Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

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Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and Adolescent Psychology

The ELSA Project in Two Primary Schools: Reflections from Key Stakeholders on the Factors that Influence Implementation

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I, Hannah Fairall confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This research examines the structure of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) project in two schools at different points in the implementation process. Implementation research is essential because the way interventions are implemented links to intervention outcomes. A mixed methods comparative multiple case study design was adopted, involving two mainstream primary schools at different stages of implementation. Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in School 1 (n = 8) and School 2 (n = 7), including the ELSA, Special Educational Needs Coordinator, Senior Leadership, teachers and Educational Psychologists (EP). Interview data were thematically analysed. A questionnaire was also circulated to wider school staff. Analyses were conducted separately for each school in order to retain the integrity of each case. Following this themes were examined across the two cases. The schools were found to implement the project in different ways, and some practices did not adhere to ELSA guidance. Intervention length was longer in School 1 than guidance outlines. In School 2, there was an absence of intervention endings, the ELSA supported pupils with complex behavioural needs as opposed to a wider range of needs, and ELSA support often operated in a reactive way. Factors found to facilitate implementation consistent with the espoused approach include: a mental health ethos, Link EP support, shared responsibility for mental health across school staff and practices in endings which acknowledge the ELSA-pupil attachment. Barriers to implementation included: lack of school-wide understanding and support of the ELSA project's primary task, difficulties incorporating and distinguishing between the intervention and other SEMH provision, blurring of ELSA role boundaries, emotional impact on ELSAs, lack of equality of access in referrals and pupil overdependence on the ELSA. Results indicate that implementation barriers are more prominent in the earlier stages of implementation. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Impact Statement

This is the first research study to explicitly explore the implementation of the ELSA project in mainstream primary contexts. This study examined the reflections of key stakeholders relative to the organisation and implementation of the ELSA project in two primary schools that had been involved with the project for different periods of time.

This study adopted a mixed methods multiple case study design. The findings of this study indicate that schools implementing the ELSA project can adopt different practices with regards to: referrals, endings, support systems and the extent of wider staff understanding of this intervention. The following factors were found to facilitate effective implementation: a mental health ethos in the school, a highly skilled ELSA, opportunities for ELSA containment, practices in intervention endings which acknowledge the importance of the ELSA-Pupil attachment, support from the Link Educational Psychologist (EP) and shared responsibility for mental health across staff. Key barriers to effective implementation include: lack of school-wide shared understanding and support for the ELSA project's primary task, difficulties incorporating and distinguishing between the ELSA project and existing SEMH provision, blurring of ELSA role boundaries, high degree of emotional impact of intervention work on the ELSA and pupil overdependence where there is an absence of intervention endings. This study highlighted that the early stages of implementation are a time of particular challenge and vulnerability in implementing this project.

The findings have implications for future research, namely the importance of considering ELSA project implementation in future efficacy research. Alongside this, the findings have implications for the practice of Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), EPs and school staff who implement this intervention:

- An implementation resource is presented within this thesis, which guides key stakeholders in schools through considerations relevant at each stage of implementation. During the essential early stages of implementation, actions are suggested including raising awareness across wider staff and defining the place of the project within wider SEMH provision.

- The ELSA model could be amended to involve a Link EP consultation with key stakeholders, while the school are in the early stages of implementation. The pricing of the ELSA project could be changed in light of this adaptation.

- EPSs could provide training to EPs who are not involved in delivering the ELSA project. The aim of this training would be to provide information about the core components of the project, as well as outlining the support Link EPs could provide to their schools.

- Suggestions are made for adaptations to the ELSA training materials in light of the findings. Given the central importance of the ELSA-Pupil attachment, references to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) could be made more prominent within the training. Practices could also be further considered in the training, including endings and challenges with pupil disclosures, in light of this attachment relationship.

- With the support of future research, EPSs perhaps in conjunction with counselling training institutions, may consider what further training and support could be provided to experienced ELSAs to enable them to provide a higher level of support within their school contexts.

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Abbreviations and Glossary of Key Terms

ELSA:

An Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) is a Teaching Assistant (TA) who has completed the ELSA training.

The ELSA Project:

The ELSA model or programme. The ELSA project develops TA knowledge and skills through a six-day training course and supervision from Educational Psychologists (EPs). ELSAs provide emotional literacy support for identified pupils in their schools.

ELSA Training:

ELSA training refers to the six-day training course delivered by EPs to Trainee-ELSAs.

ELSA Intervention:

The emotional literacy support delivered by ELSAs in their schools, through individual and group sessions with identified pupils.

Implementation:

Implementation concerns the process by which an intervention is put into practice (Humphrey, 2013). It concerns what an intervention consists of when it is delivered in a school setting (Durlak & Dupre, 2008), and thus concerns the enactment of an intervention by school staff.

Emotional Literacy:

Emotional literacy is defined as an individual's skills, including recognising, understanding and appropriately expressing emotions, which can be understood as contributing to an overall state of positive mental health and wellbeing.

Mental Health and Wellbeing:

Mental health is comprised of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing, and is understood as related but distinct from mental illness (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010).

Both the terms 'mental health and wellbeing' and 'Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH)' will be used to refer to this concept throughout this thesis.

SEMH:

Social Emotional Mental Health

Nurture Group:

An SEMH intervention. Nurture Groups are classes of 6-12 pupils, run by members of staff trained in nurture interventions. It involves pupils starting their day in their mainstream class, and then being collected by the staff and taken to the nurture group – a hybrid of home and school (Boxall, 2002).

Nurture Style Provision:

Follows the Nurture Group intervention model, but termed Nurture Style Provision (NSP) because the staff running the NSP have not completed an accredited Nurture Group training course.

