to synthesise the information and complement the explanation. The final section deals with the ethical considerations that were made prior to its inception and throughout the study period.

Chapter 4

The “Findings” chapter is subdivided into themes. To complement the data emerging from the Literature Review, the first theme reflects what was found in the process of identifying and categorising factors that appeared to have led to the study cohort being considered as “at-risk” of exclusion. It does so in the light of records on their SEN classifications and patterns of attendance and exclusion with commentary on apparent inconsistencies that were found.

The second theme deals with relationships between staff and students, focussing on support issues. Having established that some students faced more specific problems than others, sections are dedicated to exploring responses to these and variations in the types and levels of support provided in school. Support arrangements are further examined, showing the range and types available, internal and external to the school environment, including parents /carers, peers and agencies, with comment on the extent to which these appeared to influence students.

Theme 3 links support issues to curriculum and learning processes and the contribution of these towards students' aspirations, progress and achievements. Data on students' prior performance, targets, progress and achievements are provided in this section to complement profile data from previous sections and enable later comment on it in the discussion regarding responses to "at-risk" status, support and curriculum issues.

Theme 4 considers aspects of policy that appeared to be relevant and directly related to the cohort's status and experiences in being "at-risk" of exclusion, especially regarding the previous themes. As well as its content, a significant area of concern for the thesis was the effects policy appeared to have on students, with interconnected perspectives, perceptions and interpretations impinging on policy writing and implementation locally and nationally, often with unintended consequences.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5's discussion is also subdivided, beginning again with the factors that underlie "at-risk" status as applied to the cohort, synthesising information from the previous sections, commenting upon it and drawing conclusions to directly address the first research question, forming the basis upon which the rest of the section is structured. The second and third research questions are subsequently discussed, before the study's overarching conclusions are reached in the final section, with recommendations and suggestions for future research provided, in the light of

examples of events and developments that have occurred since the research was undertaken. It also outlines some of the difficulties that were encountered in undertaking the study, its strengths and weaknesses and the contribution it has made to the field, in terms of data deployment, approach and the emphasis on improving school processes and practices.

Whilst the primary research focus for the study was qualitative and relatively small scale, its implications are significant, highlighting the ramifications of the ways in which young people “at-risk of exclusion” face marginalisation at school and in society, with the prospect that increasing numbers of them may do so in future, as the range and types of provision made for them becomes further diversified. As well as contributing to the field of research, it is hoped, therefore, that the study, its conclusions and recommendations will be considered by practitioners and others providing support for those at risk of marginalisation, at national local and school levels.

Abbreviations:

The following are used throughout:

DH1 = Deputy Head Curriculum at School 1.

SS1 = Main Support Staff contact at School 1

DH2 = Deputy Head Curriculum at School 2.

HOY2 = Head of Year at School 2

SS2 = Main Support Staff contact at School 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

To recap, the aims of the study were to identify the characteristics that led to a cohort of young people being considered “at risk of exclusion”, categorise these and compare them with others, showing how they were supported towards amelioration or mitigation of “at-risk” status, whether the support was consistent, how and why variations were manifest and what were the outcomes at the end of their compulsory education at age 16.

This section shows that attempts to address “at-risk” status have been undertaken within contrasting research and policy contexts, over time and in different places and circumstances. The context in which research in this field is conducted changes quickly. Changing socio-political and socio-cultural environments can affect research frames, conclusions and suggestions made for further work. Therefore, the review attempts to account for relevant aspects of these changing conditions and place them into perspective, whilst retaining an emphasis that locates the thesis in its contemporary circumstances.

As well as changing contexts, the section also considers contrasting approaches that have been taken towards identifying and highlighting the significance of “at-risk” factors, policy responses and measures aimed at mitigating “at-risk” status. These have varied depending on whether, for example, the research purpose is academic, its focus is “official” for government use and policy-making, or if it is otherwise sponsored. They also appear to vary depending on where they originate, and the

time at which they are produced. Therefore, in attempting to draw attention to these differences of approach, the review highlights the eras in which aspects of policy and research were produced.

The review begins with consideration of others' findings, regarding the factors underlying "at-risk of exclusion" status, largely in distal and proximal terms, but underlining the interrelationships between them, to help inform and answer the first research question. Some research has attempted to isolate factors or interrelated variables so that specific responses can be suggested, where others provide explanation of the broader, underlying issues that are manifest in various ways. The categorisation of factors into distal and proximal helps to provide clarity in this respect although the distinction has limitations, as will be exemplified, especially when the proximal implications of policy implementation of the "45-day rule" are shown. Subsequently, responses to "at-risk" status are explored, considering the contributions made and approaches taken by researchers and policymakers, regarding interventions aimed at amelioration or mitigation of its underlying conditions. Examples of a variety of approaches are offered and placed in context, contrasting the provision of alternative curricula in Britain, with approaches and responses in two other countries with comparable education systems.

Organising the review in this way means that apparently similar factors or responses feature in more than one section, but as explained above, the rationale is to emphasise that the timing, location and context in which research and policy are set, appear to influence commentary and, more importantly, responses. The following example is offered as clarification. Successive governments in Britain, before and

after 2010, developed policies aimed at raising achievement and aspiration, within a broader context of attempting to improve social mobility. Their similar aims might have been expected to be reflected in cohesive and sequential policy planning and implementation but, as will be shown, their approaches were quite different, as were their actions and the outcomes that emerged from these, for reasons including prevailing economic conditions and political philosophy. Therefore, it can be argued that this literature review should acknowledge the conditions and temporal context within which the concepts and policies were developed and contrast them. Since the implications can and will be shown to have influenced the provision made available for the study's cohort, addressing the second and third research questions, the organisation of the review takes this into account. Further, by contrasting approaches taken in Britain at the time of the study, with approaches and responses in other countries, the discussion is broadened, informing its conclusions and recommendations. One important aspect of difference, explored later, is the contrast between approaches in Britain and the USA, the former of which aims, essentially, to instil aspiration in young people "at-risk", where the other espouses systematic identification of individuals' negative traits and characteristics from as early an age as possible, with intervention programmes based on the outcomes. The first could be argued to emphasise "self-motivation", the second "nurture", but the underlying rationale for both is to promote the benefits and principles of meritocracy in the relative societies.

Similarly, to highlight contrasting approaches to the issues, the review considers alternative methodologies in a discrete section, despite there being references throughout to quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative research has often

aimed to establish correlations between factors, whilst qualitative research has focussed in more detail on substantive issues, to suggest recommendations and solutions. The section dedicated to this shows that there has been some convergence and corroboration of findings regarding understanding of which issues need to be resolved, but the conclusions of quantitative research often suggest a need for results to be complemented by the depth of analysis afforded by qualitative techniques. This acknowledgement is important in the context that nuanced official statistics and data can be used to rationalise decisions regarding provision for those “at-risk” as is clarified later, when reviewing policy changes that appear to have been based upon contradictory research findings. This also is relevant to the study’s conclusions and recommendations.

The area of study is wide, comprising many related fields in which researchers might be interested and disciplines in which they are engaged. For example, a focus upon those “at-risk”, may be associated with the risk of underachievement, the risk of providing alternative education in the 14-16 phase, or what happens to young people after the period of their compulsory education. Studies considering the risk of and processes involved in school exclusion have focused upon permanent, rather than fixed-term, or internal exclusion. However, as will be shown, research findings have often uncovered similar underlying conditions and issues, because of the interrelationships between them. Therefore, research findings from any of the foci described above have been considered relevant to the circumstances of young people “at risk of exclusion”.

2.1 FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' STATUS AS "AT RISK OF EXCLUSION"

2.1.1 Social class and distal factors

Using quantitative National Child Development Study (NCDS) data from cohorts born in 1958 and 1970, Schoon and Parsons (2002) assessed the relationships between parental social class, teenage aspiration and educational attainment and subsequent impact upon occupational achievement. They found that, "In both cohorts (1958 and 1970), parental social class is a strong predictor of both educational achievement and teenage aspirations". They also found significant correlations between measures of social disadvantage and academic achievement in later occupational attainment. However, "...for the later born cohort academic achievement plays a more important role in influencing the self-conceptions of the young people." (Schoon and Parsons 2002: 1487). This research was originated in Britain, from a discipline base of Psychology.

Thompson (2011), quotes data from the Office for National Statistics (DCSF/ONS, 2009), showing that 34% of those permanently excluded from school and 28% of persistent truants, became NEET¹ post-16 (Thompson, 2011: 795). As such, the factors underlying "at risk of exclusion" and "at risk of NEET" status are likely to be linked. Much work was being undertaken at the time of the study to understand the links and their impact on the education and prospects of 14-19 age range students. Using source data including LSYPE and other research, Thompson

¹ NEET: Not in Education Employment or Training.

(2011) suggests that there are “non-controllable” factors, including social class, related to lack of educational attainment, that underpin NEET status. He also identifies gender as a risk factor for boys over girls, the significance of which increases with age. From Brynner and Parsons (2002), he notes, however, that girls living in poverty are more likely to be NEET, as are boys who live in inner city and/or social housing (Thompson, 2011: 794). Thus, gender issues can be regarded as “classed”, a point also made by Archer et al (2010), who suggest that ethnicity can be similarly treated.

Thompson’s (2011) findings, relating socio-economic or social class factors to achievement, have been corroborated by much other domestic and international research. Like Thompson, Gregg and Washbrook (2011) used LSYPE data to show that whilst young peoples’ attainment trends originate prior to age 7, the gaps widen between the ages of 7 and 11. Those from lower SES groups who had done well, fell back and were overtaken by those from higher SES groups. In addition, those from lower SES groups who were already underperforming, performed even worse. Maternal achievement and changing attitudes between ages 14-16 are important factors in achievement rates, they claim, a point developed from similar findings by Chowdry et al (2009). Again, using LSYPE data-sets, they showed that socioeconomic factors appeared to impact on the performance, attitudes and aspirations of young people, which, they say, change between ages 14 and 16. However, 24% of the “poorest” (their term) truant at 14, compared with 8% of the “richest”. In terms of performance, just 20% of the “poorest” fifth achieve 5A*-C including English and Maths at GCSE compared with 75% for the “richest” fifth.

Related to this, 15% of the poorest fifth are NEET at age 17 as opposed to 2% of the “richest”. Socioeconomic status thus appears to be a significant factor.

In “The Zombie stalking English schools”, Diane Reay (2006) argues that social class is still very much in evidence in determining life chances and that Britain has the worst record of mobility of any advanced economy. Citing Bourdieu and Champagne’s view that ruling education institutions are dominated and run by the “White-British” middle class, Reay suggests that the education system compounds inequality rather than alleviating it. Using Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, she claims that “... the educational gap between the classes has widened over the last ten years.” (Reay, 2006: 304). She suggests that a “critical mass” of white working class youth leave school without qualifications, including 10% of students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). The attainment gap between the classes is as high as ever, but mirrors the “growing material gap between the rich and poor in UK society” (Reay, 2006: 304).

Having been asked by their sponsor to draw a sample from those who were hardest to reach, Finlay et al (2010) undertook a qualitative study with a methodology focussed upon young peoples’ perspectives and descriptions of their circumstances. They worked with a cohort over three days, using varied techniques including drama, storyboard writing, video and photography. The details that emerged were recorded from what the young people in their study told them. Although their cohort was already NEET, the findings suggested that school exclusion had been an underlying contributory factor to their status, alongside a range of others, including social and economic deprivation, drug use, alcohol problems, eating disorders and

sexual habits. Finlay et al's direct association of school exclusion and achievement with socioeconomic status and deprivation has also been noted in American research. From quantitative work attributed to Theriot et al (2008), Dupper et al (2009) note that students' poverty level (their term), linked to the numbers of previous in and out-of-school suspensions and the "severity of the last infraction" can be used to predict school exclusion (Dupper et al, 2009: 8). Another American study noted that, "A strong positive relationship between poverty and school failure has been documented in numerous studies, and our results corroborated this research" (Christle et al, 2007: 333). Also, in a review of research, Hoff et al (2015) acknowledge that there is "a wide range of variables correlated with dropout", including demographic variables, identified as "socio-economic status", "race and ethnicity", and "disability status" (Hoff et al 2015: 3). It seems, therefore, that there is wide agreement on the role that socioeconomic status plays as a factor underpinning "at-risk" status and achievement, in conjunction with other factors.

2.1.2 Proximal factors

In addition to the distal, or "non-controllable" factors described above, Thompson (2011) identified a wide variety of proximal factors, working in conjunction with them. Family background and circumstances were noted as significant including, for example, parenting, parental break up, young people acting as "carers", relocation and other family members being out of work. Further "at-risk" factors included SEN status, bullying, personal traumas, disaffection, living independently, homelessness, disability, drug abuse, personal illness and gap years. As noted with the distal factors, there were similarities between Thompson's findings and those of

Greg and Washbrook (2011), who identified proximal factors including parental background and achievement, attitudes, behaviour and school environment.

Interested in the strengths of relationships between factors, Strand and Fletcher (2014) showed that prior attainment and absence were regarded as early indicators of future status “at risk of exclusion”, having noted the significance of ethnicity in the literature they reviewed. Their research, which they explain appeared to be corroborated by others, more specifically suggested that students whose origin was Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean were more at risk of fixed-term exclusions than others, even when accounting for SES factors. They raise a question as to whether the greater degree of risk attributed to these students could be accounted for by behavioural characteristics attributable to their ethnicity, or teachers’ perceptions of them and expectations of misbehaviour (Strand and Fletcher, 2014: 32). This blurs the boundaries between distal and proximal as descriptors for categorisation. However, they conclude that schools should consider whether their “reward and sanctions systems” are consistently and fairly applied to remove doubts raised by the question. They also call for more qualitative research to answer the question, of the kind that, perhaps, the discussion section of this thesis addresses considering perceptions and interpretation. A further aspect of research called for was the role of the school and neighbourhood which again, they suggest, requires qualitative understanding. They found that the rates of exclusion between schools were highly variable and suggest that this would justify further investigations, especially of academies records and practices.

Other British research has attempted to identify and establish relationships between variables to tackle specific problems. In a paper for the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER), Filmer-Sankey and McCrone (2012) specified a range of characteristics that placed students at risk. Derived from results of interviews with Local Authority and School representatives, they placed 45 indicators into two main categories. Whilst it would be difficult to classify these as distal and proximal, 17 indicators, referred to as “statistical or factual”, were labelled “Hard” and 28 “Other Personal” (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012: 21). The report was published at a time when Local Authorities were being encouraged to engage in the activity of identification to attract targeted public funding. Their research problem was based on the increasing occurrence of NEET status amongst young people concluding compulsory education, many of whom would have been at risk of school exclusion. They argue that early identification of indicators in young people could help mitigate their chances of future NEET status, by developing specific actions to counter each risk.

Similarly, much research has been undertaken in the USA on the causes and consequences of student “dropout”, as well as to exclusion, or “suspension”. Students dropout from education at various stages. It can be voluntary and is a broader concept than exclusion alone, but is usually related to difficulties faced by young people, including “retention” - being held back a year because of poor performance. Hoff et al (2015) assert that whilst no single factor is ever responsible for students dropping out, there are three “main indicators”, underlying at-risk status, called “The A-B-C Dropout Factors” of Attendance, Behaviour and Course performance. Explanation is provided as to what each of the indicators includes and

evidence given from a wider range of research. They go on to provide details of other “variables” which “...may also be used to attempt to predict the likelihood of a student dropping out of school” (Hoff et al 2015: 3). In addition to “Demographic”, these are identified as “Grade Retention”, “School Climate”, “Engagement” and “Mobility”. Caution is needed in interpreting the terminology, for example, “Mobility” is used to describe students’ transitions between schools, rather than physical conditions, or social mobility. In any case, however, they acknowledge that the research results available show correlational, rather than causal relationships, “We simply do not understand the direct causes of dropout” (Hoff et al 2015: 7).

Peer group influences have also been of interest to researchers. Archer et al (2010) argue that this is not a straightforward relationship, where interactions and relationships with peers inside and out of school result in behaviours that place young people “at-risk”. The argument that they construct identities, seeking and achieving status in peer cultures, suggests that adversarial behaviours are at least partly a product of “educational marginalisation” (Archer et al, 2010: 35). In this sense, behaviours could be construed as an overt or external reaction to the problem of marginalisation rather than the cause of it and the underlying factors, including social status as well as behaviour, may be mutually reinforcing.

Hartas (2016) found that behavioural characteristics, including bullying, were related to low levels of educational aspiration and implied that peer relationships could also be an underlying factor, calling for further investigation into peer groups’ attitudes towards learning. This was felt to be an important consideration if broader

aspiration levels were to be raised, "...considering that aspirations are likely to be indicative of wider processes and influences operating within family but also peer groups." (Hartas, 2016: 1160) Parental roles and relationships were established as influential regarding the aspiration and achievement levels of young people, although there was not such a strong relationship regarding progression to higher education and the extent of influence appeared to depend upon the availability of cultural and other forms of capital.

Thus, it seems that adults, peers and others in the locality and day-to-day environment are influential factors of "at-risk" status, although greater clarity may be needed to show how the influences are manifest and the effects they have. The influence of parents and peers, as applied to the cohort, are considered further in the findings and discussion sections, but aspiration is considered more fully below, as a concept that has been subject to alternative research findings and postulations regarding how levels can be raised to improve young peoples' development and prospects for social mobility. Subsequently, since policy prominence has been given in Britain to raising aspiration, as a need to ameliorate and mitigate the adverse circumstances faced by young people, measures taken are considered alongside curriculum issues in the section on responses to "at-risk" status.

2.1.3 Aspirations

As a proximal "risk" factor, lack of aspiration can negatively influence young peoples' motivation levels and progress. As mentioned, lack of aspiration in young

people and their parents or carers has been highlighted as playing a part in underachievement, including those at risk of exclusion.

Gregg and Washbrook (2011) found that maternal aspiration plays an important positive role in influencing young people, where there exists a strong maternal “locus of control” and where children have hobbies. Maternal aspiration was distinguished from aspiration in the children concerned, although parents’ prior education and children’s “locus of control” also had a bearing. Their conclusion was that promoting parental aspiration is important and that policy needs to support and challenge parents to this end. Chowdry et al (2009) make a similar point, explaining that young people perform better where maternal achievement is higher, but noting that whilst policy interventions to improve conditions and performance may have been influential, there is not enough evidence to confirm this.

Hartas (2016), provides a more nuanced analysis, arguing that various aspects of parental aspiration need to be broken down to understand the relationships between them. Regarding educational aspiration, a parental focus on encouraging children to do homework and take part in extracurricular activities was shown to be less important than providing access to opportunities through cultural and social capital. In this sense, family relationships enriched with dialogue and intellectual engagement were more associated with high aspiration and achievement than what she refers to as “hot-housing” (Hartas, 2016: 1158).

Concurring with Finlay et al's (2010) study, Hayward and Williams (2011) argue that lack of opportunity is more responsible for outcomes than lack of aspiration, although where aspirations are high, they are often unrealistic and fuelled by those who are advising or guiding young people. They further suggest that schools' low expectations of young people undermine their aspirations with poor achievement. In a report on careers advice and guidance, OFSTED (2013) agreed with this analysis, suggesting that opportunities for young people to engage with employers or to learn about the range of possibilities open to them for future career paths were too limited and a restriction on development of their potential.

However, regarding the attitudes of young people towards aspiration, success or underachievement, Te Riele (2006a) explains that whilst behaviour is "mediated" by factors external to them, young people construct their own identities and perceive decision making as the product of their own feelings and aspirations driven by their local and personal circumstances and individuality. She suggests that rather than accepting school values, promoting attainment and academic achievement as success, some young people prefer to create and adopt alternative goals, finding esteem and self-value in friendships and peer groups. Similarly, in relationships with adults, rather than assimilating the potential role model identities that surround them in schools, they reject older adult identities as redundant.

This perspective, along with the similar observations on peer groups of Archer et al (2010) described above, are, perhaps, consistent with what others describe as a "deficit model", regarding aspiration and motivation levels in young people. Archer and Yamashita (2003) suggest that "official" texts (their term) advocating

participation, as offering the rewards of social and economic benefits, have led to public finance being directed into awareness raising programmes, including offering opportunities in post-compulsory education. Quoting Ball et al (2001), however, they note that strong criticisms have been made of the “uni-dimensional, calculative, individualistic, consumer rationalism which predominates in official texts’ and ‘stalk(s) the pages of government white papers on education” (Archer and Yamashita, 2003: 55) This pessimistic assessment of “official” aims is rooted in a view proposing that until structural inequalities are addressed directly by policy, the problems will persist, perhaps irrespective of attempts to raise aspirations. It also appears to question the values underpinning policy development.

A further related concern of Archer and Yamashita (2003) regarding the possibilities for young peoples’ aspirations was that they were bounded by the circumstances in which they found themselves. Accounts are provided of apparently high aspirants whose intentions and expectations differed because of their perceptions about the time, effort and perhaps finance that might be needed to achieve their desired goals. Low self-esteem and uninspiring advice and support were also suggested to have been implicated, the former being linked to perceptions of where they came from as well as their personal attributes. Archer and Yamashita (2003) note that some of their respondents appeared to blame themselves for “educational failure”, but within the context of their local area and their school. They suggest that, “These perceptions were grounded within complex social, identity and institutional processes and were exacerbated by educational policies that impact upon inner city ‘failing’ schools” (Archer and Yamashita, 2003: 67). They also suggest that the views of young people are often lacking in discussions around policy and practice.

The literature on aspiration is, therefore, not straightforward. Assumptions about what aspirations young people can and should have for the benefit of society as well as themselves, can be based upon what seem to be stereotypical value-judgments. As a concept that is not identifiable or quantifiable, policies aimed at improving it have no measurable outcomes. It is, however, a quality perceived as a necessary contributor towards young peoples' improvement and self-fulfilment. As implied by Archer and Yamashita, greater understanding is needed of how schools and staff contribute towards its development. Research that adds to understanding of the interface between policy and communication, as offered by this study, could, therefore, be beneficial.

2.1.4 School exclusion processes and policy as proximal issues

Although students are often unaware of their existence or effects, policy issues at national, local and school levels are wide-ranging and often interlinked, having proximal implications regarding aspiration, the curriculum and work-based learning for those "at risk", as indicated above, but further developed in the sections below including the Discussion. Gazeley (2010) raised concerns about processes leading to the occurrence of exclusions, explaining that young people from specific social and ethnic groups are more likely to be affected, as are those with SEN and Looked After Children, who were often poor attenders and frequently moved around between providers. She points to the rules governing exclusion as being part of the problem, of which the following is an example. It concerns a policy issue and procedures directly linked to and influential upon exclusion decisions, exemplifying

how, in attempting to give clarity, policy provision can have unintended consequences for students' immediate lives and circumstances.

The "45 day" rule, determines an annual maximum that is permissible for temporary exclusion of students, before permanent exclusion must be invoked, involving formal procedures, including the need to justify actions taken and liaise with external agencies and parents/carers regarding the consequences and alternatives available, with the onus on the school to find provision. Gazeley notes the case of one boy who had been found an interim placement rather than a permanent one which she attributes to the "45-day" rule (Gazeley, 2010: 297). One inference was that the boy faced several disruptions to his education, rather than a single, but permanent move, although in this case the ramifications are not explored. Later research by Gazeley suggested the problem had persisted, though. She noted a comment from a local authority interviewee suggesting a disproportionate number of young people with SEN statements continued to be excluded for a fixed term, but none were being permanently excluded as it would trigger local authority intervention (Gazeley et al, 2013: 44).

Gazeley's findings are closely related to those of an Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC, 2012) report. The OCC found evidence of activity where "unofficial" or "informal" exclusions were used, which it defined as, "...situations when a school requires a young person to leave the premises but does not record it as a formal exclusion...", including cases where, "...a young person or their family is 'persuaded' to move school, a move usually sold to the family and the child as an alternative to a permanent exclusion going on the child's record" (OCC, 2012: 16).

Concerned that schools were engaging in illegal practices, the report goes on to identify examples, including an ‘extreme’ case, where a Headteacher had requested the parents of some Year 11 students to keep them at home after the Christmas break, for the rest of the academic year, as an alternative to permanent exclusion.

Thus, school policy appears to play a key role as a “risk” factor with proximal implications, in the incidence of exclusions, along with local and national education policies. This observation is not unique to Britain and its implications can be noted from Christle et al’s USA research, “Consistent with other research findings, we also found a positive relationship between suspension rate and dropout. Schools that rely on exclusionary discipline practices... may actually be impeding the educational progress of students, perpetuating a failure cycle” (Christle et al, 2007: 333).

2.1.5 The importance of relationships with teachers

Relationships between students and teachers can be either a ‘risk’ or a mitigating factor, as the following quote explains, “The most important school-based ‘risk’ factor is the profoundly negative relationship students can experience with some or most of their teachers. Interestingly, the reverse also occurs: positive teacher-student relationships play a key role in re-engaging ‘at risk’ students” (Te Riele, 2006b: 135). Thus, teachers’ influences and attitudes do not always have a negative impact. Complementing Te Riele’s observation, Maguire et al (2000) found that teachers had a very positive effect on actions and decisions when they had a good relationship with young people and mothers or other family members, although

‘designated intermediaries’, such as careers advisers, appeared to have been of little influential significance.

However, Evans et al (2009), interviewed 75 young people NEET, regarding their prior experiences in education. In response to questions on the barriers and factors that had prevented them from learning and making progress at school, relationships with teachers featured significantly. Similarly, in 2012, the OCC identified the expertise of school staff regarding the cognitive, emotional and cultural development of young people with SEN as a “key issue”, since, “Almost every school has a proportion of children with SEN, and practically every teacher will be required to teach children with some type of SEN in the course of their careers” (OCC, 2012: 24). Explaining that lack of understanding and poor relationships can increase disciplinary problems, they called for all trainee teachers to experience programmes that enable them to, “...understand the cultural and other differences commonly found in English society and schools.” (ibid). Further, all existing teachers should be required to refresh their understanding, although the regularity of the expectation was not clarified.

Reay’s (2006) research in two schools included interviews with young people, who suggested that teachers didn’t listen to them, enfranchise them, or involve them in the same way as their middle-class peers. In one of the schools, the lower sets were exclusively comprised of working-class students. While setting was not used in the other, class still appeared to determine opportunity. Reay suggests the need for teacher training to reconsider Bernstein’s proposition that if the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the

child must be in the consciousness of the teacher. The inference is that since teachers and others influence young people, it is important for them to understand the basis and implications of their interactions.

Gazeley's (2010) finding that teachers' attitudes and perceptions of their roles influenced decisions determining the alternatives made available for those at risk of exclusion, resonates with Reay's analysis and Ogg and Kail's (2010) evidence, showing that young people at risk of exclusion have little input or control over decisions made on their own immediate future, a similar point to that made by Archer and Yamashita (2010). Taken together, this suggests there is a need for qualitative understanding, as offered by this study, of the underlying influences surrounding discourses involving young people at risk of exclusion and how decisions about them are made, especially in view of the Marson-Smith et al (2009) finding, in research sponsored by NFER, that choices and future pathways are set in train by decisions made earlier at the age of 14. The call for further qualitative research was also recognised by others such as Schoon and Parsons (2002) and Hopson and Lee (2011), discussed below, regarding school environment or "school climate", along with Strand and Fletcher (2014). The next section considers researchers' findings in relation to these and other issues related to mediation and mitigation of "at risk" status.

2.2 RESPONSES TO “AT RISK” STATUS AND APPROACHES TO MEDIATION, AMELIORATION AND MITIGATION OF THE ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE.

2.2.1 Provision and the curriculum

Links have been made above between “at risk” status and underachievement. The school curriculum has been used in attempts to ameliorate both, especially through what is described as “Alternative Education Provision” (AEP). Alternative provision is often made for young people “at risk of exclusion”, but is not a panacea and the concern that schools use it as a tactic, to displace disruptive students cannot be discounted. Gazeley (2010) suggests that problems can be caused by providing placements inappropriate to individuals’ needs, including students finding teaching methods and learning styles very different from their schools, giving rise to potential difficulties with reintegration when programmes ended. Further, she explains that parents find it difficult to turn down an alternative when it is offered, implying that the influence and role of Headteachers predominate over parents or the needs of the young people in question.

The concept of students’ ‘needs’ and how these are best met has itself been subject to debate. Hayward and Williams (2011) argue that young people aged 14-16 do not need vocational or alternative education provision and suggest that better understanding of needs is required. Their interpretation of ‘needs’ emphasises the core, ‘traditional’ approach, advocated by the Wolf Report (2011) and implemented by the 2010 coalition. This contrasts, however, with an apparently similar observation of the necessity to consider students’ needs, put forward by Archer et al (2010), but suggesting that they must be understood in a broader and deeper

context, for the development of a relevant curriculum (their term) adapted to individual needs and aptitudes, implying that although young people “at-risk” may not be suited by a traditional curriculum with a high core content, vocational education provision may not always be the best alternative, unless it is matched to the aptitudes and capacities of the young people involved and inspires them.

Added to these issues, the quality of teaching in AEP and more generally, for young people “at-risk”, has been noted to have caused difficulties. It can vary considerably between offsite providers, as Gazeley’s quote above infers and which OFSTED (2011) confirmed in their review of alternative provision. Within school, however, those at risk of exclusion are increasingly subject to being looked after by supply teachers of varying quality and non-teaching staff (Archer et al, 2010: 102). A similar point was raised in the “Support and Aspiration” Green Paper suggesting that the most vulnerable pupils are often supported almost exclusively by teaching assistants, “...their routine deployment to pupils most in need seems to be the heart of the problem. Pupils with the most need can become separated from the teacher and the curriculum” (DfE 2011a: 63).

Marson-Smith et al (2009) were interested in how the increasing amount of alternative provision away from the school site – usually colleges or “vocational” providers, would affect those involved in it and curriculum provision overall. Like Gazeley (2010), they were concerned that there may be a greater risk of dropout, because of the provision’s unfamiliar location, content, peers and staff. This was related to the observation that student dropout is higher among those eligible for free school meals and with SEN. They argued that the colleges’ and training

providers' staff would need to adapt their teaching styles to cater for the needs of younger students aged 14–16 and parent/carer information and liaison would need consideration so that full support could be assured. A further concern was that students would miss core lessons, although they acknowledged that schools could provide catch-up lessons or other strategies to overcome the problem.

However, their evidence suggested that attendance at college pre-16 can help to prepare young people better for the end of their compulsory schooling and improve awareness of choices and available options. They found that in some cases, those who had studied on such programmes at age 14–16, continued study in the same subject area post-16. In others, undertaking an applied course pre-16 helped to refine a decision or reject an initial plan. Overall, their evidence suggested that experiences of pre-16 courses influence post-16 decision-making and therefore young people need clear and accurate guidance relating to possible progression routes.

Research driven by governments attempting to establish more effective routes to achieving qualifications, enhance employment prospects for young people and, perhaps, emphasise the perceived effectiveness of their policy implementation, has led to contradictory conclusions at times. For example, Golden et al (2004) produced DCSF sponsored research, reporting on a project that aimed to show the benefits of vocational courses and activities for young people aged 14-16, helping the “hardest to reach” into education and/or employment. They concluded that it had been successful, due to putting activities and support in place that were interesting for the young people, with well-structured outreach support

mechanisms, including strong inter-agency communications. They claimed that 50,000 had been reached, 68% of whom had subsequently re-engaged with mainstream provision. 59% of those involved were of compulsory school age.

In contrast, Alison Wolf (2011), drew on evidence suggesting that vocational courses for young people at 14-16 only led to further courses at best and had little or no beneficial effect upon, or relevance for, their employment prospects. This view informed policy after the government accepted all recommendations from her report. In the same year, the DfE published findings of a research report (Ross et al, 2011) on the impact of vocational provision for 14-16 year olds, having analysed LSYPE data. Their conclusions were that vocational education had not been successful for this age group, because no evidence was found that it “helps to re-engage young people who are disengaged from education” (Ross et al, 2011: 32), nor did it improve either the achievement of ‘Level 2’ (5 A*-C grades at GCSE), or progression to ‘Level 3’ courses. They did find evidence, however, of improvements in ‘Level 1’ achievement (D-G grades at GCSE), with a greater likelihood of those who had experienced vocational education being in work at age 17 and 18.

Santa Cruz et al (2011) provide an international comparison, complementary with Ross et al’s (2011) findings. They discuss the lasting effects of ‘tracking’ on young people across Europe, which they define as the division of learning routes into academic and vocational pathways. They argue that in the long term the practice increases inequalities, rather than reducing them, suggesting that even if tracking has helped young people to find work in their early lives, they progress relatively less well than those who achieve better academically. The evidence they provide is from

a study of immediate and extended family of 'Roma' cultural heritage in Spain, 70-80% of whom are unemployed. Vocational programmes provided for young people from this setting were suggested to have had a positive impact on them initially, until they became disillusioned when finding that it did not qualify them for work. They wanted to work with the authorities to establish programmes that would give them the formal qualifications they needed.

The chronology of the domestic reports referred to above was perhaps significant, to the extent that Golden et al (2004) and Marson-Smith et al (2009) were produced during the period of the 1997-2010 Labour government, where the others were published post-2010, when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government had been formed and the policy and finance objectives had changed considerably. Over a four-year period prior to the coalition's formation in 2010, policy at national level had been geared towards implementing a curriculum, establishing systemic academic and vocational pathways that fitted into a transferable qualifications framework. It was primarily for the 14-19 age range and one of its aims was to improve the status of vocational education and training. However, the coalition Secretary of State, using Wolf Report (2011) evidence, claimed that skills-based education was poor and counterproductive to serve 14-16-year-olds' best interests. He significantly reduced the number and type of vocational qualifications available and, concurrently, the 14-19 framework was abandoned. A new "EBacc"² was introduced to encourage schools and students to achieve higher standards through a "traditional" curriculum, promoted as more rigorous, with less

² The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a school performance measure for core academic subjects (English, Mathematics, History or Geography, Science, "a language") at Key Stage 4 in government-funded schools.

coursework and modular assessment. The measures directly affected schools' planning, including alternative provision for those "at risk of exclusion". In addition, however, a Green Paper, for the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition, published in 2011, suggested that schools identify young people too frequently as having BESD at "School Action" level and behavioural difficulties should be dealt with through, "normal day-to-day classroom practice" (DfE,2011a: 67). Therefore, it set out a new position regarding vocational education provision. Targeting young people with SEN specifically, it outlined the government's aims and intentions to promote aspiration and provide opportunity, as follows:

"...by 2015 disabled young people and young people with SEN will have:

- access to better quality vocational and work-related learning options to enable young people to progress in their learning post-16;
- good opportunities and support in order to get and keep a job"

(DfE 2011a: 11)

The assumption was that focusing provision on work-based learning and activity would encourage aspiration. The policy aims were geared towards post-16 learning, recognising that "... the majority of young people previously at School Action and School Action Plus were in further education colleges at the age of 16" (DfE, 2011a: 22) and that the colleges were already the main providers of vocational learning and qualifications. However, targeting vocational provision at post-16 learning, rather than starting at age 14, marked a shift in policy thinking. Such shifts

can have positive or destabilising effects upon the curriculum, as suggested above, but also have implications for the provision and allocation of resources.

Acknowledging this, some researchers have attempted to synthesise the issues involved in educating young people “at-risk” and distil responses to them, analysing alternative approaches that have been adopted, with critical examination and evaluation of their effects. The next section provides examples of reviews from three countries, produced at the time the research for this study was undertaken, comparing broad approaches to “at-risk” status, that help to explain and contextualise contemporary policy responses. To finish this section with specific reference to AEP in Britain, however, a literature review undertaken by Gutherson et al (2010), sponsored by CfBT³, synthesised research, with a view to establishing causal links between interventions and successful outcomes. The scope of the review included types of intervention, methods, approaches and models, teaching and learning styles, workforce characteristics, effectiveness, the impact and influence of ICT and re-engagement strategies. Whilst they found many examples of positive and successful interventions, they concluded that their evidence was not coherent or consistent enough to suggest the existence of causal links. It seems, then, that there is inconclusive evidence on alternative education provision and practice. This may be due to it being relatively new and still evolving conceptually, but also reflects inconsistencies in provision noted by Marson-Smith et al (2009), Wolf (2011) and others, as explained above. In addition, further exploration of the potential of AEP is needed, focused on its capacity to make bespoke provision for the needs of relatively small numbers of young people. Research showing the

³ CfBT is an Educational Trust, which subsequently became an Academy Sponsor

relationships between aptitudes, provision, achievement and outcomes that have emerged so far, could help to refine the practice and processes involved in identifying needs. This research contributes towards this by showing how such an assessment might be undertaken.

2.2.2 Alternative approaches to the mediation of “at-risk” status identified in contemporary literature reviews

Literature reviews and commentary on policy responses and practice, have attempted to synthesise issues surrounding “at risk status” and efforts to mitigate its effects. Drawing on examples from Britain, the USA and Australia, various approaches are explored and contrasted below to consider their implications for answering the research questions as well as for policy and practice. Their analyses of factors and intervention programmes show how contrasting diagnoses of similar problems produce alternative responses, perhaps reflecting researchers’ backgrounds disciplines and fields, as well as the cultural context in which they were produced.

Whilst USA research acknowledges the importance of distal “at-risk” factors, greater emphasis is given to delineating and distinguishing between individuals’ specific problems and characteristics, so that targeted remedial action can be suggested. Thus, social class is not a subject of analysis to the same extent as in British work and authorship appears to be rooted in psychology or social psychology, more than sociology. There are similarities, however, one of which arose from heightened concern regarding youth unemployment in Britain at the time of this research, leading policymakers attempting to prevent NEET numbers

from rising to encourage Local Authorities to develop “Risk Of NEET Indicators” (RONI’s). In trying to identify and mitigate characteristics that led to young people becoming NEET, RONI’s were more closely associated with the USA approach than directly addressing issues of inequality. Thus, it can be argued that policy actions and research frames are influenced by their timing and current cultural considerations, as well as the perspectives or objectives of its authors. Further detailed exploration of the approaches will highlight the differences and relationships between them.

Comparative approaches: Britain

Carl Parsons (2005), argues that school exclusion policies at local and national government levels in Britain are not based upon the efficacy of educational decision making alone, they emanate from a broader base of cultural positions, which vary over time, but are rooted in attitudes towards criminal justice. Parsons (2005) highlights three discourses which he attributes to Levitas (1998), that became prominent in “New Labour” policy formation. The “moral underclass” discourse (MUD) essentially describes perceived errant behaviour and characteristics as the fault of the perpetrator and adopts a policy position of seeking retribution for wrong-doing. The “redistributive” discourse (RED) sees inequality of income and wealth distribution as the foundation of problems that policy needs to address, along the lines referred to in Reay’s (2006) analysis, if inequality in education attainment is to be countered. Finally, the “social inclusion” discourse (SID) is expanded upon by Parsons (2005). This considers poverty to be a “relational”, rather than a distributional issue, postulating that income and wealth distribution is

only important in the degree to which it affects "...social participation, social integration and access to power". Policy solutions, therefore, should aim to improve quality of life through these areas, empowering young people to take responsibility for themselves. This was "3rd-way" thinking, in line with the political philosophy prevalent in the Labour government of the time. Thompson (2011) also highlights three discourses, although instead of Parsons' (2005) 'relational' terminology, he gives the third discourse a more precise focus as "...social integration through (paid) work...(that) views social exclusion as arising mainly from unemployment, which it attributes to deficiencies in the knowledge and skills of individuals." (Thompson 2011: 786). This suggests that the early identification and categorisation of negative student characteristics, such as the "RONI" referred to above, would complement "3rd Way" oriented policy, aiming to find solutions to prevent or mitigate conditions that undermine social participation and integration. The proposed solutions were, as explained, apparently rooted in the political philosophy of the time.

Closely aligned with Reay's view and using Bourdieu's conceptual analysis, however, Archer et al (2010), argue that working-class young people are less able to access economic, social and cultural capital than their middle-class counterparts. They suggest that attempts to identify specific, apparently negative, characteristics in young people and modify them with interventions, is not a successful strategy to tackle inequality and social injustice. It produces and perpetuates inequality, whilst the structural conditions and material deprivation that require fundamental correction are ignored.

Archer et al (2010) develop their argument, suggesting that where once young people may have been expected to follow a parental path from school into employment, students were now expected to aspire and progress to further and higher education. After Government policy in the 1980s had led to a low skill, low-wage economy, through deindustrialisation and weakening trade unions, “New Labour” was attempting to develop a high skill, high wage labour, ‘knowledge’ economy, requiring a workforce with high aspirations. They suggest, therefore, that “3rd Way” thinking and policy was attempting to create the conditions through which young people would develop the high aspirations they lacked and describe the “London Challenge” as an example of an intervention strategy set up to achieve the aim. Part of an “Education Action Zone” policy initiative, the “Challenge” attempted to tackle low aspiration by integrating various diverse strands of policy, such as, for example, improving school leadership, funding enhanced provision for “gifted and talented” students and improving the English-speaking capabilities of foreign students.

Archer et al (2010) argue that this was an inadequate policy response to the difficulties faced by young people, paying insufficient attention to objective analysis of needs. They question the assumption that tackling lack of aspiration and poor achievement is necessary or relevant to the needs of young people considered “at risk”, arguing that raising aspiration was set as a goal without questioning who decides what acceptable aspirations are or how they are determined. The mantra that lack of aspiration equates to poor academic achievement and failure, is suggested to be too narrow a focus and counter-productive. Kitte Te Riele emphasises the point, arguing that, “...the dominant conceptualisation of youth “at

risk” draws attention to what is wrong with these youth, rather than to what may be wrong with schooling” (Te Riele, 2006b: 129). They suggest that cognisance of the underlying social class influences in young peoples’ development is required, rather than blaming them for their perceived inadequacies, which they felt was the political wisdom of the period. Archer et al (2010), therefore conclude that research is needed to, “...understand the identities and educational engagement of urban, working-class London young people...”. They suggest that the issues to be considered should include social exclusion, social class, gender and ethnicity. Research dealing with factors that underpin decision making for young people “at-risk” in schools currently could improve understanding of their educational engagement and how identities are made up. This thesis contributes towards that.

Comparative approaches: USA

In their paper, “Dropout Screening and Early Warning”, Hoff et al (2015), synthesise American research findings and discuss policy implementation. Whilst the factors they suggest can lead to students dropping out of education were outlined earlier, they also review approaches to mediation and provide examples of how these are used to advise or determine school policy by various US State Departments. They note that research in the USA has identified problems that inhibit young people from obtaining work, staying healthy, contributing to economic well-being, staying out of prison, all of which have wider and on-going costs for society, including engagement in anti-social activities. The approach could, therefore, be described as ‘utilitarian’ or ‘economic imperative’.

As part of government strategy and policy, screening is deployed in many states to identify characteristics in young people that may develop into behaviours and conditions requiring intervention. The target areas for intervention are proximal in nature, rather than being aimed at tackling inequality directly. They include improving staff-student and home-school relationships and communications, behaviour modification, provision of supplementary academic support, adult mentoring, intervention to reduce truancy, working with feeder-schools on transitions and progress monitoring for achievement and behaviour. All these interventions aim, therefore, to address perceived deficiencies at individual level, rather than addressing broader socioeconomic issues, or social mobility. Hoff et al stress the importance, as they see it, of having ready-made interventions or programmes associated with any screening tools developed to mitigate “at risk” conditions identified in young people. They also advocate that screening should take place as early and widely as possible, perhaps from the point of school entry, aimed at preventing conditions, rather than mitigating them once established, although they recognise that resource requirements and costs could be prohibitive. Consideration is given to examples of screening systems used in various states and to some of the similarities and differences between them, ranging from a prescriptive, data-driven early warning system operated by Louisiana, to Michigan’s “dropout challenge”, leaning more towards encouragement than determinism.

More recently, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) published a paper by Rumberger et al (2017) providing specific recommendations for the consideration of state departments, schools and teachers, based upon evidence of “what works” from databases developed, analysed and tested through a panel of academic experts.

Whilst it does not determine government policy, the organisation calls itself “the statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education” and as such would be a persuasive voice. There seems to be a high degree of prescription in its recommendations, quoted below, along with concurrence with Hoff et al’s (2015) suggestion for implementation as widely and at as early an age as possible:

“1 Monitor the progress of all students, and proactively intervene when students show early signs of attendance, behavior, or academic problems (similar to the “ABC” of Hoff et al, 2015)

2 Provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success

3 Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students’ capacity to manage challenges in and out of school

4 For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support.”

(Rumberger et al, 2017: 2-3)

The paper goes on to provide evidence to justify the recommendations and gives detailed guidance on implementation. There are similarities between this and the “3rd Way” approach in attempting to identify and respond to the underlying factors that give rise to problem behaviours, creating conditions for improvement with policies aimed at nurture and encouragement of young people, rather than tackling the structural problems of inequality. There is also resonance in the “RONI” approach, described earlier, attempting to identify those at risk of becoming NEET,

with a view to tackling negative aspirational traits as early as possible. The goals of policy, which can loosely be described as aiming to produce good citizens with a strong work ethic, are similar too. The USA screening system may, however, be perceived as more interventionist and prescriptive for individuals than the “3rd Way” approach, indicative of a greater emphasis placed upon nurture and encouragement than aspiration and self-fulfilment. The language of Rumberger et al’s (2017) suggestions regarding how their recommendations should be implemented highlights this emphasis, as exemplified in the following selective quotes:

- “...take steps to help students, parents, and school staff understand the importance of attending school daily...”
- “...assign a single person to be the student’s primary advocate...”
- “...build supportive relationships and teach students how to manage challenges...”
- “...build a strong sense of identity and community to improve student engagement...”

(Rumberger et al, 2017: 2-3)

The language indicates a desire to provide all-encompassing support through individuals and teams, drawing together elements of the schools’ internal and external environments. Whilst differences between this and “3rd Way” approaches have been highlighted, the inclusion agenda of “3rd Way” political philosophy espoused similar aims. A further commonality with the “3rd Way” approach, however, is that there is not so much emphasis on accounting for students’ personal perspectives, as called for by Gazeley (2010), Ogg and Kail (2010) and Archer and

Yamashita (2003), nor to tackling underlying structural issues. Again, therefore, there seems to be a gap for research such as this, showing how relationships between those involved in the decisions and processes that surround young people “at-risk”, contribute to their development and affect outcomes.

Comparative approaches: Australia

Further similarities in international approaches, responding to “at risk” characteristics, can be seen in the final example. In her review of literature originated in Australia, Samia Michail attempts to establish school responses to challenging behaviours in relation to school suspensions. She categorises responses into four approaches, the first three of which are: punitive measures, academic models and therapeutic programmes. The fourth, referred to as the tailored approach, combines aspects of the others, to meet the bespoke needs of each student (Michail, 2011: 161-2)

The punitive approach can be associated with the “Moral Underclass Discourse” described by Parsons (2005). If students break rules, consequences apply regardless of circumstances, requiring punishment to redress the wrong-doing and prevent recurrence. Michail explains that this is referred to as a ‘deficit view’ where the student is regarded as at fault for their actions, but suggests that exclusion is inappropriate because it segregates the family, in addition to suspending the student.

The academic approach sees underlying academic issues as responsible for poor behaviour and attempts to alleviate it with alternative provision. One example of flexibility in curriculum delivery is given as the “Engaging Again” programme which is described as experiential and practical. There is similarity between this and Alternative Education Provision (AEP), referred to in the Discussion section.

The therapeutic approach takes account of the environment external to school, that may present difficulties needing resolution. Michail suggests that the approach could benefit students of low socio-economic status where, “social circumstances can affect their ability to engage well with their schooling”. An example of this approach is the “On-Campus Intervention Program” (OCIP) with counsellors providing individual or group attention to students who have been withdrawn from classes.

The final approach attempts to implement strategies that cross the boundaries of school and home environments, to address identified learning and well-being needs underlying students’ challenging behaviour. In offering both academic and therapeutic programmes, tailored to individuals, provided in a range of contexts, it therefore requires significant investment of time and resources. It also needs the staff involved to have a high level of understanding of the programmes, commitment to them and to collaborative working. There is resonance between this and Hoff et al’s (2015) suggestion that combinations of planned intervention strategies may be appropriate for any individual student, or “high-risk” (their term) groups. There is also, perhaps, some similarity with the “3rd Way” approach, attempting to draw together strands of apparently diverse policy to achieve a coherent goal. In any case, none of the approaches appear to advocate tackling the

structural issues, argued as a necessity by Archer et al (2010), Reay (2006) and others. The issues raised above, especially regarding policy and alternative education provision for those “at risk of exclusion”, are considered further in the discussion, because they are of central concern to the research questions.

2.2.3 Methodological approaches

This section shows how research with quantitative and qualitative orientations have contributed towards approaches regarding “at risk” status and its amelioration. It begins with a comparison of three quantitative studies encapsulating the opposing perspectives adopted by Parsons (2005) “3rd Way” approach and Archer et al’s (2010) criticism of it, described above. Whilst the findings of the studies contrast, this could reflect how their geographical origins and the time lag between publication dates might have influenced their research frames and subsequent conclusions. Having considered these, two qualitative research reports, that complement and contrast with the quantitative studies are provided, to show the distinctive contribution that alternative methodologies can make to understanding in this area of study.

Quantitative research

Schoon and Parsons (2002) suggest that over time, although the underlying influence of social class as a distal factor can have negative consequences for young peoples’ development and employment prospects, there are proximal factors,

among which are family environment and material conditions in the home, that can have a mediating effect on outcomes. They developed two models that show this. The “mediating model” refers to the ways in which students’ aspirations and educational attainment mediate the effect that parental social class has on occupational attainment. The “contextual systems model” acknowledges the importance of parental aspiration for children and clarifies how social background links to individual development through, “...an interconnected set of contexts, which either have a direct or indirect impact.” They conclude that whilst no factor can be considered in isolation as the prime cause of a young person’s development, there are three broad variants influencing, “the development of positive adjustment in the face of adversity”, where positive adjustment is the process through which individuals adapt to and are shaped by interactions and the context in which they exist, dependent on their developmental history and present circumstances. The variants are:

- 1) Attributes of the individual (ability, temperament, motivation).
- 2) Characteristics of the family (parental interest and support).
- 3) Wider social context (neighbourhood and social support system)

(Schoon and Parsons, 2002: 1487).

This resonates with the concepts and framework developed by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) regarding the impact which individual and institutional habitus have upon the opportunities and development of social capital in young people, in conjunction with “field” influences.

Arguing that there was consistency between their findings and earlier research, Schoon and Parsons (2002) call for more refined research into the factors and processes that affect risk and adjustment in young peoples' lives, such as individual temperament, personality characteristics and parenting styles. They also argue that further research is needed into the influence of other mediating conditions not specifically covered within their analysis, including, "...gender, region, or other microsystems, such as the school environment or peer group..." (Schoon and Parsons, 2002: 281).

Concurring with a "growing body of literature" interested in promoting the development of non-cognitive skills, such as positive attitudes, in young people, Foliano et al (2010) suggest that doing so would improve employability skills. Previous work they had undertaken (Foliano et al, 2009) suggested that schools play a limited role in determining the "cognitive achievement of pupils" or in influencing student engagement, "Clearly individual characteristics and family background matter more on both these counts." Foliano et al (2010: 31) Using LSYPE data, they therefore moved on to determine and measure students' emotional and behavioural engagement with school, characteristics they thought were influential to "at risk" status. Questionnaires were used to measure emotional engagement, asking students about their attitudes to school. Behavioural engagement was measured by rates of truancy. Their evidence showed that emotional disengagement is, "...associated with various types of illegal or undesirable activities, such as taking alcohol, cannabis, being in trouble with the police and fighting" (Foliano et al, 2010: 19). However, acknowledging a study undertaken by DCSF in 2009, they also found

relationships between several factors underlying pupil engagement, including, “...schools working with parents, provision of information and guidance, homework supervision, extracurricular activities, study support, quality of relationship with teachers, curriculum, reductions in bullying and whether there is a school culture of truancy.” Foliano et al (2010: 11).

Although they argue that they established positive relationships between the factors involved, one conclusion reached was the need for “... more nuanced indicators of behavioural disengagement than simply whether someone truant or not.” Foliano et al (2010: 31). In this respect, qualitative studies are needed to understand not just whether variables are interconnected, but how they are interconnected and significant to student development over time. Thus, there is resonance between Foliano et al and Schoon et al’s (2002) findings and their suggestions for the type and content of further research needed.

Research into the school environment, was also the subject of a quantitative USA study, assessing how “school climate” affects the relationships between family poverty, academic outcomes and behaviour. It concluded that, “...(school) climate does not moderate the association between poverty and grades” (Hopson and Lee, 2011: 2226) Whilst this concurs with Foliano et al’s (2009) earlier findings, it contrasts with their subsequent conclusions referred to above (Foliano et al, 2010) and Schoon and Parsons (2002) findings. However, there was consistency in the authors’ call for further qualitative, longitudinal research into peer, staff-student and intra-staff relationships in school, how these work and their implications, with consideration of neighbourhood and family influences. They contend that teachers

and schools cannot be blamed for stress and safety problems in what they term “poor neighbourhoods”, or inadequate access to good nutrition and healthcare in “poor households”. They suggest that school improvement plans need to be implemented in conjunction with interventions to reduce family poverty if they are to be successful (Hopson and Lee, 2011: 2227). In this sense, their conclusions resonate with others who have called for structural changes to address inequality, such as Reay (2006) and Archer et al (2010). However, it seems that whilst quantitative studies have increasingly identified complex relationships between variables and the factors that underlie “at-risk” status, their dynamics may be understood better through complementary qualitative study.

Qualitative studies

Nicola Ingram (Ingram 2009) studied the influences of individual and institutional habitus in an environment created by Northern Ireland’s relatively unique, selective system. The boys in this qualitative case study lived in the same disadvantaged working- class community but attended two different schools, depending on whether they succeeded or failed in an examination at the age of 11 years. She wanted to explore how the institutional habitus of the two Catholic schools (one grammar and one maintained) affected the boys’ personal habitus and, subsequently, their development. Her conclusion was that the working-class characteristics of the boys were modified and their behaviour changed by the differing cultures at the two schools. Ingram argues that the schools’ conditions and the boys’ experiences influenced outcomes to the point where those attending the Grammar school were found, largely, to have rejected their cultural origins “in favour of upward mobility”.

The social class and cultural origins of those attending the other school perpetuated, because, claims Ingram, they had failed or did not take an 11+ examination.

Although small-scale and qualitative, Ingrams' findings do appear to complement Schoon and Parsons (2002) models, in suggesting that the schools have different mediating effects on the boys' habitus and upon their ultimate aspirations, expectations and achievement.

In Anna Carlile's (2013) analysis, schools are depicted as "microcosms" of society, where hierarchies are established and patterns of inequality are replicated reproduced and perpetuated, "...schools are essentially designed to maintain existing social structures and inequities..." (Carlile, 2013: 57). They are described as "borderlands" through which extended body spaces are contested (ibid: 58). Carlile contends that issues related to SES, gender and ethnicity in schools are also reflective of those in wider society. Thus, there is some resonance between this analysis and Schoon and Parsons', (2002) "...interconnected set of contexts..." described above. There are also similarities between her analysis and conclusion on the importance of social class as an underlying factor for those "at risk of exclusion" and those of Reay (2006), Archer et al (2010) and Gazeley (2010), as well as Ingram (2009).

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

The literature review set out first to consider others' research findings regarding the characteristics that place some young people "at-risk" of exclusion, why they arise and the relationships between them. What is known about the relationships between

factors has developed significantly in recent years, with the inception of increasingly sophisticated databases collecting longitudinal demographic and behavioural data on the characteristics and attributes of young people and their environment. There appears to be some degree of concurrence in the findings of researchers undertaking quantitative and qualitative analysis, including those highlighted as concerned with issues of inequality. A similar point applies to acknowledgement of the complex interrelationships between and manifestations of distal and proximal factors.

Having considered identification issues, the review moves on to look at findings regarding responses to “at-risk” status and the implications of providing support to address it, showing how these can be understood from a range of perspectives, arising, for example, from the interests and concerns of researchers, where the research originated, its timing and the prevailing social conditions. As such, the evidence reflects varied dispositions and approaches, from those advocating the use of policy and mediation to mitigate “risks”, to others suggesting that more fundamental structural change is needed in society’s social and economic relationships. The review has also shown that resolution is complex because of the wide-ranging and inter-related spheres of policy and activity, such as those concerning inequality and learning issues and the diversity of agencies involved.

However, policy attempts to address “at-risk” status related to poor behaviour seem to have fallen broadly into two categories: challenging and working with perpetrators individually and directly, or providing conditions which incentivise them to adjust their behaviour and aspire to higher order achievements. This point

is developed further below. However, they have often included elements of both based upon detailed research findings and evidence-based practices. In this respect, alternative education provision (AEP) has received a good deal of attention. Whilst its potential benefits have been recorded, continuing difficulties with AEP have also been widely acknowledged including variability in the type of provision made, its organisation, especially with multi-site provision, the quality of teaching and the environment in which the alternatives are delivered. These difficulties will be shown to resonate with the findings of this study, although the benefits of AEP are also underlined.

Although the review did not seek to produce a systematic, comparative review of alternative systems in different societies, it incorporated an international dimension to show how the emphases of actions to address issues associated with the risk of exclusion reflect a divergence of approach, possibly related to wider educational policy in the countries concerned. In each circumstance, the option to address problems with punitive policy measures has been mostly rejected as, perhaps, a negative and ineffective response, especially because of the positive relationship that exists between exclusion and future imprisonment. However, research in Britain has often reflected a policy emphasis incentivising individuals to aspire and improve their personal socio-economic circumstances, whereas alternative approaches, highlighted above in examples from the USA and Australia, reflect systematic attempts to identify characteristics and conditions in individuals at as early a stage as possible and provide bespoke support to address these and help prevent their further development.

In later sections, the thesis takes this contrast of approaches further with the suggestion, for example, originally proposed by Archer et al (2010), that a more relevant curriculum and provision is required to meet individuals' needs, arising from deeper and wider assessment of characteristics than academic ability. A greater emphasis on early identification, apparent in the American approach, could complement the "aspiration" and social mobility agendas. The question of how to implement such a system and at what stage of a young person's education is not a simple one given, for example, the need also to achieve effective provision with efficiency in resource costs. The Australian tailored approach, as explained by Michail (2011), has apparent advantages in bespoke provision, although, as she acknowledges, it is also high cost due to the nature of specialist resource requirements. However, in synthesis and conclusion, this study will take account of the identified approaches to make suggestions that emphasise making the best use of existing mainstream provision, so that the needs of as many young people as possible can be looked after with better provision in existing facilities and circumstances. Further, the suggestion arising from the review that better understanding of implementation processes is needed regarding, for example, the outcomes and unintended consequences of policy, will also be addressed.

Finally, regarding research practices and methodologies, it is evident from the review that in addition to attempting to understand complex statistical relationships between factors, qualitative approaches are required to develop understanding of individual circumstances, as a means through which problems related to being "at-risk of exclusion" can be addressed. The calls for research to gain greater understanding of the relationships between individuals, their schools and

neighbourhoods and the discourses through which decisions are made for young people “at-risk of exclusion” need more attention, as do the power relationships that operate within schools and between them and their clients. As these aspects of research become more established, the further calls for young peoples’ needs to be understood from their perspectives, class-based or otherwise, can be accounted for in policy development.

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

As explained, the aims of the study were to identify the characteristics that led to a cohort of young people being considered “at risk of exclusion”, categorise these and compare them with others, showing how they were supported towards amelioration or mitigation of “at-risk” status, whether the support was consistent, how and why variations were manifest and what were the outcomes at the end of their compulsory education at age 16.

This section is set out to show the questions that were addressed and the methods that were deployed to answer them. It begins by introducing the student participants, profiling the schools they attended, to show who and what was involved in undertaking the research. It goes on to provide a rationale for the methods used, explains how they were used and shows why different methods were used for specific aspects of data collection. Ethical issues are considered and responses to some of the challenges faced in undertaking the research are explained.

The study was undertaken with a broadly constructivist, interpretivist approach, as explained in the “Methods” section below. Thus, its analysis is postulated from the view that people make sense of their social world by interpreting and ascribing meaning to their interactions with others through the communications networks of which they are a part and the language, symbols, actions and other stimuli that nurture and help them to develop and function as individuals. Whilst our understanding and actions are governed to some extent by external forces over

which we have limited control, we have a capacity to understand and harness them in constructing our own social being and personality. To put this in context, the students were in the early years of making sense of their world, understanding and interacting with it. In the study, I wanted to encapsulate the main features of that world, related to their lives at school, find out how they interacted with it and establish, as far as possible, what impact it was having upon them and vice-versa.

The primary research was a longitudinal study following ten students from two schools in the Midlands (referred to as Schools 1 and 2), approximately 15 miles apart, five from each school, all in Year 11. Both schools were located in urban settings, though the population of one town was more than five times the size of the other. Both schools were of similar size and considered to be in “challenging” circumstances. Thus, whilst their profiles were similar, the differences between them, including geographical distance and demographic circumstances, suggested that there were potentially interesting contrasts to be made by comparing their practices as institutions under the auspices of the same local authority. The profiles are provided in the Methodology, below.

After sending written information (Appendix 1), preliminary meetings with the schools’ Headteachers were held to discuss the research, its intentions and goals. Their permission to undertake the study was granted prior to identification of the students. After this, the Deputy Head responsible for the curriculum in School 1 (referred to as “DH1”) became my “primary contact” and identified the students. The primary contact was the key person who could agree to and enable any arrangements necessary for the work to take place. At School 2, the primary contact

was a senior staff member (referred to as “SS2”, to convey “Senior Staff at School 2”). Her professional responsibility included provision for and supervision of students withdrawn from classes.

The range of interviewees was established by the primary contacts who identified a sample of 5 students from each of the two schools. In total, there were three girls and seven boys in the study (split 1:4, respectively, in School 1 and 2:3 in School 2). By chance, the gender balance approximated to national exclusion data. Although a mix was requested, there was no specific attempt to achieve a gender balance, partly because the main criteria for choice was the students being considered as “at-risk of exclusion”. As Appendix 1 shows, the requested criteria to identify their “at risk” status was having had at least one fixed term exclusion in secondary education and/or being engaged in alternative provision.

In addition to the students, staff interviews were conducted with individuals who had significant dealings with them. In the first instance, the choice of staff was made from suggestions by the primary contacts. Subsequently, the students were asked in their interviews who they felt were their most significant sources of support, in order that they could be approached, if the student agreed. Alongside this, further contacts emerged during discussions with those previously identified staff, when asked to identify anyone they thought might be most “relevant”. The “choice” was therefore intentionally made progressively throughout the study, to provide as relevant and sharp a focus as possible, engaging with those who knew the students well and had the most direct contact with them. To this extent, there was no attempt to achieve numerical or gender balance between teaching and non-

teaching staff (although again by coincidence, it was numerically approximately 50-50). The method and outcome worked much better at School 1 than at School 2, where the Head of Year and “SS2” were predominantly the voices of ‘significant others’ for the students. However, almost all the people identified as most relevant were interviewed and again the transcripts provide evidence of how the information was requested and followed through. There were two people at School 1 who were not asked for interviews, but in hindsight, could have been. These were teachers with roles in behavioural issues, named by staff who were interviewed. It is unlikely, however, that they would have had access to any wider or deeper issues than those who were interviewed.

Outside of the schools, six Local Authorities responded to an email request for information regarding provision made for young people at risk of exclusion in their areas. The reason for asking was to try to understand how the students in this study might have had different experiences if they had been subjected to the policies and practices of other Local Authorities as applied to their peers. The questions asked and text of the request are submitted as Appendix 2. Responses are dealt with in the “Findings” section on policy issues, Theme 4. In addition, a recorded interview (transcribed) was undertaken with the Head of a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). One reason for not interviewing anyone from the Local Authority where the research took place was that I worked for that Authority at the time and felt that this might compromise colleagues with whom a professional relationship needed to be maintained. I also understood its policy and provision as it was relevant to my professional role.

3.1 THE PARTICIPANTS

This section is subdivided to introduce the students first, before providing background details of their schools. Data for similar characteristics have been used for individuals and schools to provide a means of comparing them and consistency of analysis. The characteristics are those focussed upon in official statistics, as will be explained.

3.1.1 The Students

Table 1 below and Figures 1 to 3 provide collated data for the whole cohort. The data for each student are then shown as individual profiles in tables that follow. The data show who they were and where they came from, providing details on their backgrounds, in terms of the location and environment in which they lived. Whilst attempting to give a clear picture and context for understanding the study findings, anonymity for the participants is maintained, however. Colour coding is used to highlight relative deprivation, a key for which is provided in the table, below the data.

Table 1: Deprivation criteria for each student's postcode - A comparison of rank position in England. (rank position = n/32844 in all cases. 1 = highest deprivation ranking). NB: First part of postcode anonymised by use of "XX".							
Student	Postcode	Income	Employm.	Health	Education	Crime	Index Tot
1	XX4 8zG	5586	9562	9648	5931	3247	5891
2	XX1 2zL	655	974	1570	2136	17	256
3	XX4 8zQ	4545	3706	2857	4343	9036	4407
4	XX4 8zA	26540	25192	23202	19170	15396	25462
5	XX4 8zA	6836	8287	5868	3586	5269	5722
6	XX8 2zA	777	2116	5170	826	4030	1540
7	XX8 1zB	10456	13478	13263	8766	6536	11383
8	XX8 3zN	4818	4251	11235	1135	393	3437
9	XX8 2zL	3998	1748	5980	6791	3064	3959
10	XX8 4zZ	29564	26969	26596	21981	27452	29850
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)							
Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2017 http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile.do?a=7&b=6275302&c=NN8+4SZ&g=6481906&i=1001x1012&j=6309179&m=1&p=1&q=1&r=0&s=1481811130510&enc=1&tab=9							

Table 1: Deprivation criteria by student postcode

Table 1 gives an indication of the extent of deprivation in the areas the students lived, identified from their postcodes. The categories were chosen as those most relevant for the individuals concerned. Two of them appeared to live in circumstances with very little hardship, but the other eight lived in some of England's more deprived areas. Student 2 appeared to have lived in one of the most deprived. The table could be misleading, in that the data may not apply to the specific circumstances of the student. Parental background and personal income levels would give a more detailed account. Also, the postcodes themselves can and

have changed since the time of the study, which could make the current profile data appear inaccurate. However, as a general indication, the data do appear to be largely consistent across the categories, regarding the students' surrounding environment. There is potential in using this data to portray the students as "at-risk of exclusion", because with education, income, employment and crime levels generally shown to be in the highest quartile of deprivation, young peoples' aspirations and expectations could be affected, as could their attitudes towards exclusion. The data will not be used in isolation, however, but alongside the further evidence of the study, to place it in context and avoid making stereotypical assertions.

Figure 1 below identifies characteristics held in common amongst the cohort. The recorded ethnicity of all was "White British". All had been designated Special Educational Needs (SEN) and all had had their SEN category changed during the time they were at school. 80% were still classified as SEN and these were all in the category "Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties" (BESD). Further detail is provided in the Findings section. None of the students remained at school after age 16. A high percentage of them received Free School Meals (FSM) and were frequently absent. 60% had attended more than one school in the Key Stage, a potential indicator of disruption to learning and progress.

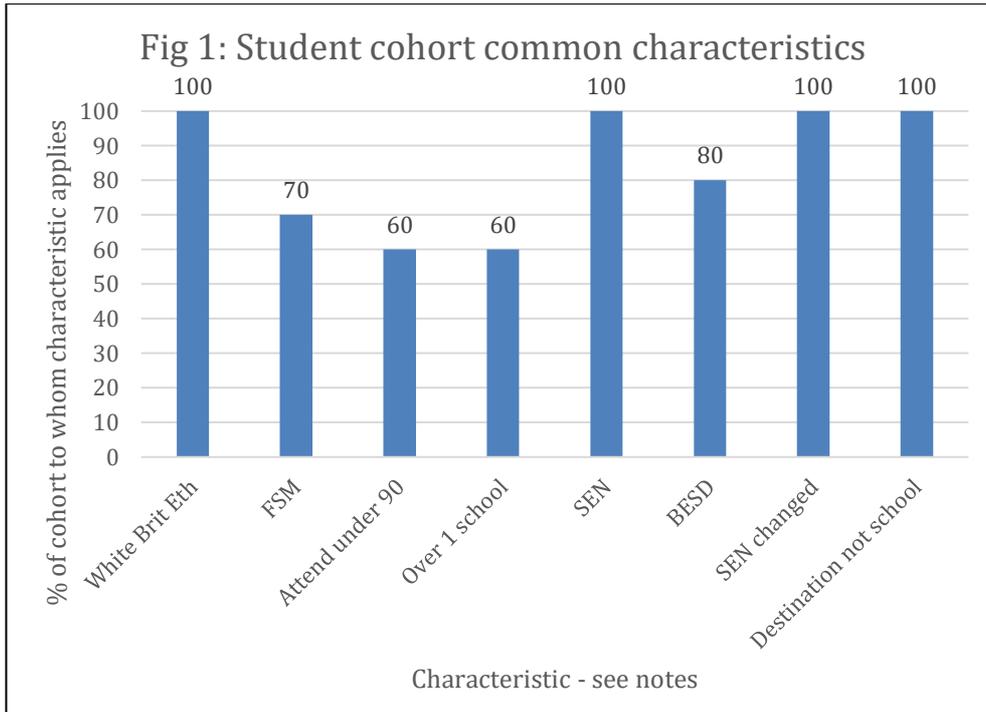


Figure 1: Student cohort common characteristics

Notes on column titles:
White Brit Eth - Ethnicity of all students in school records was “White British”
FSM = Free School Meals taken (6 students) or eligible (1)
Attend under 90 - Attendance recorded under 90% for whole of Key Stage 4
Over 1 school - Student had attended more than 1 school in the key stage
SEN - Special Education Needs designated now or previously.
BESD - % currently classified SEN with Behavioural, Emotional, Social Difficulties.
SEN changed - % whose SEN classification had changed in school records
Destination not school - expected destination as expressed by the students in their interviews. ie none intended or expected to stay at school, post-16]

OFSTED would require the school leadership to explain attendance levels of less than 90% during Key Stage 4 for 60% of the students, as shown above, if finding this during an inspection. Figure 2 shows that in most cases, individuals’ attendance appeared to get worse, as they progressed through the key stages. However, whilst this could suggest reticence to attend school through disaffection, the data should be analysed with other evidence available. There did not appear to be a direct relationship between high rates of absence and levels of deprivation, in this case.

The incidence of those with high absence rates did not match with the deprivation characteristics shown in Table 1.

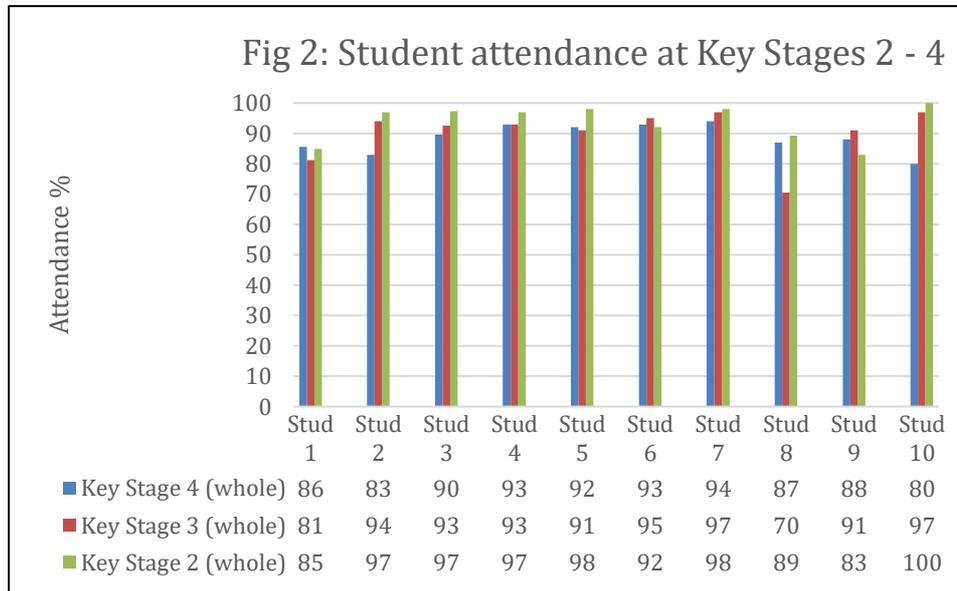


Figure 2: Student attendance at Key Stages 2 - 4

Figure 3, however, shows that the six students whose attendance was below 90% during Key Stage 4, had records that were worse than the overall national figures or those for their schools. Similarly, their record was worse than peers in receipt of Free School Meals. Of the other four, although their attendance was slightly better, none had records significantly better than the school or national figures.

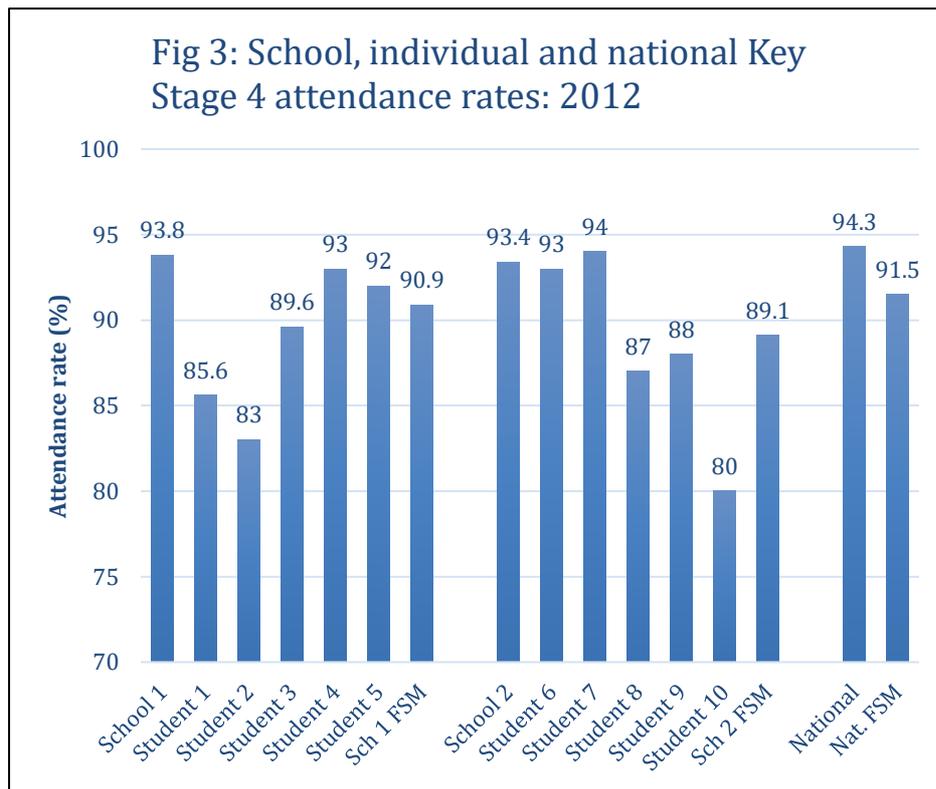


Figure 3: Comparison of KS4 attendance rates, 2012

A comprehensive summary of data showing the above and other student characteristics is provided as Appendix 5.

Individual Profiles

As explained above, this section provides an outline of each student's characteristics, as relevant to the study. The notes that preface the first student profile explain the meaning of categories or data contained in the cells for Student 1 that apply to all other students. All data in the individual profiles are consistent with the collated data above. Below the tables, a brief summary is provided for each student to highlight distinctive comparative characteristics, to be further developed in later stages of the thesis.

Notes to accompany tables:	
Parents' name:	Generally classified as "Same" or "Different" to student. Student 8 parents were "same" although student was "in care". "FS MD" = Father Same Mother Different. "Same FO" = Same name, but only father in the household (Student 6 only)
FSM:	Free School Meals ("eligible" means available but not taken)
Previous Schools:	Total number of schools attended (prim. and secondary in addition to final)
Exclusions:	Manual count from file records of removal from classes. Nb: Student 8 number does not reflect the number of incidents, only the number of exclusions on record. Of all the data provided, the number of exclusions is considered the least reliable indicator to use for assessing or analysing the students' records.
Attendance:	Figure given is for "Whole of Key Stage"
SEN:	Special Educational Needs classified SEN Type - A= School Action, P = School Action Plus, N = None
SEN changed?	Did the SEN category of the student change according to file records. Nb - Students 7, 9 and 10 recorded as "Yes" due to having been classified as type "A" prior to 2011
Deprivation:	If required, see Table 1 above for explanation of numbers and colour codes.
Destination:	"College" = one of the three Colleges of Further Education in the locality
Expected destination:	Destination as expressed by students in interviews

Identity	Student: 1	School: 1	Postcode: XX4 8TG	DOB: Jan-97	Parents' name Same
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: Yes	Previous Schs: 3	Exclusions: 14
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 85.6	3: 81.1	2: 84.9		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 5	Maths: 5	Science: 4		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 5586	Employment 9562	Health 9648	Education 5931	Crime 3247
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: College	Expected: College			

Table 2: Student 1 Profile

Student 1 was considered by his school to be of high academic ability and so was placed onto the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) route in Year 10. This restricted his options as detailed in the "Findings". He was described by staff as having a volatile

character – bright at times, but disruptive at others. This came across in his interviews, where at times he appeared to be happy and cogent and others appeared disenchanted, as reflected in the transcripts. His attendance record suggests that he became disaffected at an early stage, perhaps more so than most of the other students. There were no medical records showing absence for illness or other issues.

Identity	Student: 2	School: 1	Postcode: XX1 2SL	DOB: Aug-97	Parents' name FS MD
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: Yes	Previous Schs: 1	Exclusions 9
Key Stage Attendance %	4: 83	3: 94	2: 97		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: B	Maths: 4	Science: B		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 655	Employment 974	Health 1570	Education 2136	Crime 17
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: College	Expected: College			

Table 3: Student 2 Profile

Student 2 lived further away from the school than any other student, close to the Town Centre, in one of the most deprived areas in England. His attendance record suggests the onset of disaffection in Key Stage 4, although he did have time off (unquantified) for treatment of a physical injury. This student’s academic record was unusual for the “B” levels recorded at Key Stage 2. “B” is used where the level achieved is below the level at which the test is taken: i.e. so poor it cannot be measured. No reason was provided in the student’s file. He was reputed to lack

ambition or inspiration and this is documented in his interview transcripts, although there was a positive shift in enthusiasm apparent late in the process. It was not possible, however, to follow up after the initial period of the study to establish its significance.

Identity	Student: 3	School: 1	Postcode: XX4 8PQ	DOB: Feb-97	Parents' name Different
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: F	FSM: Eligible	Previous Schs: 6	Exclusions: 135
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 89.6	3: 92.5	2: 97.3		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 3	Maths: 3	Science: 4		
SEN	SEN category: P	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 4545	Employment 3706	Health 2857	Education 4343	Crime 9036
Key: In quartiles, 25%	Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked)				
Destination	Actual: College	Expected: College			

Table 4: Student 3 Profile

Student 3 was one of only two students in the study classified as School Action Plus (P). Her exclusion tally far exceeded any of the others and thus, her “file” extended to two very large and extensive artefacts. Her development and progress may well have been affected by having an unusual and disrupted family history and she had attended six different schools. At the start of the study, she was not expected to last at school for the whole Key Stage, but that became the objective for the school and she received extensive and bespoke support to help her to do so.

Identity	Student: 4	School: 1	Postcode: XX4 8NA	DOB: Jan-97	Parents' name Same
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: Yes	Previous Schs: 1	Exclusions: 19
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 93	3: 93	2: 97		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 4	Maths: 4	Science: 4		
SEN	SEN category A	SEN Type BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 26540	Employment 25192	Health 23202	Education 19170	Crime 15396
Key : In quartiles, ranked 25%	Dark Green = Q1,	Light Green = Q2,	Amber = Q3,	Red = Q4 (highest	
Destination	Actual: College	Expected: College			

Table 5: Student 4 Profile

Student 4 was one of two students who appeared to live in relatively affluent surroundings. His academic ability levels were sufficiently strong enough for the school to consider him as an Ebacc candidate, but did not follow it through as it was felt he would not “cope”. His apparently high attendance levels, as shown above, may have been erroneous, as further documented records show significantly lower levels at different times and his file had copies of letters sent home regarding poor attendance. This was a physically imposing student – something that seemed to be of concern to school staff (documented in interviews), because of the perceived threat it posed to the school and other students. He was also reputed to be dealing in drugs, though there was no documented evidence. There was recorded evidence of difficulties and issues he had with peers. Also, he was removed from one subject permanently – a subject in which he had future career development interests. He had ongoing battles with staff over uniform issues, which he perceived

to be unfair. Like Student 3, however, the school’s main goal was to “keep him in” until the end of the Key Stage which they did and which he acknowledged gratefully in his final interview.

Identity	Student: 5	School: 1	Postcode: XX4 8PA	DOB: Sep-97	Parents' name Different
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: No	Previous Schs: 1	Exclusions: 27
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 92	3: 91	2: 98		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 2	Maths: 3	Science: 3		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 6836	Employment 8287	Health 5868	Education 3586	Crime 5269
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: College	Expected: College			

Table 6: Student 5 Profile

Student 5 was of relatively low ability although he gave an initial impression of confidence. His exclusion tally was almost exclusively confined to the latter part of Year 11 and probably had a good deal to do with events that unfolded in the period before that. This concerned the relationship he had with the daughter of a member of staff who had pastoral responsibility and was his “mentor” also. The issues are explained in more detail later, due to their significance.

Identity	Student: 6	School: 2	Postcode: XX8 2PA	DOB: Dec-96	Parents' name Same FO
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: Yes	Previous Schs: 1	Exclusions: 6
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 93	3: 95	2: 92		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 5	Maths: 6	Science: 5		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 777	Employment 2116	Health 5170	Education 826	Crime 4030
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: Not given	Expected: College			

Table 7: Student 6 Profile

Student 6 lived with his father as sole parent. He was of relatively high academic ability per his Key Stage 2 results, but was seen by staff as a disruptive influence. A key member of the pastoral staff regarded him to be immature and as such found it difficult to appeal to him or persuade him to modify his behaviour. The best description may thus be that he was a frequent low-level disruptor.

Identity	Student: 7	School: 2	Postcode: XX8 1QB	DOB: Dec-96	Parents' name Same
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: F	FSM: No	Previous Schs: 2	Exclusions: 0
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 94	3: 97	2: 98		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 3	Maths: 3	Science: 4		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: Not recorded	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 10456	Employment 13478	Health 13263	Education 8766	Crime 6536
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: College	Expected: College			

Table 8: Student 7 Profile

Student 7 did not live in the more highly deprived areas that surrounded her peers in the study. She did live with parents whose priorities were challenged by caring for a disabled sister, however, and this appeared to have an impact upon her self-perception. She was of average academic ability, but considered to be a talented artist. Unlike other students, she was allowed by the school to give up other subjects to encourage her interest. She intended to follow a similar career path to her father in this area. Again, this student was seen as a low-level disruptor, who engaged in antagonistic activity with peers in and outside school, often involved around trouble, but not usually at the centre of it.

Identity	Student: 8	School: 2	Postcode: XX8 3EN	DOB: Dec-96	Parents' name Same
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: F	FSM: Yes	Previous Schs: 3	Exclusions: 3
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 87	3: 70.4	2: 89.3		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 4	Maths: 4	Science: 4		
SEN	SEN category: P	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 4818	Employment 4251	Health 11235	Education 1135	Crime 393
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: Not given	Expected: Not known			

Table 9: Student 8 Profile

Student 8 was pregnant at the time of the research and was not interviewed due to her very high absence rate which was not reflected in her official rate of attendance. She had become a highly disruptive influence in the later part of her school career, after showing ability and interest prior to her father leaving home. Her incidence of exclusion appears very much lower than it was. An early decision was made to keep this student in the study, even though the school had suggested she should be replaced with another. The reason was that two other students had already been replaced and it was a concern at the time that the school may be trying to put “better” candidates forward. As researcher, I was keen to follow those thought to be “at-risk”, whatever the eventual outcome.

Identity	Student: 9	School: 2	Postcode: XX8 2BL	DOB: Jun-97	Parents' name FS MD
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: Yes	Previous Schs: 2	Exclusions: 3
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 88	3: 91	2: 83		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 3	Maths: 2	Science: 3		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: BESD	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 3998	Employment 1748	Health 5980	Education 6791	Crime 3064
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: Not given	Expected: College			

Table 10: Student 9 Profile

Student 9 was reputed by school staff to be a highly disruptive influence, but also one who would thrive off the disruptive influence of others. This caused a senior member of the pastoral staff to manipulate his curriculum placement to minimise the difficulties. He was of relatively low ability, but with high, although possibly unrealistic ambition as revealed in his interviews. His disaffection with school appeared to have begun relatively early, in Key Stage 2.

Identity	Student: 10	School: 2	Postcode: XX8 4SZ	DOB: Oct-96	Parents' name FS MD
General	Ethnicity: White British	Gender: M	FSM: No	Previous Schs: 2	Exclusions: 2
Key Stage Attendance%	4: 80	3: 97	2: 100		
Key Stage 2 Achievement Levels	English: 4	Maths: 4	Science: 4		
SEN	SEN category: A	SEN Type: Not recorded	SEN changed? Yes		
Deprivation (see Table 1)	Income 29564	Employment 26969	Health 26596	Education 21981	Crime 27452
Key: In quartiles, Dark Green = Q1, Light Green = Q2, Amber = Q3, Red = Q4 (highest ranked 25%)					
Destination	Actual: Not given	Expected: College			

Table 11: Student 10 Profile

Student 10 appeared to live in affluent surroundings and his disaffection did not surface until the latter Key Stage. There did not appear to be a clear reason for it. A senior member of the pastoral staff was very supportive of him in attempting to help his development, rationalising the predicament as being that the student was not “suited” by school, a sentiment with which the student himself concurred. Some of the records of this student appeared questionable, especially in view of there being another student with the same name and in the same year group. His namesake was an academically gifted, very well respected student.

3.1.2 The Schools

This subsection of “The Participants” provides details of the schools attended by the students and contextualises information relevant to their experiences, profiles and progress. School 1 is a mixed, non-selective “sponsor-led” academy, with a

comprehensive intake of some 1200 students, aged 11 to 18. It is an urban school, located in the East Midlands in one of the largest towns in England (approx. 180,000). It was established in 2012, having previously been in local authority control. Its OFSTED record suggests that it is a “good” school, although at the time of the study its rating was “Satisfactory”. The school currently has over 80 full-time equivalent teaching staff. 14.4% of the students take Free School Meals.

School 2 is also a mixed, non-selective “sponsor-led” academy. It has a comprehensive intake of over 1100 students, aged 11 to 18, although its roll had previously been almost 1500. It is an urban school, located in the southern East Midlands in a town with a population of just less than 50,000. It was established in 2013, having previously been in local authority control. Its OFSTED record suggests that it is an “inadequate” school, whilst at the time of the study its rating was “requiring improvement”. The school currently has over 70 full-time equivalent teaching staff. 18.7% of the students take Free School Meals.

From a personal perspective based upon observation, the culture of each school appeared to be similar in that they were welcoming institutions to visit with an atmosphere that seemed to be well ordered and purposeful. The leadership of School 1 had changed and was in the process of further change. Although it had recently become an Academy, the maintenance of a strong relationship with the Local Authority was indicated in that two members of the leadership team and a senior member of staff had recently taken up posts after previously being Local Authority employees. Relationships between leadership and other staff appeared to be respectful and whilst, as will be shown, there were differences of character and

opinion, these were not manifest in hostility. Similarly, the staff gave the impression that they wished to do “the best” for students, despite there apparently being disagreement on what that meant and how it could be achieved. The school building was new, which again seemed to add to its atmosphere and sense of purpose. During visits, I always needed to walk through the school and playground areas to get to the bases to conduct interviews and collect data. The impression of student and staff activity and relationships perceived was consistent with that conveyed above.

School 2 operated on a split site with buildings approximately ¼ mile apart. These were traditional, externally, giving an initial impression of possibly having been a former “grammar school”, whilst internally there had clearly been many changes and adjustments to the fabric over the years of their existence. The Head had been in post for several years and operated almost exclusively from one site, whilst a Deputy oversaw the other. Although the school had become an Academy, it had retained relationships with the Local Authority and a strong sense of commitment to its local identity was also emphasised through engagement in a partnership arrangement, led by the Head, comprising other schools and local agencies. The site appeared busier and, perhaps, “livelier” than School 1 at times, possibly due to the greater movement between sites, although the perception may have been coincidental due to the timing of visits. Like School 1, relationships between staff appeared to be respectful and purposeful. My access seemed to be more closely monitored, however, and felt more “guarded”, as reflected in the fewer contacts I had with staff. The impression of “guardedness” was consistent with that observed between staff and students, although there is no intention to imply that this was all-

incorporating or repressive. Movement around the site and past classrooms suggested that good working relationships existed between students and staff, in a purposeful atmosphere.

Whilst the above paragraphs hint subjectively at aspects of culture and ethos in the two schools, not enough time was spent in them to convey a full or objective picture. If undertaking similar research again, more time spent on the sites observing classes, activities and operations more generally would be beneficial, especially in the areas where students spent their time when withdrawn from lessons. At School 1, this was in a facility occupied by the school's special needs staff, designed as a "hub" and located close to senior staff and administrative offices. School 2's facility was located behind a stage, in what would originally have been designed as a dressing room area. Whilst it had been adapted and was fit for purpose, it was relatively dark and dour if compared to School 1. Also, it was set up to isolate students, in contrast to School 1's facility, which had a more open feel. However, the schools' profiles will now be dealt with in more detail.

Table 12 shows that the ethnic make-up of School 1 was around 80% White British. Apart from "any other white background" all other ethnic groups made up less than 3% of the total. Whilst the ethnicity of School 2's students was over 70% White British and both schools appeared to have an increasing number of ethnic minorities, the rate of increase at School 2 seemed to be higher, between 2010 and 2012. The changing nature of student intake and its impact featured in interview discussions with the senior staff of School 2 and are referred to in the "Findings" and "Discussion" chapters.

Table 12: Schools 1 and 2: Student Profile details compared to national: 2010 – 2012			
	2010	2011	2012
Number on roll			
School 1	1,166	1,220	1,245
School 2	1,492	1,449	1,437
National	984	986	990
% girls			
School 1	50.6	50.4	48.8
School 2	47.2	49.2	49.1
National	49.6	49.6	49.6
% of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (FSM)*			
School 1	19.3	21.4	29.3
School 2	10.9	12.2	23.6
National	15.4	15.9	26.7
% of pupils from minority ethnic groups			
School 1	18.7	20.9	22.1
School 2	22.8	24.6	28.1
National	21.7	22.4	23.5
% of pupils supported at school action			
School 1	-	12.4	8.8
School 2	-	10.0	8.8
National	-	12.8	12.1
% of pupils supported by school action plus or with SEN statement			
School 1	-	13.0	12.8
School 2	-	9.5	7.9
National	-	8.5	8.1
School deprivation indicator			
School 1	0.20	0.22	0.22
School 2	0.19	0.21	0.21
National	0.22	0.21	0.21
Source: Adapted from schools' Raiseonline 2012 profile information for use in the collated table.			
*The categorisation of pupils eligible for FSM changed in 2012. Pupils are classed as FSM if they have been eligible for and claiming FSM at any time in the last 6 years. The calculation is based on pupils in Reception to Year 11 and those pupils in special schools, who are not following the national curriculum.			
The table above provides further comparative details of the two schools and their intake: (NB: Except where stated, all data in this section are provided from the "Raiseonline" Annual reports for each of the schools concerned in the study (Department for Education: 2012). Raiseonline is a resource that is confidential to the schools, compiled for them by the DfE from census data they are mandated to provide. Access is made available online with password protection. Each school allowed me access for the duration of this project).			

Table 12: Student Profile Details Compared to National: 2010-2012

Regarding SEN, the total proportion of students with needs was 21.6% at School 1 in 2012, whereas in School 2 it was 16.7%. Both schools appeared to have reduced numbers from the previous year. A breakdown in categories showed that "Specific

Learning Difficulties” at School 1 accounted for just over 45% of the total. A further 12% had “Moderate Learning Difficulties” and 32% were classified as having “Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)”, in common with the students in the study. So, these three categories combined accounted for some 89% of cases in total. Whilst at School 2, the same categories in combination accounted for just under 44% of cases, a further 44% were listed as “Other Difficulty/Disability”. This makes comparison between the schools difficult, although it is possible that students in either school might have been classified differently if they had attended the other. Although there were also differences apparent in the proportionate classifications within each school between one year and the next, an inference that might be made is that if a student was assessed as SEN, their classification would most likely be in one of the three categories identified above.

The extent of deprivation apparent in each of the schools’ areas, at just over 20%, was similar to the national average. The highest proportion of students (approx. 30-35%) lived in the same electoral ward as their school’s location. Deprivation rates varied significantly within some areas, however, as can be seen from the students’ individual and collated data tables, which provide greater detail.