EP:

Educational Psychologist

EPS:

Educational Psychology Service

LA:

Local Authority

SENCO:

Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SLT:

Senior Leadership Team

CAMHS:

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CYP:

Children and young people

SMART Targets:

Small, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited targets

TA:

Teaching Assistant

DfE:

Department for Education

DoH:

Department of Health

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Legislative Backdrop to Emotional Literacy in Education

In recent years, there has been national concern about the prevalence of mental health difficulties in children and young people (CYP) in the UK. A recent large-scale survey indicated that 1 in 8 CYP aged 5 to 19 currently meet the diagnostic criteria for at least one mental health disorder (falling across 4 categories: emotional, behavioural, hyperactivity and other less common difficulties) (NHS Digital, 2018). Emotional disorders were found to be the most prevalent disorders experienced by CYP (8.1%) (NHS Digital, 2018). Legislation emphasises the important and unique role of schools in supporting social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs (Department for Education (DfE), 2014; DfE & Department of Health (DoH); 2015). The recent Green Paper: Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision (DoH & DfE, 2017) outlines the government's plans to help support CYP with mental health difficulties. One of the key aspects of this paper states that all schools should have a trained member of staff who will be responsible for the school's approach to mental health (a designated mental health lead).

Interventions and approaches which support SEMH within schools generally fall within a three-tiered structure (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). Universal support at Tier 1 involves whole-school initiatives which foster an environment of emotional wellbeing. Interventions and approaches at Tier 2 involve small group or one-to-one support either in or outside of the classroom. Tier 3 interventions are intensive one-to-one approaches and can involve contact with professionals from different agencies (Carroll & Hurry, 2018).

Several UK programmes and initiatives have been developed to promote social and emotional skills, which are understood to underpin and support effective learning. For example, the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' is a Tier 1 whole-school approach which was adopted by approximately 90% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools (DfE, 2007). 'Targeted Mental Health in Schools' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008) is another initiative adopted by schools, which emphasised the schools' responsibility to support the development of competencies around SEMH.

Considering a different aspect of the legislative backdrop, the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) working in mainstream schools has significantly increased in the last 15 years. There has been a threefold increase since the year 2000; from 79,000 to 243,000 (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2015). TAs now represent 35% of staff in primary schools and 15% of staff in secondary schools. Through this rise, the government aimed to raise educational standards and reduce teacher workload (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). In the context of legislation highlighting the key role of schools in providing SEMH support, it is not surprising that this large resource (the TA population) is being deployed in ways which support the SEMH needs of pupils.

1.2 The ELSA Project

The ELSA project is a Tier 2 intervention which was developed by Sheila Burton, Educational Psychologist (EP). In 2001, ELSAs were employed within an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in Southampton Local Authority (LA) to work peripatetically to deliver individual and small group targeted interventions to promote emotional literacy (Burton, 2018). Burton then developed a more sustainable model of support which involved training both primary and secondary school TAs, meaning the role became school-based.

The ELSA project involves EPs providing selected 'skilled' TAs with training and in-role support which develops their psychological understanding of the needs underpinning healthy emotional development in children. Burton (2018) explains the EP's unique combined knowledge of psychological theory and the education system makes them well placed to lead this intervention. ELSAs are deployed as an in-house resource in schools; they deliver planned programmes of support which aim to increase the emotional literacy skills with the CYP with whom they work (Burton, 2018), making this in-school intervention proactive as opposed to reactive. TAs from a range of schools and settings, including primary, secondary, special and pupil referral units, in the LA can be involved in the ELSA project.

The publication of the ELSA Trainers' Manual in 2009 (Burton, 2009) led to rapid growth of the ELSA project across the UK. As outlined on the ELSA Network website (2017), over 100 LAs now deliver the ELSA project in the UK. Given the

widespread and growing nature of this initiative, it is imperative that the ELSA project is rigorously researched.

1.3 Research Rationale

Following a systematic review of the literature in the ELSA field, exploration of the implementation of the ELSA project was identified as a critical gap in the literature.

The central importance of implementation research has been highlighted by researchers (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman et al., 2009; Greenberg et al., 2005; Humphrey; 2013), with an entire research discipline termed 'implementation science' which aims to explain what makes interventions work in real world contexts (Kelly, 2012). Implementation research concerns how interventions are implemented or enacted in school contexts, with regards to their fidelity (i.e. the extent to which critical components of an intervention are present when enacted in a school context), participant reach (which young people in the school are in receipt of the intervention), and the number of sessions delivered. Another aspect of implementation research considers the conditions an intervention is implemented within, including the pre-planning and foundations in place such as wider-staff awareness of the intervention, the intervention supportive systems and the ethos of the school. Implementation research is essential because how interventions are implemented, in addition to the conditions they are implemented within, have been evidenced to link to the outcomes for interventions (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Implementation research also plays an explanatory role, detailing why a particular programme works including the factors that facilitate the workings of an intervention (Lendrum & Humphrey, 2013), and why the intervention is (or is not) leading to positive outcomes (Humphrey, 2013). Therefore, implementation research develops our understanding of how best to support young people with SEMH needs. However, very little is known about how the ELSA project is implemented in schools.

This study examines the reflections of key stakeholders relative to the organisation and implementation of the ELSA project in two primary schools that had been involved with the project for different periods of time. Several research studies have highlighted potential facilitators and barriers to schools introducing this intervention including: lack of wider-staff and Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

understanding of the intervention (Leighton, 2015), challenges ensuring protected ELSA time (Grahamslaw, 2010), time constraints of the role (Mann, 2014), the importance of whole-school understanding of pupils' SEMH needs and ELSA-teacher communication (Nicholson-Roberts, 2019). However, while these factors have emerged out of the literature, no research has yet deliberately examined the implementation of the ELSA project within the primary school setting. Specific gaps in the research base were identified in relation to the implementation literature which concern both how the intervention is implemented (i.e. fidelity, participant reach), as well as the conditions for implementation (Humphrey, 2013). The specific gaps identified and explored in this study are: the nature of the ELSA support system, what ELSA intervention endings look like in practice, wider-staff awareness and understanding of the ELSA intervention in school, the nature of the referral process and how the school ethos and system act as a facilitator and barrier to implementation. Researchers have also highlighted that implementation is a process as opposed to an event, and different activities are conducted at different points in the process (Kelly, 2013). The facilitators and barriers to ELSA project implementation could vary at different stages, which is the final element explored in the present study.

1.4 Relevance to Educational Psychology

The ELSA project is an EP-led intervention. This research provides those EPs delivering ELSA training and supervision with a greater understanding of how the project is implemented in primary school settings, as well as the factors that facilitate and act as barriers to implementation. This may better place EPs to provide support which is sensitive to the challenges schools and ELSAs face in implementing this project. This research could lead to adaptations to the ELSA training, ELSA model as well as lead to guidance for schools in promoting effective implementation.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of five chapters. A review of the relevant literature is conducted in chapter two, which ends by highlighting the focus of the present study and research questions to be addressed. Chapter three presents a detailed account of the methodology employed in this study. The findings are presented in chapter

four, which outlines both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. The discussion in chapter five details the results in relation to the research questions of the study and considers implications for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review is divided into four sections. Section 2.1 explores the ELSA project including: defining terms in the emotional literacy field, the purpose of the project, theoretical underpinnings and intervention practices and resources. Section 2.2 details a systematic literature review of the ELSA research base, and gaps in the literature are identified in terms of the implementation of the project in school settings. In section 2.3, the importance of implementation research for interventions is discussed. Lastly, in section 2.4, the focus of this study is outlined, and the research questions are presented.

2.1 The ELSA Project

2.1.1 ELSA and Terms in the Emotional Literacy Field

The key concept underlying the ELSA project is emotional literacy, which is a term widely adopted in the UK education sector. The term developed from the concept of emotional intelligence. Gardner (1983) emphasised that intelligence is a multi-faceted concept, and that plural 'intelligences' exist which cover a range of capacities. Within Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligence model, he suggests there are two types of 'personal intelligences' – intra-personal (self-understanding) and inter-personal (understanding others). Emotional intelligence is the umbrella term which comprises these two concepts and is defined as the:

> *Ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (*Salovey and Mayer, 1990, p189)

Emotional intelligence thus involves both the inter- and intra-personal skills that guide one's actions. The term emotional intelligence is used particularly in the USA and business contexts and describes more or less the same competencies as the term emotional literacy (Weare, 2003). Within the ELSA training manual, it is highlighted that these terms can be used interchangeably (Burton, 2009). In the UK education sector, the term emotional literacy is more generally adopted because the term 'intelligence' relates to the measurement of a fixed innate concept, as opposed to the possibility of teaching, learning or developing these skills (Weare, 2003).

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Steiner initially coined the term emotional literacy (Steiner & Perry, 1997). Emotional literacy can be defined as "*the ability to recognise, understand, handle, and appropriately express emotions*" (Sharp, 2001, p1). According to Weare (2003) being emotionally literate includes three key competencies: understanding ourselves, understanding and managing emotions and understanding social situations. Self-understanding concerns having an accurate and positive view of ourselves, and having a sense of optimism about life. Understanding and managing emotions concerns understanding the causes of our emotions and expressing our emotions appropriately. Lastly, emotional literacy involves the competency of understanding social situations and making relationships, including forming attachments to others, experiencing empathy and managing relationships effectively (Weare, 2003). These competencies might be viewed as targets of the ELSA intervention.

The concept of emotional literacy also overlaps with other terms, including 'mental health' and 'wellbeing' (Weare, 2003). While the ELSA manual (Burton, 2009) uses the terms 'mental health, 'wellbeing' and 'emotional literacy', there is little in the way of defining how these terms overlap and can be distinguished between. However, we can look to other literature in this task.

Mental health and wellbeing have previously been considered as the absence of mental illness, however there is a growing evidence base for the two continua model of mental illness and mental health, which posits these concepts as related but distinct (Westhoff & Keyes, 2010). One continuum indicates the extent of presence or absence of mental health, while the other indicates the extent of presence or absence of mental illness, e.g. generalised anxiety, panic disorder or depression (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). This model is supported by findings from a large-scale survey (n = 3,032), where confirmatory factor analyses supported the hypothesis that measures of mental health and mental illness constitute separate but correlated dimensions (Keyes, 2005). Within this model, positive mental health is comprised of three core components:

- Satisfaction with life and feelings of happiness (emotional well-being)
- Positive individual functioning in terms of self-realisation (psychological wellbeing)

- Good relationships with others and positive societal functioning in terms of being of social value (social well-being) (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010)

This model enables those supporting CYP's mental health and wellbeing to examine these three core areas, which encompass both pupils feeling happy but also considers social and self-realisation (fulfilling one's potential) factors.

Researchers have found positive correlations between emotional literacy skills and increased feelings of emotional wellbeing (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, Mckenley, & Hollander, 2002). It is theorised that those who are able to recognise, comprehend and manage their emotions (i.e. are emotionally literate) are able to maintain emotional wellbeing, and thus being emotionally literate contributes to one's emotional wellbeing and mental health (Schutte et al., 2002).

There is a great difficulty and complexity in disentangling these interlinked concepts in the emotional literacy field. In the context of the present study, mental health is comprised of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing, and is understood as related but distinct from mental illness. Both the terms mental health and SEMH will be used to refer to this concept throughout this thesis. Emotional literacy is understood as an individual's skills, including recognising, understanding and appropriately expressing emotions, which can be understood as contributing to an overall state of positive mental health and wellbeing.

2.1.2 The Purpose of the ELSA Project

The ELSA project involves EPs providing training and in-role support for selected 'skilled' TAs in primary mainstream, secondary mainstream and alternative provisions.

Schools are expected to select suitable TAs to work as ELSAs. Burton (2009; 2018) outlines core qualities an ELSA should hold. At the heart of the role is the ability to build strong positive relationships with CYP. To do so, ELSAs should have qualities such as empathy, warmth and authenticity. An ELSA's resourcefulness, ability to work autonomously and organisational skills are also noted. Burton (2018) highlights the importance of an ELSA's own resilience, and their ability to cope with the emotional impact of information young people share with them. This indicates that a highly skilled TA with specific qualities is needed to effectively act as an ELSA.

The ELSA project can be considered in the context of TA deployment research. Blatchford et al. (2015) found that although TAs reduce teacher workload, pupils receiving the most support from TAs made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no TA support (Blatchford et al., 2015). A proposed explanation of these results is that TAs often are deployed in a direct teaching role, which acts as an alternative to teacher time (Blatchford et al., 2015). As TAs often do not have training for their role, those with the highest levels of need are most often taught by those whom are the least qualified. The ELSA project may be similarly critiqued for extending this practice, that is, those with the highest level of need who are likely to be emotionally vulnerable, are being supported by TAs, those with the lowest qualifications. Burton (2018) emphasises the importance of highly skilled TAs training to be ELSAs, however this does not fully addresses this issue. It is also important that ELSAs have a strong management and support network in ensuring best practice in their work, both through EP supervision but also from an ELSA Line Manager within their school environment. Nevertheless, every school context is different, and there is very little research into the implementation of the ELSA project and what this support looks like for ELSAs within their school environment.