Table 13: Absence rates at Schools 1 and 2 by Free School Meals and Gender. Adapted from Raiseonline 2012								
Absence (%)	Overall (Note 1)				Persistent (Note 2)			
	Total	FSM	Male	Fem.	Total	FSM	Male	Fem.
School 1	6.2	9.1	6.1	6.3	7.8	15.3	8.3	7.2
School 2	6.6	10.9	6.4	6.9	8.4	18	8.3	8.6
National	5.7	8.5	5.6	5.9	6.9	13.8	6.6	7.2

Notes:
1) "Overall" absence is measured as the percentage of sessions missed. Each school day is classified as two sessions.
2) "Persistent" absence is the percentage of those missing 15% or more of sessions during the 2012 academic year.

Table 13: Absence rates at Schools 1 and 2 by FSM and Gender

Table 14: Absence rates at Schools 1 and 2 for 2014-2015. Adapted from GOV.UK			
School Name	Type of School	Overall rate of absence	Persistent absence
See note		1	2
School 1	Academy	5.80%	6.60%
School 2	Academy	6.80%	8.60%
England	State-funded only	5.30%	5.40%

Notes:
1) Percentage of possible mornings or afternoons recorded as an absence from school for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised, across the full academic year.
2) The percentage of pupils missing 15% or more of the mornings or afternoons they could attend. For most pupils, this means missing 56 or more mornings or afternoons in a year.

Source: Gov.UK: <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/>

Table 14: Absence rates at Schools 1 and 2: 2014-15

Table 13 shows that absence levels at both schools were slightly higher than the national average, across the categories. At School 2, however, they were also consistently higher than School 1. Table 14 shows the latest data available. It seems that by this time the picture had developed further: School 1 had reduced rates by 2014-15, whereas in School 2 they had increased further. Those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), had higher absence rates than the average although again, rates were higher at School 2 than School 1. The sharpest contrast and difference between the schools was evident in the "persistent" category. A similar picture emerged for those with SEN, although this varied depending on the classification. Gender figures showed a similar pattern to the overall data, although the persistent absence rate for boys was the same for both schools.

Table 15: Exclusions at Schools 1 and 2 by Gender and Free School Meals. Adapted from Raiseonline 2012												
	Fixed term exclusions as a percentage of the pupil group				% enrolments with 1 or more fixed-term exclusions				Permanent exclusions as a percentage of the pupil group			
	Tot	FSM	M	F	Tot	FSM	M	F	Tot	FSM	M	F
School 1	6.83	17.24	5.63	8.01	2.8	6.47	2.65	2.94	0.66	1.72	0.5	0.82
School 2	6.02	21.43	8.58	3.37	3.87	12.99	5.04	2.67	0.14	0.0	0.27	0.0
National	8.5	21.38	12.13	4.9	4.68	10.6	6.58	2.74	0.14	0.38	0.2	0.07

Table 15: Exclusions at Schools 1 and 2 by Gender and FSM

Table 16: Exclusions at Schools 1 and 2 by SEN classification. Adapted from Raiseonline 2012												
SEN Categories	Fixed term exclusions as a percentage of the pupil group				% enrolments with 1 or more fixed-term exclusions				Permanent exclusions as a percentage of the pupil group			
	W	A	P	S	W	A	P	S	W	A	P	S
School 1	21.75	25.17	17.91	17.39	8.77	8.61	8.96	4.35	2.46	3.97	0.75	4.35
School 2	17.6	12.5	25.84	19.57	10.3	9.03	12.36	10.87	0.86	0.0	2.25	0.0
National	24.14	16.15	40.28	27.46	11.85	8.78	18.02	12.13	0.48	0.23	0.99	0.32

Key to SEN Categories:
W = SEN WITHOUT a statement.
A = School Action (SEN)
P = School Action Plus (SEN)
S = SEN WITH Statement

Table 16: Exclusions at Schools 1 and 2 by SEN category

In contrast with those for absence, the data for exclusions show that national rates were higher than those for either school in several categories. A notable feature of Table 15 is that exclusion rates at School 1 were generally higher for girls than boys, whereas for School 2 the opposite is true, which is more reflective of what would be expected. It is possible that this was an anomaly, but would be interesting to review over time and look deeper into the reasons.

Also, in both schools and nationally, the highest incidence of exclusions was amongst those on FSM and with SEN, as shown in tables 15 and 16. The picture for permanent exclusions is not so clear, but these would have involved far fewer students, with consequently more variable percentages. Both schools appeared to exclude those in the “School Action Plus” and “Statemented” categories less frequently than nationally. However, School 1’s permanent exclusion rate was much higher than the national for “School Action” and “Statemented” students, whilst School 2 had a much higher permanent rate for those with “School Action Plus”. Again, these are not postulated as “trend” statements, without further analysis to establish reasons. What the data do appear to suggest, in conjunction with the cohort’s personal profile data, is that the students in the study had a greater statistical chance of being excluded than their peers.

School 1			All	Male	Female	FSM	SEN A	SEN P	Low PA	CLA
Cohort (Numbers)			197	104	93	50	16	24	53	2
GCSE	5+A*-C (EM)	%	34	27	41	18	13	4	2	0
All qual	5+ A*-C (EM)	%	41	37	46	24	25	13	2	0
All qual	5+ A*-C	%	73	71	74	64	75	29	53	0
All qual	5+ A*-G	%	97	96	99	92	88	92	98	100
School 2			All	Male	Fem	FSM	SEN	SEN P	Low PA	CLA
Cohort (Numbers)			242	136	106	42	11	8	34	1
GCSE	5+A*-C (EM)	%	54	54	54	31	36	38	21	0
All qual	5+ A*-C (EM)	%	57	58	57	38	36	50	3	0
All qual	5+ A*-C	%	75	73	77	60	55	63	21	100
All qual	5+ A*-G	%	93	90	96	81	91	100	68	100
Notes: FSM = Free School Meals / SEN A = School Action / SEN P = School Action Plus / Low PA = Low Prior Attainment CLA = “Children Looked After” NB: 5+ A* to C (EM) = 5+ A* to C including English and Maths.										

Table 17: Performance data at Schools 1 and 2 by Gender, FSM and SEN categories

Table 18: Overall performance: end of Key Stage 4 in 2016 - All pupils								
School Name	Type of School	No. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4	Progress 8 score	Attain 8 score	Grade C or better: English and Maths GCSE's	Achieve the English Bacc	Entering the English Bacc	Staying in education /entering employ (2014 leavers)
See note	1		2	3				
School 1	Academy	206	-0.29.	46.2	57%	17%	35%	91%
School 2	Academy	223	-0.35.	44.5	38%	16%	27%	92%
Nat.	State funded	540689	-0.03	49.9	63%	24.7%	39.7%	94%
Notes:								
1) Academy - government-funded but run by an academy trust rather than a local authority.								
2) This score shows how much progress pupils at this school made between the end of Key Stage 2 and the end of Key Stage 4, compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of Key Stage 2. This is based on results in up to 8 qualifications, which include English, Maths, three English Baccalaureate qualifications including Sciences, Computer Science, History, Geography and Languages, and three other additional approved qualifications.								
3) Schools get a score based on how well pupils have performed in up to 8 qualifications, which include English, Maths, 3 English Baccalaureate qualifications including sciences, computer science, history, geography and languages, and 3 other additional approved qualifications.								
Source: GOV.UK: https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/								

Table 18: Overall performance at the end of Key Stage 4: 2016

Regarding performance and attainment, the data in Tables 17 and 18 show that in 2012, School 2 out-performed School 1 in every category except one. They also show that by 2016, although the categories are different, the schools' relative performance appeared to have been reversed. By 2016, as explained above, School 2 was regarded by OFSTED to be "Inadequate" in its provision. The one category in which School 1 out-performed School 2 in 2012 was "All qualifications: 5 A*-G". This might imply that it was more concerned about the achievements of lower ability students, especially since the qualifications accounted for in this category encompass those in all the other categories too. However, it would be wrong to make such an assertion without thorough analysis of wider and deeper levels of data. For example, the SEN data could be shown to contradict the proposition, given the categorisations arising from SEN assessments described above.

What Table 17 does show is that students on FSM and those with SEN were likely to perform less well than their peers in both schools in public examinations and qualifications, perhaps significant, again, for the cohort, as reflected upon in the Findings.

3.2 EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGICAL POSITION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The design and framing of the research took an epistemologically interpretivist stance, rooted in phenomenology, described by Bryman as being, "...concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world." (Bryman, 2004: 13) As explained in the introduction, one concern of this research was to understand how the young people constituting its cohort made sense of their surroundings and interaction with those around them. However, it was also concerned to understand and show how 'those around' the cohort interacted and made sense of the environment that provided a context for their actions.

Regarding the latter part of Bryman's quote, my role as researcher was to try to ensure, as far as possible, that having worked in the field for many years, my experience and preconceptions did not influence the results or analysis, or that if they did, acknowledgement was provided and the perception explained. It was the environment in which the primary research was undertaken that the greatest potential for researcher bias existed. Attention is given later to how this was

addressed, when explaining the conduct of the interviews and collection of data from school records, which provided the basis for understanding how and why the cohort was considered “at risk of exclusion” and how provision for them was adapted by their schools in response. However, the broader aspects of the research including, for example, the literature review and use of data external to the school environment, were important for placing, supporting or contrasting its findings in a wider context and to achieve a greater depth of understanding for reporting upon them. This enabled data to be presented in a variety of ways, from statistical tables and charts, to in-depth descriptions and explanations of students’ circumstances, provision and support using vignettes. Attention was also paid to the context in which other research was produced as well as its content, so that alternative emphases could be considered in how schools respond to students’ “at-risk” status in different circumstances and at different times. Thus, in addition to phenomenology, the study adopted a hermeneutic approach, which has been described as attempting to find and bring out meanings from authors’ texts that, “...entail attention to the social and historical context within which the text was produced.” (Bryman, 2004: 394). Although the approach was not systematically applied, its consideration enabled the content of this research to be placed in its own context, comparing it with alternative findings and approaches adopted by other researchers. This was important because whilst aspects of the findings, analysis and conclusions resonate or contrast with others’ research, they remain in their own temporal, geographical, socio-political, educational philosophical, cultural and logistical settings.

Referring to the work of Van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2007) distinguishes between hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology, the latter being an epistemology through which, "...the investigator set(s) aside as much as possible his or her experiences to take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon under examination." (Creswell, 2007: 254). Where in this study, the 'phenomenon' was the concept of young peoples' experiences 'at-risk of exclusion', it adopted the approach by drawing together various perspectives on exclusion and provision for those affected, providing a fresh perspective, whilst undertaking to place its findings in context, as explained above, discussing and concluding upon them in the further context of others findings. However, despite the distinctions between phenomenological perspectives described by Creswell, the overall aim of the project was to synthesise its findings, develop understanding and make suggestions for improvements for those young people at risk of exclusion that are new, revised, or built upon existing provision and practice.

A constructivist methodological approach was deployed to analyse the research data, as shown in greater detail in the following 'Methods' section (3.3). Citing Derry (1999), Hartas explains that as a qualitative research paradigm, "Social constructivism emphasises the culture and the social context that surrounds people's lives and help us to understand society and construct knowledge based on this understanding." (Hartas, 2010: 44). Bryman (2004) exemplifies how researchers have conceptualised organisations and culture through the ontological considerations of constructivism. Regarding organisations and referring to Strauss et al's (1973) conclusions from research into operational aspects of how hospitals work, he explains that, from a constructivist's viewpoint, organisations are defined

by a 'negotiated order' through underlying and ongoing processes, arising from the understanding and interaction of those working in them at any given time, their interpretations of its rules and procedures, their roles within it and relationships with others. Bryman explains that, "Precisely because relatively little of the spheres of action of doctors, nurses and other personnel was prescribed, the social order of the hospital was an outcome of agreed-upon patterns of action that were themselves the products of negotiations between the different parties involved." (Bryman, 2004: 17). Because the 'different parties involved' are in a constant state of change and turnover, as may also apply to the organisation's formal rules, procedures and structures, this suggests that organisational change itself is continuous and is, thus, a complex subject of study.

This research, similar in its attempts to explore and understand issues related to organisations in the public-sector, takes a similar ontological position. The study's qualitative methods therefore involved collecting in-depth data, collating, interpreting, analysing and reflecting upon it with other sources, before drawing conclusions and reviewing the results, using them to inform further stages of research. Whilst primary and secondary data were used in conjunction with each other, it was the distinctive nature of the primary sources and methods used to collect data from them that provided the potential for rich description and in-depth analysis. By coding responses and categorising findings, the constructivist approach allowed understanding to be built up in stages, developed from the input of those contributing to it and the meanings which they ascribed to the world and their surroundings, as projected through their explanations. As Bryman notes, the ontological implication of this stance is that, "It implies that social phenomena and

categories are not only produced through social interaction, but that they are in a constant state of revision.” (Bryman, 2004: 17). This further underlines the rationale for considering the data with a hermeneutic approach. Again, however, the specific methods and mechanisms of the study are explained further after the next section on the design of the research.

3.2.1 Research Design:

Since a key aim of the study was to establish and understand how events and interaction unfolded for the young people involved and the ensuing outcomes over the period of one academic year, the research design chosen was longitudinal. Interviews were undertaken with the cohort and a small number of staff at various times during the year, in addition to one-off interviews with a wider range of staff. The term ‘cohort’ is used throughout the study, in deference to Bryman’s definition of the term as comprising those, “...who share a certain characteristic, such as...having a certain experience...” (Bryman, 2004: 46). Bryman distinguishes ‘cohort’ from ‘panel’ longitudinal design, which chooses participants using sampling methods. The cohort were not randomly chosen through sampling, but were identified by their school’s “lead” staff, having been asked to choose students who had already experienced at least one exclusion. The procedure and outcome arising from it is explained and justified in more detail later. The longitudinal design, however, enabled deeper understanding of the cohort’s experiences than would have been possible with a cross-sectional approach, especially as student’s each case took on different characteristics and responses over the time of the study, which would not have emerged if recording all its data in a single time frame. In this

respect, Gilbert (2008) suggests that, "...the great advantage of longitudinal research is that one can directly study process and mechanism: that is, how one thing is affected by or depends on another." Gilbert (2008: 36). Like Bryman (2004), he identifies two types of longitudinal research, the 'Case' and 'Representative' designs, the latter of which, regarding sample selection, is comparable with the 'panel' term used by Bryman (2004). This study was more closely aligned to what Gilbert (2008) describes as the 'Case' design, making use of vignettes to provide in-depth analysis of cases, although it also attempted to overcome the criticism that Gilbert (2008) ascribes to the methodology, that generalisations cannot be inferred from individual cases. Comparative data was gathered, for example from school records, literature and wider demographic and geographical research (e.g. alternative education provision data from other Local Authorities), that enabled the results to be analysed in a wider context than the individual cases themselves would have allowed.

Overall, therefore, Bryman's (2004) 'cohort' is a more accurate descriptor of the basis upon which the longitudinal research design was based, whilst the distinctions discussed above underpin the rationale for describing the study as interpretivist rather than descriptive, as it would be if case study based.

3.3 METHODS

Figure 4, below, provides a summary of the methods of data collection associated with each of the research questions. Having presented this, the section goes on to explain and justify the methods and the context in which they were deployed. The emerging data were used to complement or contrast with that found in the literature review providing the basis for the Discussion.

Fig 4: Research Questions and Associated Methods		
“At risk of exclusion”? A study of the experiences of and support provided for 10 young people aged 14-16 in two large, urban secondary schools.		
	Research Question	Associated Method
1	What characterises a young person as being at risk of exclusion from school? Is it possible to identify a range of characteristics or factors that place young people “at risk” of exclusion and assess the extent to which they are evident?	<p>Primary Source: Semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and “significant others”</p> <p>Secondary Source: Document analysis including data gathered from school and mentor records and national data. Analysis of local demographic data. Documentary evidence from other research Document analysis of publications from official sources e.g. local and national data</p>
2	Can “at-risk” factors in the school environment and beyond be mitigated through interventions and the provision of support?	<p>Primary Source: Semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and “significant others”, including support staff. Document analysis including data gathered from school records and mentor records.</p> <p>Documentary sources (secondary): Analysis of student and school records from profile data regarding exclusions, attendance, SEN status, Free School Meals (FSM) Documentary evidence from other Local Authorities and research</p>
3	Can “at risk” status be ameliorated or mitigated by the curriculum, achievement and opportunities to make choices?	<p>Primary Source: Semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and “significant others”, including curriculum decision makers. Document analysis including data gathered from school records and mentor records. Analysis of student attainment data.</p> <p>Secondary Source: Document analysis of publications from official sources e.g. Local Authorities, DfE/DfES Document analysis from analytical sources e.g. Raiseonline and Fischer Family Trust (FFT)</p>

Figure 4: Research Questions and Associated Methods

As inferred previously, mixed methods, with a qualitative emphasis, were deployed for the study, analysis being based upon interpretivism. For the interviews and data collection phases, a constructivist approach, along with Document Analysis, allowed for learning that emerged at each stage in the process of the study, to inform subsequent stages and further develop data for analysis and understanding.

Document analysis followed synthesis of data that was held about the students in various files, places and types. As well as assessing relationships such as, for example, how engagement with Alternative Education Provision (AEP) might be related to academic results, I wanted to understand why decisions were made, how they related to others, how the students involved made sense of and rationalised them and what, if known, were the outcomes. Figure 5 below provides a broad conceptual view of the ways in which the primary data were collected and processed, before going on to look at the data collection methods specifically.

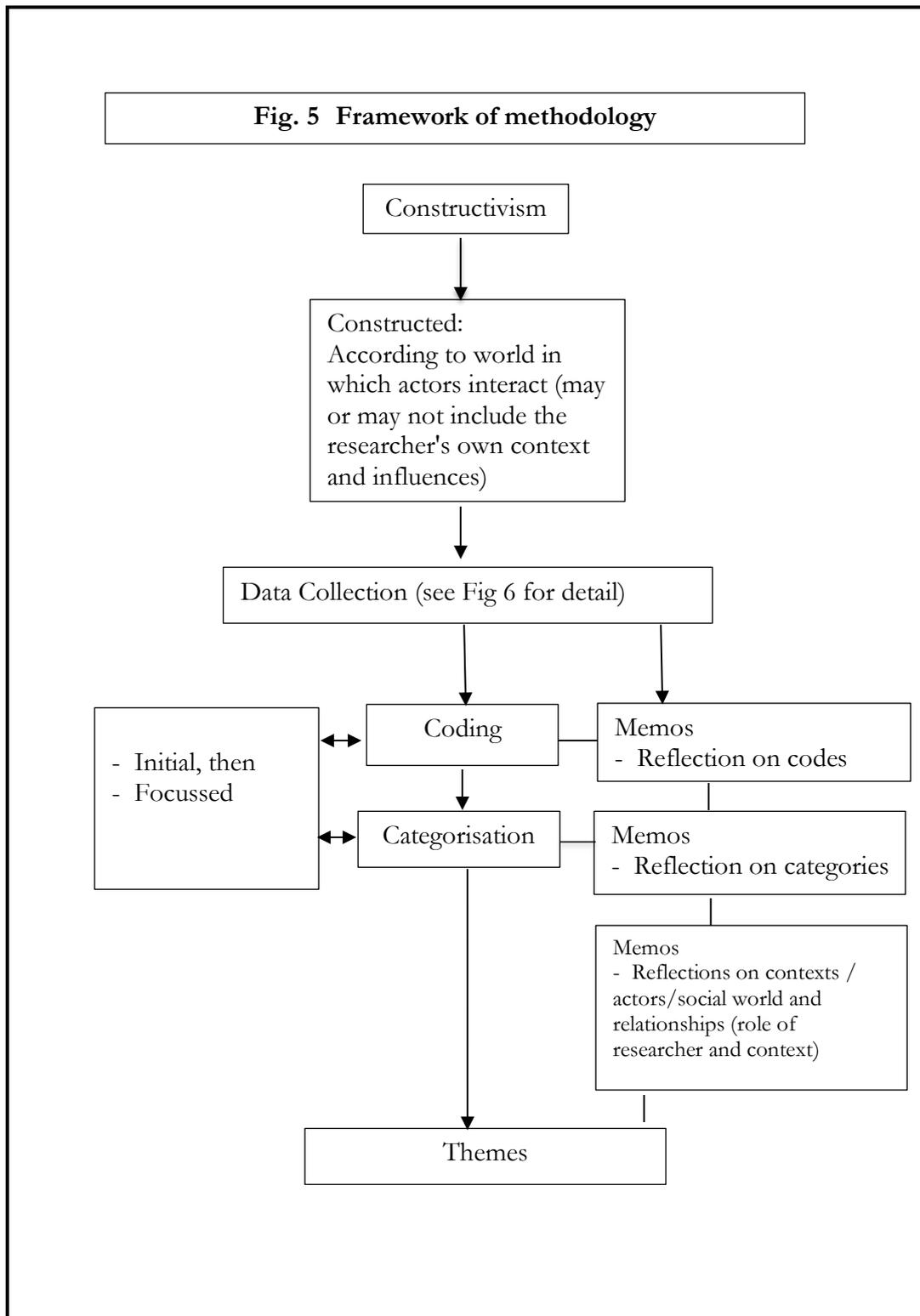


Figure 5: Framework of methodology

3.3.1 Data Collection Methods

The interviews were semi-structured. Details of their conduct are provided in the next section. The semi-structured approach was taken so that respondents could talk freely if issues were of concern individually, whilst retaining a degree of consistency between them. There was no need to generate responses from identical questions, because the research was trying to establish what differentiated the cohort's characteristics and experiences, rather than compare responses to specific issues. As far as the research was concerned, all the cohort had in common, prior to its initiation, was being thought of as "at-risk of exclusion", so assumptions of "group" characteristics and status extended no further than that. Their characteristics for comparison could be identified from additional data, so the interviews could be qualitative. A similar approach was taken towards the staff interviews, in this respect, so that differences in students' experiences could be identified. The method provided flexibility and in the case of the staff, the freedom to talk about issues related to students, their roles, the school and colleagues more openly than closed questions would have allowed, enhancing the quality of information and perhaps also covering a wider range of issues. Whilst, as the Findings and Discussion show, there were unexpected outcomes, differences were anticipated, resulting from individuals' experiences. This was part of the focus of the research. On the other hand, the semi-structured approach also ensured that some structure would be retained, so that analysis could account for comparability and differences, rather than simply identify them.

Regarding the use of content and documentary analysis, Fitzgerald (2012) acknowledges Scott's (1990) argument that documents should not be classified as objective evidence. She suggests that they are more appropriately used to provide different perspectives or to help to triangulate information from other sources; interviews, for example. "School Records" referred to in Figure 6 below are an example of data sources used for this purpose, to help to explain and provide a context for actions and events that affected the students and their progress. Student files, one source of school records used, contain a wide variety of documents that provide insight into what happened to them. On the other hand, because the files might have had many contributors over several years, they are best considered as subjective. Other sources used, such as schools' performance and target-setting data, from organisations such as OFSTED, Raiseonline and Fischer Family Trust (FFT) may be considered as more objective, because of their traceable origins and potential for verification. The latter two, however, are not in the "public domain" and so are more difficult to access. Also, the type of data they make available are a response to political decisions, requiring performance data for analysis and publication rather than driven by school-level or research needs, thus limiting the extent to which they can be refined or verified.

However, with further reference to Scott (1990), Fitzgerald (2012) provides four criteria for analysing documents: 1) Authenticity, 2) Credibility, 3) Representativeness and 4) Meaning. Whilst not systematically deployed during the research period, these criteria provide the basis upon which the documents referred to above were used.

Authenticity is to do with the ability to claim that documents used are sound and have not been tampered with. In terms of the documents used, this is far more difficult to ascertain with school files than it is for the official documentation. The authenticity of the former can only be taken on trust, given that these are sensitive documents, held in secure conditions, by public organisations which themselves are subject to scrutiny.

Credibility refers to the accuracy of documentation. Similar comments apply here as for authenticity and some of the difficulties in use are exemplified in the findings section. However, since student files are kept securely, are overseen by senior school staff and are ultimately the responsibility of Headteachers, the credibility of the documents used was, again, at least subject to professional scrutiny.

Representativeness refers to the possibilities for documents to be made available and survive in the longer term. Again, for use here, the students' files are the ones in most need of justification. Most documents in their files are paper records that will be kept for the duration of the student's time at school and a period beyond as considered prudent. Documents kept electronically will be archived, but longevity may be subject to the school's data storage capacity. Over time, as potential capacity expands, these problems become less relevant.

Meaning is the criteria that presents the greatest challenge in the sense that it is to do with interpretation. Fitzgerald points out that in order to interpret and analyse effectively, key words, phrases and concepts must be understood. The degree to

which understanding and shared meaning can be claimed and ascribed to historical, often hand-written records is debatable. This is an issue that arises in the Findings and Discussion, regarding, for example, the writing and interpretation of policy and student data at school level.

The diagram below provides a summary of the methods used and how analysis of the data generated was approached.

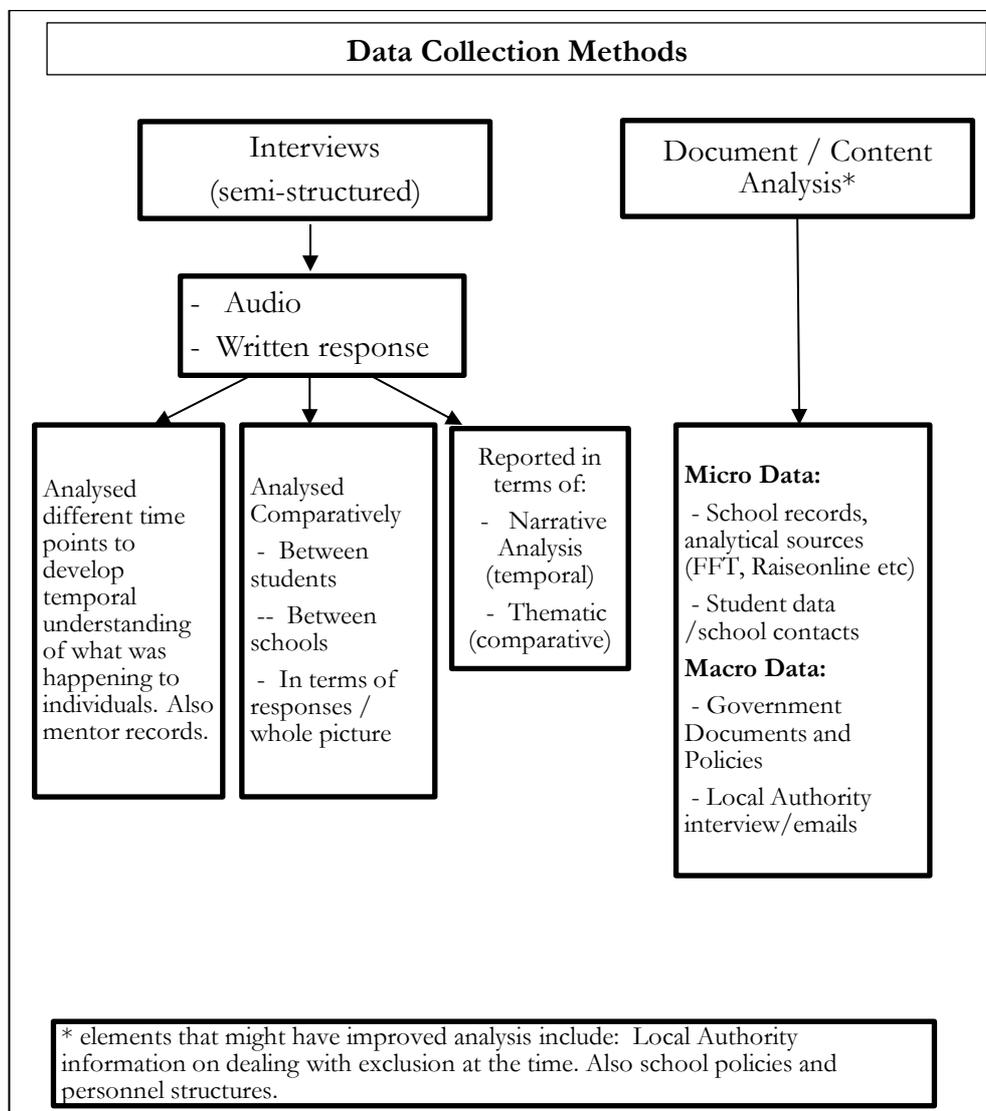


Figure 6: Data Collection Methods

The terms “Micro” and “Macro” data above describe the use of data applicable at individual or school level (micro) as opposed to that which has been aggregated (macro). The distinction is made by Vignoles and Dex (2012), who argue the validity and justification of using existing data sets in research. They also explain how these can be classified as primary or secondary data. Macro data is almost always secondary because it is likely to have been aggregated for local or national use. Micro data is much more likely to be primary. However, Vignoles and Dex (2012) explain the benefits of using an existing data set such as a school PLASC return (Pupil Level Annual School Census) to create a new primary data set for a specific research purpose. This distinction is important for my study in that PLASC data was used, for example, to contribute to the students’ profile information e.g. name, date of birth, ethnicity, gender, SEN details etc. It is essentially secondary data, used in a primary context. Table 19 below shows the PLASC data collected for a single student, combined with academic monitoring and progress data for the same student, that was collated to produce tables of comparable data for each of them. Appendix 5 provides further details, showing the PLASC data collated in tabular form.

Table 19: An example of one student's data collated from file and electronic records

Profile data								
School No.	1	number assigned for study						
Student No.	1	number assigned for study						
Gender	M							
DOB	#####							
Prev School	3	Total number of schools attended (primary and secondary in addition to f						
Parents	Same name as student							
Ethnicity	White British							
SEN category	A	Alternated between "N", "A" and "P" at different times in school career. See Individ						
SEN Type	BESD	Notes for 2009 only. Notes show attendance at weekly "success centre"						
FSM	Yes							
Attendance%	85.6	86.2	N/A	81.1	84.9			
	whole KS4	Jan'13. Yr11	Yr 10	KS3	KS2			
Exclusions	14	internal (IEU or BASE referred) or external, from notes						
Destination	Moulton College	(Last known destination recorded)						
Academic (Grades or %)								
PROGRESS DATA								
	Jan Yr11	End Yr 10	Prior attainment					
English Lang	C	C			Test (Assessed)		Teacher Assessed	
English Lit	D	C			KS2	KS3	KS2	KS3
Maths		UDU*	English	5c	6	5	6	
Science (BTEC)	E	U	Maths	5b	5	4	5	
Drama	C	A	Science	4a	Abs	4	Abs	
Geography	D	D/E						
PE BTEC	Merit	Pass						
Art	C	D/E						
		* Maths: 3 grades are for 3 modules						
Academic (Grades or %)								
EXPECTED OR PREDICTED								
	Result	School			Fischer Family Trust (FFT)			
5A*-C (EM)					89.9	FFT estimated chances of:		
	Final	Predicted	Target Yr11	Target Yr10*	Outcome	C or better	A*-G	
English Lang	C	C	B	A-C	86.8	86.8	99	
English Lit	D	C	B	A-C				
Maths	C	C	B	A-C	93.8	93.8	99	
Science (BTEC)	FG	D	B	A-C	99	86.9	99	
Drama	C	C	B	A-C	79	79	99	
Geography	F	D	B	A-C	99	74.9	99	
PE BTEC	MM	Pass	Merit	Pass	53	82.7	99	
Art	C	D	D	A-C	75.7	75.7	99	
				* notes record says: grades all A - C, but mostly B	If BTEC was taken, the equivalent GCSE grade is used as proxy for the chance of success from Fischer			

Table 19: An example of one student's data collated from file and electronic records

3.3.2 The conduct of the interviews, collection of school-level data, record keeping, processing and methods of analysis

The Interviews

Interview Schedule Phase	1	2 (Oct)	2 (Dec)	3	4
STUDENTS					
School 1	Written	Written	Recorded	Recorded	Recorded
Student 1	5.10.12	26.10.12		4.3.13	14.5.13
Student 2	9.11.12			4.3.13	9.5.13
Student 3	5.10.12		7.12.12	4.3.13	9.5.13
Student 4	5.10.12	28.10.12		4.3.13	9.5.13
Student 5	5.10.12	28.10.12		4.3.13	9.5.13
School 2	Written	Written	Recorded	Recorded	Recorded
Student 6			5.12.12		
Student 7	16.11.12				
Student 8					
Student 9			12.12.12		8.5.13
Student 10					8.5.13
STAFF					
School 1					
DH1			23.11.12		16.9.13
Student 5 support* (T)					11.7.13
Student main support* (NT)	(main support for students 3 and 4)				13.8.13
Student 1 and 2 support* (NT)					11.7.13
Student 4 support* (NT)					19.7.13
Student 4 support* (2) (T)			9.11.12		
School 2					
DH2 and Senior Support* Staff (T)					4.7.13
Head of Year 11 (all students) (T)			28.11.12		
Local Authority					
Local Authority Rep					13.9.13

* (T) = Teacher, (NT) = Non-Teacher. "Support" refers to support for the students concerned, rather than staff functions.

Table 20: Interview Schedule; whole of study

Primary information was collected from 34 interviews, 25 of which were recorded and transcribed and 9 written up after notes were taken during the interview. The interviews were conducted during the academic year 2012-13, when the 10 students involved were in Year 11. They took place over four phases (referred to in the text

as “points” 1 to 4): September/October (point 1), November/December (point 2), February (point 3) and April/May (point 4). The schedule enabled an assessment of change experienced by the students over time, how it affected their school lives and how they felt any changes had impacted upon them. The detailed schedule is shown in Table 20 above. In addition to the main schedule, informal conversations took place during visits to the schools from which memos and notes were made for further use.

The student interviews were semi-structured and intended to last 15 to 20 minutes, although occasionally they were longer. A brief structure was devised for the first interviews (Appendix 3), with questions designed to acquire consistent introductory information from the students. They were carried out face-to-face, in a conversational style, to enable the respondents to provide free responses within reasonable limits and feel as comfortable as possible. Subsequent interview rounds used a similar method, but with questions devised after the previous interview point, in order to take account of the answers and issues the students were raising. The first two rounds of interviews were documented by using pen and paper notes so that students’ conversation would not be disrupted or stilted by the presence of recording media. A digital recorder was used in the third and fourth rounds, however, and the results were transcribed, using Dragon software. This was because the pen and paper method produced notes which were not detailed enough and having asked the students, none of them objected to the use of recording media. Transcriptions from interviews 3 and 4, produced far better results and detail (full transcripts are available). The students were not at all worried about being recorded and there was no apparent difference in the manner of their responses.

As with the students' interviews, a brief list of questions was produced for staff and either outlined or provided in advance for their consideration prior to the interview. It was intended that the senior staff would be interviewed at the start of the process (September/October) and again at the end. This worked well at School 1 although the comparable staff at School 2 were not available at the start, so they were interviewed once only. Staff interviews were recorded and conducted over a period of 30 to 60 minutes. There were, however, three ad hoc conversations with members of staff who were significant for individual students where notes were written up after the conversations, because they had not been anticipated and the recording media was not therefore available.

Further primary information was requested by email (see Appendix 2) from other Local Authorities, so that comparison could be made with arrangements for young people "at-risk of exclusion" elsewhere. The contact list was derived from my professional employment at the time. Whilst several responses were received, one interview was also arranged, providing in-depth information from the Head of a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The interview and other responses were collated and the results are reflected in the Findings.

Secondary data collection at school level.

School-level secondary data was obtained from student records and documentary evidence by having regular access to student files, mentor notes and performance data. For data protection, the files were provided in secure conditions at each school

by the administrative staff responsible for them. Their login details were used to access electronically held information and notes were recorded manually. In addition to providing the files when I was in school, the administrative staff liaised with senior staff and organised appointments with students and teachers, but did not take part in the study directly. Full access to what had been recorded was made available to the school representatives at all times in notebooks kept for each student. Care was taken to ensure that ethical procedures were followed as confirmed by my university's completed ethical approval form (Appendix 9). There is also further explanation of difficulties experienced in the research and how they were dealt with in the final main section "Ethical Considerations".

In addition to school-based research and the literature review, further sources provided complementary data. These included local and national databases, available electronically, especially Raiseonline, Fischer Family Trust (FFT) and OFSTED reports. These are explained in more detail at the point of use in the thesis. Raiseonline data and documentation were compiled by the Department for Education (DfE), using data obtained mandatorily from an annual schools' "census". FFT, using data voluntarily supplied to them by schools, analyse it and provide reports back to schools, where it is used to set targets related to their students' capabilities and achievements. Although it is voluntary, schools generally use FFT without question to satisfy an OFSTED requirement for inspections that their data is "triangulated", because otherwise they would have to find an alternative additional source to supplement their own data systems.

Figure 7 below summarises the data sources used and relationships between them:

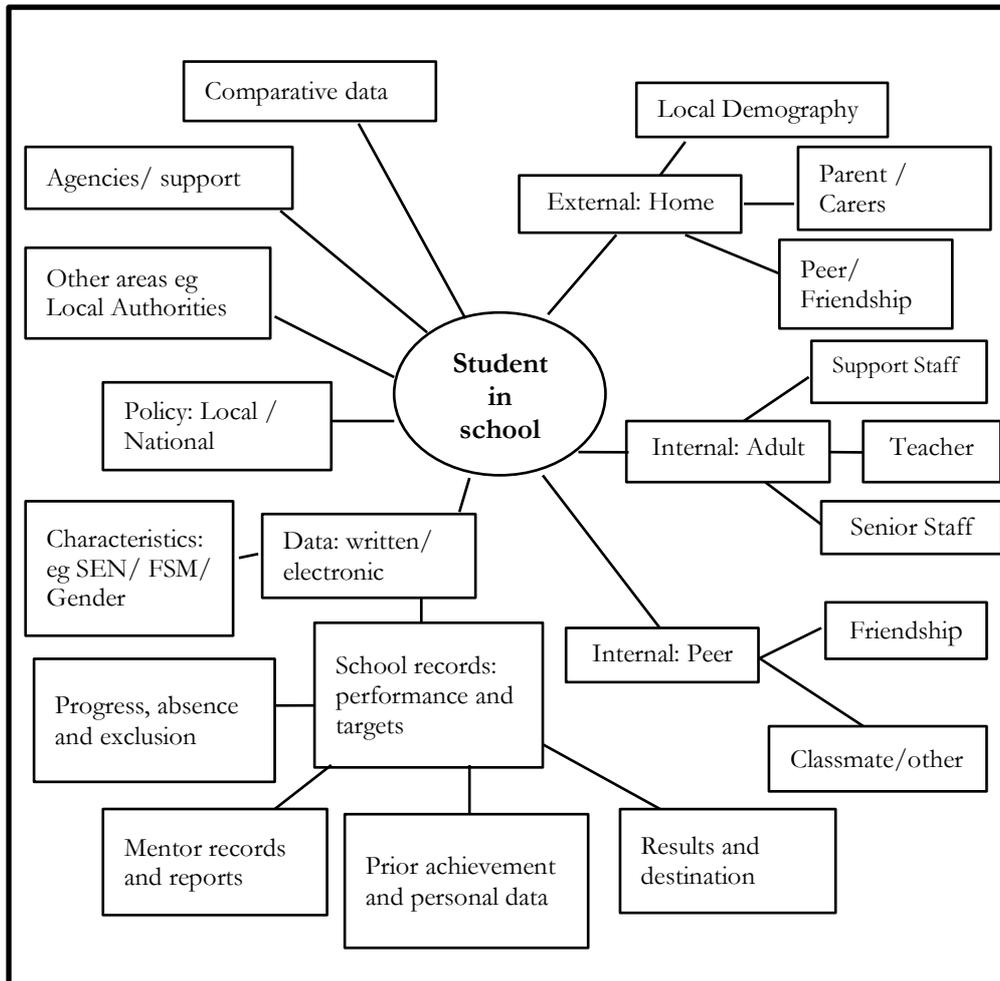


Figure 7: A diagrammatic summary of data sources used and interrelationships

Coding and analysis

Coding and analysis were undertaken after the interviews and data collection had been completed. Analysis was based upon constructivist methods as explained earlier and Nvivo was used in the process, as a tool to organise the material that had been collected, rather than to perform the analysis. It provided a platform through which it was easy to identify where material could be found so that review and refinement of data and codes were always possible.

Before importing to Nvivo, folders were created, into which the transcriptions could be placed along with any other relevant information. The key folders created were labelled as staff or student documents at School 1 and School 2. A further folder was created for Local Authority information along with others for notes, statistics and other relevant information.

Having allocated transcriptions to the folders, the process of coding was undertaken by using nodes. This involved reading the interviews line by line. Where a comment arose that appeared to have significance e.g. a student commented on their aspirations, a node was devised and the comment allocated to that node – in this case “Aspirations”. This method was continued to build up a framework of nodes which could be used across both schools and for all students. It allowed flexibility, as any new comments or issues raised could easily be allocated to new nodes. As each interview produced further new nodes, previous interviews which had already been coded could be reviewed and reallocated as necessary. Comments being coded

could be allocated to several nodes. The node structure that emerged from Nvivo is shown in Table 21 below.

Once the initial allocation process had been undertaken, the information logged within the node structure was categorised. There were some difficulties with this, mainly due to the use of multiple coding – i.e. coding one comment to several nodes. These were overcome, however, as the process of synthesis began and the emerging categorisation was developed. A major advantage of using Nvivo and this method was that the categories themselves could be used for different purposes – enabling comparisons to be made between school and/or individual profiles. Across the two schools, as the year progressed, similarities and differences became evident in terms of the experiences of the young people and the ways in which staff treated and dealt with them.

The information derived from the interviews was used in conjunction with notes from students' paper and electronic files, along with profile and progress data to build up full information about each of them with frameworks that were produced to enable consistent comparison to be made between their characteristics, experiences and outcomes. These were used to produce tables for each individual student, logging and mapping the outcomes of interviews with them and their support staff, along with the further data. The individuals' tables were collated and condensed to create summaries for each of the two schools. These tables and collated summaries are available, but were too long to include as appendices. The templates devised for them are provided as Figures 8 and 9 below.

As data was added to tables and pictures built up on each student, the categories that had emerged from the Nvivo coding began to suggest themes, which can be gleaned from the headings used in Figures 8 and 9. Some were clearer than others so that, for example, the factors underlying students' "at-risk" status were understood to need a significant part of the findings associated with them as a theme in themselves. At this stage, however, there was still a major question of organisation to answer, regarding whether the format to report the findings should be in the form of Case Studies for each student, by including information from the interviews and students' files in synthesis with curriculum, monitoring and progress data. Whilst it may have been possible to do this, important aspects of the study would, perhaps, have been ignored. There were some issues that were common to all and others that underlined differences between students, but some concerned external/non-controllable factors such as policy issues, that may not have been highlighted by using Case Studies and narrative analysis. Also, it became clear that a Case Study approach could lead to important aspects of staff support and their approaches to it being marginalised in the analysis, where it appeared that they were of importance to the students, especially in terms of the effect they had in the schools' responses to their status. The decision was taken, therefore, to consider common and individual aspects, making comparisons and using synthesis where appropriate, but using extended examples in the form of vignettes where individual cases warranted focus. The themes that were decided upon are, again, evident if referring to Figures 8 and 9, in that once the "at-risk" factors had been adopted as a distinct theme, the schools' and staff responses and support available to address them also needed substantial consideration as themes. These were divided between what was essentially pastoral and personal support and that which was curriculum

or “academically” based, whilst issues surrounding the incidence and achievement of “aspirations” were threaded throughout. Policy issues required a further distinct theme, as they were relevant not only to individuals’ circumstances and responses to them, but also their influence on wider educational provision as it affected the students directly.

To summarise, the themes that emerged were: Factors related to exclusion and students’ “at-risk” status (Theme 1), relationships and support (Theme 2), aspiration, choice, curriculum and progress related (Theme 3) and policy issues (Theme 4).

Table 21: Nvivo Node Structure					
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On
Change Factors	28	195	25/01/2016 20:00	PJ	25/01/2016 20:00
Comments	23	89	26/01/2016 15:09	PJ	29/01/2016 14:57
Negative	18	44	25/01/2016 20:01	PJ	29/01/2016 15:05
Positive	19	62	25/01/2016 20:01	PJ	29/01/2016 14:54
Local Authority	3	10	24/01/2016 10:34	PJ	11/05/2016 11:00
Personal Notes	28	62	27/01/2016 11:11	PJ	11/05/2016 11:00
Staff (combined)	13	355	24/01/2016 10:32	PJ	28/01/2016 10:06
StaffSch1	10	221	24/01/2016 10:32	PJ	08/04/2016 10:33
Attitude	3	28	06/04/2016 11:09	PJ	07/04/2016 11:56
Ed Policy related	4	15	04/04/2016 13:41	PJ	07/04/2016 12:05
Personality related	5	19	04/04/2016 14:20	PJ	06/04/2016 19:33
Problem areas	7	29	04/04/2016 14:16	PJ	07/04/2016 11:56
Sch policy related	9	73	04/04/2016 13:43	PJ	07/04/2016 12:10
Student Specific	1	2	04/04/2016 13:41	PJ	07/04/2016 12:10
Support given	6	46	05/04/2016 13:39	PJ	07/04/2016 12:02
Use of Language	3	9	06/04/2016 11:14	PJ	06/04/2016 19:42
StaffSch2	2	133	24/01/2016 10:33	PJ	08/04/2016 10:33
Attitude	2	14	06/04/2016 11:10	PJ	10/04/2016 15:04
Ed Policy related	2	9	04/04/2016 13:44	PJ	11/05/2016 10:53
Personality related	1	6	04/04/2016 14:20	PJ	10/04/2016 15:02
Problem areas	2	13	04/04/2016 14:16	PJ	11/05/2016 11:00
Sch policy related	2	33	04/04/2016 13:44	PJ	11/05/2016 11:00
Student Specific	1	5	04/04/2016 13:41	PJ	11/05/2016 11:00
Support given	2	42	05/04/2016 13:40	PJ	11/05/2016 11:00
Use of Language	2	11	06/04/2016 11:14	PJ	11/05/2016 10:53
Students (combined)	34	475	24/01/2016 10:28	PJ	28/01/2016 10:04
StudentsSch1	24	273	24/01/2016 10:30	PJ	28/01/2016 10:04
Aspiration Motivation	13	20	26/01/2016 14:26	PJ	29/01/2016 09:57
At risk factors	16	65	26/01/2016 12:20	PJ	29/01/2016 10:46
Characteristics	2	6	28/01/2016 11:08	PJ	29/01/2016 10:45
Choices	19	60	26/01/2016 14:45	PJ	10/02/2016 09:56
Knowledge of choices	4	6	28/01/2016 10:03	PJ	29/01/2016 10:29
Peer Relationships	4	7	28/01/2016 10:55	PJ	29/01/2016 10:44
Significant Others	18	36	26/01/2016 12:22	PJ	10/02/2016 09:56
Support	18	70	27/01/2016 10:54	PJ	10/02/2016 20:16
Work away from class	6	9	26/01/2016 14:55	PJ	28/01/2016 11:02
StudentsSch2	10	202	24/01/2016 10:30	PJ	28/01/2016 10:05
Aspiration Motivation	6	19	26/01/2016 14:27	PJ	23/02/2016 10:09
At risk factors	7	50	26/01/2016 12:20	PJ	29/01/2016 15:05
Characteristics	7	22	28/01/2016 11:08	PJ	29/01/2016 15:03
Choices	7	44	26/01/2016 14:45	PJ	29/01/2016 14:56
Knowledge of choices	4	11	28/01/2016 10:05	PJ	29/01/2016 14:46
Peer Relationships	6	10	28/01/2016 10:55	PJ	29/01/2016 14:58
Significant Others	7	15	26/01/2016 12:23	PJ	29/01/2016 15:04
Support	9	34	27/01/2016 10:54	PJ	29/01/2016 14:58
Work away from class	5	8	26/01/2016 14:55	PJ	29/01/2016 14:56

Table 21: Nvivo Node Structure

Fig 8: Template for individual student information				
STUDENT	What the records show/issues	P t	SIGNIFICANT OTHERS	SUPPORT (e.g. staff or Connexions)
Aspiration / career intention. (as expressed by the student)				
“At Risk” Factors	Family/Home Exclusions recorded in file: Report cards: Other file comments:			
Choices / available routes. What options were available to students and/or taken? Decision Making – How and who				
Work away from class/school				

Figure 8: Template for individual student information

Fig 9: Template for collated student information.		
All Students	What the records show/issues	Point
Aspiration / career intention. (as expressed by the student)		This column was to enable the different time points in which the interviews took place to be identified.
“At Risk” Factors	Specific to Student Basic Details Attendance Behaviour Parental support Exclusions	
Choices and available routes. What options were available to students and/or taken? Decision Making – How and who	Choices made Perceived Support Actual Support Changes to choices	
Work away from class/school		

Figure 9: Template for collated student information.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Working with young people necessitates the exercise of care and caution, for safeguarding. Although I was experienced in dealing with young people as a teacher and senior school leader and had previously received CRB enhanced clearance, the further clearance needed to undertake this research was sought and granted.