2.1.3 The Nature of the ELSA Training

In its original form, the ELSA training comprised five full days of training. The original curriculum in the training manual (Burton, 2009) is detailed in Table 2.1, with example learning activities listed.

Table 2.1 Original ELSA Training Curriculum with Example Learning Activities

Day Number	Topics Covered	Example Learning Activities
Day 1	• Emotional Literacy in Schools • Raising Emotional Literacy	• Introduction and teaching of psychological foundations (e.g. emotional intelligence (Salovey and Mayer, 1990)). • ELSAs complete the 'EQ self-test' to assess their own emotional competencies.
Day 2	• Self-esteem • Active Listening and Communication Skills	• Introduction to the term self-concept (Borba, 1989). • Small group discussions of how a child with a low sense of security (i.e. feeling of safety) would present. • Discussing the features of active listening (e.g. clarifying, restating), and opportunity for ELSAs to practice these skills together.
Day 3	• Understanding and Managing Anger • Working with Puppets	• Exploring the 'Firework Model' and 'Assault Cycle' as ways of explaining anger arousal in CYP.
Day 4	• Social Skills Training • Introduction to Autism	• ELSAs have the opportunity to have a conversation in pairs using only gestures. • Introduction to research around autism, and use of strategies (e.g. social stories). • ELSAs create their own social story.
Day 5	• Friendship Skills and Therapeutic Stories	• Teaching about the Circle of Friends intervention.
Supplementary Training	• Bereavement and Loss	• Teaching relevant models, e.g. upward spiral of grief.

Most LAs offering the ELSA project have now extended the training to involve six full days (Burton, 2018), including the initially supplementary 'Bereavement and Loss' as a day of training. Ongoing adaptations are also made to the training within LA EPS contexts, in order to adapt to ongoing feedback from the sessions.

The training days are led by at least two EPs and are spaced two to four weeks apart. The training involves both teaching psychological theory and practical guidance on the ELSA role. The training adopts both a didactic and experiential learning model. Within this approach, the EP facilitators give information about psychological theory and practice, but also provide the opportunity for the ELSAs to apply their experiences in school to the concepts they are learning. Kolb (2014) emphasises the importance of experiential learning in an adult learning model; this

involves a cycle where learners reflect on their experience, understand new concepts and test their knowledge in new situations. The ELSA training appears to adhere to this model.

Following completion of the training days, ELSAs receive regular ongoing group supervision led by an EP to support their practice. The supervision occurs twice per school term in groups of up to eight ELSAs, allowing two hours per session (Burton, 2018). The supervision provides opportunities for EP-led guidance and reflection on the ELSAs' casework, including relating the cases to psychological theory. ELSAs are also expected to have a Line Manager in school to support their practice (Burton, 2018). Research has examined ELSAs' views of the challenges and strengths of supervision received (Osborne & Burton, 2014) (see section 2.2 and Appendix 1 for findings and critique). However, no research has yet examined how supported ELSAs feel within their school context. ELSAs' experiences of within-school support are likely to vary depending on their school context and the practices in place, such as their experiences with their Line Manager as well as more informal support from their colleagues. Burton (2018) has emphasised that ELSA intervention work can be emotionally challenging for ELSAs themselves, therefore it is important that research examines the factors that facilitate or act as barriers for ELSAs feeling supported within their school context.

2.1.4 ELSA Practices and Resources

ELSAs run interventions with identified young people in their schools. ELSAs are expected to deliver pupil support at least one day each week, and to have planning time built into their weekly timetable (Burton, 2018). ELSAs most commonly run individual sessions with pupils, although ELSAs can also complete work with a small group of pupils. Burton (2018) explains that there needs to be a clear rationale for choosing the medium of group work, as often SLT can drive for working as a group as this appears more cost effective and more pupils can be seen. However, ELSAs need to consider whether group or individual work would be most beneficial for meeting the aims of the intervention. In working as a group, high demands may be put on the ELSA and limit the ELSA's ability to respond to individual issues.

Pupils tend to be referred to the intervention by members of staff in school, such as class teachers (Burton, 2018). A robust referral process is essential, where

the needs of the young person are discussed with the referring staff member, the ELSA and Line Manager in an initial planning meeting (Burton, 2018). Burton (2018, p51-52) provides an initial planning meeting document which can be used. There are potential limitations to the referral process. According to Burton (2018), school staff, including teachers and SLT, often do not fully understand the nature of the programme in school – expecting the intervention will 'fix' the young persons' behaviour or difficulties, as opposed to building emotional literacy and resilience. As members of staff are referring young people into the programme, their misunderstanding could be influencing who they are referring in and pull into question the appropriateness of the intervention for the children they are referring. Furthermore, research has widely emphasised difficulties with high teacher workload. The Teacher Workload Survey (DfE, 2016) found that 93% of teachers in their survey stated that workload in their school is a 'fairly serious problem'. The average working hours for all classroom teachers and middle leaders across the schools participating in the survey was 54.4 hours. A large sample of teachers (n = 3,186) across a wide demographic and school characteristics completed this survey, providing a highly representative sample. The recommended referral process involves class teachers attending an initial planning meeting to discuss their concerns, however the reality and possibility of this may be restricted by the teacher's workload and other commitments. There is no current research available on the ELSA referral process. It would be beneficial for research to examine what the referral process looks like in practice, who is referring in and their reasons for referral.

It is recommended that ELSA interventions consist of approximately 6-10 weekly, 30-minute to 1-hour sessions (Burton, 2009, 2018). Use of SMART (small, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited) targets are essential in this time-limited intervention (Burton, 2018). Burton (2018) emphasises the importance of endings, including signalling endings a few weeks in advance so the pupil is prepared. Some informal contact may continue to enable gradual withdrawal from support.