All students were asked to sign an agreement for their progress to be followed as an integral part of the research after it had been explained to them (Appendix 10).

They were not specifically told that they were considered “at risk of exclusion”, as the potential consequences of doing so were thought to be unethical. It could have influenced the students’ perceptions of themselves and their status in their schools. Instead, I explained that I was interested in studying how changes occurring over the course of the academic year affected their school lives and performance. This was recorded in some interviews and is therefore available to exemplify how the issue was handled. They were told that they could withdraw at any time and the opportunity to opt out of further involvement was restated at each interview. When dates were set in interviews for future meetings, they were told what further interviews would take place and asked if they were happy to continue. Agreement of parents/carers was also sought and, similarly, they were given the opportunity to opt out, by me and by school representatives as well. All were assured that no aspect of their personal identities would be revealed in a manner attributable to them, nor would their schools’ identities be revealed. To ensure this, the identities of schools, students and staff involved have been anonymised.

The danger that my sample size might have significantly reduced each time an opt-out occurred within the study period did not transpire, although there were some problems. Early on, one of the schools decided to change the cohort. I agreed on two occasions, but on a third, asked the school not to make further changes, as the study was underway by that time and it was felt better for there to be no more disruption. Although it risked one or more students being frequently unavailable, I wanted to avoid the possibility that the cohort identity was being manipulated by the school to achieve more positive outcomes. Whilst this did, unfortunately, result in one of the students never being available, it was felt that this student's data still made a valid contribution to the study.

Prior to my research, I had previously been a Vice Principal at a local secondary school. There was a possibility, therefore, that if this was known to the students involved they may become more self-conscious or reticent in answering questions or discussing issues in interviews. To overcome this, I decided to tell the students I was a teacher who had worked at another local school and be open about my prior role if the question arose, but not declare it as a matter of course. The approach enabled me to act in the role of someone who could help to support the students, in addition to them being told about my research and what I was trying to achieve. The support took the form of offering advice on where to ask questions or search for information on choices and careers which was, in any case, one of my specialisms. The topic was relevant to the questions being asked in the students' interviews. Although it did not feature highly or often, any advice that was offered is available to review in the interview transcripts as well as the original recordings.

Similarly, with staff, my background was made clear in terms of both the research to be undertaken and previous history. Some knew me, or at least knew of me, to which extent my Vice Principal role was known. In any case, clarity was provided whilst trying to avoid unnecessary diversions from the purpose of the interviews in casual conversations. The transcripts of interviews are available as evidence of the attempts to achieve balance in this respect.

My thesis is, therefore, written in the style of researcher with professional experience, rather than as an “outsider”. There were advantages, including that as a researcher with professional experience, I could demonstrate familiarity with the use of performance data, how it may have been interpreted by school users and how the same data could be interpreted differently. This made it possible to identify and comment on potential inconsistencies that might have arisen from variable interpretations of students’ data. It had the further benefit of helping to distinguish this study from others with similar aims, but where the researcher did not appear to have had similar expertise. The relevant data are apparent in the findings and the discussion sections on students’ academic performance and progress. The danger of having knowledge and experience in the field is that it impinges upon and influences the conduct and outcomes of the research itself. A similar point, related to “insider” status was made by Carlile (2013), who was concerned that her knowledge could influence her judgement too much, causing her to change methodological approach. Her ethnographic approach was not one I felt would be possible for my study, however, as the potential ethical risks might have been insurmountable, in a study needing direct contact with young people. My approach was, therefore, to try to minimise the difficulties, taking care to maintain a respectful “distance” from those

involved in the study, whilst being constantly reflective in questioning what I was doing and why. The task was made easier by my role, working for the Local Authority, but it was still difficult to achieve balance in working amiably but professionally as a researcher.

Ethical issues also arose though, related to being a Local Authority school advisory employee. Data - largely performance and analysis based - that schools could find sensitive, was available to me. The Headteachers of the schools involved were aware of this and full details were available to them. Having sent a document (Appendix 1) to the Head at each school, meetings (unrecorded) took place to discuss the information needed and they were guaranteed confidentiality in its use. At School 1, the main meeting was with the Deputy Head (DH1) after meeting the Head briefly. It was also made clear that the work was subject to rigorous ethical procedures required to be followed by Warwick University. Assurance was provided as to the ethical use of their students' data and it was confirmed that any product of the research would be available to them.

Liaising with two other staff, below senior level, brought further issues which needed to be overcome, related to my professional work. After a visit to School 1, a "note to self" memo suggested the two staff were concerned that I had been brought in to do my research as a ploy to build evidence against at least one of the students, to prepare for their exclusion. The staff involved were antagonistic towards the school, in terms of disagreeing with policy and the actions of senior staff. Some of this is commented upon in the "Findings", regarding Student 5. Further difficulties were manifest where some members of staff, including those

already referred to, wished to make points about the school that were outside the remit of the research. I perceived their intention was to send information back to senior staff, using me as a conduit. There was no simple answer to this, other than to try to be as earnest as possible with both the members of staff concerned and the senior staff, restating, when it seemed appropriate, the purpose of the research and how any information received might be used. On one occasion, however, information was passed back to senior staff of the school when it appeared to concern the well-being of one of the students. Despite these perceived problems, at no point was my ability to continue with and complete the research questioned and, ethical policies and principles were always followed. The issues did not seem insurmountable to the point where advice needed to be sought and in this sense, personal experience was felt to have been an asset.

4. FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Four themes emerged from the research, which have been used to structure the Findings section. Theme 1 elaborates on the factors, outlined in the Methodology, that underpin the students' classification as "at-risk of exclusion" and shows how the risks unfolded during the period of the investigation. Theme 2 considers the support available to the students to meet their current needs and those that emerged as the study progressed. Various aspects of support, internal and external to the school environment, are brought into focus, including the use of "vignettes" to provide detailed examples. Attention is also paid to the perceptions of the students and the schools' staff regarding what was apparently offered and how it was provided. Theme 3 goes on to consider the students' aspirations, using individual profiles to discuss their academic records and potential. In the process, factors are identified which apparently facilitated or inhibited the students' progress. The final Theme 4, presents the policy context that influenced the possibilities available for the students and outcomes. It is focussed upon school and local levels although wider national policy also features where it was directly relevant.

4.1 THEME 1: EXCLUSIONS, ABSENCE AND SANCTIONS.

Exclusions and high absence rates are contributory reasons for young people underachieving at school. The students in the study were considered at risk of exclusion and underperformance for many reasons, although these were not systematically used to identify the participants. As shown in the students' profiles in the Methodology, a high percentage of the cohort shared characteristics which may

be expected to be found in those at risk of exclusion. To recap, these included Special Educational Needs (SEN), Free School Meals (FSM) status and “White British” ethnicity. All were classified as SEN at the time of the study or previously. 80% remained SEN classified and these were all categorised BESD (Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties). The final part of this section provides further comment on SEN and more detailed data on individuals’ absence records, to complement the profile data that was used to introduce the students.

Other characteristics, however, specific to individuals, also appeared to be linked with their increased risk of exclusion. These are identified here and their significance explained. Following that, consideration will be given to the students’ records on exclusions and sanctions, before reviewing the help they were given to mediate their conditions and support they were provided with more generally. Any apparent implications for the performance and next-stage intentions of the students are also considered.

The terms “sanctions” and “exclusions” are used here to describe actions taken to counter students’ misdemeanours. “Sanctions” is a broad term used to describe corrective actions and punishments given in school. Whilst exclusions are also sanctions, they are taken to be a more specific entity with more serious consequences, which themselves take various forms, as explained in the relevant passages. Exclusion always involves the withdrawal of students from classes, however. The same definitions are then used in subsequent themes to provide evidence on the types and levels of support given to students to help to mitigate their “at-risk” status.

4.1.1 Factors with specific significance for individuals in the cohort, underlying the identification of students as “at-risk” of exclusion.

This section identifies factors which were of specific relevance for individuals being considered as “at-risk” of exclusion. The factors were categorised and, as shown in Table 22 and explained below, are presented as “internal” and “external”, where the school is defined as the internal environment. Further below, the students’ records on exclusion and sanctions are considered, to show how the risk factors were manifest during their school lives. Support is considered in terms of the students’ perceptions and contrasted with those of the schools’ staff.

Table 22: Factors with specific significance for individual students										
Internal (School)										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Behaviour	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Changing Schools			✓					✓		
Curriculum	✓			✓						
Drug-related			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
External – Home/Family										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Family			✓				✓			
Child Protection								✓	✓	
Marital Breakdown		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
External - Other										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Peer influence (ext)				✓						
Medical		✓	✓							
Personal Relationships			✓	✓	✓					

Table 22: Factors with specific significance for individual students

Although some factors, especially “Behaviour” and “Curriculum”, can be said to have been applicable to all the students, the categories only account for difficulties faced by individuals as established by the evidence provided. This explains why

some factors, such as in-school peer influence, have been omitted that might otherwise seem surprising.

Behaviour

(All Students)

As their SEN classification shows, all the cohort had behavioural issues. Some of these were quite specific to their being at risk of exclusion. For example, Student 4 was regularly refused entry to Design Technology classes and at one point permanently, because of his behaviour. This was significant because it was an area of study in which he was intending to progress, through college and his subsequent future career intentions.

However, behavioural issues were often a description of minor, low-level occurrences that could only put a student “at risk of exclusion” if considered cumulatively. In the “Relationships and Support for Students” section, Vignette 3 below identifies behavioural characteristics in Student 1 that put him “at odds” with the school and his teachers. It further considers the ways in which he was perceived, the implications of his behaviour and its apparent impact on his long-term future at the school.

Vignette 4 refers to another student whose behaviour and its implications were similarly perceived, but for different reasons. Student 6’s behaviour patterns and consequent “at risk” status may have been linked to low self-esteem. He explained that he felt he was the cause of his father’s unemployment, “He doesn’t work... He had to quit because he had me...” His file contained records of letters about his

behaviour over a long period, including a note from a professional expressing concern that he may have ADHD. On one occasion, Student 6 was sent home for disruptive behaviour but was sent back by his father. In addition, a file record showed that he had been subject to an “assault” by another pupil, at point 3. In his interview, he explained that he found biological theory difficult and consequently his sports studies course was not going well, suggesting a lack of confidence. In this case, therefore, the term “Behaviour” is an inadequate description of a factor placing a student at risk. It is, perhaps, more a manifestation of several interrelated factors, as appears to be the case with most of these issues. Consequently, the term “Persistent Disruptive Behaviour”, often associated with exclusions for frequent low-level misdemeanours, can also be considered as inappropriate, since it implies that the disruption has just one underlying “cause” i.e. the student’s intent to behave badly.

Changing Schools

(Students 3, 8)

Student 3’s file record showed that she had been on the roll of six previous schools. The full history of reasons was not documented in her files. Several others appeared to have moved more than once (after age 11), though only Student 8 had moved more than twice. As an indicator of the difficulties these students faced, explained elsewhere in the study, the number of school changes within Key Stages therefore appeared to have relevance.

Curriculum

(Students 1, 4)

This is the subject of Theme 3, providing evidence of how curriculum related issues had implications for the students. In line with the point made above, the issues were rarely self-contained and could often be associated with behaviour.

In one specific case, however, details of which are provided in the theme, Student 1 was put onto the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) route at the start of year 10. This involved taking French to which he was not suited. His behaviour in the subject was poor, leading to his permanent removal from the group. Whilst this had the advantage of him being able to spend more time on other subjects, it also presented the difficulties of working in isolation and becoming bored and frustrated, as was evident in his interview transcripts.

Drug abuse related

(Students 3, 4, 8, 9, 10)

50% of the cohort were involved in a variety of drug-related issues before or during the study period. When interviewed in May, Student 3 explained how earlier in the year she had become involved in a regular pattern of drug taking and alcohol abuse as part of her daily routine. She had emerged from this, she explained, but it had clearly had a negative impact at the time.

A senior member of staff alleged that Student 4 was implicated in drug dealing, which caused her to place him on a part-time timetable to reduce the time he had in

school and his potential for subversive activity. Student 8 was excluded for “supplying illegal drugs”.

Student 9 was twice excluded for activity relating to drugs – both times for possession. Student 10 was also implicated in drug-related activity recorded in his file notes, although the letter sent home explained that he was implicated by his presence at the scene, rather than involved in the activity.

External – Home/Family

(Students 3, 7)

Student 3 faced other very significant problems putting her at risk of exclusion and underperformance. At interview point 1, these included being a carer for her younger siblings whilst her mother was working evenings and weekends. Later in the year she became a replacement for her mother, who had left home and moved to another area. In addition, SS1 explained that at one point, her mother had health problems which Student 3 took very badly and which coincided with a deterioration of her behaviour in school. Family care arrangements varied over time and included the involvement of Social Services during the study period.

Student 7 had a severely disabled sister which affected her personally as well as her relationship with her family. An interview with HOY2 revealed that she had become embarrassed by her sister’s behaviour on a visit to the town centre. He indicated that this and the atmosphere at home, (described as “tense”, because the sister had turned 18, meaning that respite care was no longer available), had affected her self-

image and possibly her performance at school too. The school informed all Student 7's teaching staff to try to mitigate potential problems and encourage supportive relationships.

Child protection issues

(Students 8, 9)

Student 8's file records showed that she was a Looked After Child. Incidents at "home" were recorded as having been referred to social services, including her inappropriate use of knives on three occasions when she had been upset. The issues Student 8 faced included pregnancy which caused her to miss a significant amount of time at school. However, she appeared to have shown positive early potential. Class teacher comments from Years 4 and 5 described her as a "hard-working, cheerful and pleasant character". Since her attitude and behaviour towards school changed dramatically after a family break-up that occurred at the time, it is possible the events were related.

Similarly, a note in Student 9's file from 2003 stated that a child protection issue had caused his father to be prevented from seeing him. In his interviews, the student said on several occasions that his mother and stepfather were positive influences for him, but not his father, implying that his experience in 2003 may have had a continuing effect, although this was not confirmed.

Marital breakdown

(Students 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10)

Many of the students had experienced disruption related to family life. Whilst the direct effects of family breakdown were not a subject for the interviews unless the student volunteered information, it did seem to have featured in many of the students' backgrounds. Therefore, as an indicator of possible changes in family circumstances, a record was made as to whether the student had the same name as their parents or a different one. According to that criteria, it appeared that 60% had experience related to marital breakdown. Student 3 lived apart from both parents, who each had different names. Similarly, the parents and grandparents of Student 5 had different names to each other, but all were different to his own. The name of Student 2's father was the same as his, but mother was different. Only two students at School 1 had names the same as their parents.

At School 2, three had names the same as their parents, although of those, one lived solely with his father. The other two had parents whose mother's name was different from their father. Student 9's position was unclear in that he had a named stepmother and another female relative as his contacts for the school. Along with the alleged child protection issues related to his father (see above) this may have contributed to his "at-risk" status.

External – Peer influence.

(Student 4)

External influences can make it difficult for a school to identify and tackle issues with students. With Student 4, SS1 felt this was true of him, "...it is outside influences...outside influences with him. Because he's a big lad...he goes out with older lads outside of school... he is involved with people who, you know, are deviant...drugs play a part outside of school..." In his interviews, the student identified peer-group problems himself as significant, causing him difficulties in class and away from school.

Medical

(Students 2, 3)

Medical conditions giving rise to a negative attitude, poor motivation and personal well being affected some of the students. Student 3 described personal health problems involving regular hospital visits and treatment over a period of months which she said was due to debilitating stomach pain. It caused significant disruption to her learning, particularly as it also involved being prescribed antidepressant medication.

Student 2 incurred a physical injury disrupting his learning, which he perceived as having posed performance problems in his option choices. This may not have been serious, but the disruption was sustained and did affect coursework in one of his favourite subjects, PE.

Personal Relationships

(Students 3, 4, 5)

As suggested in the following quote from his interview at point 2, Student 5 considered himself to be relatively low ability and lacking in confidence, "... I won't be able to get anything better than E's because I'm not good..." Unexpected events emerged for this student, however, affecting his school life and performance. These centred around his relationship with the daughter of a member of staff who had been his tutor and mentor. The relationships that evolved had complex implications for the student, as described in more detail in Vignette 2, below. As these events unfolded, relationships between the boy and other staff at the school also became fragile. Eleven incidents were recorded on file in Year 11, over a period of four months after January, which may well have been linked, as evidenced by commentary on the difficulties they caused. The incidents included inappropriate comments on social media, non-compliance, disruption and inappropriate behaviour in lessons, spraying deodorant in a lesson and filming a student hitting another.

Student 3 was involved in a same-sex relationship which appeared to have significance in terms of her progress. SS1 explained at interview point 1 that she was subject to "increasingly unreasonable" demands from her partner, although this differed significantly from the girl's own perception, as in later interviews she described the esteem in which she held her partner, whom she saw as a role model.

4.1.2 Special Education Needs (SEN) and attendance as factors related to “at-risk of exclusion” status

Changes in SEN categorisation and classification

The support available for students with SEN and its extent, depends upon its categorisation. Whilst it should be straightforward to establish if students are classified as SEN, there are many reasons why categories may change, including changes in definitions or alternative criteria being used by Ofsted. All students in the study had their SEN status changed over time as noted from their files, to a greater or lesser extent. For example, Students 6 and 9 changed from “N” (none) to “A” (School Action), both with primarily Behaviour Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). Student 10 was classified “A” from 2005 to 2011, but unclassified thereafter. These may have been due to changes in students’ behaviour and progress at different stages in their school lives. However, a lack of clarity over time might also suggest inconsistency in recording, dealing with and treating behavioural characteristics evident in students. Unfortunately, whilst the changes to categorisation were noted, the reasons were not clarified.

Attendance

Poor attendance was a common trait. Table 23 below shows the students’ attendance rates throughout Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, with additional data that was also available in some students’ files.

Table 23: Attendance (%) at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Over whole Key Stage (KS)										
KS 4	85.6	83	89.6	93	92	93	94	87	88	80
KS 3	81.1	94	92.5	93	91	95	97	70.4	91	97
KS 2	84.9	97	97.3	97	98	92	98	89.3	83	100
From other recorded sources (regular progress reports or letters home)										
Year 11	86.2 Jan	94.3 Apr	53.3 May	73.6 Jan	93.9 Apr	89.9 Report		22.4 CP1	88.2 Report	58.9 CP3
Year 10		78	89.6			93	92 Report	87 CP4	87.1 Report	93.6 Report
Year 9						92.2	96.5 Report	32.8 Report	82.4 Report	97.1 Report

Table 23: Attendance at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4

As mentioned previously, attendance rates of 90% or below are enough to give cause for concern in school or OFSTED terms. Nearly all students at both schools had significant problems recorded in their files. The only exception was Student 5, who had a record of 92% attendance at Key Stage 3 and 91% at Key Stage 4. There did seem to be inconsistencies in recording data, however. Student 4 apparently had an official “whole of Key Stage 4” attendance rate of 93%, although his file had records of letters sent home over the course of the Key Stage, detailing cause for concern about his absence rate. The only statistic reflecting this was his regular progress check report in January, as shown the table.

There were many records of letters having been sent home. Student 1 had letters sent home in Key Stage 3, although these appeared to have had little effect as his Key Stage 4 attendance was 85.6%. Other cases suggested that absence produced further consequences. Poor attendance was cited, along with behaviour and achievement as the reason for Student 6 being placed in the “Target” group.

Records of letters and meetings suggest that Student 7 was in a similar situation except that she was not placed in “Target”. Her file notes suggested that it was felt her situation was mitigated by her family circumstances.

Student 3’s attendance problems were apparent throughout Key Stage 4, including records of truancy. She had wanted to go into the Sixth Form but had not been provided the opportunity, especially because of her poor attendance, as confirmed in mentor notes. The student herself acknowledged that poor attendance had affected her chances of achieving a Sixth Form place, “They said that my attendance is too low and I didn’t even get put forward for a meeting or anything...”

Records of absence were sometimes accompanied by suggestions of difficulties in contacting parents or carers, as was the case with Student 8, who had recorded attendance of 32.8% in Year 9, a level that persisted throughout.

In addition to the difficulties outlined above, the students’ records of exclusions throw further light on their predicaments. These will now be considered, before going on to look at how they were supported.

4.1.3 Sanctions and exclusions. The incidents, actions and behaviours that led to their imposition

The students’ files and records showed that a high proportion of problems were associated with relatively low-level incidents. Sometimes these could be linked to

expectations and the student's reputation. Often, use of terminology such as 'non-compliance', 'rudeness towards a member of staff', 'persistent disruptive behaviour', or 'inappropriate behaviour' would be deemed sufficient explanation for recording incidents. This section will first provide evidence related to the deployment of sanctions other than exclusion, before going on to review details of students records of withdrawal from classes and from school.

Student behaviour and the application of sanctions

There were similarities in the records of students in both schools, suggesting that the cumulative effect of relatively minor misdemeanours could result in sanctions being automatically considered because of a student's reputation for poor behaviour. Details of attempts to contact and work with parents/carers were frequently evident, although these rarely recorded any follow-up or conclusion. If sanctions applied in school were proving ineffective, however, exclusion could follow.

The use of report cards was prolific, as a less drastic sanction than exclusion, although this was more prevalent in School 2 than in School 1. Student 6, for example, received many sanctions involving report cards. After Christmas in Year 11, fourteen full report cards were issued before the following May, when a further seven daily report cards, to monitor his behaviour only, were filed. The reasons recorded were problems such as, '...won't work, disrupts lessons...' Extensive evidence of minor issues had accumulated in his records. As a microcosmic example

of this, when opening a plastic bag that had been stored in the student's file, a report card was found, torn up into small pieces. There was no record of who filed the debris, or why, even though it must have been thought to be useful information to retain.

Student 1's file notes showed that he too was "on report" frequently. Comments such as, '...can be silly at times...', '...doesn't do homework...', '...poor attitude...', '...often late...' and '...disrespectful towards teacher...' ran alongside notes recording lack of attendance at mentor sessions and poor behaviour in lessons. Commentary on Student 2 was similar, but with the addition of implied laziness and lack of effort in lessons, through poor motivation.

There were also many report cards in Student 7's files, with references to lack of homework and effort, make-up and behaviour, for example. Several records refer to her presence or involvement in antagonistic verbal abuse and occasional violence towards peers though. Many of these appeared to have been relatively low level, with several references to 'threatening' behaviour or giving 'dirty looks' and spreading rumours and gossip in circumstances where groups of girls saw themselves as rivals. One more serious incident noted she had held a cigarette to another student's face and thrown objects. There were also records of her having been threatened and verbally bullied by others.

Apart from occasional references to 'disruptive behaviour' and one to '...spitting at others...', Student 10's misdemeanours were almost exclusively related to lack of

work, moodiness, laziness and poor punctuality. His moods were apparently inconsistent, with staff noting that he could often be, ‘...quiet and polite...’ offset by an apparent tendency to ‘...rudeness and poor attitude...’.

Whilst these are not surprising behaviours in young people at risk of exclusion, there was, as mentioned, evidence they might have had a cumulative impact, suggesting, therefore, that students’ reputations for challenging authority, may have been significant in decisions as to whether incidents were recorded or punishments extended. The inference is the author's opinion, however.

Inconsistency and the application of sanctions

There was also evidence, though, of divisions and disagreements between staff colleagues as to what actions were appropriate for maintaining high standards of discipline. This was perhaps the result of a variety of factors including uncertainty over interpretation and application of school rules or policy, evidenced in more detail in a subsequent theme, but it reflected an apparent lack of consistency. One example concerned Student 4 and whether his behaviour was considered ‘appropriate’, which determined whether he was allowed into classes. A member of support staff in the ‘Target’ unit explained, “(The) DT teacher says he'll be allowed back in when appropriate but according to (another member of support staff) what is appropriate is not clear... (Student 4) just doesn't do as he is asked. He does no work”. Suggesting concern regarding her experience of colleagues’ disciplinary relationships with students, she concluded that, “The class as a whole is

dysfunctional...”. This appeared to have affected her perception of her own relationship with the student and ability to influence his behaviour. Attempts at modifying Student 4’s behaviour had given way to the imposition of automatic sanctions when she saw him wearing a hoodie which he did frequently, in her view, as a “badge”. Confrontation had become a mutual expectation between the student and this member of staff each time they met. The member of staff maintained that she would continue to take action and follow-up incidents of his misbehaviour. She also explained, however, that she stayed away from an area of the school at times she thought the student would be there, to avoid the confrontation.

Incident records for Student 8 noted confrontational activity with peers and “non-compliance” with staff. One record outlined ‘Strategies for Staff’ which advised ‘setting firm boundaries’ for her, whilst ‘avoiding confrontation’. Whilst attempting to provide clear advice, it can be argued that these suggestions were ambiguous and inconsistent, encouraging judgements to be made through subjective interpretation.

The phrase, ‘Strategies for Staff’ also featured in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for Student 9 repeating the advice that “...firm boundaries need to be set...” and that he should be seated “...away from distractions”. Confrontation between staff and student was endemic. One member of staff who recorded having referred to him as ‘pathetic’ was told by the student that he was ‘pathetic’ too, as the student walked out of the class. The member of staff recorded that he had, “...walked off every ‘on-call’ (sanction) so far from Science...” However, file notes also recorded Student 9’s aggressive behaviour and occasional violence towards peers, including the use of ‘racist language’.

Students' records on exclusions

Although the concept of 'internal exclusion' is contentious, incidents of students' withdrawal from classes are recorded here, alongside external exclusion records, to distinguish the seriousness of the sanction from other internal disciplinary actions, such as those in the previous section.

Seven exclusions were recorded for Student 1 in 2013 (Year 11), for apparently "low-level" misdemeanours, as mentioned earlier. Non-compliance, lack of work, rudeness and attitude were provided as reasons, along with throwing food in a canteen and being 'unkind' towards another student.

Similarly, there were nine records of exclusion for Student 2 in 2013. These ranged from non-compliance and wearing a hoodie, to the physical, "(Student 2) allowed another student to strangle him into unconsciousness". Records of other incidents included, "2 days plus 1 BASE". The reason was, "Throwing a sweet outside a Year 7 class. Refused to pick up when challenged by staff." He was also excluded for five lessons for behaviour classed as 'dangerous' when he, "Held a plastic sword to a student's throat..."

By contrast, Students 3 and 4 posed major challenges for School 1 to justify keeping them in school. There were similarities to the examples above. Student 3's file had records of 135 separate incidents, the great majority of which were dealt with internally, the sanctions being that she was sent to "BASE" or "IEU". Student 4

was frequently involved in issues related to his uniform or poor relationships with staff.

However, both were considered as candidates for permanent exclusion at points where it was felt that the impact of their presence was too strong a negative influence upon the staff who had to deal with them and their peer group who had to work with them. Both were involved in incidents of physical aggression towards peers, staff or both which ended with fixed-term exclusions. Both appeared to have been frequently verbally aggressive in a manner considered inappropriate. Student 4 was put onto an anger management course to address his behaviour which occurred inside and outside classes. Student 3 truanted on several occasions. It appeared that incidents involving her were temporally clustered. SS1 felt this was significant, as discussed in the relationships section.

In addition to Student 4's reputation for aggressive behaviour, disruptive disposition in classes and antagonism towards staff and peers, he was suspected by the school of dealing in drugs. Teaching and non-teaching staff appeared to be aware of the problem during the period of the study. There was no evidence recorded in his file that he was in fact engaged in this behaviour and he was never formally excluded for drug-related issues, only placed onto a part-time timetable.

Student 5 only had one external exclusion which was for an incident of theft at the end of year 10. In addition, he was twice removed from classes having made, "...inappropriate sexual comments towards a female student..." and then for

‘threatening behaviour’ towards another student, which he denied having intended (at interview point 4), claiming the accusation was an injustice. Towards the end of Year 11, DH 1 put Student 5 onto a part-time timetable with the further proviso that when he was on the school site he would need to be escorted. In one of his interviews, he referred to the negative impact this had upon him, which may also have affected his achievements.

In January of Year 11, Student 6 was excluded from school for two days for, “Threatening behaviour towards an adult” involving, “Offensive posts on Twitter, concerning a member of staff”. The member of staff was, in fact, the Headteacher. At the end of the period, in July, he was excluded again (although file notes did not provide the length of time) for violent behaviour towards another student, “... kicking him in the stomach”.

Student 8 was externally excluded prior to the period of the study (2009) for verbal abuse of a, “...personal and sexual nature...” towards a member of staff. A further letter home at a later date explained that the exclusion was being extended to five days from the original three. The reason given was that she had been supplying illegal drugs and that the exclusion was in lieu of an investigation, pending permanent exclusion. There was no written conclusion, although permanent exclusion did not officially take place during the period of the study.

Student 10 was only externally excluded once – a five-day exclusion for setting off a smoke bomb for which the school had to be evacuated in the Fire Brigade called.

As he explained in an interview, he saw this as a significant moment that changed his behaviour and his attitude towards school and his future.

4.2 THEME 2: RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS.

Having considered the factors underlying students “at-risk of exclusion” status and shown how these became manifest, this section deals with communication issues and perceptions surrounding the relationships between the students and their main supporting staff. It also pays attention to peer relationships and to the interaction between parents/carers and staff. A distinction is made between on-going support and that which was provided for choices and decision-making. The latter is considered later in the theme, before going on to look at curriculum, progress and achievement issues in Theme 3.

4.2.1 Staff communication approaches and strategies for supporting students

Strongly contrasting approaches to working and communicating with students became apparent from interviews with two members of support staff at School 1, regarding the benefits and drawbacks of having extensive knowledge of students, to provide the most beneficial support.

Student 2’s support staff felt it was important for him in his role to understand students in context and be aware of their personal circumstances, “...when you

look into the background...I'm fortunate enough that I get to look into the backgrounds and all that...and...there are reasons why, but it, you know, it doesn't make it right, their behaviour and we reinforce that..." He went on to explain that his knowledge extended to potentially illicit activity, "...we get to know who is smoking spliffs, we know who's on weed...who's having sex with who, you know, they can talk openly with us...They know we won't go to the headmaster or mum and dad unless we tell them... Unless it's a child issue...a child protection issue, or something like that".

This staff member felt that empathy was important to help resolve problems. The following quote encapsulates his use of language, approach and the strategies he deployed with students. It portrays use of personal experiences as an influence in working with the students in his responsibility area, "... I often talk about my own life experiences and... my mates and that... and we did similar things, but eventually you have a choice... and I say, 'Look: we had a tough time, because we did this...' Like my dad was physically violent... and really violent. But I will tell them, 'I could have gone one way or the other'. I could have thought '...ah bollocks... I will hit my kids' and all that. But I had a choice and what's right, what's wrong... and you've still got that choice now. You can go one way or the other and carry on being a knob, as I say to them, and just not getting anything, or maybe say to yourself, 'Well, it's getting Year 11 now, time is pushing on'...and even if we talk and you think it's a load of tosh, (Student 2), what I'm talking about, it's not a problem..."

For Student 2, the approach appeared to be effective. At interview point 1 he expressed that this member of staff and ‘maybe’ his mum were his greatest influences. He reiterated this at point 4. A previous mentor had also noted he worked better for teachers he liked. In contrast, DH1 saw a different side to Student 2. She thought he was, “... Just unpleasant...negative and unengaged and grumpy about everything...difficult...”

An alternative approach was outlined by the member of support staff responsible for Student 4. She felt that staff knowing all the intricacies of a student’s misdemeanours and background could be counter-productive to helping them learn. This member of staff saw her role as having clearly defined dimensions i.e. “...the learning and keeping them out of trouble...keeping them in school (and) having something positive to go to, (these) are the priorities for me...”

The following quote helps to highlight the approach further, “I’m very different to X (a colleague and sister), because she wants to know the ins and outs of everything...I’ll come in here and she’ll say, ‘...Ooh, I’ve found this out on Facebook... Did you know that, yeah etc? And I just say, ‘I’m just not interested. I don’t need to know all the details, I just need to do what I need to do for them, while they are here. Because I haven’t got an impact outside, I’ve only got an impact while they’re here...’” In this respect, she also felt lack of contact with parents was also not necessarily negative, “... my students aren’t the sort of students whose parents come to parents’ evenings. By the time they’ve got to Year 10 they’ve probably earned themselves such a reputation that parents stop coming...”

These contrasting approaches are considered again in the discussion as they provide a context in which support was provided for students overall.

4.2.2 Staff and student relationships where “at risk” factors were associated with specific problems.

Whilst it may be possible to identify and categorise individual “at risk” factors, they are rarely, if ever, manifest in isolation. The following “vignettes” and those used later in Theme 3, exemplify blends of factors or characteristics, unique to the individuals involved. In terms of what staff should know, or need to know to provide beneficial support, they provide context that will be reflected upon in the Discussion.

Vignette 1: Complexity underlying staff-student relationships, arising from conditions internal and external to the school environment.

At the beginning of the study, Student 3 was a potential case for permanent exclusion. Ultimately, DH1 regarded the retention of the student as a success which was due to the support of staff responsible for her. She put this in the context of the support that had also been provided for the student's brother and the family as a whole, "... her younger brother still gets that level of support you know, basically they are just a sad, sad family we need to help...we need to look after them..."

Student 3 was the subject of family circumstances which changed significantly during the study. These included the involvement of Social Services and "Care" arrangements being initiated. She was faced with many issues during her school life, some of which affected her relationships with peers in school, as SS1 explained, "...I think she went through quite a long period of falling in and out, and in and out... a three-girl group... They were forever at loggerheads...one of those three was permanently excluded and that shifted the dynamics completely." The relationship meant Student 3 was vulnerable in that she, "... would vie for the attention of the most dominant one. She was not very good at sharing the attention and sharing a friend... And actually to some degree she was not very good at sharing my attention – she didn't necessarily respond very well, if in a room full of people, my attention was on someone else..."

Asked what she thought had kept Student 3 in school, SS1 said that she responded well to encouragement, and to the frank and honest discussion which she had been able to provide, "...we did some really intensive work on valuing yourself, you know...and what your potential is..." This was supplemented with provision continued below

Vignette 1 continued

involving a white-water rafting course at a local centre, which she and her brother were placed onto, to develop social, as well as physical, skills and encourage bonding between the two. She was also put onto the Princes Trust programme, providing her with a high level of support.

SS1 felt she had a good working relationship with Student 3, although her vulnerability had fluctuating effects at different times, depending on events outside her school life.

SS1 explained the effect, “I think the overriding factors (for Student 3) were that the school really just wasn’t authority when her life went into freefall, school just wasn’t on the agenda really. It was completely secondary to the rest of her life I think...” SS1 thought that success in keeping her in school was not due solely to her intensive support. The pragmatic approach of colleagues was also important. Having commented that the girl did not respond well to a “sit down and shut up” approach, SS1 described the successful relationship another member of staff had had with Student 3, “...the relationship she had with “Y”, was that he was very upbeat, he’s very theatrical in that – it’s almost panto, Butlin’s style, thigh slapping success I suppose! But – it works. So, you know, whatever works...”

This implied a perception on the part of the support staff that pragmatism in combination with bespoke provision were the key to achieving the school’s aims in this case. In an interview, Student 3 also explained that she was motivated by being told that she was expected to fail, “... you know, everyone is expecting you to fail... Everyone is expecting this to go wrong. And you have the opportunity to do different to that, you know...” She felt that this encouraged her to prove people wrong.

In contrast to the above case, the same member of staff questioned her ability to have a positive influence with Student 4, because of the external, non-controllable influences he embraced, "... I guess if it was up to me, I would suggest with (Student 4) that it is outside influences...with him. Because he's a big lad... he is involved with people who, you know, are deviant... drugs play a part outside of school and I think... for him, knocking about with them, was more important.... He is on a part-time timetable with us because he just, you know, he's giving it the swagger, around the shoulders, and what-not and the attitude...hanging around with those older lads...he just wanted to get out of school and he was doing what the rest of them were doing, day in, day out. He had got no interest..." Thus, the implied "unknown" element to the student's external circumstances, combined with her perception of his persona in school, seemed to be a cause for concern making the staff feel that in consequence, her support may be less effective.

Student 8 was also subject to Social Services' 'care' arrangements, which HOY2 felt affected her relationships with both students and staff. She had been in danger of permanent exclusion since her arrival. He described her behaviour as, 'absolutely awful' and felt that she, "...didn't really fit-in at school..." and, "...didn't bond or 'gel' with anyone..." She had been placed in study support and put onto a limited timetable. DH2 confirmed that Student 8 had had a child and her assessment of the student was similar to that of HOY2. "... she is a young mum...basically dropped out of school... didn't engage... I'm not actually sure where she is now..." DH2 confirmed that a Parent Support Adviser (PSA) employed by the school was in liaison with the student and her family. In this case, the external unknown element seemed to have marginalised the student and the school felt unable to support her.

The next vignette portrays the complexity of problems that one student faced, arising from events linked, initially, to a personal relationship. The issues emerging from this exemplify how perceptions, personalities and staff roles work in combination with policy interpretation and implementation, producing outcomes that could not have been anticipated. DH1 identified the negative consequences of these in this case, concerning relationships between Student 5 and his support.

Vignette 2: The implications of personal relationships and their potential ramifications for staff-student interaction

The School's view

A member of staff at School 1 was Student 5's form teacher and mentor, roles which coincided with her being his girlfriend's mother. The relationships had ramifications as they evolved, as DH1 explained, "... he could have gone either way but (her) influence.... tipped it." The member of staff concerned had previously been a Head of Year at the school. Prior to that, she was the Local Authority's school support with specific responsibility for behaviour issues. DH1 went on "... (Student 5) was and possibly still is in a relationship with her daughter who was in Year Nine at the time and they were sexually active, condoned by (her)...we had to actually just try and get rid of the situation because it was just nasty. It was affecting the school with inappropriate relationships...Student 5's mum was very unhappy about it...because...Student 5 has always been a bit of a cheeky chappie, but not dangerous..."

The use of social media appeared to have compounded the problems, especially messages related to an incidence of alleged bullying. DH1 explained that the member of staff had, on Facebook, "...completely condoned Student 5's threats and bullying of other students..." (continued below)

Vignette 2 continued:

The incident was the reason given for Student 5 being placed onto a part-time timetable. However, the effect of these events and relationships were thought to have produced a change in Student 5's character as well as his performance and potential. It affected his relationship with teaching staff, because, as DH1 put it, "...he thought he was bullet-proof and he could do what he wanted and (the member of staff) would protect him... he was just putting up two fingers to the school all the time...he was involved in some quite nasty stuff right through Year 11..." (DH1)

As well as the student, there were further implications of this for the member of staff. DH1 explained that relationships with her had deteriorated to the point where, "...she has been going through a disciplinary procedure...which she has now appealed and which became very, very unpleasant and I was the investigating officer..." In addition to the incident, DH1 felt that her approach with students in general had been counter-productive, "... it was often highly unpleasant because it was highly confrontative, ...even though she was...apparently she was the Local Authority trainer for non-confrontative work with young people... She was here, with kids, screaming at them. Since (her replacement) took over – doesn't happen."

Alternative perspectives – the support staff and student

In an interview with her prior to the end of the school year, the member of staff provided her own analysis of the problems Student 5 had faced. She acknowledged what had happened on social media, "I would say that there was an incident which led to the exclusion and the part-time timetable..." However, because of this and the surrounding circumstances, she felt that Student 5, "...will definitely underperform (at GCSE).

continued below

Vignette 2 continued

The reality is, I mean, he wouldn't have got BTEC science for example...if I hadn't done some running around and had some conversations with members of staff..."

She acknowledged, however, that the situation could have been worse, but for Student 5 having very supportive parents, especially his mother. The staff member went on to say that Student 5 was badly treated by colleagues, who didn't listen to him and prejudged him. She felt that some of them were colluding against him and held this responsible for him not being able to apply to Sixth Form. Because he resented his perceived mistreatment, she saw her role as being to mediate and liaise with other staff, to mitigate the effects, "I have a very good relationship with him and that is the key." She encouraged and helped him to gain a college place, again liaising with his mother in the process, "...Mum played a significant role in supporting him with that... and I helped him from this end..." She said he had no support from Connexions or from the school and placed responsibility for his difficulties with senior management, "(Student 5) would agree with me that he doesn't have, necessarily good relations with the senior managers here...some of that is down to how he perceives fairness and his reaction to it in terms of his behaviour..." The student seemed to agree. In his final interview (without knowledge of the above, or prompting), referring to his support staff, he explained there was just one teacher whose confidence he enjoyed at school, "Yeah she's always helped me... No one else has bothered really..."

In contrast to the student in Case 1, then, who appeared to have benefited from carefully planned support in adverse circumstances, the above shows the difficulties that can arise where staff disagree with each other and circumstances internal and external to the school environment are interconnected. One outcome was the boy's perception that he was being mistreated. The members of staff supporting both Students 4 and 5 referred to the boys' sense of injustice and the negative way in which they would react if they felt treated as such. In turn, this was thought to be one reason for the negative reputations they were given by staff, suggesting a "vicious circle" effect of mutually reinforcing perceptions.

4.2.3 Staff-student relationships and the implications of frequent, low-level, behavioural disruption

The cases and discussion above relate to specific difficulties associated with students. Others developed reputations, arising from low-level but frequent misdemeanours, often referred to in file notes as "persistent disruptive behaviour". The problems posed by 'low-level disruption' were considered difficult to challenge consistently by staff, due to their relative insignificance but high level of frequency. Whilst the disruptive behaviour was low-level, the cumulative consequences could lead to students being removed from classes whilst in school or considered for college placements of varying lengths. Vignettes 3 and 4 exemplify the experiences of two students and the perceptions of the staff who dealt with them.

Vignette 3: Persistent, low-level disruption and staff-student

relationships: Example 1

In December 2012, staff were asked to make comments on the progress of Student 1. These noted that he preferred practical work and was very easily distracted. His PE BTEC staff described him as "...bright and capable but not focused...". This tone was apparent in other comments from subject and pastoral staff too. English regarded him as being "...completely changeable...", Maths as "...bright but both lazy and negative...", Drama "... A bit of a pain this year, very up and down... Not taking it seriously..." and his tutor explained, "He's disruptive and has difficulties remaining in his chair. I have had to put him in other rooms for tutorial on occasion."

Where such comments may appear insignificant, their cumulative effect did seem to have had a negative outcome regarding his application for a place in Sixth Form. DH 1, said, "(Student 1) thought he was coming into the 6th Form... I don't think so... (Student 1) ...He was kind of just a cheeky chappie who just took things too far..." She described him as being "infuriating" in a manner that staff could not accept and implied that he was fully aware and conscious of the impact of his demeanour, "...There is no reason why you can't (do his work) you are just being cussed..."

The student's support staff had a different view of him, however. He described him as, "(a)... great lad... you know, would be a good mate... his misdemeanours were mostly low-level... he would just be pulling ponytails, sort of thing, in Year 11, and flicking bits of rubber and stupid stuff... just to get sent out of French..." This perhaps acknowledged the problems, but suggested the student was unaware of the implications.

(continued below)

Vignette 3 continued

Staff comments regarding Student 1's "completely changeable" attitude and disposition seemed to be reflected in his demeanour and performance at the different interview stages. At point 1 he was enthused by doing extra Maths in one-to-one sessions in "Target" and wanted to give up French completely. In contrast, by point 2, he said he was fed up at having to work on his own doing past Maths papers. He felt that his life consisted of getting up in the morning, going to school "messing around a bit" (his phrase) and going home. He was bored by the routine, but other comments in the same interview, suggested he was positive, making progress with English and Maths revision classes, CV development and applying for Sixth Form.

At point 3 he had achieved a place in college and seemed happy, explaining how proud his mother was of him, as the first member of his family to do so. The apparent contradiction of expressing pleasure at achieving a college place after applying and being rejected for a Sixth Form place, may have been related to the student's intentions and aspirations being at odds with the school's view of him.

At point 4, Student 1 explained that family issues had been difficult for him. Although they were better by that time and he was feeling more positive, he explained that they had had an effect earlier. He did not wish to discuss these in any detail, however.

DH1's comment quoted above marked the end of Student 1's time at the school, due to the reputation he developed. The degree to which his difficulties were self-inflicted, or could have been alleviated with support is open to question. However, the problems he presented arose at least partly from his being classified as an EBacc student at the start of Year 10, requiring him to study French, which he disliked and from which he was removed, due to his disruptive behaviour.