Following the setting of a SMART target, the ELSA and young person work through different activities in line with the programme aims (Burton, 2018). Although ELSAs may draft an intervention structure, detailing key elements to be covered,

Burton (2018) recommends that planning is flexible so that sessions can be responsive to things that arose in a previous session. ELSAs are advised to set an objective for each intervention session (e.g. 'to practise turn-taking' or 'to look at the relationships between thoughts, feelings and behaviour') (Burton, 2018). ELSA intervention sessions contain a variety of activities, which are recommended to include: an initial warm-up (e.g. how the child is that day, how their week has gone), a brief recap of the previous session, outlining the objective for the current session, an experiential learning activity, a summary of the main points learned and the possibility of the ending with a neutral activity (Burton, 2018). The ELSA has a high degree of responsibility and autonomy in selecting appropriate resources and activities to use within the intervention itself. This means the intervention is individualised and will consist of different activities for different young people who access the sessions. Burton (2018) outlines potential resources ELSAs could use in practice to facilitate the conversations they have with CYP. Examples include:

- The 'Life Road' task, where CYP draw their life as a road and note their thoughts and feelings.
- Drawing feelings, where the pupil is asked to draw a feeling, e.g. frightened, and what it looks like for them.
- Use of a feelings graph, where the pupil draws on a bar graph how they feel at home and school.
- Use of puppets or miniatures, which the pupil may use to make a scene or tell a story, e.g. about their family.
- Published resources, such as the Strengths Cards or Feelings Cards.

In addition to the above resources, ELSAs can also draw upon resources on two websites. The ELSA Network (Burton, 2017) provides documents, such as sample planning documents or supervision documents, as well as specific free resources classified by areas the ELSA is working in including: Emotions, Anger and Stress Management, Self-esteem, Loss and Separation and Social Skills. The ELSA Network (Burton, 2017) is the official website, and referenced in the ELSA literature. The ELSA Support (2019) website on the other hand was developed due to "*a real lack of ELSA resources*" (ELSA Support, 2019, "About us", para 1). This website outlines a range of free and for purchase resources which vary by both the topic

areas and ages. It is apparent that ELSAs have a high degree of responsibility in locating appropriate resources for their work.

According to Burton (2009), getting the best out of the ELSA project involves the whole school, including school staff understanding the role. Some teachers and SLT can fail to properly understand the nature and purpose of the intervention, for example they can view the ELSA as being able to 'fix' all the child's needs or a teacher may mistakenly view individual time with ELSA as rewarding negative behaviour. SLT's misunderstanding the role can lead to ELSAs being asked to work outside their level of competence, such as helping resolve more serious difficulties such as eating disorders or self-harming behaviours (Burton, 2009). Burton (2018) emphasises the need for ELSAs to work within the appropriate professional remit for their level of training. However, ELSAs may have trouble in challenging these decisions due to their status in the staff hierarchy.

There are other school factors which support the efficacy of the intervention including:

- Wider staff knowing about and supporting intervention work,
- ELSAs receiving relevant background information about the young person from school staff (e.g. class teacher),
- Opportunities for ELSA liaison with the class teacher to discuss progress,
- Protected time for ELSA planning and delivery of structured block sessions, as well as protected time to attend supervision,
- A consistent private space for ELSAs to work in which is free from interruptions,
- Pupils being able to attend their sessions regularly,
- Clear role boundaries between ELSA work and the ELSA's other roles in the school (e.g. as a classroom TA),
- The ELSA role not having behaviour management responsibilities,
- ELSAs having time to communicate with parents or carers (Burton, 2018).

Therefore, Burton (2018) emphasises the importance of how this intervention is implemented, including the importance of protected time in liaising with key figures (staff, parents), protection of ELSA space and wider staff awareness and support of the intervention. The title of this resource itself is 'Excellent ELSAs' (Burton, 2018),

which indicates that some ELSAs can be more or less excellent depending on whether they are following the advice provided in this book, again highlighting the importance of how the intervention is implemented.

Although Burton (2018) emphasises the importance of how the project is implemented within a school system, it is not clear what research this is based upon. Burton (2018, p2) explains the book gathers the "*lessons learned*" since the ELSA manual was published in 2009 to optimise the impact of the intervention. As research is not cited within this book, it could be that these lessons are learnt from her role in leading and supervising the intervention as opposed to a robust study which examines the implementation of this intervention. As the researcher has not located any studies which examine the implementation of the ELSA project within primary school settings, a research project which examines this gap in the literature is needed.

2.1.5 Theoretical Foundations of the ELSA Project

Interventions which aim to develop SEMH in schools tend to be underpinned by a psychological approach or theory. For example, Nurture Groups are a psychosocial intervention, underpinned by attachment theory (Boxall, 2002). Attachment theory states that CYP who consistently experience caregivers as providing responsive comfort, protection and connection when needed, as well as a secure base from which they can explore from, will develop a secure attachment. Those CYP who are sensitively responded to, that is the caregiver has the ability to perceive, accurately interpret and appropriately respond to the child's signals, are more likely to develop an internal working model of others as trustworthy and of themselves as worthy of care (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1988). Nurture Groups are classes of 6-12 pupils, run by members of staff trained in nurture interventions. This intervention involves pupils starting their day in their mainstream class, and then being picked up by the staff and taken to the nurture group – a hybrid of home and school (Boxall, 2002). Activities in the group include curriculum activities, as well as emotional literacy sessions, news sharing and nurture breakfast. Targets for each student are devised using the Boxall Profile, an assessment of social, emotional and behavioural functioning. When the appropriate targets are met, the student is reintegrated back into mainstream class, which

generally takes between one and four terms (Nurture UK, n.d.). Nurture groups are based on immersing pupils in an accepting and warm environment that helps to replace missing or distorted early attachment experiences, enabling pupils to develop secure supportive attachments with teachers (Boxall, 2002). It is clear in this instance how the underpinning psychological theory informs the nature and aims of the intervention.