Vignette 4: Persistent, low-level disruption and staff-student relationships:

Example 2

Student 6 was thought of as always being involved in low-level disruptive activity. HOY2 felt that the main problem was, "...he didn't know where the hell he was going". Of those sent to college, Student 6 was considered the most able. HOY2 thought he could, "...create an argument...", but only to support his own misdemeanours, "...another one who won't accept responsibility for where he's going and what he's doing..." (HOY2). To address this, he was placed on report frequently and at one point was given an ultimatum that his curriculum would be changed if his behaviour did not improve, "...Bottom line: you either tow-the-line, or I alter your curriculum so that it allows other people to get on..." HOY2 explained that, "...I was...moving him into the study support area...we've already side-lined him to College... he does college one day a week and we're trying to do that to give him another outlook" (HOY2). Ultimately, HOY2 thought that a permanent college place, was the only real option for Student 6, "...to give him a new start, preferably achieving an apprenticeship." He even suggested a move away from the area could be beneficial.

DH2 also described Student 6 as a, "... Challenging young man..." who lived with his 'supportive' father and was able but, "... has never really thoroughly engaged with school..." She felt that the school had done well to retain him on roll, and whilst he had fallen out with staff and fellow students at times, "...we've managed, you know, with lots of people, to sort of keep him... Until the bitter end so to speak and he's done his exams..." (DH2) Perhaps ironically, the senior staff knew that his ambition was to be a pest controller.

4.2.4 The support and influence of parents

During the research, many comments were made about students' parents being 'supportive'. Whilst the term might have indicated their willingness to actively participate in and support actions taken, it possibly reflected them not wishing to challenge decisions made by the school, or, in some cases, feeling able to do so.

The parents' backgrounds were varied, as also seemed to apply to the support the students had from home. When incidents occurred, parents were frequently (though not always) contacted, so that they could support both student and school in understanding what had happened and perhaps help with the imposition of sanctions. An attitude that the school should do what it felt appropriate was reflected in notes recording that parents had agreed to sanctions but could not attend meetings. Sometimes they would agree to attend but not turn up. Meetings arranged with the parents of Student 1 failed to take place on four occasions. His file notes recorded that his mother was "very supportive" of the school's actions but could not attend meetings on two of the occasions. On the other two, promises that the mother would contact the school did not appear to have transpired. It was also recorded that the student's father would 'pass on messages'. Similar circumstances applied to others including Student 4 whose mother generally agreed with sanctions but was unable to attend meetings – on one occasion explaining that she was struggling to walk.

While Student 5's parents were more proactive, they were noted on occasions as having not turned up to meetings or responded to messages. Similarly, Student 3's file notes showed that her mother and father were generally 'supportive' but rarely able to attend school meetings when requested. The support staff responsible for Student 3 explained at one point that her mother was, in fact, away for weeks at a time with her partner and that Student 3 was afraid of violence from her father. Thus, it would be wrong to say that the parents of these students were not supportive of the school, but equally, they seemed to have little positive impact in helping to rectify students' behaviour or influence their lives in school.

Negative perceptions of parental support

HOY2 exemplified this point in describing the support he perceived he was given by Student 6's father, "What's the point in ringing or dealing with him because he is a waste of space anyway..." He'll say the right thing, but do nothing...dad is very supportive of us, but ineffectual – that's probably the best way to describe him..." There was a sense of frustration, because in terms of the student himself he felt, "He's a very immature Year 11, you know. We catch him running around corridors at dinnertime..." (HOY2). This indicates an apparent disconnection between parent and school with each having hopes and expectations of the other, alongside a sense of mutual frustration and inability to provide effective solutions for students.

A similar point, but with potentially more serious implications, was made by Student 1's support staff at School 1. He explained that contact was made with parents,

“...if we were really struggling... yeah, parents are quite important...” He qualified this in terms of the support that he felt he received from them, however,

“...sometimes, unfortunately, you would find out why the kids are like they are and you’re fighting against parents...Not all of them, but we only see the extreme ones you see. And, you know, if the mum’s condoning them smoking dope first thing in the morning, you’re struggling a bit if you know what I mean...” (Support Staff)

The significance of boundaries of responsibility between home and school for providing support is featured again in the Discussion.

Positive perceptions of parental support

In contrast to the previous example, HOY2 explained how frequent contact with another parent was effective for one who valued it, including the use of email late at night, despite the potential ethical problems such an approach could entail. He felt he had built a good relationship with Student 10, which he attributed partly to working with his mother, mostly via email, to try to ensure that he was supported, encouraged and given positive feedback. Student 10’s father worked away from home and HOY2 thought that this contributed to his poor discipline as well, “...Dad works away a lot of the time... so he’s left to mum to discipline... when dad comes home, dad wants to be his mate...” Having been placed on a reduced timetable and removed from Science, HOY2 got Student 10 in to work with him and felt that it had had a positive impact, helping him to understand the student better, so that he could advise colleagues regarding what would work well or not work with him. HOY2 explained that he although he was not the student’s main support staff, he had taken a personal interest because he felt that it was positive for

the student. This was put down to the student having confidence in him, perhaps because they thought on a similar “wavelength” and HOY2 was a good listener, providing valued advice, as indicated in the following quote, “...He would talk to me... he would come in here... when he needed to... (but) it was never a ‘sound-off’, he just needed time out...” HOY2 appeared to have confidence that Student 10 would eventually develop maturity and work away from home. Part of the rationale for this was that he felt his mother was, “...a real workaholic...”

A good relationship between school and parent can help to mitigate problems, therefore. The point was further exemplified regarding Student 7 in DH2’s explanation that, “...there were times ...we didn’t think she would make it through, but she did...” SS2 felt that providing her with a modified timetable to spend more time on Art, her favourite subject, and “...allowing her to feel successful...” had been important because, “She felt that she didn’t always get the attention at home that she could have done...parents were very supportive though...”

The students’ view

As far as the students themselves were concerned, relationships with parents/carers were generally expressed in interviews as positive and supportive, although not uniformly. References to them were most often associated with decision making and choices, as will be explained in the section dedicated to that.

4.2.5 The significance of peer relationships

The importance of peer relationships to students' progress was exemplified above, regarding Student 3. For some in the study, the impact of peer relationships was relatively insignificant but for others, it was more serious. For example, with Student 4, the belief amongst the staff that he was involved in drug dealing led to action being taken to minimise his contact with peers, especially the more vulnerable. The same can be said of Student 5, although this was more related to his and others' use of social media. In the interviews, Student 6 was the only one to agree that he was open to peer influence in the actions he took and choices he made, although several others appeared to have been so.

Peer relationships were monitored in the case of Student 7, because staff perceived her to be on the periphery of groups who might influence her behaviour negatively. Her interactions (from file notes) were described as bad-tempered and potentially vindictive at times. HOY2 put this down to being determined to develop her own distinctive personality, whilst wanting to be supportive of her family who she perceived as being in difficult circumstances, with her sister having Downs Syndrome. As HOY 2 explained, "She's quite a distinct character, as you can see by the way she dresses and I think that's all to do with, '...here's me, look at me... I want my attention...'" Thus, her behaviour could be quite brusque and she could be dismissive of others.

The next vignette exemplifies how behavioural issues, peer group influences, staff perceptions and staff-student relationships combined can affect curriculum provision in the short and longer terms.

Vignette 5: Peer group influences, staff perceptions and curriculum provision

For behavioural reasons, Student 9 was withdrawn from Maths classes and worked on his own. In an interview, the student suggested that he had asked to come out because, "... there's so much messing about..." He explained that he had benefited from being able to work without distraction, although he worked in isolation and left it in a box at the end of the lesson, for marking and feedback. He also attended a college "taster" course each Friday, involving activities operated on a carousel basis. Woodwork and Brickwork were his favourite courses, as he thought that practical, rather than academic work suited him better.

HOY2 thought it was best to keep Student 9 away from peers. Expressing the view that he thought the student worked better in a practical environment, he also said that he had tried, apparently unsuccessfully, to avoid sending him to College because the peer group there was, "... The backwardest peer group that has a major influence and I was trying to distance him from them..."

HOY2 described Student 9 as being relatively able but that his behaviour had been difficult to deal with, especially because of his relationships with other students. This led the school to put him on a modified timetable which he said would encourage the student, in his terms to, "... force his hand to force his way through..." as well as enabling the classes that he was taken out of to benefit from his absence.

continued below

Vignette 5 continued

DH2 described Student 9 as a, "...challenging young man... very defiant...", who had been in the school's vocational group, attending college for one day a week. Their learning was, "geared towards the kind of subjects that didn't involve lots and lots of essay writing, to try to sort of alleviate the pressure of that, kind of, area..." (DH2) She and SS2 felt the student didn't like to engage and that he could be very rude and temperamental, characteristics which made him a candidate for that group.

Membership of the vocational group did not appear to mitigate Student 9's behaviour issues, as DH2 explained that these got worse towards the end of Year 11. She also explained, however, that such groups were no longer running.

As a result of this and the difficulties he presented, the school did not want him to access the Sixth Form. Instead, HOY2 encouraged him to review information on choices and futures and encouraged him to apply for college, for which he gave him prospectuses.

When asked about which college Student 9 might go to (there were three in the area) and which course he might undertake, HOY2 appeared to be ambivalent. He thought the boy might achieve an apprenticeship, "... (he) would be far better in a practical application... knowing about the way he works. As I say, he is an astute enough lad, he's clever enough..." He thought that if it wasn't for the support that Student 9 received at school he would have potential for NEET status (Not in Education Employment or Training). In his words, the student could have, "... disappeared off the face of this earth and never be seen again ..."

4.2.6 The use of mentoring as support

The support of mentors was rarely commented on by students. All students at School 1 were allocated mentors as a matter of course. This worked differently at School 2, where any extra support was supplementary and came from within the pastoral system. At School 1 it was possible that a mentor and tutor would be the same person. An attempt was made to match students to mentors if they were available, depending on teaching and other commitments. At School 2, if thought necessary, mentors were provided as a supplement to the support of staff with pastoral responsibilities. This meant in practice that two members of the pastoral staff with different skill-sets and responsibilities, could work in liaison to help a student.

Each of these systems has its merits and drawbacks. In School 1, for example, it was apparent that some mentors had quite superficial relationships with students, where others went to lengths to try to address problems the student was facing in getting advice and support from Connexions or other outside agencies, for example. The system in School 2 could be argued to be “tighter” in that it largely concerned the pastoral staff. However, the potential disadvantage of this was that as the student became progressively known to the staff in terms of characteristics and behaviour, the response of staff could be more judgmental, or fail to take the nuances of a particular situation into account. As far as School 1 was concerned, DH1 explained that rather than to advise, the role of mentors was to help students engage with learning, “...They (the mentors) are not necessarily there to provide advice. They

are there because they are their learning mentor really, but they will be a conduit for advice” (DH1).

Mentor support records provided few examples of their specific work or effects upon students. However, Student 1’s mentor notes suggest he was supported in applying for college, recording at point 2 (November/December) that he had been provided with information to take home and discuss before filling in and returning his application form. The mentor reported that he had been accepted unconditionally at college as a result and there was even a place at school available, partly due to the mentor’s advocacy, but dependent upon Student 1 demonstrably changing his behaviour patterns prior to being accepted, which never transpired. Student 1 did not acknowledge that he had been supported in this way. Even by point 4 he talked about having been “dropped” from French and taking responsibility upon himself to talk to the colleges, prior to making his successful application. Student 2’s mentor records related conversations that had taken place about his future and it had been recommended that he apply for college. However, Students 1 and 2 gave similar accounts of how they perceived the support they were provided and each was attached to the same support and mentor staff.

4.2.7 External agency on-going support for students with specific needs

Two of the three girls in the study were subject to child care arrangements, resulting in multi-agency support being needed. These are intended to draw together the internal and external agencies providing support for the student, to enable knowledge sharing and facilitate coherence of approaches in helping the student. Meetings of the agencies often take place on school premises, though not always.

The support staff at School 1, however, explained that the various agencies seemed to expect each other to take responsibility rather than doing so themselves. This caused significant extra workload for the support staff which they found distressing.

The issues faced by Student 3, affected her life in several ways, including her option choices and study. Her support staff explained in an interview about the difficulties the student had faced because her living arrangements were in turmoil and social services were involved. In addition, where Student 3 had thought of child development as a potential future career path, a breakdown in a family relationship appeared to be directly responsible for her failure in the subject and consequent change of direction. She had to undertake a child study as part of her course and a half-sibling had been chosen. When Student 3 fell out with her father, access to the child was refused. In addition to bringing the study to a halt, there was further impact resulting from the breakdown in the relationship. The support staff said “...she no longer had a child for home study. She had missed lots of the lessons anyway... she clashed with the teacher...there are lots of reasons... why it just came to a grinding halt I guess...” Since her father lived away, it was difficult to retrieve the situation.

At School 2, an additional source of support was offered, called a “Parent Support Adviser” (PSA). The person was technically employed by the school, though did not appear to be integrated into its staff structure. The PSA was a liaison role provided for those felt to be in most need, including emotional support, and long-term absentees. Student 8 was one of the students that the PSA was following and she had also supported Student 7. Whilst the PSA was not a teacher, she did link in to

tutors. There was no liaison regarding curriculum issues, however. Originally, the role came out of Education Welfare Officer (EWO) support which was provided by the Local Authority. The school had chosen to continue funding the provision when EWO's were withdrawn to reduce the demands and pressures upon their Heads of Year.

4.2.8 Further on-going support arrangements

To help students further with future choices and decision making, the schools tried to provide them with courses or activities that would broaden horizons, as with the "taster" courses for Student 9, and Student 3's white-water rafting course. Several students benefited from this type of support. Ad hoc courses could occasionally be implemented if, for example, support staff were entrepreneurial in searching for provision for individual students. Several of the cohort were involved in skills-based learning courses, including Joinery, Hair and Beauty and PE (BTEC) at School 1.

SS1 arranged the provision for Student 3, "... I try to keep on top of what is out there under the banner of 'alternative' ... anything different, or unusual I guess, really...so I had...looked at what I thought (Student 3's) needs was (sic) and what the different places were able to offer... and kind of match them that way". The place available was discussed with the centre and the student was involved in choosing whether to go. In terms of its benefit, she further explained, "...I actually believe that that had a really positive impact for (Student 3) ... I don't know whether it will necessarily... have a huge impact on her exam results, because I think she

missed a huge amount of time with exclusions and attendance...I do think it has had an impact on her, in general terms, and...it will have a positive impact on her moving forward towards what she does post-16.” The support staff felt that a good relationship between providers can benefit the student in addition to the provision itself, “...we’ve applied for a College place for her...they’ve offered her a place and actually Kerry at the Whitewater Centre... took her shopping for some stuff that she was going to need for college out of that same budget...she’s quite switched on as to how to best...motivate them I guess...”

Part-time timetables – Support or Sanction?

Evidence from students’ interviews suggested that they were often unaware of the support that had been provided. This would certainly be the case in relation to modification of timetables. Modification could take various forms, from temporary or permanent withdrawal of students in single subjects, to removal from some or all subjects for a specific period. Part-time timetables are one example of the latter. Their use can be contentious, as schools can be accused of getting rid of students to alleviate problems without adversely affecting exclusion data that are open to scrutiny. It can also be positive, though, as will be shown. 70% of the cohort were placed onto part-time timetables during the study with a further 20% having changes that may be more appropriately referred to as “modifications”.

Student 6 was one of those whose timetable was modified. He was placed in the “Star” group in Year 9. This was for students who had difficulties, or presented

them, in standard classes and who were felt to be better suited to working in a smaller (cross year), isolated group with intensive supervision. Although “Star” group members were withdrawn from all lessons, Student 6 was enabled to attend classes in his option choices.

Four of the five students at School 1 were placed onto a part-time timetable at either point 3 of the interview schedule, around March, or slightly later. Generally, this was used as a mechanism operated in the interests of not just these students, but those whose classes were affected by their presence. In the run-up to GCSE exams, it was a way of alleviating potential problems and to help focus on study and revision. In Student 4’s case, he and his support staff felt that he had benefited from this arrangement, not just for his ability to work in different conditions with one-to-one support, but also the flexibility it gave him in his attendance patterns. The school was happy to provide this facility because of his alleged ‘drug-related’ activities, which it felt might negatively affect others when he attended school. When asked about the arrangement in an interview, Student 4 felt that being on the part-time timetable had had little effect on his home or school life nor any peer group relationships. He attended Business classes fortnightly rather than weekly because of the timetabling arrangements, an irregular pattern that might have led to him falling behind and underperforming, although his achievement of a Merit suggests that this was not the case. It was, in fact, one of his better results. Student 5 was also placed on a part-time timetable which he too felt suited him, although he resented having to be accompanied, as a condition of it, when on site. The rationale was the nature of the misdemeanours which had led to an exclusion, as explained.

A greater depth of evidence on the wider aspects of curriculum provision and its effects will be found in the policy issues, discussed in Theme 3.

4.2.9 Support for student choices and decision making at Key Stages 4 and 5

So far, the evidence presented in this theme has dealt with on-going support issues. This section looks at decision making at Key Stage 4 and the period leading up to Key Stage 5. It contrasts students' perceptions of who had influenced and helped them make decisions, with the school's view, as expressed by their senior and support staff. It also deals with views expressed about their decision making more generally.

Generally, the students felt clear that they had control over their own decisions. Most agreed that they had parental and/or family support in making them. The influence of peer group was more difficult to assess, because sometimes it appeared that responses given were not fully cognisant of the influences that others have. This certainly applied to the frequently expressed point that teachers and "the school" did not provide them with any help. Similarly, there was general agreement that Connexions, the options and careers agency providing support for students throughout the county, had not provided specific support for many of the cohort. There were exceptions and these are documented below in a section dedicated to Connexions. Several students, however, claimed that they had never heard of them.

Support provided by the School

Essentially, internal support for students was provided by subject teachers, careers teachers, support staff and the use of resources. In addition, external agencies were linked to the school or invited in. At the time of the study, however, Connexions and its functions were threatened by reductions in central government funding. The schools were having to seek alternative sources of support and the students in the study were directly affected. Some who would previously have qualified for one-to-one support, for example, were no longer classified as “vulnerable” by Connexions.

When asked at the end of the interview process about School 1’s success in keeping the cohort in school and helping them progress, DH1 explained, “...what we do is be endlessly flexible and endlessly supportive, so for all of those (five) they had huge amounts of input which was beyond what we would normally give to a student... (in order to) put them in a situation where they felt supported and able to stay engaged with school...” There are significant ramifications to this statement that are more fully explored in the Discussion.

DH1 outlined an alternative arrangement for external support implemented at School 1. Although Connexions had begun offering “packages” for schools to buy in to support students with choices and career options, the school had chosen to purchase “Uexplore”, an online facility. “We chose not to buy into any of those offers ‘cause we can do just as well ourselves and we don’t need them. Although

Jane, from Connexions... (is) still attached to us to do the one-to-one interviews for the vulnerable students...”

HOY2 took a different view. He explained that the support provided by Connexions had been valued by school staff and its demise at the time of the study was adding pressure for schools to replace it. HOY2 felt that he had had to provide support in this area, in addition to his other responsibilities, which was proving difficult, “...with Connexions disappearing... they’ve had to be very controlled about who they give guidance to...I don’t feel I’m an expert in career opportunities...what I liked about Connexions was I could say, ‘...right, this student is floundering...go and talk to (Connexions)’ ...because she could spend an hour with them. If I spend an hour with one kid in here – we’ve got 249 – where do I fit those hours in?” He felt, however, that he had tried, “... I think I’ve done more with this year group in terms of careers, than I’ve ever done...”

HOY2 felt that when choosing options, students were too concerned about the present time and whether they liked the subject, rather than thinking about what it would do for them in the future, “They look at the options booklet and they say, ‘... Oh, I could do that... Oh, I like the idea of that...’ He also appeared to lack confidence in his students’ ability overall, to make decisions, “...they don’t have a direction... and that’s why I think a lot of the staff seem to be pulling their hair out, because... there is no sense of urgency...” (HOY2)

Concurring with HOY2's negative view of how students made choices, the Curriculum Deputy at School 2 was anticipating changing the options process, "...We were thinking of moving away from free choices...there are some students that you give...a free choice to and they just – it doesn't matter how much advice that you give them...they don't take it...and then you get the dropouts... later on..." (DH2)

Students' perceptions of decision making, choices and support

Regarding who the students felt had supported their decision making, there was some commonality of thought. At School 1, all specifically mentioned the support of their mother, although Student 5 included his father at one point. Equally, all mentioned one or more members of support staff. All except Student 3 were clear that Connexions had been of no help to them. Students 1 and 2 made the same comment regarding their teachers. Student 5 was more forthcoming about his teachers at point 1, but had changed his mind by the end, as explained in Vignette 2.

Of the others, at School 2, Student 7 suggested that whilst she was not antagonistic, she felt that in making choices family and friends had been her support and influence, rather than anyone at school. She talked with friends in school and older friends outside school. Student 6 was clear that his options choices were his own. He appeared to support his Head of Year's view that students' decision making could be whimsical, though. His choices were, he said, "...free choice... I just felt like taking them..." He agreed that family and friends had supported him in making

choices but maintained that the school had not supported him or influenced him in any way. One of his choices, Sports Studies, turned out to have been made on false assumptions though. He had not realised it had a high element of studying human anatomy and as a result he had difficulty with it.

In contrast, Student 9 maintained that he had not made his own choices, the school had made them for him. He seemed resentful of this, but still felt that in other respects he made all his own decisions, "... Yeah. I think I do make all the (sic) own choices... Yeah..." He contradicted himself further in responding to a question about discussing choices with friends and peers. At one point, his response was, "... No, not really... I just keep it to myself..." Later, however, he explained, "...oh, me and yeah... me and my mate spoke about the choices... and he chose the same as me..." The point appeared to be that the student wanted to show his ability to make and back his own judgements. His resentment was still apparent in his final interview in May. He felt that his parents had helped him a lot in making decisions, but still maintained that the school and its staff were of no help or support to him at all. He said that two of his options, in Business and ICT, would be of limited benefit, "... ICT might help a bit with it, but Business Studies ain't going to help a lot... So that's not going to get me anywhere."

Where the mind-set of some remained consistent throughout the interviews, Student 3 seemed to experience and recognise quite significant changes in her own attitude and the way she felt she had been supported, over the same period, as the next vignette shows.

Vignette 6: Decision making in adverse circumstances with complex influences

Student 3 maintained that she made all her own choices although in the course of the interviews it became clear that decision-making had been complex for her. At times her home and personal circumstances, over which she had varying degrees of control, were a significant influence. At interview point 1 in October, she saw her mother as a main source of support, along with two support staff with whom she spent much of her time whilst in school. At that stage, she appeared reticent to talk about relationships with significant others outside school.

By interview points 3 and 4, however, she became much more open and in the latter stage, talked about a female partner whose influence on her was inspirational as she aspired to be like her (although her support staff held a very different opinion of the partner, believing her to be very demanding of Student 3 and a negative influence).

Also by point 3, by which time her mother had left home and moved out of the locality, Student 3 became more reliant upon a grandmother for replacement support, although her relationship with her “Nan” was also volatile. At one point the student was looking after her sibling family members herself.

At point 4, when explaining changes to her courses and future intentions Student 3 said that some teachers’ attitudes had had a negative impact on her aspirations, “... Yeah, I still want to do... Health and Social... But I had teachers telling me I wasn’t good enough to do it and I wasn’t qualified to do it... That brought my confidence down.” In contrast, however, she acknowledged the extra support the school had made available to her and knew that these staff had provided stability to help her through very difficult times. For that reason, she expressed the view that she would miss being at school after Year 11.

Support from external agencies – the students' perspectives on Connexions

The example in Vignette 6 can be argued to demonstrate the need for young people in similar circumstances to have impartial and independent advice and guidance available. Connexions was clearly of value for Student 3, who used their one-to-one support as one of the few students entitled to it at that time. At interview point 4, she acknowledged its helpfulness in the sense that it prompted her to act, “When she (Connexions) spoke to me about that (making applications) and I thought from that point on, ‘...it is getting late, I do need to apply to college and look for jobs...’ and stuff like that. She said the best thing to do was to apply for college and 6th Form at the same time, so I did that, but didn’t get into 6th Form...”

Generally, though, students expressed the view that they had had no support from Connexions, or that it had had no impact. Student 4 acknowledged that he had attended an assembly. He explained, “Yeah. We had an assembly with Connexions... they just talked to us... as a whole”. When questioned further, however, he went on to say that personal support had been made available to him, but that he had declined it as he knew what he wanted to do. In other cases, there was an apparent ambivalence towards Connexions. At interview point 4, Student 1 explained that he knew what the organisation was there for, “...yeah, they come out like tell you about jobs and that and how to work around a CV and all that don’t they? Yeah...” He went on to say that, “No I’ve never been to them...” and when asked if he had used online CV packages, seemed to imply he had, but from another source, “... I went online to make one... like, a CV template...” Similarly, when Student 2 was asked if he had experienced support from Connexions, the response

was, "...hmmm... I don't think so..." When asked where he would look for this type of support if he needed it he went on, "hmmm... Mr (teacher name). He just like helps you with career options and stuff..."

The position was similar at School 2. This was succinctly summarised by Student 6, in response to several questions prompting him to talk about the help he had been given. He didn't know if anyone in school could help him with careers, but thought someone might be available. However, he had never been spoken to by anyone from Connexions and was certain he had never heard of them. In contrast, Student 9 was fully cognisant of the support he had received (again, at interview stage 2), "...Connexions helped me with the motorsport...they helped me... 'cause I didn't know you could do the...motorsport and when we went away to (place name)...we got a little pamphlet from them and it said all the things we can do and the main thing that's erm... stuck out was the motorsport. So I went away and done that straightaway cause I'm really into motorsport..." Although this was the result of a whole-class input, he explained it as coming out of an 'interview' with Connexions. He was reluctant to acknowledge the support of the school, however and there were implications arising from this choice that are provided in Vignette 8.

Vignette 7: Connections between impartial advice and support, achievement and progress.

Government policy was that provision of "independent and impartial" advice should be available for students. Student 5 had significant and complex personal difficulties involving his relationships with senior and support staff as well as peers.

(continued below)

Vignette 7 continued

These may have been mitigated had he been able to access independent and impartial advice and support from Connexions. In an interview, Student 5's support staff explained the problem and potential consequences she thought were likely to ensue, "...when a student gets a reputation wrongly or rightly...it makes it very difficult for people to engage with that student... and therefore whilst subject staff should have been influential in guiding him to develop his strengths, they weren't necessarily able to, or felt that they could..." Her conclusion was that, "... he (Student 5) will definitely underperform".

Student 5 seemed to agree with his support staff. His view was that he had had little support other than that provided by her as the one teacher whose confidence he enjoyed at school, "If it weren't really for her, then I wouldn't really (sic) have got the grades..." This comment was made after results from early entry exams had been received, with which he had been pleased. Subsequently, the support staff prediction expressed earlier, proved to be more accurate, regarding the final outcome.

Despite these perceptions, in terms of support that was provided to prepare for the future, Student 5's mentor discussed this with him and recommended that he apply for college. By the time of his final interview, the student himself acknowledged that the school had someone he could go to for careers advice and that he had attended assemblies provided by that person. He had also had some support from his tutor and had been provided with a reference.

In contrast to the above example, Student 4 was given a high degree of access to support staff and was able to call them into classes if needed as well as having one-to-one support outside. Whilst he felt that he had never had any Connexions careers education, Student 4 was in the Princes Trust group which spent a good deal of

their time on work-related skills, making choices and learning about how to make applications. They made college applications in this time and prepared for interviews. They may even have been taken to interview if thought necessary, as Student 4's support staff explained, "...we will have sat next to him, making sure that application went in and will, on occasion, if need be, take them to the college interviews, to make sure that it happens..." This highlights the lengths to which the school was prepared to go to "keep him in". The only negative aspect was that having allowed Student 4 to decline careers support, he did appear to be relatively unclear about how to go about searching for information. When asked about it, vague references such as 'use the internet' were given. As with his peers, he did attend whole-school sessions, with the army and police in assemblies along with Connexions input, for example, but this did not appear to have helped.

THEME 3: STUDENT ASPIRATIONS, EXPECTATIONS, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

4.3.1 Students' Aspirations

Throughout the interview period, students were asked about their aspirations and intentions for progression. The aim was to try to establish what these were for individual students and how their ideas were conceived, fostered and subject to change over time. This was considered a key part of the study, to help reflect upon the support and preparation the students were given towards achieving their goals as well as mitigating the problems they might pose and the risk of exclusion.

The students' expressions of personal aspirations often contrasted with the expectations of school staff. A further contrast was that their intentions for progression post-16 were not always consistent with their aspirations. Evidence of their intentions is, therefore, provided in addition to their aspirations and attention is also paid to some of the changes of aspiration and intentions that occurred during the interview period.

All the young people in this study expressed aspirations, except for one who was not interviewed. All of them appeared to be optimistic about the future and could identify career paths that appealed to them. The types of work to which they aspired are considered below. Whether their aspirations were realistic or achievable is expressed, in the context of staff perceptions and what was known of the students' ability levels. It was not in the scope of the study to determine or objectively quantify "realism" or "achievability", however.

Aspirations – the students' aims

The occupations students identified covered a wide range of professional and skilled work areas. Accountancy was the desired professional route of one, whilst Student 3's earliest wish was to go into midwifery. Skills-based occupations were the preferred route for most. Another wanted to do carpentry, whilst Student 4 knew that car finishing and spraying was his goal. Both maintained this throughout the interview period. Other choices included electrical or engineering work and plumbing, whilst careers in Sport and Art appealed to the final two. Student 9

wanted to go into motorsport and could express several aspects in which he might become engaged.

Although their wishes perhaps concurred with gender stereotypes regarding the occupations identified, there was no duplication of ideas, suggesting that these were the students' own thoughts rather than ones they had been led towards. Student 10 aspired to owning his own business in the future, "I was thinking about, like, if I do well in college I could start like... thinking about starting my own business."

School and teacher perceptions of student aspiration

There were differences between students' expressions of aspirations and those of the school staff. As shown earlier in Vignette 6, Student 3, for example, felt that teachers' attitudes had had a negative impact on her aspirations. In contrast, Student 7 appeared to have been encouraged by the school to focus upon Art extensively, with extra support and lesson time to concentrate upon it, dropping another option, perhaps at risk of detriment to the school's performance data. She was strongly motivated by Art and her father had been a graffiti artist. As will be shown later, however, this intervention ran counter to school policy which was to discourage students from changing options as far as possible.

In other cases, teachers' perceptions concurred with the students' intentions, if not their aspirations. For example, DH2 described how Student 10 was attending college because, "...he couldn't cope in school particularly well, so he has been following a college placement... which has been quite successful..." He had a

significantly reduced timetable and, “He was at college a lot... for some periods in the day...” (DH2). She felt that this had been necessary to enable him to complete his schooling successfully. DH2 and SS2 agreed that the boy’s parents had been supportive and felt that their actions had therefore been justified. Student 10 apparently agreed and it clarified his intentions post-16. He understood his own personal characteristics and how they influenced his decisions, “...’cause I like... I like to do practical stuff, not, like, sitting in an office. That’s what frustrates me... sitting at a computer, doing paperwork and stuff...” He had no resentment towards the school in not being offered a Sixth Form place. On the contrary, a place at college appealed to him because of the course offered and, “Just the different atmosphere... feels like I’ve been there for years and years...” Thus, it appeared that where student aspiration concurred with the school’s assessment, it was more likely that they would be supported.

How aspirations changed during the interview schedule

Students’ aspirations and intentions changed during the interview schedule, perhaps because of new ideas and experiences or input from support. As explained above, Student 3’s case was complex and her aspiration changed along with the experiences, influences and support that surrounded her. Home and school life experiences also appeared to change Student 5’s thoughts. At interview point 3, he expected to achieve his plumbing ambition through a three day a week course at college. This expectation had been reduced to a ‘hope’ by point 4 as he felt that having gone through an exclusion, it might reduce his chance of achieving his place,

because of the conditions attached to offers. He had not been in contact with the college concerned at that stage, though, to confirm his assumption.

On the other hand, Student 1's desire to go into accountancy, expressed throughout the interview period, was consistent and this was matched by many of the others. A change in life circumstances apparently had beneficial effects for Student 6. He explained that whilst his father had given up working as a pest control operative in a friend's business to look after him, it had provided him with the opportunity to take the work. When it was put to him that there may have been an unexpected benefit associated with this, Student 6 replied, "Yeah. Lucky... 'cause I've had a job there since day one... (and) I'm positive. He said as soon I leave school, I'm going to start working part-time with him..." Changes to aspirations and intentions were not always negative, therefore.

Realistic aspirations, or "pie in the sky"?

Regarding the realism behind the students' aspirations, HOY2 referred to their thinking as being "pie in the sky" at times, rather than well thought through and purposeful. Though it was not universally applicable, this had resonance for some. Student 1 was considered to be academically gifted enough to follow the EBacc route and accountancy was recognised by staff as an achievable goal. However, by point 4 of the interviews in May, it was clear that he still had a rudimentary view of what it entailed, "... I'm going to like look for another job... but I will be asking banks, like cause accountancy is mainly to do with banks..." This exemplified a lack

of understanding that was apparent in others too. For his intended career in pest control, Student 6 explained that he needed a higher level of education, "...I'm not old enough... I have got to be 16 and I have to go to college to get a degree in it..."

Student 3 appeared to have researched and understood what was needed for a career in midwifery. On the other hand, she showed some naivety in the thought that her annual salary might range from £35-£85,000. Further, by interview point 3 her new aspiration to become a forensics officer was apparently driven by her love of a TV crime drama series, "... I want to become a forensics officer...". Asked about the change, she explained it was due to, "Watching too much CSI!" The seriousness of the aspiration should perhaps be seen in the context of both the humour of her comment and her answer to a further question about what the future held, however, "... I don't know really. I don't really think about the future..."

In contrast, Student 4 appeared to know what skills and qualifications he needed for spraying and finishing cars and how the work that he wanted to do fitted into the environment in which he would be working. His knowledge had been built on a foundation of family and peer experiences. He also felt he knew where he was likely to end up working, "Probably work in a garage... some people are doing the mechanics, I'll do the other bit..." The value of role models, family and reference points in students' decisions was exemplified in Student 7, who had been inspired by her father's creative work and, as explained earlier, she intended to follow a similar route.

Student 2 had realised the possibility of achieving an apprenticeship by point 3 of the interviews and it appeared that this had inspired him. He had discussed his prospects at home and in school and knew the importance of English and Maths to achieving his goal. The inspiration had come from input at the college he intended to go to. The student recalled being told, "... 'if you get an apprenticeship, which probably most of you will, within the time that you're at college...' he said, '...it's worthwhile showing that you want to work hard and if you're good enough they'll just take you on'..." This, therefore, exemplified aspiration that appeared to be well thought through and achievable. Vignette 8, however, raises a question regarding a whose responsibility it is for challenging aspirations where these are thought to be unrealistic and whose interests need to be considered in providing support.

Vignette 8: Challenging aspirations with appropriate support.

The validity of Student 9's aspiration to work in Formula 1 motorsport was not challenged, but neither was it clear that it was achievable. This brought into question the advice and support he was receiving to help him make realistic decisions. The student had a part time job, working with motor vehicles, "Oh, I work in this factory, with my stepdad and I just help clean some vans and fix them up and... just stuff like that... I get paid...£30-£40 a day..." He was enthused by the prospect of pursuing a future course in motorsport, with a related career as a goal in due course. However, there was nothing to suggest that he had the aptitude, relevant experience or skills for it. Also by interview point 4 it appeared that he had had to pay £500 to achieve his place on the course. "But, it's like, if I do... don't pass it (referring to English and Maths) then they'll let me do it again for free, because I have to pay £500 for this course..." When asked for confirmation of the sum, he continued, "Yeah... if you was like (sic)... I think it said 18 you would have to pay £1000 or £1500..."

His aspiration appeared to have originated from an event that SS2 had taken him to. When asked to recall this, he said, "... (SS2) took us to (local) school for the (College open day) thing... it was a little while ago... I can't remember..." After being prompted that the college was linked with a project run at a Formula 1 race track, he went on to explain the benefit of the visit, "... Yeah I saw the (name of venue) and thought, 'I'm going to try and get to that' ... I didn't like the other stuff..."

continued below

Vignette 8 continued

Although the aspiration may have been unrealistic, Student 9 did show he had thought pragmatically about it, as he explained where it might lead, "... I'm hoping I'll get an apprenticeship with a proper Formula One team, but I doubt that very much cause they've not had many people get into a Formula One apprenticeship... They just got into a racing apprenticeship ..."

However, the implications of encouraging a student to adopt a potentially "pie in the sky" vision of his future could be questioned. The school might justifiably suggest that they were encouraging a young person to aspire and maximise his potential, except that their stance seemed to be that they were also trying to protect his peers in the classes from which he was withdrawn. Commenting on his being in the "vocational group" DH2 explained they saw him as, "... (a) very challenging young man... Very defiant...". SS2 went on to explain that the vocational group, "...wasn't for kids who were, sort of, the Star needs (SEN)...it was kids who we felt would benefit from... they all went to College, one day a week, mostly on Friday."

Regarding his choices and decision making SS2 further suggested, "... (Student 9) felt that he knew a lot, but he actually didn't... and as with many kids, you sort of think, "... One day, mate, you'll wake up ... and you'll realise that actually, you don't know everything and you do actually need to modify the way you think and the way that you behave..."

The above passage raises questions related to issues taken up again later in the Discussion, regarding who should take responsibility for supporting students in various circumstances. Often the answers are debatable and tenuous, as may well be the case with the example in Vignette 8. Nevertheless, it can be argued, that for

clarity of client support, schools should address them. On-going, one-to-one support from an independent professional, with knowledge of the student, could have been of benefit to Student 9 in this case.

Next stage intentions (Key Stage 5)

Whilst individual future aspirations were diverse, there was concurrence in the students' intentions for the more immediate future after Key Stage 4. This was the result of a combination of student wishes and direction from their schools, as explained above and the section on student support.

All students knew that "college" was their preferred route and they also knew why. Students 2 and 4 explained in their earliest interviews that they wanted to 'go to college', as they were clear on the skills development it could offer for their chosen career paths. Only Students 1 and 5 were interviewed for places in the Sixth Form and neither were ultimately offered places. Although Student 5 thought at first he wanted to apply for a 6th Form place, he was interested in learning plumbing for which a place at college was needed.

Student 7 achieved a place at college to take a Level 2 Diploma in Art and Design, conditional upon achieving GCSE grades that had been predicted for her. Student 10 also achieved a place at college and whilst his place was also dependent upon what grades he achieved at GCSE, flexibility had been offered. He could either begin at level 1 or at level 2 depending on his prior grades.

Whilst it was clear that all of them aspired, there were no clear links between the students' aspirations and their post-16 intentions, although in some cases there was coincidence, if the students' school was encouraging them in a particular direction.

The following section outlines aspects of the students' prior academic performance and potential, to provide a clearer picture of their capabilities, before the final theme deals with the policy context in which provision was made for them at various levels, contributing towards making their goals more, or less, accessible.

4.3.2 Student options, performance, achievements and progression.

Over the study period, data were collected related to students' personal backgrounds, option choices, learning performance, academic results and final post-16 destinations. This was collated into tables, an example of which, for one student, is provided in Appendix 7. The tables showed the students' prior achievements, predicted grades (school and national level), school progress grades and independent analysis from Fisher Family Trust (FFT)⁴, along with other personal records. This data is linked to provision of support, as one of its functions is to inform students' discussions with teachers, mentors and parents/carers.

The data used for these purposes is sensitive and can be ambiguous. If it is misunderstood or misinterpreted by tutors or others, it could set a tone for discussions giving rise to or confusion, resentment in students or, at worst,

⁴ FFT receives student and school data which each school submits voluntarily, analyses it using comparable local and national data and sends reports back to the schools. The schools then interpret and use FFT's reports to assess students' capabilities and set targets.

underachievement. Extensive examples of data as applied to the cohort are outlined in Appendix 8, but one is provided in the final Vignette 9, below. In this case, an underlying factor in the target setting confusion it explains, may have been the student's reticence to take tests at Key Stage 2, although there is no direct evidence, because his records only contained the grades.

Vignette 9: Target setting, ambiguity and achievement - one student's academic profile

Student 2 chose options in BTEC PE, Art, Business and Joinery which he said was his favourite subject. He had started Joinery in Year 9 and wanted to follow up with a diploma course at college. He chose not to apply for the Sixth Form and by point 3 of his interview cycle (January/February) had achieved an offer of a college place which he believed was unconditional.

At Key Stage 3, Student 2 had test results in English, Maths and Science, all grade 4. For target setting, grade 4 would be interpreted by the school as suggesting he could progress to C grades at GCSE. However, evidence from FFT analysis suggested it was unlikely that he could achieve this, as it gave him an 8.8% chance of achieving a C grade or better in English. In Maths he was given a 43.3% chance, but only 15.3% in Science. Overall, his chance of achieving 5 grades A*-C was suggested by FFT to be 9.7%. The main reason for the disparity would possibly have been the student's Key Stage 2 results, where although he achieved a grade 4 for Maths, his English and Science results were given as 'B', designated where a student was working 'Below' the level of the tests.

It can be argued that there was inconsistency, therefore, in the student's grades and subsequent expectations of him, which was compounded, perhaps, by the target grades he was set in Year 10. These were recorded in his file notes as "in the range of" E-U. (continued below)

Vignette 9 continued

Since students were expected to know their target grades for mentoring and support purposes, these may have been confusing and dispiriting for Student 2, affecting his conversations with support staff and teachers. By Year 11 the target grades had been refined: English E, Maths C, Science Pass (BTEC science). The potential for further confusion arose, however, as he was given predicted grades in Year 11 of E, G and Pass respectively. These would have been determined around January of the final year and proved to be relatively accurate regarding the outcome: English E, Maths F, Science Pass. He also achieved BTEC passes in Joinery and PE, whilst in Business he was awarded a Merit, enabling the school to claim that he achieved more than 5 passes at A*-C, because BTEC accreditation, at the time, was accorded the equivalence of 5 GCSE passes. The degree to which any or all this information would have had any motivational impact on Student 2 is unclear, but the lack of clarity over time would not have been helpful, especially, as mentioned, in conversations with mentors and others.

The vignette shows that the expected destination for this student was unlikely to have been affected by any confusion there was in his data and target setting and it could be argued that the initial “E-U” projection ultimately proved accurate. This would ignore, however, the potential difficulties that may have ensued and the further examples in Appendix 8 appear to confirm this point. Recording more qualitative information could improve record keeping, target setting, communication and, perhaps, student motivation.

Although there were variations to the types of courses followed, the “Core” subjects of English, Maths and Science were compulsory for students, providing an opportunity to compare students’ progress and achievement. Table 24 below provides a summary of details of the cohort’s prior performance in the ‘core’ subjects at Key Stages 2 and 3, the targets they were set at Key Stage 4 and their ultimate results. It shows that in general terms, none of the students met the targets that were set for them. Even when considering individual subject targets, only 20% of those set across the whole cohort were achieved (6 out of 30). There were no examples of any student exceeding a target. The FFT data can be used to confirm this.

Table 24: Prior performance, targets and results in the “Core” subjects, with estimated chances of achieving final grades										
Key Stage 2 Results (externally assessed)										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eng	5	B	3	4	2	5	3	4	3	4
Maths	5	4	3	4	3	6	3	4	2	4
Sci	4	B	4	4	3	5	4	4	3	4
Key Stage 3 Results (externally assessed)										
Eng	6	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	5
Maths	5	4	5	5	4	3	5	4	4	7
Sci	Abs	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
Key Stage 4 Targets in Core Subjects (School set, Year 11)										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eng 4T	B	E	C	C	E	C	C	N	D	C
Maths 4T	B	C	D	C	E	B	C	N	D	C
Sci 4T	B	C	C	B	C	C	C	N	C	A
Key Stage 4 Results in Core Subjects										
Eng 4R	C	E	D	C	F	E	D	N	E	E
Maths 4R	C	F	F	E	G	D	E	N	F	F
Sci 4R	F	C	C	C	C	D	C	N	N	F
Fischer Family Trust (FFT) Estimated chances of achieving grades.										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5A*-C	89.9	9.7	16.8	45	1.4	26.3	12.2	51.1	2.5	26.3
Estimated chance of achieving a Grade C (FFT)										
Eng est1	86.8	8.8	44.8	58.3	7.5	55.4	44.9	68	18.9	42.9
Math est1	93.8	43.3	25.7	59.9	3.7	34	16	62.3	3.2	44.6
Sci est1	86.9	15.3	35.1	59.8	8.6	45	30	58.3	12.4	47.9
Estimated chance of the student achieving their final result (FFT)										
Eng est2	86.8	69.6	79	58.3	89.8	95.4	78.8	0	80.1	92.4
Math est2	93.8	96.3	94.2	95.1	99	63.6	67.9	0	75.1	89.2
Sci est2	99	15.3	65.4	95.7	8.6	75.9	30	0	0	98
Key to Subjects in the left-hand column (Eng used as example): Eng 4T: English <u>T</u> arget at Key Stage 4 (school set). Eng 4R: English <u>R</u> esult at Key Stage 4 5A*-C: FFT estimated chance of student getting 5 grades A* to C Eng est1: FFT estimated chance of student achieving grade C Eng est2: FFT estimated chance of student achieving their actual final grade.										

Table 24: Prior performance, estimates, targets and results in the “Core” subjects

In the last category of Table 24, estimating the chance of achieving their final result, the higher the percentage figure, the greater the chance suggested that the student should achieve at least that grade. This shows, therefore, that in most cases, using

FFT analysis, the final grade had a very high chance of being achieved. Although this does not suggest that students' results were good or bad per se, it does suggest that regarding their prior performance and that of comparable students locally and nationally (the basis upon which FFT estimates are provided), there was little chance of them achieving less.

The following graphs are presented using the data from Table 24, to emphasise the comments made above.

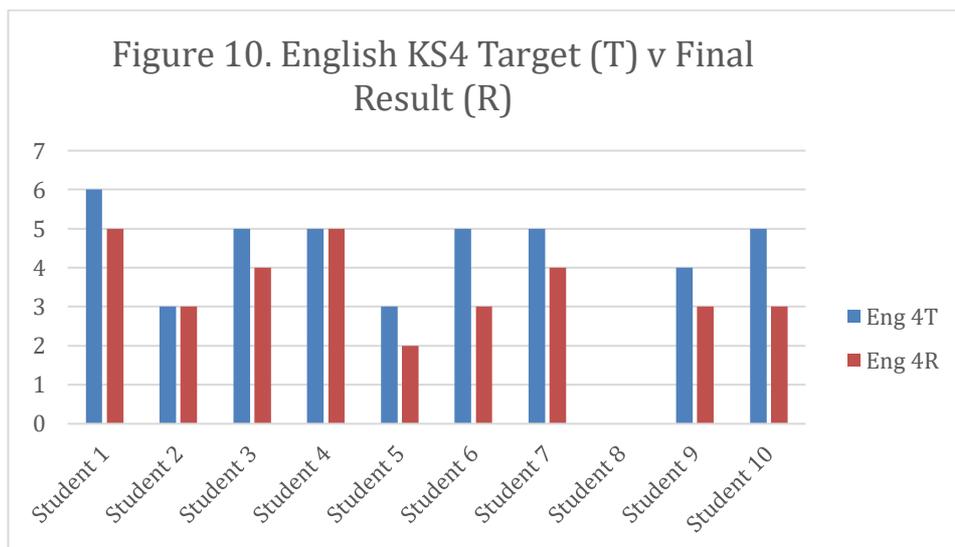


Figure 10: English Key Stage 4 target and final result

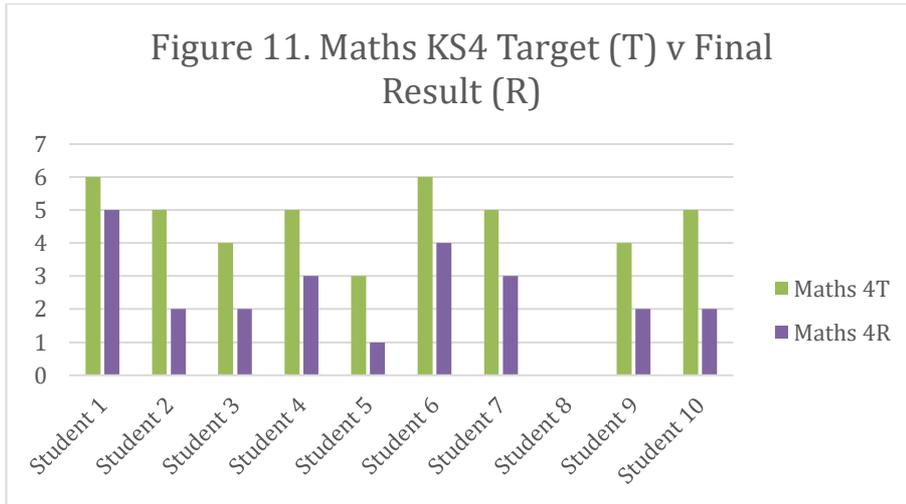


Figure 11: Maths Key Stage 4 target and final result

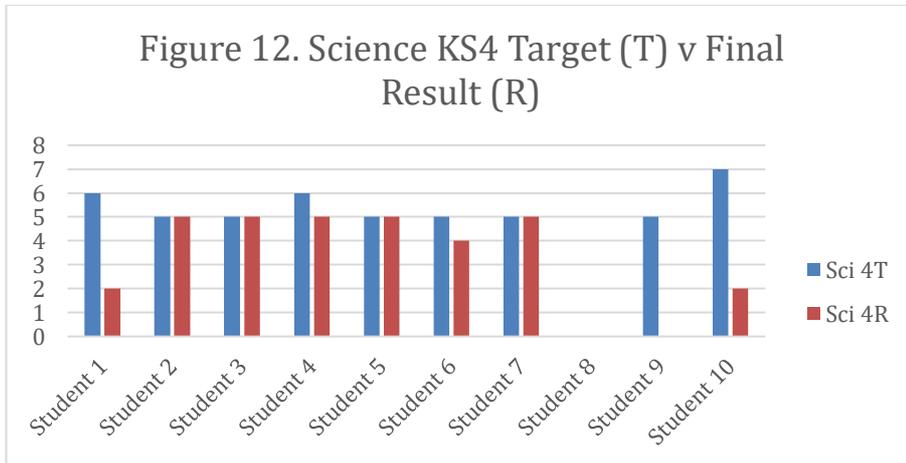


Figure 12: Science Key Stage 4 target and final result

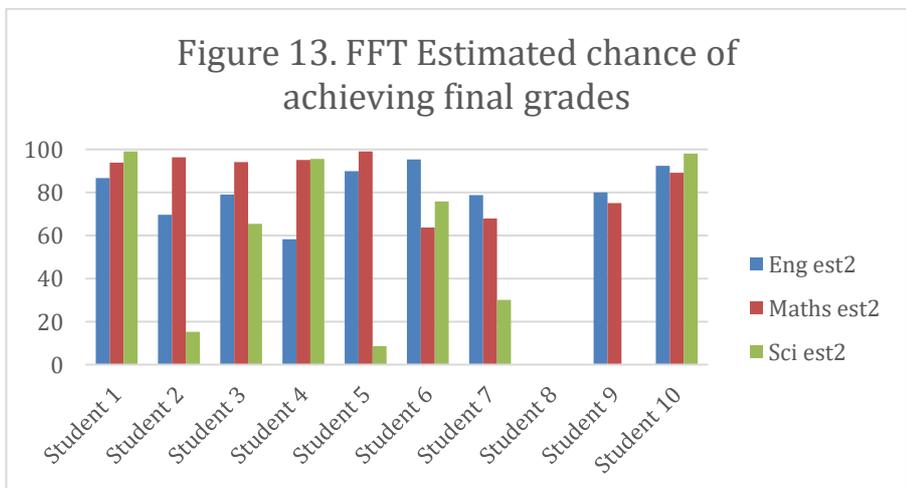


Figure 13: FFT estimated chance of achieving final grades

Comments on the students' academic profiles

The evidence presented in this section shows the students' achievements by the end of Key Stage 4 in relation to what was expected of them and their perceived "potential". The difficulties of accurate and motivational target setting are apparent in the evidence. Where target setters would hope to achieve a straightforward link between data available on prior performance and current potential, this appears to have posed problems in several cases with the cohort. Targets were, perhaps, set too high for some and too low in one case, important because they would have influenced those providing the support and the type and extent of support available for individual students.

Changes in targets and expectations were in evidence for several students. These may again have affected the provision of support and although they are likely to have been made in the light of new evidence of the students' performance, they may also have affected student motivation.

Further evidence of the difficulties of target setting has been shown regarding the baseline that was used. OFSTED convention was to prioritise improvement at Key Stages 2 to 4, rather than Key Stages 3 to 4 and this may have influenced staff when making the choice to use one or the other. However, at least two of the students (one exemplified in Vignette 9, the other in Appendix 8), were set targets that were, perhaps, too high regarding their prior performance at the different stages. The danger with this and with changing targets and expectations over time is that it can

lead to confusion for students and support staff, as well as being demotivating.

Having made these points, it also appeared that regardless of their potential, events during Key Stage 4 influenced outcomes in several cases and target setting cannot account for such events.

From the schools' perspectives, however, their achievements with the students at Key Stage 4 were not necessarily based on academic performance alone. In some cases, the priority seemed to be "keeping them in" school at least as much as their achieving academic success. This will be returned to in the Discussion.

Overall, none of the students excelled in terms of what might have been reasonably expected of them, although there were instances where the achievement of five grades A*-C would have given the schools the opportunity to claim they had done so. These were in cases where vocational subjects were considered equivalent to multiple GCSE passes which, after government intervention, is no longer possible. Many achieved good grades in one or more subjects, although the reasons as to why they did so in these subjects, rather than across the board, were unclear. In any case, the achievements of many also fell within a range that Fischer Family Trust data suggested was a strong possibility, indicating that potential may not have been fully attained.

Having considered target setting and prior achievement as influences upon students' development, the following section explores the policies, processes and practices that guided the schools' provision and setting of standards.

4.4 THEME 4: DEVSING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF EXCLUSION.

The cohort experienced a variety of learning conditions and programmes. These often involved being withdrawn from classes and working in units or centres dedicated to behaviour correction or aspects of learning, including special needs. This section assesses the development and implementation of policy related to this provision in Schools 1 and 2 and evidence of the influence it had upon the students and staff. Details are drawn from staff interviews with reference to national policy and other sources. Provision for similar students in other Local Authorities is outlined, to show how the students' experiences might have differed if they had lived elsewhere. Primary responses from other Local Authorities were elicited in this regard, including an interview with the Head of a Pupil Referral Unit.

4.4.1 The organisation of the curriculum, constraints and implementation

Generally, schools attempt to accommodate as full a range of individual needs as possible, but with due regard to cost and timetable constraints. As DH1 put it, "...the bottom line is, you have to be pragmatic...in terms of the staff you've got available... and your financial situation...because there is no point designing a curriculum you cannot deliver..." Parameters are further determined by National curriculum and policy, Local Authority or Academy sponsors' support and school level policy, which are themselves subject to interpretation. The leadership at both Schools 1 and 2 developed a curriculum and facilities that distinguished between those with specific learning needs and those with behavioural needs. Both provided what they saw as the best "mix" possible with currently available resources.

However, the desire to provide the curriculum best suited for individual students was balanced with the need to implement national policy. This gave rise to a conflict of objectives perceived by senior managers which was further complicated by influences at local and school levels. The attitude taken towards implementing the English Baccalaureate or “Ebacc”, with its increased emphasis on “core” provision, at the expense of optional subjects, vocational and other learning routes, differed between the schools. At the time of the study, there was a drive towards increasing the numbers of young people taking the Ebacc route. The Secretary of State for Education had prioritised its implementation, but there was not universal understanding of how determined he was to ensure full implementation. The differences that emerged between the schools were more likely to have been driven by current local thinking, therefore, rather than strategy or policy.

The full impact this directly had on the cohort’s curriculum is not measurable, but did appear to have been influential in what was available to them at Key Stage 4 and beyond, especially in combination with the central government policy to significantly reduce the number of vocational qualifications and options related to these. DH1 acknowledged the impact, explaining that external pressure to implement the EBacc arose, at least partly, “...well mainly because of the government targets... because of floor standards... we need to increase time in core and EBacc.... I had held off doing that, because previously we had had poor maths teachers and poor science teachers...So, I’ve been trying in the past to do damage limitation and actually spread the curriculum across where I know we’ve got good teaching....”

On the other hand, DH2 explained that although elements of the EBacc were important, School 2 had decided not to follow the route fully at that time. “Yes. Absolutely, yes... Those students in Year 9 that are in top sets for French and Spanish are encouraged to take a language at GCSE... some take it up and some don’t...(and) we are not in the game of forcing them to... *at this stage*” (my emphasis). She went on to say that the curriculum at Key Stage 4 was based on the national curriculum. All students took Maths, English, a Science course (either a triple, double or BTEC), ICT and RE. In English Language and Literature, around 60% did both with 40% taking English Language only. They then had a choice of four free options... “*at the moment*” (DH2), (my emphasis).

The implications of the senior management decision on EBacc implementation were further rationalised by HOY2. He explained that although there was strong encouragement from government for students to take the EBacc route, it was unsuitable for some students, “... we’re trying to encourage kids down this ‘EB’ route whereas a lot of them... the stronger minded ones have said, you know...and some of them I’m really, really chuffed with are the really able kids who have said, ‘... I don’t want to do languages... I want to do this, this and this because that will help me with my future...’” (HOY2).

In addition to the Core curriculum at School 2, a small group, referred to as ‘Star’, were considered to be ‘special needs’ and were offered a more practical, skills-based curriculum. This included ASDAN, Design Technology and Art, “... because those

faculty areas have actually found that they can provide something of use to the students.” (DH2). The EBacc was considered unsuitable for this group, especially because it was felt that they would not cope with studying languages. However, SS2 revealed that, “...we’ve decided that...even the ‘Star’ group...we haven’t always entered them for examinations...but we’ve made the conscious decision this year...they are going to do the iGCSE... because ...we do need to make sure that...they are all achieving, you know, qualifications...” (SS2). This was, perhaps, evidence of further urging from central government to provide what were perceived as rigorous accredited learning courses. The rationale for choosing iGCSE was in part because, “...they don’t need to do as many controlled assessments...” (SS2). It was therefore thought to be more suitable for students considered to have a “practical” orientation.

Finally, a substantial number of students had an alternative, ‘vocational’ (skills based) curriculum provided, “If it is more appropriate for them, then they’ll do a day at college, or a work placement, or individual self-supported study in our study area...there’s a vast number of courses that we access...” (DH2). She explained the decision also depended, to some extent, upon how the student’s presence would affect classes in school, if not attending college.

This provision was a cause for concern at the time of the study as the Wolf (2011) report had been produced, undermining the validity of vocational provision, especially at Key Stage 4. However, the school policy as expressed by DH2 was that the provision would continue to be made for as long as the school felt that it was in the best interests of the student, “... absolutely, yes... as the... national picture

swayed against 14 to 16's being involved in vocational education, you (still) do it...where you...feel it's appropriate for them and it's right..." and as SS2 explained in addition, "...for some of them, it's a life-saver..."

4.4.2 Policy and the provision of programmes and facilities

School 1 had created several units: "Target", "Base" and "IEU". The former changed emphasis during the period of the study, away from behavioural issues, towards learning support. "Target" was divided into two parts – one for those at significant risk of exclusion, the other for those considered to be the most vulnerable. This was partly because senior leadership required it and partly due to the school changing status to become an Academy. "Base" and "IEU" were deployed as behaviour units – for short and longer-term issues.

In addition to the units, with their staffing and resourcing, there was also a learning support team, led by the SENCO. Much of their work was undertaken within existing classes. The senior leadership had implemented an "Entitlement Team" to discuss and provide solutions for individual students, where needed. It comprised a group of mainly teaching and non-teaching staff, leading or involved in learning and behavioural issues. These were cognisant of, but separate to Child Protection arrangements which involved cooperation with outside agencies, as they arose.

As a result, a large number of people could be involved directly or indirectly in decisions made for any individual student. School 1, however, attempted to

synthesise issues for individual students in a detailed way to develop bespoke provision. DH1 explained, “Yeah, any referral goes to that (Entitlement) group... So I guess it’s about, you know, when their behaviour’s bad...trying to understand why the behaviour’s bad and not just have a knee-jerk reaction...we look at it holistically. When (‘Target’) comes in it’s that whole, sort of, things have gone wrong...support for when their curriculum temporarily or permanently breaks down.” School 1 had also planned for continuity and leadership succession, “It’s... (Target Centre lead) who chairs the Entitlement Team. The systems are in place. It doesn’t need me, it’s self-perpetuating... the system exists...it has evolved...what we had was a lot of people doing brilliant work with kids in ‘silo’ and all I’ve done is bring them together and get them talking to each other...the ethos comes from the top....”

Whilst many aspects of provision in School 2 were similar to School 1, a different dimension emerged for making provision for individual students. Their student profile was changing, as students arrived from different countries, for a variety of reasons. The senior staff explained how the Local Authority’s ‘pupil placement’ policy was causing concern, because changing needs and profiles gave rise to upheaval as they tried to accommodate new students and change provision, with consequences for those already in school. For example, the senior staff perception was that the Local Authority policy might increase the number of looked after children on role. As a result, increased liaison with social workers and other agencies would follow, with further subsequent impact.

The senior staff did not see such changes as wholly negative. Describing their experience with students who had arrived from Afghanistan, SS2 commented, “The Afghans come over, you know, and it goes through pupil placement and I think we did...a good job and Abdullah was very happy here, they (the Local Authority) automatically put us down...as the 1st choice, for the latest three that we’ve got...” However, the school also had an increasing cohort of Eastern European students on roll, which was having an impact on curriculum provision and choice and would also have had funding and resource implications. They had decided to move towards “guided” rather than “free” choices for students’ options. As the Deputy explained, “...We’ve got an EAL⁵ cohort this year, mainly Polish speaking students who have been directed as one of their options. They have to do Polish, because it’s obvious they would want to do Polish... and they are going to do youth award, ASDAN, as well because...it will be easier for them to access. So we do guided choices for some students, but not for all...” She explained that there had been a significant increase in those arriving from Eastern Europe, affecting her area and the East of England in general in the previous three to four years.

The approach at School 2 towards students changing courses differed from School 1. Rather than maximising flexibility, SS2 commented, “We don’t like them moving out, at all...”. DH2 followed up, saying “We try to make it as difficult as possible...” They explained that parents were always involved in the process but they would always rationalise their position to persuade them of the reasons for not changing. Any of these factors could have affected provision for students in general, but especially those with specific needs. The next section shows how the cohort

⁵ English as an Additional Language (EAL)

may have had different experiences and, perhaps, outcomes, if they had lived in another Local Authority.

4.4.3 Policy and the provision of alternative school arrangements for students at risk of exclusion

In some areas, students with behavioural issues, severe enough to be considered for permanent exclusion are educated in centres away from their schools. For School 1 and others in its area, there was no Local Authority provided centre available to alleviate these problems, external to the school's own facilities. Consequently, a system of "managed moves" was agreed by a group of seven "Town" Headteachers' who collaborated on a range of policy and practice issues, through a forum they had set up for the purpose. Managing exclusion was a thorny issue though, which tended to be treated with mutual suspicion.

The managed move concept involved one school agreeing to take a young person at risk of exclusion from another "Town" school. In return, the other schools agreed to take similar students, as necessary, at other times. The idea was that the net "swap figure" would distribute the problem students evenly amongst participating schools, whilst benefiting students by giving those involved fresh opportunities. The relatively bespoke nature of these agreements, brokered by the Local Authority (which was represented on the Heads' meeting group), meant that moves might be temporary or permanent depending on the student's needs.

Despite the appeal of apparent simplicity and flexibility in the arrangement, exclusion featured frequently on the agendas of Heads' meetings, suggesting they did not regard managed moves as wholly satisfactory. In other Local Authorities, the plethora of arrangements in operation, further suggests that there was no perfect solution available. Often, funding arrangements proved difficult to agree between the institutions involved.

From Local Authorities' (LA) responses to a request for information, several alternative models for such provision at Key Stage 4 in other areas can be outlined:

- Shared provision, the student spending a certain number of days (usually 3:2 split) at a Support Centre or similar, with further days spent at the "home" school. (LA 1, East Midlands)
- Shared provision, the student studying "core" subjects at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and options at the "home" school. (LA 2, South West)
- Full-time provision at a centre. If the student was in Year 10, this would be with a view to reintegration at the "home" school in due course. If the student was in Year 11 the placement would more likely be full time and permanent. (LA 3, North East)
- Bespoke: Shared, or full time and permanent provision, in one of three types: PRU, Alternative (skills based) and specialist BESD, depending on the student's needs. (LA 4, North)

NB: LA's 1 and 2 both referred to negotiation that could take place between the institutions involved so that flexibility could be provided with "bespoke" arrangements.

In all cases above, the respondents noted that the picture for provision had either changed recently, or was likely to change further in the near future. Funding and policy were the reasons, so that future provision was at best uncertain for the students in these areas. In one example, where previously there had been a very high use of a centre's facilities by Headteachers in one Local Authority, a fall in referrals had been noted. It was felt this may have been due to the centre changing status to be recognised as a school and would, therefore, claim full funding for any students attending it.

In addition to the alternatives described above, an interview was undertaken with the Head of a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in another East Midlands authority, who described the provision made for those at risk of exclusion and the facilities available for teaching, "... I mean where we are, is purely on the basis of where they manage to find us space. We are like a lot of PRU'S – we are the last, I think, probably to be considered so therefore we occupy the places that are available and nobody else particularly wants...". This included, "... an old, semi-derelect Junior School" (Head of PRU, East Midlands). This Authority had a team of staff who ran programmes with young people as referred to above, but also at their home institutions, therefore adding a further variation to provision in other Local Authorities. At Key Stage 3, the expectation was that re-integration of the student to their original school would take place. Placements were undertaken part-time for one or two days per week. Alternatively, there was a full-time programme which was limited to six weeks' duration. In both cases, the PRU team would then support the student and 'home' school upon reintegration, on an 'outreach' basis. Provision at

Key Stage 4 operated similarly with a six-week placement, although the emphasis was different, “They are assessed for their academic levels and they are prepared for vocational placement... ‘cause any child in Key Stage 4 staying with us, for any length of time, will access a vocational programme, largely...” (Head of PRU, East Midlands)

Where the senior curriculum staff of Schools 1 and 2 had contrasting views about changing provision for young people at risk of exclusion, especially vocational, this Head of PRU had taken a clear line against government policy and their advice to drop it, “We are holding firm because we believe in ‘voc’ for... a large number of our students is (sic) appropriate and they will achieve better doing that than they will coming into, you know, a typically educational environment...” (Head of PRU, East Midlands). He went on to explain some of the complications this caused for the centre and the schools, particularly regarding gaining points for the qualifications students were awarded, contributing to league tables and cognisant of OFSTED inspections. Concurring with the perceptions of the schools’ senior staff, however, he remained committed to the principle of providing the best for the students’ interests.

In addition to the core and optional curriculum, the centre provided functional skills, PSHE and enrichment programmes. The Head of PRU also held contact with parents in high regard, “...Our contact with parents is pretty good... every child would have a meeting with the parents here, when they are first referred and the reason we do that is because very often they’ve had a bad experience at school, they’ve got quite a negative view, (and) we don’t know necessarily what the school

has said about us....” (Head of PRU, East Midlands). Review meetings would be held after six weeks and there would, he said, be further follow up.

4.4.4 Interpretation of policy and inconsistent implementation

The weight given to written school policies in informing decisions might vary, depending on the user. Where separate but related policies exist, such as ‘Behaviour’ or ‘School Uniform’, for example, interpretation of standards by decision makers can be inconsistent, especially if they work in teaching and non-teaching roles and in different curricular, pastoral or physical areas of the school. The application of policy to the case of an individual student at any one time, therefore, has the potential to be confusing and possibly unjust.

This was exemplified in discussion with four members of staff who dealt with Student 4. As reported earlier, one, who had responsibility for behavioural issues, felt that there was inconsistency from colleagues, including senior, regarding standards of uniform and that her dealings with the boy had taken on a personal dimension because of the inconsistency of others, leading her to avoid contact, because she knew if she saw him it would lead to confrontation. Another example cited earlier, concerning the use of imprecise language, due to confusion over what “appropriate” behaviour meant, led to the boy being withdrawn from classes.

On the other hand, regarding the uniform issue, Student 4’s support staff commented, “...I think that...one or two people perhaps in the behaviour team had

decided that they were absolutely going to insist that he didn't wear his hoodie... so much time wasted on arguments... over hoodies in this school...I go to the pastoral care meetings, once a week...so (he) was often mentioned there. But mostly it was about his hoodie..." (Support Staff). She felt that this became a distraction from what she saw as her role, helping him to stay in school and achieve his maximum potential. She went on to explain the impact: "I'm in the Entitlement Team meetings as well...when you head towards Easter...and you're the sort of person (Student 4) was, you're on dodgy ground then...at risk then of going really early...and not completing your work... he ended up on a part-time timetable..." (Support Staff). This implies, again, that reputation and frequency of misdemeanours may increase a student's prospects of punitive treatment as much, perhaps, as policy implementation.

Finally, another member of staff appeared to feel that the problems were exacerbated because of lack of a cohesive response to them, or clarity. A previous Head of Year, who, because of a change in school policy, now had responsibility for behavioural issues only, felt that her capacity to help the student with curriculum and support had been compromised to his detriment. Thus, it can be seen how conflicting standards on uniform and changes in school policy and its interpretation affected provision for Student 4. The student himself, however, in his interview at the end of his schooling, said that the school had been very supportive of him and appeared positive about the help he had received to move on to college, post-16.

On a wider scale, issues over policy implementation seemed to run deeper than those concerning Student 4. From staff interviews at School 1, contrary feedback

suggested that, in the view of some staff, senior management were not dealing well with many of the school's issues, especially poor behaviour. The member of staff working with students in IEU (behaviour unit) suggested that there was inconsistency in the way that errant students were dealt with. She felt this led to, "...different outcomes on different days..." favouritism being shown towards some, whereas others were dealt with more harshly.

Personal observation provided further insight, that seemed to support these comments. After spending a morning in the special needs unit, a memo noted that whilst there was a good supportive atmosphere amongst these non-teaching staff, criticism of school policy was freely offered, along with the perception of a lack of support they felt they received from senior management. One member of staff questioned whether the Academy sponsors had the resolve to tackle the school's behaviour issues.

At School 2, there was evidence that staff disagreements about the best way to deal with errant students could lead to significantly different arrangements being made for them. This may have influenced decisions about which students were sent on college courses at Key Stage 4. More seriously, discussion about the potential exclusion of a student was exemplified by HOY2. The girl had a complex background as a looked after child. The disagreement focused upon how meeting the needs of this one child was perceived to impact upon others at the school. HOY2 commented, "...I'm trying to keep her in school...she (referring to a senior support staff member) is trying to get her out of school, but I want her in school

because I know for a fact... If she's out of school she's going to achieve nothing..." (HOY2)

Other issues raised related to changes in school circumstances, including changes in personnel and roles, and even changes in the status of the school (Academy) leading to a different emphasis on the means through which support for students was provided. Student 2's support staff felt that the support provided was too late for him. In addition, a change of emphasis in school policy required his support to be curriculum, rather than behaviour/pastoral based, "...it's swung 60:40 to curriculum-based...40%, you know, trying to modify their behaviour, but ... we helped him mainly in Year 11 really, which in my opinion is a little late, but, you know, it has swung that way..." This left the support staff with a dilemma. He felt he should counter external influences (in this case parents) in order to make effective progress with the student, but was unable to do so because of the change in policy and his role, "...whether it's the Academy or... we ...all feel that we are parenting pretty much most of it, (which) stems from the messages they are getting or not getting at home unfortunately...Sometimes you're battling against, 'my dad told me to hit him as soon as anyone speaks to me badly'... it's difficult" (Support Staff). This suggested that although he wanted to provide pastoral support, he felt less able to do so. The same member of staff also questioned the validity of school policy with teaching colleagues sending students out of class to "Base", "My point was, you know...why are they allowed to just not do anything in class...What the teacher is supposed to do is, if its non-compliance, is send them to Base, but...sending them to Base isn't going to get them a GCSE in Science, if they are not going to do it there..." (Support Staff).

A similar change in emphasis policy at School 2, regarding the division of pastoral and curriculum support, led HOY2 to comment on his frustration at not being able to support students in the way he felt best. In terms of supporting those at risk of exclusion, he explained that the shift in policy, which he perceived to be from government level, had changed his ability to help his students with PSP's (Pastoral Support Programmes). This was because the emphasis of his role was now behavioural, where it used to be combined. Support was now determined at senior level, "... (If) it's a fixed term exclusion... when they are brought back we have the interview with parents... they have a reintegration meeting with the Head and Deputy... Originally I would do them with a member of SLT or Assistant Head... So, I would set the targets and I could follow them through... (but) the way they work through now... I feel I lost out there... because (with PSP setting) ... I would liaise with the child, their parent, me... and I would have that regular dialogue... I don't think I've got anything to hold them to account on any more..."

It is possible that these changes in school policy emphasis were driven by national policy at the time, in that there was a drive to tackle behaviour issues in schools. The Secretary of State had appointed Charlie Taylor to lead this, one focus of which was the publication of a document, (DfE, 2011b). Nevertheless, the potential remained for inconsistency to arise from support staff acting as they felt appropriate in contrast, to school policy, or from lack of clarity.

A further example of how interpretation of school policy could impact inconsistently upon students was entry policy for post-16 courses. Schools use criteria such as academic achievement and capability, availability of courses and

students' prior performance, but these are open to interpretation on the part of school and college admissions tutors. Both schools in the study had a similar relationship with the Colleges in the area, including accessing courses at the pre-16 level and encouraging or discouraging students to apply for college places post-16. The pre-16 courses were generally of a practical, skills-based nature, used for young people such as those in the cohort, thought to be unsuited to an academic curriculum. Regarding Student 9, interview comments from HOY2 exemplified how this worked and the implications, "... he will need the careers interview, he will need us to lead him through, by the nose, 'this is your college application... what are you going to apply for what are you going to do...?'" (HOY2). The rationale for this was that, "...we wouldn't want him in the 6th Form, because of the detrimental effect on others and I don't think he will achieve enough for the minimum entry anyway." He went on to explain that if it was not for the support of the school, the student may potentially become NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training). The implication appeared to be that the decision had been made for the student, the only question was how the "opportunity" was taken.

4.4.5 Difficulties in devising, framing and agreeing policy

DH1 discussed issues on how framing school policy had become more difficult, regarding curriculum provision. She was working in increasingly complex circumstances, arising from the school changing status, turnover of senior staff and governing body members and changes in national education policy, amongst others, leading her, when looking at the interview questions to be covered, to suggest, "These are interesting questions at this moment in time... for me, because we are just changing our curriculum model for next year, in the light of so many things..."

(DH1). She had presented a curriculum model to senior staff, looking for discussion and agreement on a way forward. Regarding their response, "...they didn't say 'why have you done that?' ... They just kind of looked at it and said 'okay' ... and I thought, 'No, you need to challenge me, because I need to know that these decisions I've made are the right ones, because I've just made them and they need to be tested out.'" Her response to the predicament was to seek constructive criticism from a valued colleague, attempting to avoid future problems that might occur by implementing the curriculum without further discussion. Even so, worries about the number of issues needing to be attended to concurrently led to fears that conflicts would emerge, "...and then while you're juggling the plates, quite a lot of them... crash and you think '... well that was going to happen, wasn't it? Because it wasn't thought through...'" (DH1)

Though they were not universally felt, there were benefits for the cohort members, as their interviews revealed. Three described their satisfaction at having completed courses and exams well before the end of Year 11. The implications of the above, however, suggests that school policy and the actions of managers may not always be enacted coherently and consistently, if driven by national policy requirements and performance indicators, unless implementation is well resourced. These and related issues form the basis for part of the Discussion.

5. DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

As outlined in previous sections, the aims of the study were to identify the characteristics that led to a cohort of young people being considered “at risk of exclusion”, categorise these and compare them with others, showing how they were supported towards amelioration or mitigation of “at-risk” status, whether the support was consistent, how and why variations were manifest and what were the outcomes at the end of their compulsory education at age 16. The intention was to contrast the experiences of individuals in the group, in terms of the processes they went through, influences upon decisions made by and for them, their progress, achievement and the subsequent progression routes made available to them.

The factors that underlie exclusion and how these affected the cohort were shown in the findings and methodology. Regarding distal factors, in terms of socioeconomic status, most of the students were shown to live in areas of relative deprivation and the gender mix reflected national school exclusion data. All of the cohort were designated SEN, or had been previously, largely related to behavioural characteristics (BESD) and their ethnicity was classified as “White-British”. In addition, a range of proximal issues, related to home background and the external environment, family circumstances, peer group relationships, drug-related issues, medical conditions and multiple changes of school, were identified as associated with specific members of the cohort. Consideration was also given to students’ exclusion records, attendance patterns, curriculum provision, attainment, choices and decision-making processes, along with influences external to the school

environment. It was found that whilst there were strong similarities in the distal characteristics underlying students' "at-risk" status, there were also distinctive differences, most often related to proximal conditions. Differences were also noted in that some students were associated with significant and identifiable problems, whilst others' status was characterised more by frequent, low-level behavioural disruption. Nevertheless, by the end of their compulsory education period, the schools involved had successfully kept all the cohort engaged, although analysis discussed in the final section, showed that their overall achievement levels might have been better. The implications of the outcomes are discussed and recommendations made.

The discussion begins by comparing the findings on why the cohort was regarded as "at risk", with those of other studies. Issues related to socioeconomic status are highlighted to start with, reflecting the extent to which its incidence has been acknowledged and analysed in other research. Having portrayed the significance of SES and material deprivation, links are established, or at least inferred, to show that the wider factors underlying a student's "at-risk of exclusion" status are multifarious and interconnected, as also reflected in other research. Ethnicity and gender are, therefore, considered in conjunction with proximal factors and the interconnections found between them, rather than as discrete distal factors. Similarly, issues related to SEN status feature throughout.

The initial discussion of the distal and proximal factors underlying students' "at risk of exclusion" status, might suggest they are subject to influences over which they have little or no control. However, as it progresses, the discussion considers the

proposition that, to some extent, young people make up their own personalities, as well as being subject to conditions around them. Aspects of the personal lives of those in the cohort are therefore exemplified, to show how individuals' characteristics related to their "made-up" identities and the implications are considered with other research findings. Essentially, it is suggested that the more complex and intermeshed factors become, the more difficult it is to ameliorate or mitigate them.

After reviewing the underlying "risk" factors, the discussion addresses the research questions that ask if, and how, factors can be mitigated with support and measures to encourage aspiration and improve achievement through a more flexible and accessible curriculum. Whilst the schools had set up structures and processes to deal with issues as they arose, there seemed to be inconsistencies in staff approaches towards the application of sanctions and subsequent support with which students were provided. These became apparent in the findings that considered responses to "at-risk" status, when reviewing relationships, events and communication between students and staff, parents/carers and significant others, along with staff perceptions of their roles and interpretation of school policies in undertaking them. Therefore, issues concerning policy implementation and its implications are considered, alongside alternative approaches and interventions, again drawing on other research findings and contrasting them. In doing so, the contemporary context in which research findings were set is acknowledged, showing that contrasting approaches to research and the mitigation of "at risk" factors are related to when, where and why they were produced.

5.1 WHAT CHARACTERISES A YOUNG PERSON AS BEING “AT RISK OF EXCLUSION” FROM SCHOOL? IS IT POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY A RANGE OF CHARACTERISTICS OR FACTORS THAT PLACE YOUNG PEOPLE “AT RISK” OF EXCLUSION AND ASSESS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY ARE EVIDENT?

This section reviews findings regarding the characteristics of “at-risk” status, categorising and identifying relationships between factors, with a view to understanding ways in which underlying issues can be addressed. These are discussed in subsequent sections, in terms of the approaches of the schools and their staff dealing with the cohort, compared with findings from other research, but with further reference to policy and approaches outlined in the literature review.

5.1.1 Socioeconomic status and Social Class

Evidence of characteristics, including SES and SEN status, was shown through the students’ demographic profiles and free school meals status, in the Methodology. Although parental income and status were not criteria for choosing the cohort, 80% lived in a relatively deprived local demographic environment. Both schools in the study were similarly located, as indicated by a DfE “deprivation factor”, showing that each had a total student population with over 20% living in relative poverty. This evidence resonated with other research, including Reay (2006), Archer et al (2010), Gazeley (2010), Thompson (2011) and Carlile (2013) in linking “at risk” status to SES. The link identified between relative deprivation and underachievement by Reay (2006), was also apparent in the cohort. In terms of national benchmarking based on prior performance, most students underachieved

and none were more “successful” in achieving formal qualifications than the data suggested they should be, as was shown in the Findings and is reviewed later, when discussing the curriculum and related issues.

The Department for Education has also recognised socioeconomic status to be a primary factor linked to “at risk” status, in conjunction with others. For example, it published data showing that students with SEN statements, whose need was “Behaviour, Emotional, Social, Difficulties” (BESD), are more likely than those without to be eligible for free school meals (FSM) (DfE, 2011c: 8), a combination of characteristics evident in almost all my cohort. In addition, it showed that fixed-term exclusion rates for FSM students, as a proportion of the group, were far higher than whole-school or gender rates, as was also reflected in the data for both schools in the study.

5.1.2 Exclusion, Ethnicity and Gender

There was a significant difference in the overall exclusion rates of the cohort’s schools’, suggesting that the chances of “at risk of exclusion” status could be affected by which school students attend, and, perhaps, when. Both schools were academies and during the study, School 1 was going through the process of transition. It had higher rates of permanent exclusions, measured as a percentage of the pupil group, than School 2 at the time, for males (0.5 to 0.27%), females (0.82 to 0%) and those eligible for FSM (1.72 to 0%), as well as for all SEN categories except “School Action Plus”. On the other hand, School 2 had higher rates of fixed-term exclusions, as a percentage of enrolments, in all SEN categories, especially “School Action Plus” (12.36 to 8.96%) and those with statements (10.87

to 4.35%). In the same categories, both schools had lower fixed-term exclusion rates, however, than was reflected in the national data for all schools. Whilst there were exceptions, a similar point also applied in many other categories. If attempting to account for the differences, the data could give rise to many interpretations, but deeper and wider analysis would be required before concluding that they were due to the behavioural characteristics of the prevailing school student population, or a reflection of school and leadership policy, actions or intentions.

However, relationships between poor student behaviour, SEN classification, and the risk of exclusion have been noted by several authors and were reflected in the findings, 80% of the cohort being identified as behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). DfE data for 2009-10 corroborated this, showing that students with SEN were much more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than others and those with (BESD) were far more likely to receive either fixed-term or permanent exclusion. SEN “School Action Plus” students were over seven times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than those without (DfE, 2011c: 76).

Whilst my findings resonated with those of the DfE above, observations from students’ file records suggested that for transgressions ending in withdrawal from classes, there were differences in the type and severity of disruptive behaviour in which they had been engaged. Also, the number of times that individual students had been withdrawn from classes or received fixed-term exclusions varied widely. Written explanations, often brief, recorded phrases such as “persistent disruptive behaviour” as reasons for what sometimes appeared, at “face value”, to be relatively low level, minor offences. DfE data for 2008-9, confirmed in a Barnardo’s

publication (Evans, 2010: 21), corroborate the observation, in showing that, “Persistent Disruptive Behaviour” accounted for 29.6% of permanent exclusions and 23.3% of fixed-term exclusions. Acts of physical aggression or verbal abuse towards adults or other students accounted for a further 43.1% of permanent and 49.3% of fixed-term exclusions. Cumulatively, around two-thirds of all exclusions were accounted for by these reasons at that time, with a similar proportion applying to an exclusion length of the minimum 1 or 2 days. Whilst the reasons for and pattern of exclusion for my cohort appeared to reflect the national data, therefore, the labels used for classification need further and deeper analysis if the underlying issues are to be clearly established and understood.

The DfE (2011) data also confirmed that in all circumstances, boys were more likely to experience exclusion from school than girls (DfE, 2011c: 76). My findings diverged from this in showing that, exceptionally, School 1’s rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusion for females (2.94 and 0.82% respectively) were higher than those for males (2.65 and 0.5%) and for the national averages for females (2.74 and 0.07%). Analysis over a longer period may well show this to have been a temporary phenomenon though, rather than an on-going trend, and in any case, the differences in numbers were small. Regarding gender more generally, Gazeley et al (2013) suggest that a reason for the higher incidence of exclusion in boys than girls, could lie in differences in the ways in which they and their difficulties are understood by those who deal with them, as well as their specific problems. Their interviews with young people also suggested that girls and boys interact differently with teachers, implying that relationships and outcomes would vary accordingly (Gazeley et al 2013: 42, 43). They found that boys are more confrontational in dealing with issues,

where girls may try to avoid them by, for example, absenteeism. One of their interviewees also expressed a perception that a similar outcome might apply to problems, involving social media and networking sites, causing issues for girls. (Gazeley et al, 2013: 42)

“At risk” status and underachievement related to ethnic minorities is frequently a subject of research. For example, using DfE data, the Office for the Children’s Commissioner, OCC (2012), showed that related to ethnicity, exclusion rates for some students were much higher than for others. Students of “Black Caribbean”⁶ origin were almost four times more likely to be permanently excluded, in 2009-10, for example. Further, “Black Caribbean” boys were eleven times more likely to be permanently excluded than white girls of the same age in similar schools (OCC, 2012: 13), suggesting that if excluded students’ gender and ethnicity are looked at together, the differences were heightened. In the same year, Gypsy and Roma Traveller and Irish Traveller children were four times more likely to be permanently excluded than was the school population. Similar points are noted by Gazeley (2013: 14) and Santa Cruz et al (2011), as referred to in the literature review.

However, the ethnic make-up of my cohort was 100% “White-British”. Whilst this was by chance, it reflected the intake of both schools and the demography of their localities. The significance of “White-British” identity was a subject of Reay’s (2006) findings on social class and underachievement. Reay and other contemporaries, describe increasing concerns, especially regarding underachievement and white,

⁶ OCC used the criteria for ethnic origin as defined by DfE

working-class males, a description prevalent in the cohort. However, Archer et al, (2010: 38), explain that the development of young peoples' identities is increasingly subject to a range of "culturally entangled" contributory factors, a term attributed to Hesse, (2000). They provide examples, suggesting that ethnicity is itself a "classed" issue, linked with "at risk" status or underachievement. Analysis of ethnicity appears, therefore, to be developing more nuanced descriptions of the makeup of young peoples' identities and associated implications, as an aspect of research in this area.

Similarly, whilst issues related to ethnicity have, so far, been discussed in context at the time of the study, the ethnic make-up of school and local population can change quickly, with implications. In an interview at one of the study schools, the senior staff explained that Local Authority placements were affecting the school's ethnic profile. Partly linked to migration patterns, they suggested that there was transience in the school population, moving in this case from East Asian to Eastern European. The situation presented difficulties in planning and making provision, although they saw financial benefits as recompense, providing a positive dimension. However, Gazeley et al (2013), reporting a similar issue from a school, reflected in a Local Authority's observation, found that exclusion rates for specific ethnic groups varied year on year and noted that SEN provision would be affected, especially if individuals' needs required specialist support.

As a policy response to the issues, Gazeley et al (2013) suggest that Initial Teacher Training courses should deal with Institutional Racism to improve teachers' understanding of it as a systemic issue. To inform training, that concept itself may

need to be developed, though, to take account of the further dimension of “cultural entanglement”. The issues are discussed further below when considering whether “at-risk” characteristics are assimilated, or self-determined.

5.1.3 Attendance and absence

Attendance patterns for the schools involved and the cohort were provided in the methodology. Absenteeism appeared to be a problem in both schools, including persistent absence in one of them. Six of the cohort had attendance levels at less than 90%, including two of the three girls involved. Since lower than 90% would cause concern for an Ofsted inspection, monitoring of the students’ attendance would be more likely in the circumstance. Putting the figures into perspective, the national attendance rate for those on FSM was 91.5% in 2012. Their significance is acknowledged by Gazeley (2010), however, noting that students who were involved in school exclusion processes were likely to have complex and unstable patterns of school attendance. The point was further evidenced in the Special Educational Needs Information Act, DfE (2011c), which showed that, “Pupils with special educational needs were more likely to be absent from school than other pupils” (DfE, 2011c: 69) and, “Pupils at School Action Plus (9.2 per cent) and with statements (9.1 per cent) missed the most school through absence” (ibid). Also, those with BESD were among the most likely to be absent from school.

Whilst it is not possible to conclude that poor attendance had specific consequences for the students, there does appear to have been a relationship, consistent with other research. For example, attendance has also been linked to performance, Archer et al suggesting that students with poor attendance records, “... inevitably

impacted on their achievement.” (Archer et al, 2010: 30). This gives rise to a tension for schools wishing to promote high attendance levels as a virtue, in contrast with their exclusion or withdrawal from classes of students, for the benefit of others. Decisions on the length of time to exclude, provision of alternative placements involving “catch-up” arrangements and placing students on part-time timetables are all manifestations of the tension, which will be discussed further in the section on curriculum and achievement.

Whilst absenteeism might be a sign of disaffection as a factor related to young people being “at-risk of exclusion”, it may also be a reaction to students’ vulnerability and perceptions of feeling “at risk” more broadly, as described above in Gazeley’s observation about girls wishing to avoid confrontation with teachers. Of those with high absence rates from the study, for example, the girls had significant personal difficulties, causing them various problems throughout their time in Key Stage 4. Student 10’s attendance was lowest of all at 80%, but he did not appear to be disaffected. He saw the time he had left at school as transitional and was looking forward to attending college full-time and permanently. Archer et al (2010: 30) provide further examples showing why absence cannot always be equated to disaffection. In one girl’s case, health-related issues due to a tragic family related accident were found to be responsible. The poor attendance of two others was due to home circumstances where they had experienced parental violence causing one of them to run away. Nevertheless, links between exclusion, high absence and underachievement arising from proximal circumstances and conditions, internal, or external to the school environment, can be inferred and there is some evidence that they are linked to socioeconomic status too.

5.1.4 Do students create identities that contribute to their own “at-risk” status?

Students were not asked directly in interviews how they understood their personal identities to have been formed. However, several accounts are provided in the Findings, especially the “vignettes”, exemplifying how they saw themselves, resonating with the argument that their “at-risk” status did not arise solely through assimilated characteristics. Student 3’s activities, home circumstances and relationships with family and partner, Student 5’s personal relationships, Student 7’s reflections on home life and subsequent development of her own idiosyncratic character are all examples, as was Student 6’s expectations of his future as a pest controller, although this appeared to have been influenced by the “role model” adult relations with whom he lived and worked. Later in the section, a more detailed account of how interactions influenced the personal identity and “at-risk of exclusion” status of Student 4 is considered.

As discussed above, the cultural background within which the students’ identities were developing was largely “working-class, White-British”. Rather than being associated with stereotypical connotations of life in a traditional, “working-class” environment, there was probably a closer relationship with Archer et al’s (2010) findings, having used a research sample and frame with similarities to mine. They noted that the identities constructed by contemporary “White-British” young-people were more complex than may have been expected traditionally. One girl had adopted “...a particular form of culturally entangled urban style...” through what they termed a “black cool” identity, whilst also expressing pride in being a “London

girl". They explain, "While the majority of pupils in the study were British, the ethnic and national allegiances and feelings of belonging were far more intricate than being a mere matter of their passport and ethnic/cultural heritage." Archer et al (2010: 42).

Te Riele (2009) suggests that whilst young people take on characteristics related to their backgrounds and socio-economic positions, they make up their own identities and take decisions based upon these. She argues that more attention should be paid to the socio-cultural conditions in which they develop, as well as underlying distal factors. Archer et al (2010: 31) make a similar point, contrasting the influences of home and surrounding environment with students' experiences at school, as they develop identities as members of their families and communities. A further dimension is added in Te Riele's (2006a) observation that "role model" identities, associated with older people, are no longer relevant for young people, suggesting that characteristics are developed as contemporary phenomena, as well as through interaction with environment and circumstances. Use of social media and rapid technological developments are increasingly influential upon young peoples' identities and future working lives, as was seen with Student 5 especially. This suggests that even if adverse socio-economic conditions can be mediated with interventions over time, a more sophisticated approach and response may be needed to understand the on-going changes in the cultural environment. More research on this may well be needed, but these arguments serve to underline the complexity and interrelatedness of factors, as well as the need for bespoke responses and solutions called for by Finlay et al (2010). They also resonate with the

perceptions of the whole cohort, that they were in control of their own decisions and relationships, although whether this was the case, is explored further below.