In comparison, the ELSA project does not appear to be underpinned by one specific psychological approach or theory. Instead, the training manual (Burton, 2009) makes explicit reference to a range of underlying principles and theories, which are outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 ELSA Theoretical Underpinnings

Underpinning ELSA Theory or Approach	Important Elements Relevant to ELSAs
Emotional Intelligence (Salovey and Mayer, 1990), Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and Emotional Literacy (Sharp, 2001)	• Intelligence is more than cognitive ability, importance of CYP understanding emotions and managing them effectively • ELSAs supporting CYP in recognising emotions, developing emotional vocabulary and self-regulation in anger management (Burton, 2009)
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970)	• CYP's need for safety, belonging and security precedes positive self-esteem and learning potential
Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)	• Children learn behaviour from the models around them, effective role of ELSA in modelling positive ways of being (Burton, 2009)
Self-Concept and Building Blocks of Self-Esteem (Borba, 1989)	• Self-concept is the umbrella term which incorporates self-image (ideas we have about our appearance, abilities and attributes), ideal-self (the picture we build of how we ought to be) and self-esteem (our evaluation of the self in relation to the ideal-self) • Supporting CYP's self-concept though the building blocks of self-esteem, e.g. ensuring CYP feel safe and at ease, are self-aware and have a sense of belonging (Burton, 2009)
Attachment (Bowlby, 1988)	• Although not cited in the original training manual (Burton, 2009), attachment theory has been included in several LA updates and amendments to the training • This theory emphasises the importance of the relationship between the ELSA and young person, ensuring the CYP receive responsive support and attention, and feel they belong, are safe and are liked in ELSA sessions. This contributes to CYP having a positive view of themselves.

A challenge with this more fragmented framework, which draws on a range of underlying theories and approaches, is that we have little clarity on the mechanisms that may explain the potential effectiveness of the ELSA project. Effectiveness research then may face a challenge in distilling down what element of the ELSA project makes the difference for a child in receipt of this intervention, for example is it the relationship with the adult (attachment theory), the ELSA modelling a calm approach (social learning theory) or the child understanding emotional vocabulary (emotional literacy theory)? Burton may argue all the factors in Table 2.2 are relevant

to the efficacy of the intervention, but there is nothing to suggest that it is not just one of these elements. In addition, given the wide-ranging theoretical foundations, it is not clear what a whole-school adoption of ELSA principles would look like – what key theory or approach should schools be emphasising when adopting this intervention at a whole-school level? Therefore, it appears the theoretical foundations of the ELSA project are wide-ranging, which may act as a barrier both in terms of evaluating the efficacy of the intervention and in what a whole-school adoption of ELSA principles should look like.

2.2 Systematic Literature Review

A systematic review of the ELSA literature was completed, which aimed to review studies which examine the ELSA intervention.

2.2.1 Search Strategy

Online databases including Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index and OpenDissertations, accessed via EBSCO, and PsycINFO, were searched with a range of search terms (see Table 2.3). These were accessed via the University College London E-Library. Article titles and abstracts were scanned to determine their relevance. Once relevant papers were located, the references within these papers were also scanned to locate any further relevant items. A table of search terms used is presented below.

Table 2.3: Systematic Literature Review Search Items

Main search item	Other terms searched
Emotional Literacy Support Assistant	ELSA, ELSAs
Intervention	Project, training
Teaching Assistant	Learning Support Assistant, TA, LSA
Emotional Literacy	Social and emotional learning, social and emotional competencies, wellbeing, social and emotional mental health

2.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The main inclusion criteria were studies that explored the ELSA intervention. Many other systematic reviews around the ELSA project have needed to extend the search to include social emotional interventions run by TAs more widely (Begley, 2016; Mann, 2014). However, the author judged that as the ELSA literature is a small but growing field, there is sufficient work to examine the ELSA literature alone in the present review. Thus, the main inclusion criteria were studies that explored the ELSA intervention, this could be in terms of examining the effectiveness in a quantitative way or in terms of examining perceptions of the intervention. The main exclusion criteria were those studies which did not include a focus on the ELSA project. The main question asked in this review is broad, and concerns what the existing ELSA literature tells us in terms of both the effectiveness and processes underpinning this intervention.

As all current ELSA research has been conducted in the UK with school-aged pupils (5-16), the research included in this review does not extend outside of this location or age range.

Although systematic reviews often exclude studies which are not peer reviewed, there are currently only four ELSA studies which are peer reviewed (Claridge & Wilding, 2016; Hills, 2016; Krause, Blackwell & Claridge, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014). In order to include a wider range of studies, the search was

expanded to include literature on the online databases cited. The limitations of this are considered.

Twenty-nine evaluation reports were also found on the ELSA Network website (Burton, 2017). Two of these reports have been included in the review (Burton et al., 2010; Burton, Traill & Norgate, 2009). Upon review these two studies included: a background, rationale, research questions, detail of research methods and findings. However, the remaining 26 LA reports were not included in this review. The reports were often very short (2-3 pages) and often consisted of a brief summary of evaluation forms submitted at the end of the ELSA training. Research questions, aims and methods were not outlined, and the lack of detail about the research in these 26 reports was not sufficient to enable a robust review and thus they were not included. There is also potential for bias around research conducted by LAs as many of them concurrently provide ELSA training for schools to buy into.

Thus, only literature available on the online databases cited in addition to the two LA reports highlighted were included in the literature review, including those which were and were not peer reviewed.

2.2.3 Framework

The studies located employed qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approach, and it was judged that different frameworks would be useful in evaluating these. In terms of the wholly qualitative and quantitative work, a step-by-step approach was used to critically appraise the quantitative (Coughlan, Cronin, & Ryan, 2007a) and qualitative research (Coughlan, Cronin, & Ryan, 2007b). In terms of appraising the mixed methods research, Sale and Brazil (2004) examined the literature and did not locate criteria for judging a mixed methods study. Since this time, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) have stated mixed methods work can be appraised in terms of: appropriateness of mixed methods for the research questions, consideration of philosophical assumptions and consideration of consistencies and inconsistencies across the qualitative and quantitative results. Thus, the mixed methods work was critically appraised through the use of Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) broad criteria, and through a combination of the step-by-step qualitative and quantitative critical appraisal criteria (Coughlan el al., 2007a; Coughlan et al., 2007b).