In her ethnographic study of permanent exclusion, Anna Carlile uses the concepts of “contested spaces”, working within “extended bodies”, as a means of explaining and analysing young peoples’ experiences. The term “extended body” implies that people are comprised of a physical body with “inner and extended elements” (Carlile, 2013: 47), surrounded by various aspects and dimensions interacting with its environment. The physical body is not discrete. Essentially, there are multiple stimuli, interactions, events and circumstances that shape how we think and act, contesting the open and available “spaces” within the extended body. The proposition suggests that students become “at risk of exclusion” through interactions, circumstances and relationships that can be understood in terms of the influences of socio-cultural and other factors, in addition to socio-economic considerations, but that these influences will themselves be variable depending on the individual’s experiences. The analysis helps, therefore, to explain variations in outcomes from apparently similar peer and school staff relationships and the type and extent of support made available. The following example is used to illustrate the point.

In terms of “contested space”, Student 4 was the subject of an unsubstantiated suspicion of “drug-dealing” in school, as mentioned at several points in the Findings. The boy’s relationships and activities with peers external to school were thought to be affecting those in school, where staff were concerned that his peers were vulnerable to pressure to purchase illicit goods. This contributed to his being placed on a part-time timetable, so that his movements could be monitored, more

closely than he would otherwise have been, whilst in school. Using Carlile's terminology, the "spaces" of the "extended body" were open to "contest" out of school, where he may or may not have been subject to pressures in relationships and activities, related to his alleged "drug-dealing". When attending school, his extended body spaces were further "contested", in terms of the person he wanted to project himself as being, contrasted with the alternative perceptions held by his peers and staff regarding who he was and how they should relate to and deal with him, influenced by their suspicion of what might be happening outside. It could be argued, therefore, that there was no objective reality underlying the scenario. Subjective judgements helped to determine the relationships that contributed to the development of the boy's persona, some of which he controlled but some of which arose from interaction with others and their perceptions.

The interactions involved in the example might have led to various outcomes, through several alternative scenarios. However, the sanctions, i.e. using the part-time timetable and monitoring his behaviour and movements, can be argued to have allowed him to remain at school, albeit at 'arms-length' from staff and students, although his achievement levels could have been affected adversely by the arrangement, as will be explored further when discussing alternative education provision (AEP).

Taken from OCC (2012), the following quote from a Headteacher called Sewell (2010), regarding the underachievement of black male students, helps to draw together the issues discussed in this section. It suggests that young people do make up their own identities and that they are "at-risk" because significant adults,

especially those external to the school environment, do not challenge, or expect enough of them, “What we now see in schools are children undermined by poor parenting, peer-group pressure and an inability to be responsible for their own behaviour. They are not subjects of institutional racism. They have failed their GCSEs because they did not do the homework, did not pay attention and were disrespectful to their teachers. Instead of challenging our children we have given them the discourse of the victim – a sense that the world is against them and they cannot succeed” (OCC, 2012: 95).

This resonates with the “moral underclass discourse” explained by Parsons (2005) and Michail’s (2011) “punitive approach”, suggesting that those “at-risk” are responsible for their own behaviour and there is a need to take corrective actions to address “wrong-thinking and wrong-doing”. It also suggests that schools’ capacities to mitigate against “at-risk” factors, are undermined because of lack of external support, or outright rejection. Issues, regarding where responsibility boundaries lie, in this respect, are considered later.

5.1.5 The extent to which characteristics or factors are influential

If schools and policymakers are to attempt to mitigate the factors or characteristics underlying “at-risk” status, it would be helpful to know the extent to which they are influential and the relationships between them, as the example above implies. However, efforts to isolate variables and assess the extent to which they are influential present difficulties, especially where influences occur external to the

school environment. The following example will clarify the point. At least 60% of the cohort experienced difficulties arising from personal relationships and peer influences, external to school. Another 60% experienced more than one move between schools, which sometimes can be indicative of disruptive influences increasing “at risk” status, although family relocation may be the reason. 60% had also experienced family breakdown or relationship difficulties, including two who had been placed “in care” for some time. One of those was pregnant. Half the cohort had been implicated with drug use or associated issues. The number of potential combinations of these variables and the degree to which each of them was significant together or separately, makes the extent of their impact difficult to measure. Accounting for them in conjunction with other environmental influences, would add much greater complexity. Nevertheless, improving understanding of correlational links could give rise to more effective possibilities for prevention or mitigation of conditions.

Despite the difficulties outlined, Gazeley (2010), citing a DCSF (2009) report, notes the recognition that the social class location of pupils who become involved in school exclusion and the extent to which it perpetuates this, should be, “...a key question for policymakers interested in breaking the link between educational attainment and disadvantage.” (Gazeley, 2010: 302). Whilst deprivation was evident, its extent and the degree to which it influenced the decision-making, progress and attainment of the students in my study is less clear. However, the next section discusses the ways in which their schools tried to mediate and mitigate their circumstances and the difficulties faced in doing so, contrasted, again, with other research findings. Discussion of support and its provision for the student cohort in

the two schools, considers how policies, procedures and relationships affected them as young people “at risk of exclusion”, through pastoral “duty of care”, choices and curriculum, progress monitoring and attendance.

5.2 CAN “AT-RISK” FACTORS IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND BEYOND BE MITIGATED THROUGH INTERVENTIONS AND THE PROVISION OF SUPPORT?

From student interview comments, staff-student relationships appeared to have influenced students’ self-esteem, perceptions of ability and their engagement with education, varying from encouragement to specialise in art in one student’s case, to discouragement in others and in one case disapproval of his relationships and related activities. This concurred with a similar point made by Archer et al, who found that, “...participants repeatedly told us that teacher-student relationships are a crucial factor affecting their engagement with schooling” (Archer et al, 2010: 100). Interventions could have a positive or negative influence, depending on how specific issues were dealt with and how students experienced them in relation to other aspects of school life. Positive influences were observed from planned, “strategic” support, whilst unexpected events or developments were perhaps more likely to be associated with negative outcomes, although they could also be beneficial.

This section considers aspects of the structures, communication processes and interaction that influenced provision of pastoral support, along with support for progression and making choices. It shows how approaches to policy and support were influenced by the dispositions and personalities of those responsible for its

implementation and considers where the boundaries of responsibility lie in supporting students, within and external to the school environment, from different perspectives. It also contrasts the benefits of providing one-to-one support, with arrangements that dispersed responsibilities between specialist agencies, some of which were external to the school environment.

The underlying rationale for decisions, interventions and actions, seemed to give precedence, in some cases at least, to avoiding students dropping out or being permanently excluded, rather than to their performance or achievement. This had implications for the support and flexibility of provision made for them. Having support available for students leaving, or being sent out of classes was an important strategy in this respect and helped to maintain working relationships between staff and students. Also, alternative provision was often made, on a temporary, or permanent basis, as discussed further in the section on curriculum issues. Hoff et al's review of policy and practice in the USA, provides a rationale for the approach, "...when peers were planning on graduating and students had a positive regard towards teachers, their chances of graduating were higher. These indicators serve as protective factors that may keep students in school even when problem behavior is high" (Hoff et al, 2015: 2). As an indicator of the success of the strategy, it was perhaps significant that none of the cohort was permanently excluded during the period of the study, although subsequently none of them remained at school either. The point will be returned to in the conclusion.

5.2.1 Implementing support with structures and policy that inform staff-student relationships and communications.

Formal structures⁷ helped to shape the support provided, day-to-day interaction, relationships and communications between students and staff, within and external to the school environment. In conjunction with policy, both schools had created structures for dealing with student issues. One had established an “Entitlement Team”, comprised of key non-teaching staff, senior staff and those with responsibility for the various units or functions such as SEN. This operated at a supplementary level to the Head of Year and Curriculum structures, as explained in the Findings. Their role was to act as a catalyst for identification of problems where behavioural, social, or academic difficulties arose with students, providing interventions as thought necessary. They had resource backup to affect provision and network arrangements available to process and implement decisions. As cases arose, students were put into contact with those thought best suited to meet their needs. Various units were in operation at both schools with specific functions, usually related to curriculum, behavioural support or both, to be deployed when students were withdrawn from “standard”, timetabled classes, as those in the cohort frequently were. The staff operating these units were, therefore, the most likely to encounter cohort members, other than teaching and senior staff. This “team” and multi-unit approach was intended to provide flexible and relevant in-school support for the students, within the available resource constraints. Other mediating influences such as mentoring (internal) and vocational support (internal and external agency) were also available and are returned to later in the discussion.

⁷ The term “formal structures” is used here to describe the mechanisms that have been produced internally or adopted by the school, including policies and practices, for the guidance of staff, students’ and others’ (eg external agencies).

5.2.2 Are clear structures and policies enough? The implications of dispositions and interpretation of roles and policies.

Whilst the arrangements described above provided structure for interventions and staff-student relationships, the dispositions and nuances of personality amongst those responsible for implementing them made the operation of formal policies problematic. The type and extent of support provided were planned by the schools along with training for staff with responsibilities for implementing it, but policies were subject to interpretation, which could cause problems including disagreements and staff accusations of institutional inconsistency, as noted in the final section of the Findings. Related to this, staff faced a dilemma, when dealing with errant students, of either adhering rigidly to school policy, or adopting a pragmatic approach to elicit improvement in standards of behaviour. One member of staff advocated a pragmatic approach to keep students in school. However, in other cases, the contrasting and even conflicting approaches taken by staff interacting with students on a day-to-day basis were found to have wider ramifications, as was exemplified with Student 5. In a further example, contrasting approaches to students wearing school uniform and inconsistency of policy application, led to confusion and resentment between staff. Ambiguous language in advisory documentation also gave rise to the potential for inconsistent application of rules and sanctions. Written advice that staff should “set firm boundaries” for students whilst “avoiding confrontation”, for example, or “seat them away from distractions”, referred to in the Findings, was open to more literal interpretation by some than others. Similar points have been noted in other research, teachers’ inconsistencies in applying standards being attributed to variations in interpretation of policy, or conflicting values (Gazeley, 2013; Evans, 2010). It also resonates with the analysis of Ball et al, highlighting the potential for problems to arise, in creating

and implementing a school behaviour policy. They identify multiple agencies, internal and external to schools, as potential contributors to the written policy, with a further multiplicity of individuals or groups responsible for enacting it and others training for its implementation over time. They conclude that policy can become “confused” and “muddled”, through inconsistency and interpretation (Ball et al, 2011: 10).

5.2.3 “Duty of care” support - staff roles and the boundaries of responsibility

In addition to policy, staff responsibilities and roles in supporting students were also subject to personal interpretation. Diametrically opposed views were expressed by members of the SEN support staff. One believed that getting to know as much as possible about students’ lives in and out of school, helped her to understand them and provide support in context, “...when it goes wrong, or if ... there is some kind of crisis occurring... they’re like homing pigeons... they know they can come and find me and get it off their chest... I think sometimes that ...quickly stops them brooding and... I think sometimes that saves a bigger explosion later.”

Another of the support staff felt that it was better for her to limit herself to internal school affairs, because knowledge of external influences may deflect her from her role, which she perceived as making sure that they were motivated and actively engaged, to perform well in school socially and academically, “I don’t need to know all the details...because I haven’t got an impact outside, I’ve only got an impact while they’re here... the learning and keeping them out of trouble...keeping them

in school (and) having something positive to go to, (these) are the two priorities for me...”

A further perspective, based on the former approach, was offered by a third member of staff, suggesting that extensive knowledge of students’ external activities would help him to provide more cohesive and comprehensive support, for the “whole-school” as well as the individuals concerned. Examples included understanding local patterns of drug abuse and gang antagonisms, as well as students’ personal lives, “...they know they can be really open and trusting with us. From day one, because they’ve known the students that have come before and gone to Target Centre. They all know each other, because it’s the same, they are the same type, if you like, and they know that.” He also felt that it was important for him to empathise with young people, to help them deal with their difficulties. Archer et al (2010: 101) noted a similar sentiment expressed by one of their cohort, appreciating the support of a teacher who he, “...could talk to, like a good mate and would give me a hand with my work and that when I needed it...”. Students 1 and 2 valued this approach, the latter suggesting in two interviews that he was perhaps an influential role model, although it brings an ethical dimension into consideration of what is “appropriate” in staff-student relationships and boundaries, from which some students may experience dissonance.

As well as contrasting approaches, the three perspectives described above highlight differences in understanding between staff as to where the boundaries of responsibility lie in supporting students. This will be developed further below where parent/carer support is discussed. However Gazeley (2010), also found contrasting

attitudes between staff towards boundaries of responsibility, noting that some teaching respondents expressed empathy with students and their parents and were keen to work closely with them, whilst others saw those who were involved in school exclusion processes as primarily the responsibility of other professionals, suggesting that consequently, students' transitions from one form of provision to another could be more difficult, where "Alternative Education Provision" (AEP) was involved. One conclusion that can be drawn, then, is that if staff interpretation of policies and their roles in supporting students differs significantly, training that considers the potential implications of alternative approaches could improve understanding and help to achieve greater consistency of provision for students.

The discussion above argues that ambiguity, lack of clarity, interpretation and misunderstanding of policy and communications may have influenced interventions with students. Differences in social status may well have been influential in staff-student relationships and communications. However, the point that schools' staff are not a homogeneous unit in terms of social status and that issues arise from their alternative dispositions, also applies. The issues identified above, however, seemed to be compounded with misunderstandings between school staff and parents/carers, regarding the boundaries of responsibilities for providing pastoral care. The next section will now consider this.

5.2.4 "Duty of care" support - the boundaries of responsibility between the external and internal school environments

The rhetoric of mutual support between staff and parent/carers, often advocated by schools, was not always in evidence from staff interviews. As explained above, there

were differences in the degree to which teaching and support staff appeared to feel it was their responsibility to support students in school. Further differences were evident in mutual expectations between school staff and parents/carers, regarding responsibilities for provision of support, in different circumstances. Whether or how support was provided by parent/carers, school teaching and non-teaching staff or external agencies appeared to depend, to some extent, on who were the participants in the various roles. Positive and negative aspects to staff-parent relationships were exemplified in the frustration expressed by one member of staff, extolling the virtues of one parent, whilst bemoaning the inadequacies of another and parents in general. In terms of how important or effective relationships were thought to be, staff opinion ranged from positive enthusiasm to ambivalence, as evidenced in the Findings. One member of staff recalled the value of parental contact, even late at night, "...I can email her (a parent) at 11 o'clock at night and she emails me back. So it's a good way of communicating..." (HOY 2). Another, however, suggested contact would be made "...if we were really struggling... and sometimes, unfortunately, you would find out why the kids are like they are and you're fighting against parents..." (Support Staff, School 1)

When interventions were planned for students, their records were consistent in showing that school representatives contacted parents to involve or at least inform them. Parents/carers were generally described as "supportive" in these notes, whilst often also recording that they failed to attend meetings, or follow up, perhaps suggesting that they expected the schools to take full responsibility. The example of the father who sent his son back to school after he had been sent home, highlights the perception, although his action could also have reflected a view that the school

had acted irresponsibly. In any case, his personal sense of responsibility, juxtaposed with the school's anticipation of his "support", may have had implications for the young person's self-perception and actions as he travelled between home and school.

In interviews, the students generally expressed a view that they had good relationships with their parents/carers, although other evidence suggested inconsistencies in support. The complicated home-school circumstances faced by Student 3, for example, possibly exacerbated the problems she faced within the school context. File notes suggested that her parents were "supportive", yet they were rarely able to attend meetings and were literally absent from home at times. Student 5 also faced a unique set of circumstances. External events and relationships, communicated through social media and other means, affected his peer and home-school relationships and apparently fuelled controversy between staff dealing with the issues that arose. Up to that point, his parents had been proactive and supportive of him and the school, although afterwards their contact with school also became inconsistent and was less supportive. Other students, such as those presenting persistent but "low-level" behaviour problems, also seemed subject to inconsistent support from parents/carers though, with file notes expressing their complicity, often not supported by engagement. Reasons could be proffered, but they would be conjecture. Further exploration of this area with parents/carers would have been beneficial.

Consistent with the description above, Gazeley found contradictions in the views of "professionals" and parents/carers when explaining parental support. On the one

hand, the teaching support respondents in her research apparently felt they needed to provide support that was unavailable from parents and carers, some of whom rarely or never contacted the school, "... (they) attributed pupils' difficulties at school to difficulties within the home, highlighting circumstances that suggested a particular need for stability and continuity in (the) educational provision." Gazeley (2010: 299). On the other hand, the mothers she interviewed felt they had frequent contact with school, but suggested that school exclusion processes could be demanding in emotional and financial aspects, as well as time. Implied she felt that the school expected too much of parents, one respondent expressed a perception that, "... they push it all on to you" (Gazeley, 2012: 302-3), suggesting that mutual support was a fallacy and the school expected parents to take full responsibility. Tucker (2013) suggests that this is an area that would benefit from increased attention in schools, arguing that, "... pastoral interventions are more likely to succeed if there is a high level of consistency between home and school." (Tucker, 2013: 288). The point is further highlighted in his finding that, "... young people themselves often feel excluded from conversations about their behaviour and school/parental responses to it. They report attending meetings where the adults dominate discussion, only ask them to agree with their diagnosis of a specific problem, or patronise them." (Tucker, 2013: 288)

This section has shown that although staff had policy and guidance available for reference when providing support for students at school, there was, perhaps, less clarity in terms of where the boundaries lay for providing support within and beyond the school gates. It may be that parents/carers were more disenfranchised and disengaged than antipathetic, in communications and support for their

children's schools. Their deference to school decisions may have been due to a perceived lack of power in their relationships with school/ teachers, or inability in terms of the capacity, resources, skills or time needed to provide support.

Citing research from several sources, however, Gazeley suggests that this is a class issue. Middle-class parents/carers are in a better position to use support networks, access resources and argue their cases, than their working-class counterparts. In turn, this implies that social class is a potentially inhibiting factor in schools providing support, as suggested by Gazeley and Reay's (2006) analysis. If so, this raises the possibility of there being a chasm between them, which may not easily be resolved. A further complication is the suggestion, Gazeley (2010) and Reay (2006), that the problem is related to gender, because it is mothers who are most frequently involved in support issues, rather than "parents/carers" in general, a finding with which this research concurred. Further, Gazeley argues that there is a power relationship in schools, between teachers and parent/carers, such that when, for example, alternative provision is offered in terms of there being "no other choice", parents/carers may not feel able to turn it down (Gazeley, 2010: 298).

Regarding schools' responses to these concerns, Gazeley (2010) suggests that teachers' perceptions lead them to, "...reject an emphasis on social class in favour of an individualised focus..." in terms of how they deal with student issues. She attributes the assertion to other research, "(Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Savage, Bagnal, and Longhurst 2001; Gazeley and Dunne 2005)". The "blind eye" approach may well need to be challenged and, again, Gazeley and Reay have both argued for improved training in schools to address these problems.

5.2.5 Further approaches to support contrasted – single and “multi-agency” arrangements

Having discussed aspects of support processes and the interface between students, staff and parents/carers that help or inhibit these, this section considers the benefits of a single person, having access to comprehensive data on individual students, providing support, in contrast with multi-agency arrangements, involving a range of specialists with knowledge of specific factors, characteristics or conditions. Mentors can be drawn from either the internal, or external school environment, where “multi-agency” arrangements almost always draw together representatives from both.

Mentoring is intended to provide bespoke support, where mentors develop a deep understanding of the “whole-student”, perhaps adopting aspects of the approach of the third member of staff outlined earlier. It can be used for pastoral and/or academic purposes, depending on perceived needs and provides an opportunity for staff-student support relationships to mediate and help to overcome problems and misunderstandings. Mentors could be internal staff, external specialists or volunteers. As explained from the students’ perspectives in their interviews though, whilst different mentoring arrangements existed in each school, they did not feature in many cases as having been important or influential. Their experiences differed, as did the extent of input by the mentors themselves, but in general their influence was not significant. To exemplify this, mentor note comments in student files ranged from suggestions for action with follow up arrangements, to records that the student was “absent” or similar, with no follow-up. Whilst this is not a definitive conclusion on mentoring, it indicates that there was inconsistency of provision.

There could be various reasons. DH1 implied that since the mentors most suited to students' specific needs were not always available, the staff allocated to mentoring were those who had time available, having not been used for teaching or other purposes. A similar approach to staffing was taken in other support related provision, including careers education, as part of Personal and Social Education (PSE) programmes. As DH1 put it, "We choose the best of what's left...", suggesting that curriculum specialisms were prioritised for staffing and timetable purposes.

"Multiagency" arrangements are also intended to provide bespoke support and interventions, although the method of operation is diametrically opposed to mentoring. Drawing various specialists together including, for example, Educational Psychologists, Social Services, the Police and school staff, who understand aspects of young peoples' lives in and away from school, from different perspectives, they meet regularly to share information, plan and enact programmes of intervention for students. Developed under New Labour in the early 2000's, their use was to promote the "inclusion" agenda, adopted at central government level, attempting to reduce exclusion of any kind. Only two of the cohort were involved in multiagency arrangements and for one of these, no details were available. Frustration was expressed, however, by the school staff involved in the other case, concerned at what they saw as attempts by the individual agencies to deflect responsibility away from themselves and towards each other. As they perceived it, the consequences were, perversely, lack of student support due to prevarication and inaction. The staff explained that, rather than being one isolated case, their experience here was comparable with other cases in which they were involved. This perhaps implies that

inertia deriving from arrangements formally devised at national level, are subject to interpretation and alternative dispositions, similar to those described at school level earlier in this section. The points above were also recognised in a government discussion paper, “Support and Aspiration: A Consultation” (2011), proposing to draw all aspects of provision in this area into an all incorporating “Education, Care and Health Support Plan” to support individual special needs.

To summarise and conclude this section, both schools in the study devised formal rules, structures and procedures to help to communicate and deal with their students “at risk of exclusion”. They also put specific staff roles and training in place to work with them. Reasons explaining the variability of students’ experiences arising from these arrangements have been considered, including issues of interpretation and alternative dispositions in staff, as well as students. Attempts to provide bespoke support in one-to-one mentoring of the “whole” student, have been contrasted with those involving a variety of specialists in multiagency arrangements, familiar with specific aspects of their lives. The deficiencies of both have been proffered with descriptions of possible causes. It is not possible to conclude that some factors seem to provide mediation better than others, because the outcomes appear to depend on the individual characteristics, dispositions and interactions of those involved. Again, however, various underlying influences have been suggested to have affected relationships, arrangements and communications between staff and students.

Having discussed issues surrounding the provision and implications of pastoral support, the next section will focus on support for subject choices and future options available to the cohort, including external agency provision – primarily

Connexions. Subsequently, these will be related to the students' achievements and related progress, as they went through their final year of 14-16 education, or "Key Stage 4".

5.2.6 Support for student choices and decision making

The concept of "support for choices" could imply that the freedom to make decisions is countered by a degree of persuasion. Evidence from the students' interviews suggested that they felt they were in control of their own decisions, although there was less agreement about the support they had received to choose options. One expressed frustration that his choices have been made for him, in his absence, indicating compulsion, in his case, rather than persuasion.

Internally, support for careers and personal progression was available for students through tutors and most had mentors too. In addition, there was structured support for decision making and careers inside and outside classes. The schools considered this important for the cohort to help them "move on" during and after their school years especially because, as mentioned earlier, none were to achieve a Sixth Form place.

External agency support for future career paths was provided through Connexions, the role of which was to ensure that all young people were prepared for the world of work, aiming to provide independent and impartial one-to-one support as needed. However, provision for careers education was changing throughout Britain

at the time (2010-13). Connexions careers services were threatened by lack of funding, and many closures of local branches took place. Individual support was, therefore, not an entitlement and careers education was of variable quality, support being provided by specialists or non-specialists depending on availability. Central government intended to replace Connexions with an “All Age Careers Service”, although this was provided via a website.

The county council, which funded Connexions, was also subject to central government cuts, resulting in a policy decision that only a small number of the “most vulnerable” students could be supported, with a Connexions “package” including one-to-one support. A minority of those in the cohort thus received, or were offered, one-to-one support, but most did not fit the “most vulnerable” category. Several students commented that they had never even heard of Connexions, although whole-year group assemblies were provided. In any case, it can be argued that this type of support and its provision was influenced by the socio-political environment.

Evidence from the schools’ perspectives, suggested they felt they were doing everything possible to support students, whilst acknowledging difficulties in doing so. The perception was related, partly, to the issue, raised above, regarding whose responsibility it was to provide this support. However, the difficulty was compounded at one school, by a lack of trust, expressed by senior staff, in students’ judgement and capacity for decision making, substantiated by their intention to restrict choice in the future, suggesting that they may not be providing “independent, impartial” IAG, as mandated by national policy. This resonated with

the concerns of Gazeley (2010) and Reay (2006), as to whether the providers' culture, values and interests, were conflicting with the students' interests as users of the service. The question is one that has been paid attention by professionals, policymakers and commentators, but without resolution. Attempts to address it have included schools using combinations of externally sourced support, supplemented by internal inputs, as well as online or electronic support devices, like the "All Age Careers Service".

After the study period, there was no apparent improvement in provision for similar students. Having originally been part of the County Council, the local Connexions became a private, self-financing company, attempting to operate independently. However, the new company lost its contract shortly afterwards. As the local newspaper put it, "A former employee told the Chronicle & Echo 'it is inevitable that one-to-one support to young people will be drastically reduced'" (11/2/2016).

To summarise this section, whilst it is difficult to quantify the benefits and drawbacks of support provided for the cohort, they all remained at school to complete their compulsory education, enabling senior staff to suggest that their objectives were successfully achieved and their interventions, decisions and actions were justified. The discussion explored factors that helped or inhibited the processes involved and considered them from alternative perspectives. However, the notion that completion of compulsory schooling is a successful outcome per se, gives no indication of what progress has been made, or whether students' best interests have been served in terms of their "next stages", or future lives. At the time of the study, policymakers had recognised this issue and the DfE was in the

process of implementing a performance tool, known as the “Destinations Measure”, making schools responsible for students’ destinations after school. The rationale was to encourage schools to pay more attention to academic and vocational preparation for life after leaving school, rather than devising strategies for “keeping them in”.

The following quote from HOY2 is his response to a question asking if students and parents/carers could benefit from the destinations measure and its implications. Whilst he felt the support provided for students had had a positive influence, he acknowledges that there were some whose future paths were less well known under the prevailing system, especially those for whom alternative provision had been made. The acknowledgement was reflected in the lack of destination information made available from School 2 at the end of the research period.

“...I would imagine the parents would think the same thing...Once they’ve officially left...then...they’re on their own...and it’s those kids...that are...still here, you automatically know what they’re doing, but it’s those students who, as you say, we’ve side-lined or who are in the “ether” ... who... yeah”

If the policy aims were successful, schools might consider the potential longer-term consequences of making alternative provision or “side-lining” students, rather than “keeping them in” until reaching age 16. This suggests there are potential benefits to policy development in terms of influencing school staff dispositions and their relationships and communications with students and parents/carers. The process of

progress monitoring and academic achievement, discussed in the next section, would also be affected with, perhaps, a sharper focus on outcomes than behaviour.

5.3 CAN “AT-RISK” STATUS BE AMELIORATED OR MITIGATED BY THE CURRICULUM, ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE CHOICES?

To recap from the literature review, the proposition that the factors influencing “at-risk” status can be mitigated has been subject to research including that of Schoon and Parsons (2002) and Hopson and Lee (2011). Whilst the conclusions of those researchers differed, along with others considered, the education policy of successive central governments around the time of the study espoused raising young peoples’ aspiration, as a means of tackling inequality. The policy rationale linked the benefits of positive aspiration for individuals, to society’s economic prosperity, suggesting that if individuals are encouraged to learn about and seek opportunities, paid work can mitigate “at risk” status.

However, whilst successive governments agreed on aspiration and paid work as goals to address inequality, they disagreed on the role of work-related, or “vocational”, education, how it should be offered and whether it should start at age 14 or 16, leading to the implementation of contrasting policies. Along with the demise of Connexions, described above, changes of policy contributed to a period of uncertainty, affecting the cohort’s curriculum and available choices, directly. Schools were faced with difficulties in changing planned provision and support for young people in general, but, as explained by senior staff planners and corroborated by Gazeley (2013: 33), especially for those “at risk”. Cuts made in local funding

affected college based activity, especially “Alternative Education Provision” (AEP) courses and qualifications, often used for students at risk of exclusion at Key Stage 4, for whom the “standard” curriculum had proven to be less motivating or accessible.

Whilst they intended to comply with national policy, interviews with senior curriculum staff indicated their discomfort at having to make provision that was perceived as inappropriate, especially for those “at-risk”, whose aspiration, they felt, was unlikely to be stimulated by a curriculum with a high “core” content and increased testing. At one school, a decision was taken to ignore a national move to reduce pre-16 work-related learning, until it was clarified and enforced, where in the other a decision to implement the “EBacc” was taken contrary to the responsible Deputy’s beliefs in its appropriateness for the students in her school, “...when I put this curriculum together I said ... I can’t believe this is me doing this, because actually, I don’t believe in it. But ... I’ve got no choice, because of the pressure of ... the government and actually the profession...The Academy sponsors... he has to go (to a meeting with the Secretary of State) and he gets pressure on him, and he pushes that pressure down to us. We’ve got no choice, and I think it’s dreadful... So what I want to do is mitigate...so that our kids can still do hair and beauty (and) construction, they can still have opportunities to do those other things... because that’s right for them...” (DH1). In addition, the latter also was concerned that her decisions in shaping the curriculum lacked scrutiny, although she attributed this to pressures faced by other senior colleagues dealing with their own responsibility areas, rather than disinterest. In this sense, policy development and implementation

at national level can be inferred as having different effects on local decisions and student choices, through local interpretation and staff dispositions.

5.3.1 Alternative provision

Despite these difficulties, the cohort received “endlessly flexible” curriculum support, as described by one Deputy Head, providing opportunities that responded to perceived needs and varying them when alternatives were thought necessary. It ranged from external provision, often with a “work-related” orientation, to one-to-one support in-class, or periods of varying length spent in the facilities provided for individual needs, as described earlier. The depth of support offered was exemplified in one student’s needs being prioritised by providing him with the means to call for any member of support staff, “on demand”. In another case, AEP had been used to support and improve family relationships, with apparent success, due to the actions of one member of support staff. 90% of the cohort gained qualifications in “applied” subjects and the learning styles associated with these were suggested by staff and students to have been beneficial for those involved. It had the added “benefit” of reducing potential disruption in classes for other students.

In interviews, several of the cohort spoke positively of their “vocational” AEP experiences (involving 80% of them) and intended to pursue related courses in further education. Archer et al, (2010) reported similar findings, although they suggested that alternative teacher-student relationships may have been responsible for the students’ perceptions, more than their learning experiences.

There were, however, tensions between the benefits of alternative provision and the ramifications, in addition to those described above. These included students missing lessons to attend AEP, requiring “catch-up” arrangements to compensate, with similar consequences applying to the use of part-time timetables. Providing these types of support therefore risks the paradoxical effect that actions intended to help students improve their performance, “keep them in” and ameliorate “at-risk” status, could have negative consequences for learning and achievement in compulsory core subjects and this seemed to have been the case, as discussed below. Further, the idea that success is achieved by being “endlessly flexible” in provision has been challenged. Gazeley found that, “In cases where alternative provision had to be adjusted as new problems arose it appeared as if the provision being made for pupils was being shaped by circumstances and resources rather than by design” Gazeley (2010: 299). This suggests that provision may be inappropriate if, as a goal, meeting students’ identifiable needs becomes secondary to finding alternatives. Going further, she explains that in her research, “...respondents suggested that when alternative provision broke down, pupils were at increased risk of becoming missing from education altogether...” Gazeley (2010: 299). The inference, therefore, is that “endless flexibility” risks a further paradox by creating opportunities for increased truancy. If, as mentioned in the literature review, parents/carers are not involved in arranging placements and are unable to challenge them, a further tension perhaps arises, regarding the boundaries of responsibility for “duty of care” and protecting students’ interests, as discussed earlier. However, although the extent to which AEP arrangements ameliorated “at-risk” status cannot be quantified, they can be argued to have contributed to the study’s schools’ success in keeping the cohort engaged.

Regarding government policy and the assertion that job creation and raising aspiration will tackle inequality and offer mitigation for “at-risk” status, Archer et al (2010) question its underlying assumptions as simplistic. Lack of aspiration was not apparent in either this study’s cohort, as reported in the Findings, or that of Archer et al (2010), the characteristics of which were similar. Also, there was no apparent disinclination to work, several of the cohort giving accounts of their current work activity and future expectations. Wider concerns were more relevant in both studies, regarding how aspirations originate, whether they are achievable and how they are fostered or supported. Hayward and Williams (2011) suggestion that lack of opportunity was more important than aspiration resonated in this respect. The Findings exemplified the effect that teacher expectations can have on students’ progress and aspirations, although the capacity of young people to create their own identity has also been discussed, suggesting that teachers’ influence may be limited. Archer et al also argue that being happy and staying safe are legitimate aspirations and that the concept itself is complex and “messy” (their term), driven by emotion and identity, related to social class, “race” or ethnicity and gender (Archer et al, 2010: 97).

Along with aspiration, raising achievement has been upheld by governments as a means through which inequality can be reduced, mitigating students’ “at-risk” status. This has been implicitly linked above to meeting their needs, but the concept of “needs” has itself been subject to debate, as acknowledged in the literature review, when considering the views of Hayward and Williams (2011) and Wolf (2011), calling for a traditional curriculum with extended “core” learning, in contrast

with Archer et al (2010), who argued for the development of a relevant curriculum, rather than one with a specifically “vocational” focus, to meet identified needs (Archer et al, 2010: 108-11).

A more relevant curriculum for those “at risk”, could require qualitative understanding and analysis of students’ backgrounds and lives external to the school environment, as well as their academic ability, skills and capabilities. That depth of analysis was not possible in this study, but the availability of students’ prior attainment, targets, progress and achievement records provided an opportunity to explore this dimension, one upon which other studies have not focused in detail.

5.3.2 Target-setting, progress monitoring and achievement

A rationale for target-setting is that it can encourage students to aspire and achieve their “full potential”, whilst acting as a trigger for support to be provided if they are not making anticipated progress. As shown in the Findings, however, analysis of target data related to the cohort’s prior academic achievement, suggested that they under-performed at Key Stage 4, in the “core” subjects, especially English and Maths. Targets were achieved in just 20% of cases in English, Maths and Science and they were never exceeded. It is not known if low expectations, aspirations, or support were influential, or if there was any effect on the students’ longer-term future options and progress.

Curriculum choices were made, however and targets set, based on assessments of students' potential as suggested by prior achievement data. One student, considered as high ability, was placed onto the "EBacc" route, requiring him to study French, which did not suit him. His disaffection led to internal exclusion and he had further learning problems in the longer term, working in isolation. In another example, a student was set target grades at Key Stage 4, much higher than his previous performance suggested were achievable. Since targets are set to motivate students and inform staff-student interaction, this may have influenced the judgement of staff responsible for supporting and challenging him. This student's choices were also influenced by the assessments and he too became disaffected at times during Key Stage 4. Since both concluded their studies and progressed to future places at college, it could be argued this was success and there was no negative impact in the longer term, but this would be conjecture.

Further analysis and subjective judgement of prior performance in other cases, suggested that alternative targets may have been more motivating and curriculum choices and decisions could also be cast as having had positive or negative effects. Rather than attempting to link cause and effect, though, the issues are raised to acknowledge the influence of interpretation and dispositions on students' progress and curriculum choices, similar to that discussed regarding "duty of care" support. Judgements made and actions taken can help to ameliorate "at-risk" status, but can have a counter effect, especially if the student is not involved in decisions as noted by Gazeley (2010) and confirmed, at least in some cases, in this study.

Disposition and interpretation have also been suggested by Carlile (2013) to influence the formation and implementation of policy at national level, in a similar way to the relationships that exist at school level, evoking the concept of schools as a microcosm of society, in which the “borderlands” of the extended body are contested spaces subject, at different times, to alternative ideas, practices and policies being developed and implemented. In this context, policy change and contrasting research evidence can be perceived as a product of the prevailing socio-political environment and authors’ objectives. Provision for students can be caught between eras, as was the case with the cohort. Rather than progressing through consistent provision at Key Stage 4 that is subject only to improvement, as claimed by professionals’ rhetoric, they were faced with change, to which they were apparently oblivious, affecting their choices and, perhaps, performance. Their schools’ success, as explained earlier, was in retaining them and AEP probably contributed towards this, as did the “endless flexibility” of its use. In terms of choices, however, like others, they were guided to take what could be offered at the time, rather than that needed to fulfil their potential. The latter point, confirmed in the further finding that the cohort’s “next stage intentions” concurred with what was expected of them, regardless of their stated aspirations, may have had implications in the longer term.

The difficulties were not confined to the geographical area in which the cohort attended school. Information received from several other Local Authorities suggested that their AEP arrangements always involved the removal of students from schools or classes, temporarily or permanently, although models for provision varied, as shown in the findings. The Head of a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in one

local authority expressed concern, in an interview, about the quality of facilities available and the implications arising concurrently from changes to curriculum, SEN provision, funding and responsibilities at Local Authority level. His concerns reflected OFSTED's observations at the time as well as the views of the curriculum managers in the cohort's schools. They also resonated with Ball et al's (2011) conclusion that policy implementation can become 'confused' and 'muddled' when multifarious interests are involved in its inception and operation, as discussed earlier.

6. CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, whilst it is possible to identify a range of characteristics underlying the status of young people “at-risk” of exclusion, greater problems lie in attempting to understand the degree to which any are more influential than others and in trying to resolve them. Among the characteristics, inequality, related to socio-economic status, appears to underpin many of the other factors. Whether this needs to be addressed fundamentally, before other issues can be resolved, has been a subject of debate, as explained in the literature review and discussed throughout the thesis. However, the characteristics have been shown to be intermeshed and this complexity is reflected in the variety of approaches that have been taken towards resolving issues.

When collating data regarding the schools’ responses to the cohort’s “at-risk” status, two areas, support and the curriculum, emerged as key for analysis. The discussion considered various aspects of these from alternative perspectives, within and beyond the schools’ boundaries. Whilst the schools had probably not formally assessed and analysed the full range of factors underlying individual students’ conditions, they had assessed the issues in combination and had developed policies and practices to address them. Although these were subject to staff dispositions and interpretation, none of the cohort was permanently excluded, indicating that the combined influences of policy and practice had been positive in that regard. Despite the variability of staff demeanours and approaches, there was apparent cohesion in working towards the goal of “keeping them in”. The contributory roles of parents, leadership and support staff, peers and external agencies were also considered and

where there were differences in mutual expectations as to whose responsibility it was to support students, their dispositions were contrasted.

On the other hand, whilst the available curriculum was deployed fully and flexibly to accommodate students' perceived needs, the definition of needs implied above was, perhaps, quite narrow. Different views were highlighted in the literature review regarding what a broader definition of needs might entail and alternative approaches to meeting them were considered. However, the combined effect of external pressures, funding cuts, policy changes and other influences, suggested that there were constraints on the schools' capacity to prepare the cohort for life after the end of compulsory schooling. The focus appeared to be fixed upon the students leaving, with "going to college" as the preferred post-16 option. Attention was also paid to alternative experiences the cohort might have had, if they had attended institutions elsewhere in Britain, but although models providing for those "at risk of exclusion" varied, their goals remained essentially similar – geared towards reintegration of students to their institution of origin as early as possible, to complete their compulsory period of education.

The need for change, preparing young people for their post-16 lives, rather than seeing age 16 as a conclusion, appeared to have been acknowledged in national policy. The destinations measure, referred to earlier, was introduced, as part of the RPA strategy, to encourage schools to broaden their focus, especially regarding achievement and how students were prepared for their lives after compulsory education. Raising the participation age (RPA) legislated for young people to remain

in education and training up to the age of 18. Those at risk of exclusion were a prime target for inclusion, as were others of potential NEET status.

In terms of the alternative approaches to amelioration or mitigation of “at-risk” status, they were considered in three broad categories: those that advocated addressing individual conditions, those concerned with inequality and those concerned with improving provision or alleviating perceived problems in schools. Whilst the characteristics and related problems they identified were similar, the practices and solutions espoused contrasted, ranging from tackling specifically identified needs, to devising policy based on meritocratic principles, attempting to create the conditions through which individuals can aspire to brighter, self-determined futures, mitigating their own “at-risk” status.

However, researchers concerned with inequality issues, such as Reay (2006), Archer et al (2010) and Gazeley (2010), have argued that more fundamental socioeconomic adjustment is required, suggesting that schools both reflect and perpetuate students’ social status or social class positions.

Their arguments and manifestations of the implications were considered throughout the thesis. On the other hand, whilst there may be potential for class divisions to be reinforced by school processes and structures, it was also argued that schools are not staffed by a homogeneous, “class-based” unit, implementing fully coherent and comprehensive policies. Nevertheless, working with those at risk of exclusion, requires teachers, as well as support staff, to develop the skills and capability to understand, communicate with and advise young people whose backgrounds and

identities are increasingly diverse and, as has been noted, training needs to account for this.

The final but, perhaps, main conclusion, relates to calls that have been made for more research into young peoples' perspectives, their concerns and the make-up of their persona. Archer et al (2010) and Gazeley (2010) argued that young people at risk of exclusion are disenfranchised when decisions are made regarding their choices and future and that change is needed. Gazeley also pointed out that the needs of young people must be addressed, rather than those of the institutions they attend. Te Riele (2017) suggested that to meet young peoples' needs, education provision itself should be revised, to incorporate a view of success that takes account of their lives and backgrounds and the transitions from youth to adulthood in modern society. Taken together, these observations resonate with the view that young people should be more involved in decisions and assessment of their needs than appears to be the case and that these should be clearly defined and understood, especially for those "at-risk of exclusion". For example, revisions to codes for recording behavioural characteristics should be considered, rather than reducing them to generic phrases such as "persistent disruptive behaviour" or "verbal abuse", for accessible statistical analysis. Needs assessment should begin as early as possible, taking account of deeper and broader aspects of young peoples' lives and potential than their academic, or work-related potential.

Overall, young people "at risk of exclusion" need decision makers to move towards planning principles that ask "what are the needs of young people, how can they be met, how does that shape the whole school curriculum and resource needs and how

will these be deployed and organised”, rather than establishing provision by prioritising current perceptions to assuage or appeal to popular opinion, at any given time.

The following recommendations are made, derived from these concluding remarks:

1 Students and their parents/carers should be more involved in needs analysis and decision making, as the evidence suggested that students, especially, were not. Needs analysis should be precise and responses bespoke. Although institutions can argue that it is already precise and bespoke, especially where needs are statutorily assessed, the key is consistency for all.

The scope of this area could be wide, incorporating the collection and analysis of student data through electronic data systems, along with development of the meeting, communication and support structures needed to collect, collate and utilise information longitudinally, including transition between schools. Fact-finding visits or partnership development with states of the USA may be beneficial, in this respect, to understanding their systems and processes. It would, however, be naïve for a study such as this to suggest that solutions are straightforward, especially in areas which have been paid a great deal of attention in education research and institutions.

Nevertheless, the argument that students should be engaged in personal decision-making processes is compelling and the evidence presented suggests that universally, they and their parents/carers are not. One way of addressing this would be for OFSTED to set it as a criterion for inspection and for inspectors to assess how engagement is encouraged and assured, perhaps by conducting audit trails. Other, more generic ways in which schools can encourage involvement of students and parents/carers are described below and in the “Future Directions” section.

2 In addition to identification of their existence and extent, deeper understanding regarding how and why “at risk” factors occur and combine in individuals, is needed to develop bespoke responses towards undertaking needs analyses, drawing upon the approaches and methodologies of ethnography and social psychology.

3 The potential for underlying social class and sociocultural influences to affect decisions suggests a need for further research into the existence of institutional prejudice in schools, its manifestations and implications. This recommendation is linked with the others and proposed actions are outlined in the section on “Future Directions”. Although the suggestion, in this case, is aimed at the research community, it is also one for individual institutions to address. Assuming that no educational institution is consciously organised to show prejudice towards individuals or groups, analysis of its organisation, structures, policies and practices should aim to establish the potential or presence of unintentional prejudice, its manifestations and effects. Since this would require objective and impartial analysis, the support of external sources with the professional capacity to

design and frame research should, perhaps, be sought, as explained later. However, if the aim was to try to eliminate or minimise the risk of prejudice, rather than identify and acknowledge its existence, then actions such as those proposed to address recommendation 7 could help to promote inclusivity, aiming to enfranchise all interested parties within the decision-making, monitoring, policy writing and implementation processes in a school.

4 Staff interpretation of, and disposition towards, their roles in supporting students and school policies can differ significantly. Therefore, training should aim for a more consistent institutional approach towards interventions with students, to develop understanding of the ways in which alternative dispositions and perspectives have potential implications for students, staff and the wider school community. Suggestions are made after the next recommendation.

5 The argument considered earlier, of authors such as Reay (2006), that schools' staff do not provide effectively for youngsters "at-risk" because they do not understand working-class culture and values, suggested that relevant teacher training is needed to improve their understanding, alongside structural change to address issues of inequality. However, workforce planners and training providers should also recognise that the profile of the profession has changed and will change further, taking this into account when planning activities.

Taking recommendations 4 and 5 together, the following suggestions are made regarding training that may be undertaken with staff. These could form part of a

programme, or be free standing activities, used on staff training days or perhaps even staff meetings. Whilst they are suggested for staff at one school, it would be possible to vary the activities, to include other participants, such as staff from “feeder” or partner schools and colleges, alternative education providers and parents/carers. They may be devised in conjunction with local teacher training establishments, as a means of involving prospective entrants to teaching. The activities themselves could include the following:

Participants discuss the approaches they would take in dealing with students involved in incidents that might result in exclusion, as outlined in a series of simulated case studies, including brief case histories of the student. A ‘keynote’ talk, or a simple introduction could be given by a senior teacher, followed by smaller seminar group discussion forums, led by facilitators from which responses are collated and documented with further commentary and, perhaps, advice, for distribution to all current staff and inclusion in induction material for new staff.

As a variation, participants could be requested to explain not just their possible approaches, but how they perceived the extent of their responsibility, senior staff could review responses and take them into account, when renewing role descriptions, for example. The latter suggestion might be contentious, so participants may need to be assured that written up responses will be anonymised.

A further session might be arranged making use of role-play, devising a basic script for the “actors”, with improvised contributions played by school staff, allocated

specific roles, such as Learning Mentor or Behaviour Support Assistant, who are responding to the same or similar incidents. Participants would be asked to comment on their perceptions of the actions and responses to the cases, as portrayed by the “actors”.

To the same end, another solution could be to ask staff to review video “vignettes” of material based on ‘real-life’ cases, prior to attending the seminar group. Use could be made of excerpts from dramas such as “Three Girls”, although the content and its use would need to be carefully and professionally thought through.

A series of workshop sessions could be led by experts (SENCO, Learning Mentors, Behaviour Support Assistants, Teaching Assistants, Pastoral Leaders for example) who discuss their role in school and specifically how they work with individual students. These workshops could then be followed up in smaller groups where the information from workshops is discussed before engaging in a broader discussion about the effects of the colleagues’ roles in supporting students, the work of teaching departments and how they can contribute to and support each other’s work.

6 The motives for, delivery and quality of alternative education provision (AEP) have been questioned in terms of whose needs it meets. An alternative prognosis is to consider that the problem is not AEP, as such, but what is offered, how it meets established needs, the way it is prescribed, the process of delivery (including monitoring/recording/reporting/care issues, as well as content and

pedagogy) and resources allocated to it. These are major issues, but ignoring them risks marginalisation of young people at risk of exclusion and perhaps more widely too. Dealing with them would contribute to the development of a “relevant” curriculum, as advocated by Archer et al (2010) and described earlier.

Alternative education provision has emerged partly because schools cannot make bespoke provision for all young people, since no single institution has unlimited resources. However, local timetabling constraints can cause problems. To access alternative provision, students often need to move between sites, causing the need to have “catch up” sessions for missed lessons, which can lead to underachievement. At national policy-making level, greater attention paid to improving working relationships and collaboration between providers of alternative education, enabling greater flexibility, would be beneficial. Collaboration between local institutions’ timetablers can help to improve conditions, but research and development is needed to resolve the wider issues as described in the paragraph above.

7 Inconsistency of provision and interventions appeared to be related to constraints in the availability of resources the schools could provide to support students, in not being able to fulfil their aim of matching mentors to students’ perceived needs, for example, or to rely on external agencies such as Connexions to provide bespoke support. Added to this, ambiguity was found regarding whose responsibility it is to support students in various circumstances, between home and school. These issues suggest that systemic development of policy, practice and resource provision in this area is needed. Comment on making specific resource

provision is beyond the scope of this study, but the following is a suggestion for devising and implementing policy such as behaviour, homework or school uniform. The example below will refer to behaviour.

Groups of interested parties, including parents, students, staff and school governors, for example, could be drawn together to discuss standards of behaviour at the school and review its current policy. For the students, this could be set up as a PSE curriculum activity, so that they are all engaged and know what the school policy says. For others, meetings could be set up with a cross-section of participants or with each distinct group, depending on the requirements or preference of the school.

The Heads of Year and related staff are asked to collate information from the sessions outlined above. In addition, they are asked to consult with academic departments and review student files and records, to assess how policy has been deployed in the past 12 months regarding those “at risk of exclusion”, with specific parameters defined to identify the relevant students.

From the above, those responsible for writing policy review the data requested and any further issues emerging before producing a revised or new policy. The policy should have a generic section, outlining expectations for all, but it would be beneficial to have separate sections outlining the responsibilities of each group invited to participate. These could include, for example, the responsibilities of staff, parents, governors and, of course, students.

The new draft policy can be issued for discussion, using similar mechanisms to those initially described and feedback taken before final implementation, with regular review dates nominated.

Whilst this would be a significant undertaking, engaging the various parties could produce significant benefits, not just for policy development, but for members of the school community to communicate with each other and understand others' views and perspectives.

8 A final recommendation is that schools could encourage a reflective approach amongst those directly involved in supporting their young people “at-risk of exclusion”. Based upon the examples above and the data emerging from the suggestions, the staff involved could be drawn together at infrequent, but regular intervals to discuss approaches with senior staff and each other. In addition to the benefits described, this may also be helpful as an induction and training mechanism in situations where staff turnover is high, engaging staff and making them feel “valued”.

6.1 The contribution of the study and subsequent developments

This study has contributed to the debate, referred to earlier, about the use of the term “at-risk” as an appropriate description of young people whose characteristics could make them prone to exclusion. Although “at-risk” has been used throughout for consistency, the conclusions above indicate that “marginalised” may well be a

more accurate descriptor. Efforts to keep students in school with varied levels of support and curriculum adjustment can be interpreted as attempting to alleviate potential threats to order, discipline and, perhaps, achievement, by keeping them “at arm’s length”, or what Carlile (2013) refers to as “weak” inclusion, until they can be released legitimately. The underlying rationale may be related to schools’ perceived needs to raise academic achievement and boost league-table performance to enhance reputation. Policy options to challenge the status quo have included the Destinations Measure and RPA and after the period of the study, the “Pupil Premium” presented a further opportunity, as a funding strategy specifically aimed at improving achievement for those eligible for FSM. Details of School 1’s reported improved performance are provided as Appendix 6.

However, the study has also contributed to the field in showing how policy implementation can lead to unintended consequences and implications, especially where there is ambiguity, from national to local levels. The promotion of Free Schools and Academy Trusts as means of increasing choice and improving standards through diversity of provision, along with measures to help schools to maintain high standards of behaviour and attendance, are examples of national policy enactment that appear to have potential, in combination to have unintended consequences for young people “at-risk” of marginalisation. The concept of “off-rolling” students has attracted attention, as reported by “The Guardian” (21/3/17), including OFSTED, a former Children’s Commissioner and teaching unions. The report suggested that an Academy Trust was using two Studio schools it had set up to remove students from the roll of its main secondary provision, before the cut off point in Year 11 after which their performance would have an adverse effect upon

the school's GCSE results and that OFSTED had paid no attention to the changes in numbers. The "Pupil Premium" data provided in Appendix 6, mentioned above, also shows small falls in year group numbers as they were "promoted" in subsequent years. Whilst there is no intention to imply illicit practice, further research into the effects of these and other changes in secondary provision, does seem to be needed. Where this thesis concludes that the policy of "keeping them in" benefited the students concerned, whilst perhaps limiting achievement and potential, these subsequent developments suggest that perverse incentives may have been created to further marginalise young people "at-risk" through the further unintended consequences of policy.

A similar point applies in relation to home-schooling. As an option for further flexibility, if parents/ carers wish to take control of their children's education, the numbers doing so have recently been reported to have almost doubled between 2011 and 2017, from 15 to nearly 30,000, according to responses to a "freedom of information" request from 86 local councils out of 152 ("Schoolsweek" 7/7/17). The report, however, acknowledged feedback from the councils suggesting that at least part of the increase might be associated with parents/carers attempting to avoid fines or imprisonment for their children's persistent absence, or because they may be "at-risk of exclusion".

Further concerns about recent developments have arisen from changes to the statementing processes, operation and implications of Education and Health Care Plans, especially related to increased mental health issues in young people. These perhaps confirm the need for further research and development along the lines

suggested in the recommendations, though the problems appear to have wider implications than those which are the subject of this thesis.

6.2 Strengths, limitations and challenges related to the study

In several quantitative research reports, authors have called for qualitative data to provide a greater depth of understanding to complement relationships found between variables. This research adds to the knowledge base in that respect. One of the strengths of the study was that it did not rely on the perceptions of the participants alone. Access to electronic and paper records, not usually available in other similar research, enabled commentary in terms of being able to see what had happened to students over time and how it related to their progress. Student records provided data that could be used to complement or corroborate the views and perceptions participants expressed in their interviews, placing information in context over time, offering triangulation and deeper understanding. The report showed students' achievement, performance and other data, rather than relying on results alone. Some data needed to be treated with caution, however, especially if it was unclear as to who had provided it and when, or if it appeared to be incomplete. Occasionally, for example, it was noticed that file records had changed in one medium, without a corresponding change in another: electronic and paper records showing inconsistent information on SEN and FSM classifications.

Another strength of the study was that rather than focusing solely upon identifying factors and possible resolutions, it attempted to explain some of the processes in

operation underlying the interactions between the schools, their staff, the students and those related to them. In this respect, it shows that similar problems, tackled with similar policies and resources did not consistently produce similar outcomes. This led to the suggestions made for further improvement being focused upon the means through which earlier, wider and deeper understanding of students might be achieved, along with greater sensitivity in schools regarding the implications of staff-student interaction and engagement.

A major limitation of the study was its limited scale, using findings from just two schools in the same county, with many similar features. Since demographics and secondary education provision are varied and increasingly diverse, far wider research would be needed to suggest that the findings or recommendations of this study were reliable, although in its review of literature the report does account for such variations. A further limitation is that, as has been noted earlier, findings in this area of study are reliant upon contemporary policies and practices which are themselves subject to current political, economic and sociocultural conditions. Findings are thus firmly located in the era in which they were produced and may not be replicable.

In addition to the broader strengths and limitations outlined above, others were more specific to the study. As well as the student “subjects”, a challenging aspect of the study was dealing with staff of different types and levels, especially having worked in schools myself. The perspectives and dispositions of senior staff might, perhaps, be expected to differ from other teachers, at least on some issues.

However, the different types of support staff involved, contributing to the schools’

operation in a variety of ways, brought alternative views and fresh perspectives to similar problems. Sometimes these would be due to the specialisms involved e.g. the staff working within the SEN function knew each other well and worked in the same area of the school. In other cases, staff who were part-time, temporary or external, or those working in the administrative function could appear to see their roles and student-related issues in a different light to others. Related to this, as a “white, middle-class male”, attempting to avoid stereotypical judgements of staff-student and staff-colleague relationships, for example, the potential to see the research participants and findings from any combination of personal, cultural or social status perspectives needed to be understood and acknowledged.

The alternative perspectives and dispositions described above, contributed to challenges in completing the primary research. The student interview schedule at School 2, for example, was not completed as fully as at School 1. This appeared to be related to a difference, between the two schools, in the demeanour of administrative staff allocated to the project, as much as it was to student absence. For example, a personal memo recalled two days on which visits were made but none of the students were available. On the first day, all were absent from school, whilst on the second, the students had promised to be there but had “gone” when the support staff went to look for them. At another time, a student was unavailable for an interview because the person who scheduled it made an alternative arrangement for him. A further one was missed when a student left school after a lesson, without letting anyone know. Although he attended the lesson, he had not been in registration, but the school did not know until I arrived to do his interview. Although these were minor problems, the frequency of occurrence suggested there

may be underlying reasons and they only occurred at one of the schools. On another occasion, interviews were delayed because there were no rooms available. Perhaps the staff concerned were busier, more disorganised, or unhappy to provide the support, although it had been agreed with the Headteacher. My perception was that they felt dissonance, related to their role and job-descriptions, in being asked to help an external researcher, providing files and confidential information. My reaction was not to challenge the problem directly, but to work through it, making return visits as necessary.

In hindsight, this may not have been the most appropriate response, however. At the final point of data collection, the staff informed me that Student 6's file was no longer available – the student had been excluded earlier in the term after being rude about the Headteacher on social media. At first, the file was said to be “on the other (school) site”. On a subsequent visit, the file had been “archived” and was “irretrievable”. It seemed that there was suspicion of the research and concern about how it may be used.

Other support staff also appeared suspicious at times, especially in questioning why I needed provision of information. At School 1, a personal memo noted an apparent perception by two staff that I had been brought in to do my research as a ploy to undermine and build evidence to exclude at least one of the students. The staff involved were antagonistic towards the school, openly disagreeing with policy and the actions of senior staff. There was no simple answer to this, therefore, other than to try to be as earnest as possible with both the members of staff concerned and the senior staff. If thought needed, the purpose of the research and how any

information received might be used was restated. On one occasion, however, information was passed back to senior staff of the school when it was felt to be relevant and important to the well-being of one of the students. At all times, ethical policies and principles were followed and at no point was my ability to continue with and complete the research questioned. Generally, these difficulties were less significant at School 1 than at School 2, accounting for the interview schedule being more fully completed. The issues did not seem insurmountable to the point where advice needed to be sought, though. Personal experience was felt to have been an asset in this case.

At the outset, it was intended to interview or hold discussions with parents in addition to the students, but unfortunately this was not possible in many cases. The process was begun and conversations took place personally and by telephone in preparation. A brief list of questions was devised along the same lines as for the students themselves. What prevented the interviews taking place was illness at the time that they were planned – the intention was to undertake them immediately after the students had completed Year 11, to ask for their reflections on the schools' provision and outcomes. Having had to take a temporary withdrawal, it was too late to go back to parents afterwards. It is likely that even if it had been possible, some parents would have been difficult to contact and interview, as evidenced from conversations with students and file notes regarding requests by their schools for meetings or information, which parents/carers were unable or unwilling to meet. Nevertheless, this aspect of the research was incomplete.

Regarding the literature review, some difficulty was encountered in searching for material that was directly relevant. For example, using the phrase “at risk” in searches produces a wide range of topics relevant to the lives and development of young people, including health and abuse related issues. Using “at risk of exclusion” as a more specific search term helped, but the term “exclusion” also proved ambiguous. Much of the literature on exclusion has concerned young people who have already been permanently excluded, dealing with its extent and the processes involved. Most of these difficulties were overcome by referring to the publications’ abstracts, however.

Using Special Education Needs in searches added further complexity in trying to establish what was relevant for my study, alongside specific terms such as BESD. The range of publications on policy and practice is wide and varied with historical, social and political perspectives. It was difficult to identify what was relevant, especially when dealing with apparently contradictory research reports, as mentioned in the review, the reliability and validity of which could not be clarified. In this respect, it was helpful to report on international findings, contrasting them with domestic research or corroborating it, whilst acknowledging that they, too, are driven by alternative perspectives.

6.3 Future Directions

Several areas for further research have been suggested in the sections prior to this and throughout the study. The relatively recent availability of the National Pupil

Database (NPD) may make a useful addition to the longitudinal tools of LSYPE and others already in existence. As this source becomes increasingly rich, it should be possible to test for associations between the aspects of policy change referred to above and the effects these had on achievement and the post-school destinations of those at-risk, for example, as well as exclusion and attendance rates, from whatever institution they attend. It should also be possible to do this, comparing the nature and purpose of institutions attended – Free, or Studio Schools and Pupil Referral Units, for example, or those who are schooled at home, since it is intended that the NPD would also account for these. The latter, especially, would benefit from further qualitative research to understand not just the associations, but their manifestations and effects over time. In addition, as the secondary education system continues to diversify, research into the resourcing and monitoring of institutions and educational trusts would also be of benefit assessing, for example, the potential for teaching and other resources being attracted towards apparently more successful schools, offering the perceived “highest-value” outcomes. Arrangements and funding for one-to-one support and teaching assistants could also be considered along with other aspects related to meeting the needs of marginalised young people.

The curriculum and timetable also need further research. The problems identified in this thesis and especially by Gazeley et al (2010) discussed earlier, regarding “Alternative Curriculum” arrangements and its effects upon achievement, aspirations and progress need clarification, recommendations and solutions if the relevant curriculum proposed by Archer et al (2010) for those “at-risk” is to be established. School timetables and staffing are major issues related to constraints of time, specialisms and having the resources and capacities to enable students to

follow courses and activities appropriate to their individual capabilities. The problems are compounded when collaborative work is undertaken between, for example, local colleges and schools, whose operations are not matched, for example, with timetable arrangements. Educating some young people off-site at local Pupil Referral Units creates further issues, in this respect, regarding the lack of continuity of provision as students spend time in a variety of institutional settings. Collaborative experiments with extended school days have produced working solutions in some cases, but thorough examination of current policies, practices, long-term outcomes and implications could have significant benefits for school students, planners and potentially more widely in developing flexible and relevant curriculum provision.

Regarding some of the organisational and training issues suggested for improvement, at the local, school level, these can be undertaken by inviting external researchers in to assess issues objectively, or by engaging internal staff, students, parents/carers and other resources to enhance involvement and ownership. Academic research could examine the issues with various approaches from alternative perspectives, depending upon the aims. For example, the existence of institutional prejudice might be established by reviewing policy inception and implementation, practices, hierarchies and structures, relationships, communications, teaching and pastoral practices to examine differences within and across institutions in the ways in which staff, students and parents/carers are drawn into decision making, meeting and other general practices and procedures.

For the benefit of schools and young people, however, another approach might be to develop a methodology aimed at mitigating against institutional prejudice, rather than to establish and focus upon whether it exists or not. In this sense, the methodology would involve drawing students and parents/carers into school practices, enfranchising them and providing ownership. Such practices are not uncommon in schools and they can be undertaken collaboratively with others. Although there is no specific ideal model available to recommend, Action Research has been adopted as a methodology in some cases. Where the recommendations called for improvements in drawing students and parent/carers into practices and decisions affecting them, there are examples of schemes that have been shown to engage them effectively. “Students as Researchers”, as explained by Carlile (2013), engages young people by encouraging them to ask and seek answers to questions of concern to them, related to their school lives. They are professionally trained in research techniques and operate collectively and collaboratively. Opportunities to meet with senior and other staff can be provided to learn about and question school operations and practices, although the questions and issues dealt with must be those of concern to the young people themselves and framed by them. For such initiatives to be sustained, there needs to be a commitment and enthusiasm towards them at all levels of the organisation, including openness and willingness to implement at least some recommendations.

A further initiative has been derived from the concept of restorative justice. It is similar to “Students as Researchers” in that it encourages students to take an active role in their school’s practices and procedures and training them to do so, as “restorative ambassadors”, helping peers to develop empathy and resolve conflicts

with each other. Where misdemeanours would commonly be met with punitive actions by staff, the emphasis is changed to assess why actions occurred and to address them by drawing information together so that they can be understood in context. Where it was noted in the research that student files were often populated with cursory notes, linking misdemeanours to sanctions, this initiative would require that underlying reasons be provided and context given to inform judgements and future decisions. The perpetrator is involved in the judgement of their actions and in the consequential resolutions.

Whilst these examples need far more detailed description, they are provided as means through which young people can become more engaged and enfranchised in the decisions that affect them directly and therefore, for those “at risk of exclusion” may be considered as potential mechanisms to ameliorate the status. Such changes to the ways in which the involvement of students and parents/carers is encouraged, can help to show that their perspectives are valued and develop consistency in institutional practices.

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APPENDIX 1: REQUEST FOR SUPPORT WITH PHD RESEARCH - PAUL MORETON

The message below was sent to the schools as a formal request to undertake my study.

The following is a brief written statement which I would be happy to discuss in further detail if possible. The objective of my statement is to achieve the agreement and support of the Heads in the schools involved to work with and learn about a cohort of students in their schools over the next year. I am researching the factors that influence decisions made by and for young people at risk of exclusion⁸. The idea is to study a relatively small group (around 10) and build up as much information as possible to provide qualitative evidence about their experiences and the impact of these upon their destinations/outcomes.

Who?

The students I would choose to study will have been either or both of the following:

- excluded for one or more periods during their secondary education
- in alternative provision for a time, on or off-site, or regarded as potential candidates for alternative provision to the point where this has been discussed with student and parent/carer

⁸ Full proposal is available on request

My preference would be to study those going into Year 11, male and female, but no need for equal numbers. The main advantages of working with this specific year group would be:

- to learn from experiences they have already had regarding choices made and subsequent events as well as studying what happens to them during the course of their final year
- to be able to record and comment upon their destinations/ outcomes at what would be the end of their final year and the period of my research.

What information will be sought?

The information I need to establish is potentially sensitive. This is necessary because the purpose of the research is, in part, to learn about any influence that could have contributed to decisions made for and by the student about their education choices, options and placements. Confidentiality will be guaranteed. As well as providing the Heads in the students' schools and the students themselves with any assurance required, as far as possible, I have to go through a rigorous procedure with Warwick University.

The information I will be trying to establish includes:

Education history and "journey" to date. The detail of what this would include and the method and level of access can be agreed through the Head. My aim would be to achieve as great a depth of understanding as possible about each individual. *The following would be amongst the desired information:*

Addresses at postcode level

Records of attendance, exclusions, transitions, performance

Reports and monitoring and tracking records

Methods to be used:

The following are not “set in stone” as the precise detailed methodology has still to be completed. It will, however, involve the following:

Questionnaires: Students/staff/parents

Interviews: Students/staff/parents

Meetings: Students/staff/other contacts who are working with or supporting the students. As an example, if a student has an exclusion pending which involves consideration of a temporary or permanent alternative provision, I would like to learn about the alternatives being considered and the people involved in making the decisions. Meetings will be arranged to minimise disruption and advice will be sought and taken from each school involved to ensure this.

Having stressed that confidentiality will be of the utmost importance, I would also stress that there will be no commentary in the research or what is written up from it about the correctness or validity of any course of action taken or choice made, by or for the students involved. The research is only trying to establish what happens and, as far as possible, the reasons for this. Any written material emerging from the research will be made available to the Heads of the schools involved. As mentioned at the beginning, I would be very happy if it is possible, to meet and discuss this further. I will also be happy to provide any other written information that is requested.

My email address at work is (provided). If it is possible to use this in the first instance to confirm that you are willing to support me, I will respond with further contact details (home email, telephone and mobile) to ensure that contact is easily established when needed. All I would ask is that a positive, or negative response is given, for which I will be grateful. I understand that what I am asking for could be perceived as too sensitive to contemplate, but hope that you will agree that the potential advantages that could emerge from the research and the project overall outweigh the sensitivities, given the assurances that have been provided. I look forward to your response.

Paul Moreton (July 2012)

APPENDIX 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FROM OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Dear colleague

I have been undertaking PhD research into the experiences of young people at risk of exclusion aged 14-16, closely following several individuals during their Year 11 this year. The research covers the period between 2010 and now, during this period of major educational change.

As you are well aware, the outcomes for the young people concerned depend largely on the circumstances they find themselves in and the specific people who deal with them.

Could colleagues help me by outlining what arrangements are in place for such young people in their areas / or schools in their areas and how this has changed

since 2010? It would be really useful if it is possible and will give my research a new dimension.

I want to keep this short, but am happy to provide any further explanation that would help to say what I am looking for, if emailed at (email address) (reply to this email)

Essentially though, the questions I am hoping to answer include:

If a young person in Key Stage 4 is regarded as being at risk of exclusion (already having been excluded for a period, but still deemed to be at further risk) in your area, what arrangements are in place for their curriculum to be followed and progression paths to be identified?

Are arrangements consistent across your area? If not, what determines the differences that arise?

How have arrangements changed since 2010 and what impact have these had?

These are not exclusive so any commentary colleagues can provide will be welcomed – including a critique of the questions themselves!

Thanks to anyone who feels able to contribute and for indulging me by at least reading this far!

Paul Moreton. .August 2013.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS, PHASES 1 – 4

Phase 1: Starter questions for research cohort

NAME _____

What subject choices did you make going into year 10?

Do you make all your own choices?

Who did you talk to about your choices?

Who would you say has the biggest input to choices that you make?

Have any of the following helped you to make your choices?

Home/parent/family/carer

Careers or Connexions staff

Teachers

Friends

Anyone else?

Apart from your choices, who do you look to for help and support in decisions you make? Who do you think has the biggest influence over you?

Second phase questions for research cohort

What are the most important things in your life at the moment on which you need to make decisions? Inside or outside school?

What are you doing to sort these out? Are you looking to other people to help you?

What do you think you will do at the end of the school year in June or July? Would you like to stay on at school, or do something else? What do you think will help you decide and who will you talk to about it?

Ask them to think of an incident or something that has happened to them recently that they think is important. Ask for a description of it and what happened, who was involved, what were the outcomes, how did these come about etc.

Third phase questions for research cohort

What are the most important things in your life at the moment on which you need to make decisions? Inside or outside school?

What are you doing to sort these out? Are you looking to other people to help you?

Has there been any change to what you are doing in school this year? Are you having difficulties in any of the subjects you are taking or with anything else in your school life? (Ask about English and Maths classes, plus their 2 other most favourite subjects)

What about changes outside school? Have there been any and if so what brought them about? (prompt for explanation)

Do you know yet what you will be doing at the end of the school year and beyond?

What have you done to make decisions on this? Has anyone else given you information or helped you to decide? What will you do about it and when do you expect to make your choices?

Do you think that your school will want you to stay next year? Why do you think this?

If you knew that there was a job you wanted to do, where would you look for information about it? Is there anything you need to know about this?

Research Phase Four Base Questions

Do you think you are going to achieve the best results you can from your exams this year? What factors are helping you and which are creating problems? (discuss subjects where not volunteered)

What changes have you experienced at school or at home in recent months? Have these caused any difficulties and if they have, who has been helping you with them?

Have you been excluded or taken out of classes for any reason in the past few months? (If so) Who did you deal with in the process and how did it affect your school work?

Are you certain now of what you will be doing at the end of this school year? (discuss in relation to options and IAG that were put in place)

Have you changed your mind at any time this year about what you are going to do after school (end of Yr 11)? If so, what has brought this about and who, if anyone, influenced you?

Is there anything you would do differently if you had the chance to do Yr 11 again? (who, what, where, why?)

Which teaching staff has had the biggest influence on you (so that I can talk to them)?

APPENDIX 4: SENIOR STAFF QUESTIONS

Interview 1: Questions for DH1 – Curriculum choices, advice, guidance and support. 23/11/12

- 1 How is curriculum designed and implemented at Abbeyfield?
- 2 How do you take account of national and local policy and priorities in curriculum planning? (examples?)
- 3 How are individual needs catered for in the course of planning?
- 4 What support, advice and guidance is given to individuals making choices at 14?
- 5 What processes might be gone through if changes are needed for individuals in the course of (during) a year
- 6 Can we talk about each of the individuals involved in the study?

APPENDIX 5: STUDENT PROFILE DETAILS FROM PLASC DATA AND FILES

Appendix 5: Student profile details recorded from PLASC data and files										
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
DOB	Jan - 97	Aug- 97	Feb- 97	Jan- 97	Sep- 97	Dec- 96	Dec- 96	Dec- 96	Jun- 97	Oct- 96
Ethnicity	Whi Brit									
Gender	M	M	F	M	M	M	F	F	M	M
Parent name	Same	FS MD	Diff	Same	Diff	Same FO	Same	Same	FS MD	FS MD
FSM	Yes	Yes	Eligible	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Attend (%)	85.6	83	72	93	92	93	94	87	88	80
Prev Schs	3	1	6	1	1	1	2	3	2	2
SEN Cat	A	A	P	A	A	A	A	P	A	A
SEN Type	BESD	BESD	BESD	BESD	BESD	BESD	NK	BESD	BESD	NK
SEN change	Yes									
Exclusion	14	9	135	19	27	6	0	3	3	2
Destinat	College	College	College	College	College	NA	College	College	NA	NA
Exp Dest	College	NK	Coll							

Notes:

Parents' name.

Student 8 parents were "same" but student was "in care".

FS MD = father same mother different. Same FO = Same names but only father in the household **FSM**

FSM= Free School Meals ("eligible" means available but not taken)

Attend = Attendance

Figure given is for "Whole of Key Stage 4" but due to unreliability of single statistic further detail is provided in a separate table (REF)

Prev Schs = Previous Schools

Total number of schools attended (primary and secondary in addition to final)

SEN

SEN Cat = Special Educational Needs classification. A= School Action, P = School Action Plus, N = None

SEN Type – BESD = Behavioral Emotional and Social Difficulties.

SEN change = Did the SEN category of the student change according to file records. Nb - Students 7, 9 and 10 recorded as "Yes" due to having been classified as type "A" prior to 2011

Exclusions

Manual count from file records of removal from classes. Nb: Student 8 number does not reflect the number of incidents, only the number of exclusions on record.

Destination College/ Coll - one of the three Colleges of Further Education in the locality.

NK= Not known

Exp dest = Expected Destination- Destination as expressed by students in interviews

APPENDIX 6: PUPIL PREMIUM 2013-15 (SCHOOL 1)

(This is an extract from the school's report on its Pupil Premium achievements)

All schools and Academies receive a budget for students who receive free school meals or have done for any time in the preceding six years. This is known as the Pupil Premium Grant. The Pupil Premium Grant received in the budget 2013-14 totalled £285,550. This sum was calculated on the number of students who were entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) in that year, students who had been on the FSM register at any time in the preceding six years and Looked After Children (LAC)

The aim of this funding is to narrow the gap in achievement and progress between these students and their peers. The number of students in this category was shown below.

2013/14	FSM	%FSM	LAC	%LAC	PP	%PP	Total in Year
Year 7	39	19.7	4	2.0	62	31.3	198
Year 8	27	11.1	0	0.0	64	26.3	243
Year 9	44	19.7	2	0.9	68	30.3	224
Year 10	37	16.4	3	1.3	62	27.5	225
Year 11	31	14.0	4	1.8	65	29.4	221

The progress of students in all year groups improved as a result of this funding. For Pupil Premium students in Year 11, the improvement in their examination result was significant. They are outlined in the following table:

	% 5+ACEM*	% 5+ A*-C	% A*-C En	% 3LP** En	% A*-C Ma	% 3LP Ma
2011 Results (35)	11	60	37	35	26	30
2012 Results (47)	24	64	48	60	34	48
2013 Results (59)	41	81	63	69	47	41
2014 Results	36	41	63	77	47	48

In (School 1's) budget for the year 2013-14, we continue to receive a Pupil Premium Grant for students who receive Free School Meals or had done so any time in the preceding six years and Looked After Children. Students in this category are in the following year groups:

2014/15	FSM	%FSM	LAC	%LAC	PP	%PP	Total in Year
Year 7	35	14.5	4		58	24.1	240
Year 8	26	12.7	0		67	32.7	205
Year 9	46	19.5	1		64	27.2	235
Year 10	39	17.9	2		64	29.3	218
Year 11	35	16.0	3		61	27.8	220

APPENDIX 7: EXAMPLE OF STUDENT DATA TABLES.

Progress and achievement table:

Grade or %	EXPECTED OR PREDICTED								PROGRESS DATA		Previous:			
	School				Fischer Family Trust (FFT)									
5A*-C (EM)	Results and grades				89.9	FFT est chance:						Test		Teach
	Final	Pred	Targ Yr11	Targ Yr10	come	≥C	A*-G	Jan Yr11	End Yr10		KS2	KS3	KS2	KS3
Eng	C	C	B	A-C	87	86.8	99	C	C	Eng	5c	6	5	6
Lang														
Eng Lit	D	C	B	A-C				D	C	Math	5b	5	4	5
Math	C	C	B	A-C	94	93.8	99		UDU	Sci	4a	Abs	4	Abs
Sci (BTEC)	FG	D	B	A-C	99	86.9	99	E	U					
Drama	C	C	B	A-C	79	79	99	C	A					
Geog	F	D	B	A-C	99	74.9	99	D	D/E					
PE BTEC	MM	Pass	Merit	Pass	53	82.7	99	Merit	Pass					
Art	C	D	D	A-C	76	75.7	99	C	D/E					

Profile information:

Profile data	ans 1	ans 2	ans 3	ans 4	ans 5					
School No.	1	number assigned for study								
Student No.	1	number assigned for study								
Gender	M									
DOB	07/01/1997									
Prev School	3	Total number of schools attended (primary and secondary in addition to final)								
Parents	Same name as student									
Ethnicity	White British									
SEN category	A	Alternated between "N", "A" and "P" at different times in school career. See Individual Student History pag								
SEN Type	BESD	Notes for 2009 only. Notes show attendance at weekly "success centre"								
FSM	Yes									
Attendance%	85.6	86.2	N/A	81.1	84.9					
	for whole KS4	Jan '13 Yr 11	Yr 10	KS3	KS2					
Exclusions	14	internal (IEU or BASE referred) or external, from notes								
Destination	Moulton College	Last known destination recorded								

These tables were collated for each cohort member and are available for review.

APPENDIX 8: FURTHER EXAMPLES OF COMMENTARY ON STUDENT PROGRESS, ATTAINMENT AND TARGET SETTING

Student 3

Student 3 opted for a range of courses with a practical orientation at the start of Year 10. These included Travel and Tourism, Health and Social Care, Drama, Princes Trust, and Child Development. She had wanted to do Sociology, but this was not available at School 1.

At Key Stage 3, she achieved level 5 in English and Maths – a significant improvement of 2 levels from Key Stage 2. Her Science level was 4 at both Key Stages. However, the subsequent targets she was set were based upon her Key Stage 2 results. The reason would have been that the school needed to be consistent in setting targets for all students, as OFSTED's reported performance measures recorded improvement in student progress from Key Stage 2 to 4, rather than 3 to 4. It could be argued that this was not in this student's best interests for her motivational conversations with mentors and tutors.

In Year 10, the school set targets of D for English, E for Maths and "Pass" for BTEC science. FFT data showed that she had a 44.8% chance of achieving a C grade or better in English. In Maths it was 25.7% and for Science, 35.1%. Her chance of achieving 5 GCSEs at A*-C, was given as 16.8%.

Her targets were raised in Year 11 as it was felt she could achieve a C in English and D in Maths. However, Student 3's progress data was given as G in English and F in Maths and by the time of the predicted grades in January, she was expected to achieve a D in English and an F in Maths. The reasons for these swings were unclear, but the latter were, in fact, her final grades. In addition, she achieved the

expected Pass in Science and Princes Trust with a “Merit” for Health and Social Care and Travel and Tourism.

Thus, in terms of inconsistencies evident in target setting and expectations in relation to performance, a very similar picture can be presented for this student as for Student 2. However, as time elapsed and more became known about the performance of Students 2 and 3, the refinement of their target and progress grades reflected a greater accuracy of understanding with regard to what they were likely to achieve. Also, when her performance is considered in the light of her frequent absence, potential for permanent exclusion and other factors, Student 3’s final results and progression to college were seen as a triumph by and for the school. In her last interview, it appeared that the student concurred.

The last known destination for Student 3 was a place at a local college at which she was to take a course in Hair and Beauty.

Student 4

Student 4’s option choices were Princes Trust, Joinery and Business. He explained this at point 1 but said that he had to have a Humanities subject as well. His file notes provided a more detailed list of options: BTEC Business, BTEC Graphics, Joinery, Key life skills, PE and Princes Trust. At the earliest point, Student 4 clarified his intention to go to college after Year 11, knowing that re-spraying cars was an occupational line he wished to follow. He was a relatively able student who could have followed the “English Baccalaureate” (EBacc) route. According to mentor notes, however, he had not been selected to do so because it was felt that he would not pass French.

Student 4's academic record was the most straightforward to assess in that he achieved test scores of level 4 across the board at Key Stage 2 and level 5 at Key Stage 3. This suggested that he should achieve grade C's in English Maths and Science at GCSE. These were, in fact, the targets that were set for him in Year 10 and Year 11, although in Science a Merit was given for BTEC. FFT analysis showed that he had a 58-59% chance of achieving these grades. They gave him a 45% chance of achieving 5 GCSE grades at A*-C.

In his final results, the C was achieved in English, but Maths was grade E and in Science, where unusually he took both GCSE and BTEC, his awards were grade E and Pass, respectively. In his other subjects, he was graded at Merit in Business and Pass in Joinery. It appeared that he had not completed the courses in PE, Princes Trust and BTEC Graphics, however.

Like Student 3, Student 4's progression was seen as a triumph for the school, acknowledged by the student himself in his interviews. His potential for permanent exclusion had been high and so keeping him on roll with the successful completion of GCSE and BTEC courses was an achievement in itself. In particular, getting through that period to the time where he could attend college to take his preferred course was a significant benefit to Student 4. On the other hand, the achievements of Student 4 did not show progression to the grades that, for his ability level, he should have been able to achieve. Progression to college was most important though, after which his previous achievements would be less likely to influence his future.

The last known destination for Student 4 was a place at a local college, probably on a course involving vehicle paint spraying, though this was not recorded.

Student 5

Student 5's choices at point 1 were Construction, Drama, Business and Information Technology. At that early stage, he knew that plumbing was an ambition.

Student 5 was of relatively low ability. In Key stage 3 tests, he achieved level 4 in English and Maths, with a 3 in Science. This represented progression from Key Stage 2 where his English was assessed at level 2, with 3's in Maths and Science. As a result, his GCSE target grades were set in Year 10 at E for English, F for Maths and Pass for Science BTEC. FFT gave him chances of between 3 and 9% of achieving grade C in any of the subjects, with a 1.4% chance of him gaining 5 grade A*-C passes. In this context, final results of F, G and Pass respectively would be seen as expected. At the same time, his grade C in ICT and Merit in Business were significant successes, particularly in the light of the difficult relationship that developed between the student and the school's staff in Year 11. He also achieved a Pass in BTEC PE and a grade E in drama.

By interview point 3 he expected to achieve a qualification in plumbing by taking a 3 day a week course at college. By point 4, after experiencing an exclusion, he thought it might adversely affect the chance of achieving his place. His intentions were still the same though.

The last known destination for Student 5 was a place at a local college to undertake a course in building.

Student 6

Student 6 took options in Art, Sports Studies, ICT and Geography at Key stage 4.

The Key Stage test results for Student 6 show that he was apparently of average to low ability at Key Stage 2. His English result was level 4, Maths 3, and Science 4.

Improvement could be seen at Key Stage 3 where his levels were given as 5, 6 and 5 respectively for those subjects. Since FFT expectations were based on Key Stage 2 scores, these showed that they thought he had a 54% chance of achieving a grade C at GCSE in English, with a 34% chance of a C in Maths and 45% in Science. His final grades were E for English and D in Maths and Science.

The chance of him achieving those final grades was estimated by FFT at 95.4% for English (i.e. it was 95.4% sure that he would achieve at least this grade), whereas for Maths, his D grade was 63.6% and Science was 75.9% likely to be grade D or above. In short, his achievements in these subjects were lower than they should have been given his ability level. The school had recognised this in the targets that had been set for Student 6: C for English, B for Maths and C for Science.

The chance of Student 6 achieving 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths was estimated by FFT at 26.3%. During Key Stage 4, however, there was no stage at which Student 6's progress data showed that he was likely to achieve any better than his final performance. Throughout all of his subjects, from assessments in Year 10 to mock examinations in Year 11, only one grade C was reported – in Geography for which he finally achieved grade E. He did achieve one grade C at GCSE in Art. All other grades, progress and final, were in the range D to G.

There was no last known destination for Student 6 at the conclusion of Year 11. No further progress details were provided for him.

Student 10

Student 10's choices included a double GCSE equivalent Engineering course, ICT and Art. He appeared to be content with how he had made his choices and with the school's approach towards him in doing so.

His test results at Key Stage 2 were level 4 in each of English, Maths and Science. Subsequently, his Key Stage 3 tests assessed him as levels 5, 7 and 6 respectively. The significance of this for Student 10, however, lay in the disparity between what FFT thought as being reasonable percentage chances of him achieving grade C or above at GCSE and the targets that were set for him by the school. FFT's percentages ranged from 43% for English to 44.6% for Maths and 48% for Science. For Year 10, the school set targets of B for English and A* for Maths and A for Science. His final grades of E in English, E in Maths and F in Science show underachievement in this respect, as do his other grades of between D and F. Only a pass in ICT gained him a GCSE grade C equivalent.

The disparities between target grades and final results were potentially important for the student. The targets would have been used by teaching staff, mentor staff and pastoral staff in trying to motivate and support him. The student himself would have been told about his target grades and encouraged to think that they were realistic. Whether he felt they were realistic is open to question. At no point in his interviews did he offer a view that he aspired to academic achievement at the

highest level and his desired future course did not appear to take such achievement into account.

To this extent, the research uncovered instances of low expectations of students whose prior performance warranted higher and, in the latter case, of excessive expectations that were unwarranted. Where, for other students, targets for Key Stage 4 were set from their achievement at Key Stage 2, it seems that Student 10's targets must have been set using Key Stage 3 results, without questioning what turned out to be a "rogue" KS3 result in Maths. It is also possible that there may have been some confusion on the part of the senior staff who set the target grades, as Student 10's year group had two students with the same name, one of whom was a high academic achiever. No clear evidence was available to investigate this possibility, however.

Using his Key Stage 2 results and the FFT projections, Student 10's final results were more in keeping with expectations. Indeed, the school had recognised this in that by Year 11, his target grades had been generally modified at grade C. His progress grades never exceeded grade D in English or Maths and were usually lower.

Student 10's final destination was not recorded.

APPENDIX 9: ETHICAL APPROVAL

2012-08-22 03:33 001



Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees (MA by research, MPhil/PhD, EdD)

Name of student **Paul Moreton**

MA
By research

EdD

PhD
✓

Project title: **The influences and circumstances that shape the decisions made by and for young people, at risk for exclusion (aged 14-16) regarding their access to educational provision and future progression**

Supervisor **Dr Dimitra Hartas**

Funding Body (if relevant)

Please ensure you have read the Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research available in the handbook.

Methodology

Please outline the methodology e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing etc. Methods to be deployed are outlined in the upgrade paper. They include observation and recording of students' documents regarding participation and performance at school and/or in alternative settings. Interviews and questionnaires will be deployed with students, teaching staff, support staff and external workers who directly support the individuals in the study. These will be semi structured to involve free responses and allow issues to be explored as they arise, as well as gaining factual information to compare directly with responses of others.

Participants

Please specify all participants in the research including ages of children and young people where appropriate. Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. children; as a result of learning disability. Again, details of this are provided in the upgrade paper. There will be some 40 young people involved directly in the study, some of whom can be classified as vulnerable and some have specific learning disabilities. They will be aged 14-15 during the course of the study. Their names will not be provided here, but are available at the request of my supervisor. Other participants will include significant others in the education of the young people eg parents/carers, teachers, internal and external support workers, local authority and perhaps social services professionals.

Respect for participants' rights and dignity

How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values? Confidentiality is being guaranteed by not naming participants or schools in the reporting of the project or its outcomes. Where potential religious and/or cultural issues arise, these will be checked directly with the participant or subsequently with professional staff if this is not possible or appropriate.

Privacy and confidentiality

How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.

Please see the answer above.

Data records being used are the result of access via passwords and so are automatically protected. The data I generate will be protected by ensuring that spreadsheet information distributed is either password protected or has formula or collated information removed. Senior colleagues involved will be consulted and agreement will be sought on the generation and use of information, including asking for assent if the intention is to share their information with others, in which case, they will be told with whom and where it will be shared.

My thesis will not be shared with anyone other than my supervisor until it is complete, to which end it will be stored securely in my home environment. The same applies to data and records, other than those already mentioned, which will be shared with no-one outside of those mentioned. Where mentors are to be asked to provide information, its subsequent recording will be shared with each mentor individually and the originals shredded.

Consent

- will prior informed consent be obtained?

- from participants? Yes from others? Yes

- explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason: Letters are being sent to parents/carers and the young people themselves will be informed prior to the period of the study. They will only be involved with the consent of both parties.

- will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?

Yes

Competence

How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?

The Advanced Research Methods Course followed will provide a consistent reference point and in particular the ethical training received. Continuation of the advice and support provided by my supervisor will also be sought. Further updating will be undertaken via the Research Student Skills Programme provided by Warwick University.

Protection of participants

How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?

I have had CRB clearance as it is needed for my current post. Contact has been made with Warwick CRB to ensure that any further necessary arrangements can be made before embarking on the research. I have already and will continue to work with Headteachers and senior leaders in the schools involved to make sure that participants are safe and safeguarded. All the professionals making input to the study will have had CRB clearance too.

For any one-to-one interviews, advice will be sought from the school as to whether it will be necessary or prudent for there to be a parent/carer or teacher/support worker in attendance.

Child protection

Will a CRB check be needed? No (If yes, please attach a copy.)

Addressing dilemmas

Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?

If ethical dilemmas arise I will first seek the advice of professionals in the relevant school but will also check and take these further with my supervisor.

Misuse of research

How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?

Throughout the period of the research I will be working with and through senior leaders in the schools concerned individually and collectively. Validation will be sought from them regularly, which can be a source of cross checking also in the collective meetings. Again, any clarification needed can be discussed with and verified through my supervisor. I have collaborated also with NFER who are conducting parallel research with the same group which should help in this respect. The research also has a good deal of quantitative objective data to draw upon which is held by external agencies such as Fischer Family Trust.

Support for research participants

What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?

In the former case, assuming these situations arise during my personal contact with the young people concerned, I will conclude the interview by telling the student what action I will take (almost always what I will tell and what I will say), having interjected when the issue was first raised to say that I cannot keep this confidential. In the latter, I would most likely (depending on the nature of the "upset") conclude the interview and seek the support of an appropriate member of staff or the parent/carer directly, if more appropriate.

Integrity

How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?

Through rigour in recording, checking, cross-checking and monitoring information and data received, verifying it with participants during the course of the research and/or afterwards, seeking support for monitoring and analytical purposes as appropriate. Also by providing prior written information for participants and giving feedback to them on information received. Finally, by being personally respectful in discourse; aware of and sensitive to participants' alternative perceptions, views and understanding.

What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?

We have not reached agreement upon this at this point, but I will seek to do so if the need arises where my supervisor has made significant input to my research or feels the need to raise this.

Other issues? Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.

Signed

Research student

Date

Supervisor



Date

26/07/12

Action

Please submit to the Research Office (Louisa Hopkins, room WE132)

Action taken

Approved

Approved with modification or conditions – see below

Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

Name

G. LINDSAY

Date

22.8.12

Signature



Stamped

Notes of Action

Signed *Paul Moxley*

23/7/12

Research student

Date

Supervisor

Date

Action

Please submit to the Research Office (Louisa Hopkins, room WE132)

Action taken

- Approved
- Approved with modification or conditions – see below
- Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

Name

Date

Signature

Stamped

Notes of Action

APPENDIX 10: EXAMPLE OF STUDENT INFORMATION:

Prior to the first interview, each student was asked to agree to take part and to sign a form upon doing so. The format of the form can be seen below, with a scanned copy of one of the student's signatures, chosen for anonymity to be maintained.

NAME _____ Student X _____ School: 1

I know that Mr Moreton is doing research at Warwick University, following what happens to me at school this year and I agree to him using my information as long as my personal identity is not used in what is written up. He has explained what his research is about and how it will be used.

Signed  _____ Date 5 Oct.

The following excerpt from a transcript, exemplifies the approach taken with students to explain what the research was about. It is taken from an interview with one of the students, who asked for a recap at the end of his interview at point/phase 3 of the schedule:

Student (S): Can I just ask what this is for?
Interviewer (I): It's for a study that I'm doing, trying to follow...10 young people through their GCSE year and why I keep on to you about change, it's how things are changing for them and

what's significant about it ... you know, what important things there are for them....

S: Yeah...

I: What causes change... and I'm trying to draw all that together in a study so ... you will be part of... you will be part of that. But you won't be named or anything, it's just a...

S: A survey type thing....

I: You as a person.... Yeah, exactly.

S: Yeah. Oh all right then, yeah that's fine. Ah, thank you...

I: See you then...

S: Take care... Bye.

Students were told at each interview stage how many more sessions were to come and were given the opportunity to opt out of further sessions.