A personal rating of quality ranging from 1-10 (where 10 indicates highest quality and 1 indicates lowest) was ascribed to each study alongside a detailed critique. These ratings were reached by considering the studies in light of the relevant step-by-step critical appraisal criteria (Coughlan el al., 2007a; Coughlan et al., 2007b), and if relevant mixed methods broad criteria (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). For example, Coughlan et al. (2007) outline several criteria for wholly qualitative work, including: ethical considerations (e.g. whether considerations were made and whether participants were fully informed about the nature of the study), data collection (e.g. whether data collection strategies were described) and rigour (e.g. considerations around credibility, dependability or transferability). The rating of quality is described as personal in the sense that it was arrived at by the researcher in light of these considerations.

2.2.4 Systematic Literature Review Results

Eighteen relevant pieces of research were located through the search strategy. However, two of these (Garwood, 2012; Ridley, 2017) were not publicly available – only abstracts as opposed to full texts were available via EBSCO, meaning these studies could not be scrutinised for robustness. For this reason, these two studies were not included in this review. The remaining sixteen studies were included and comprised of unpublished doctoral theses (n = 10), LA Reports (n = 2) and published articles (n = 4).

Six key areas of the research were located: ELSA in the home context, ELSA training, ELSA-EP supervision, ELSA-pupil relationship, ELSA in the secondary school context and impact of ELSA project on pupil wellbeing.

A full table of the review is presented in Appendix 1. Key aspects of the review are discussed below.

2.2.4.1 Key Themes in the Literature

Firstly, ELSA support emerged as a key area in the research literature. Osborne and Burton (2014) aimed to gain the views of ELSAs on the supervision received from the EPS. ELSAs (n = 270) completed a questionnaire to examine their views on supervision. The results indicated that the majority of ELSAs felt their supervision needs were being met, and they felt they had a good relationship with

their supervisors and other group members. Following supervision, they felt better able to support the CYP they work with. Although this research has started to shed light onto ELSAs' experiences of the supervision they receive, supervision is only one aspect of the support ELSAs receive, with much of the support coming from within school, such as from their Line Manager (Burton, 2018). In Rees' study (2016), which examined TA perceptions of their future ELSA role through thematic analysis of focus group data, participant ELSAs voiced concern about lack of support in their schools and loneliness in their roles. This is a potential barrier to ELSA's effective working in school. However, research has not yet examined the nature of support provided for ELSAs within the school environment.

Leighton's (2015) unpublished doctoral thesis examined trainee ELSA experiences of engaging with their school in the ELSA role. Seven trainee ELSAs participated in semi-structured interviews, and five completed reflective journals. Thematic analysis of data revealed that senior management and colleagues often lacked an understanding of the ELSA intervention. This study highlights the importance of wider school awareness, knowledge and understanding of the intervention in school contexts, and how this can impact upon how supported ELSAs feel. However, due to the small opportunistic sample, we cannot be certain there is a lack understanding of the project across staff in all schools which implement the ELSA project. Furthermore, only ELSAs were involved in this study; if members of staff in the participant's schools were also involved, this would have triangulated and better supported the ELSAs' claims about staff knowledge and understanding of the project.

Leighton (2015) also found that one ELSA in the sample had difficulty with referral and prioritising of young people. Conflict between the ELSA and a member of the SLT emerged in this study, concerning which CYP the ELSA should work with. For this ELSA, the final decision about referral was always made by the SLT. This practice appears to stray from Burton's (2018) recommendation that ELSAs are fully involved in discussions and decisions about referral to the intervention. However, only one ELSA in the sample cited this concern, it is unknown whether this is a barrier for ELSAs more generally. An impact study sheds some light on how young people are prioritised for this intervention. Burton et al. (2010) compared pre and post measures of an intervention group who accessed the ELSA intervention and a

control group who were on the waiting list. Interestingly, the group on the waiting list had a lower level of need (according to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Emotional Literacy Checklist for Teachers and Pupils) in comparison to those who accessed the intervention. This indicates schools prioritise those pupils who are perceived to have a higher level of need by teachers and pupils. However, research has yet to examine the nature of the referral process more generally in schools, including how prioritising decisions are made and who is involved in these decisions. Although Burton (2009; 2018) provides advice on how referrals should be made, it is unknown whether this advice is strictly followed in practice.

There is a growing research base in the secondary school context (Begley, 2016; Nicholson-Roberts, 2019). Through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, Nicholson-Roberts (2019) examined how the ELSA project operates within secondary schools. It was found that intervention length within the two schools examined was longer than Burton (2009; 2018) recommends. Nicholson-Roberts (2019) also found several factors which support the operation of the project within the secondary schools examined including: ELSA-pupil relationships, flexibility within the intervention and support from the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and EPs. Attachment and containment were also found to be prominent processes. Although an ELSA is not a typical caregiver as viewed in the original attachment theory, CYP in this study developed secure and responsive relationships with the ELSAs. This enables the ELSAs to hold or 'contain' CYP's difficult feelings and experiences. Containment was conceptualised as initially originating in the mother-child relationship, where the mother holds and helps the child process negative events into digestible experiences (Bion, 1961). This research indicates the ELSA can act as a containing attachment figure. One might extend the application of containment to the importance of an ELSA support network. According to the 'Container and Contained' model, in order for an individual to provide containment, they themselves must feel a sense of emotional security and containment (Bion, 1985). In the context of teachers, it has been emphasised feeling uncontained can have a detrimental impact on their ability to engage in work:

> *It seems an evident conclusion that where teachers feel unsupported and uncontained they will be less likely to engage in their work effectively (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015, p31).*

Therefore, we may speculate that for ELSAs to effectively engage in work, they need to feel adequately contained. This might be through within-school support networks or from EP supervision. However very little research has yet to examine what the ELSA support network within the school context looks like.

Nicholson-Roberts (2019) also identified challenges in the operation of the ELSA project in the secondary schools. These challenges included: difficulty developing whole-school understanding of pupils' SEMH needs, limited ELSA-parent and ELSA-teacher communication, difficult emotional effects on ELSAs and negative effects for pupils, including the risk of pupil dependency on their ELSA. Begley's (2016) work supported Nicholson-Roberts' (2019) finding that ELSAs can experience difficult emotional effects of ELSA work, due to the high level of empathy required in this role. This study sheds light on key facilitators and barriers of the implementation of the ELSA project in secondary settings. This study may have been enhanced with the inclusion of EPs as stakeholders in the semi-structured interviews. Burton (2018) emphasises the role of both the school and supervisory EP in the implementation of the ELSA project, and so their views could highlighted further challenges and facilitators to the operation of the project. Furthermore, this study may have benefitted from the inclusion of ELSA projects at different stages, e.g. a school with a recently trained ELSA and a school which has had ELSA in place for a longer period of time, to consider the potential impact of implementation stages (i.e. how long the intervention has been in place for) (Kelly, 2012) on the operation of the intervention. There is no research which has yet examined how the project operates within the primary context, which is a clear gap in the literature.

Only five studies have been located which examine the impact of the intervention on pupil wellbeing using quantitative measures (Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2010; Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; Mann, 2014). Mann (2014) employed a mixed methods design, which assessed pre and post measures of the Emotional Literacy Checklist and Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) and thematic analysis of focus group and questionnaire data from ELSAs. This study was not able to determine whether the ELSA project had an impact on the pupils' wellbeing due to the small sample size, however the thematic analysis suggests that participants perceived the intervention to be of value. Some barriers of the project were also raised from the focus group data, for example an ELSA voiced concern

that pupils receiving too much ELSA time may become dependent on their ELSA. However only one ELSA voiced this in the focus group data so it is not known whether this is a difficulty widely encountered in this intervention. Burton et al. (2010), also employed pre- and post- intervention measures with an ELSA and control group. Across the teacher measures (SDQ and Emotional Literacy Checklist), there was a significant improvement for the intervention group, while significant differences were not found in the control group. In the pupil rated emotional literacy checklist, no significant changes were found in either control or intervention group. The authors suggest lack of significance in pupil self-report data could be due to young people considering their emotional literacy across home and school, whereas teachers are basing their reports on only school-based observations. This indicates the importance of context in the efficacy of this intervention.

There are challenges in measuring the impact of the ELSA intervention on pupil wellbeing in a broader sense. Researchers argue for the complexity and depth of experience in interventions around wellbeing (Coppock, 2007), and thus the limitation of using quantitative measures to assess this complex experience. A further challenge of measuring the impact of wellbeing is summarised by Humphrey (2013). He explains that implementation is a key feature in the effectiveness in social emotional learning programmes. Implementation concerns how an intervention is enacted in a school setting. Key influential aspects for implementation include: staff attitudes, time, resources and support from school leadership. Therefore, it is important to consider how different social emotional learning programmes, such as the ELSA project, are implemented before generalising from the evaluation of one programme to support or refute a different implementation in another school.

The importance of the implementation of the ELSA project is apparent in the literature. Factors which facilitate or act as barriers to the implementation of the project have emerged out of the existing literature. These include: the need for home-school communication (Claridge & Wilding, 2016), loneliness in the role (Rees, 2016), lack of understanding of emotional literacy and the intervention from colleagues and SLT (Leighton, 2015), protected time in school (Grahamslaw, 2010), time constraints of the role (Mann, 2014), a whole school understanding of pupils' SEMH needs, the need for support from the ELSA Line Manager and ELSA-teacher communication (Nicholson-Roberts, 2019). Therefore the current literature indicates

that factors related to the implementation of the ELSA project, including the support systems, wider staff understanding the intervention and the resources available, are essential to the effectiveness of the intervention. However, no research has yet deliberately examined the implementation of the project in the primary context.

2.2.4.2 Summary of Systematic Literature Review

It is apparent from the table in Appendix 1 that the majority of the research in the field is unpublished work. Only four published peer reviewed studies (Claridge & Wilding, 2016; Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014) were located. The remaining studies are unpublished dissertations and LA reports. The rigour of the peer review process often attests to the quality of research. However, as most of the ELSA research base is unpublished, some caution may be required when considering the value and contribution of the unpublished work.

A key aspect which has arisen out of the literature is that there is little research into the way schools are implementing the ELSA project in practice, and how it is organised and integrated into the school context. This gap in the literature is particularly apparent in the primary school context. Although guidance is provided around ELSA intervention referrals and endings (Burton 2009; 2018), very limited research outlines what this looks like in practice. In addition, although research has highlighted that ELSAs can feel lonely in their role (Rees, 2016), limited research has examined what processes and practices act as facilitators and barriers to ELSAs feeling supported in school. Research has also not yet explored the role of wider staff knowledge and understanding of the ELSA intervention.

2.3 The Importance of Understanding Implementation

2.3.1 What is Implementation?

Implementation concerns the process by which an intervention is put into practice (Humphrey, 2013). It concerns what an intervention consists of when it is delivered in a school setting (Durlak & Dupre, 2008), and thus concerns the enactment of an intervention by school staff.

Research considers aspects of implementation, such as fidelity (the extent to which critical components of a programme are present when enacted in a school),

the number of sessions delivered and participant reach (which CYP in school access the intervention). Research also considers what factors influence these aspects of implementation, examining the optimal conditions for effective implementation. These might be aspects such as staff awareness, resources and support from SLT (Humphrey, 2013). This includes understanding the behaviour of professionals and other stakeholders as a key variable in implementation (Foreman et al., 2013).

2.3.2 Why is Research on Implementation Essential?

The way an SEMH intervention is rolled out in a real-world setting influences whether positive outcomes are achieved from the intervention (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Humphrey, 2013). For this reason, researchers call for increased monitoring of implementation practice (Kelly, 2012; Lendrum & Humphrey, 2012)

In a review of over 500 studies in the literature, Durlak and DuPre (2008) found that implementation links to the outcomes obtained. The review included both qualitative and quantitative studies which examined the influence of implementation on intervention outcomes. The review spanned interventions for CYP in the areas of: physical health and development, academic performance, drug use and SEMH interventions. The results indicated that good implementation (in terms of aspects such as fidelity, number of sessions, participant reach, etc.) increases the chance of programme success, with those well-implemented programmes achieving greater effect sizes for participants in comparison to poorly implemented programmes. This finding offers strong support for the conclusion that implementation influences outcomes for the programmes considered in this study. We can potentially extend this conclusion to the ELSA project, indicating that implementation will influence the outcomes for the CYP who access the intervention. However, the ELSA project is not included in Durlak and DuPre's (2008) study. Furthermore, this study considered a range of health promotion programmes for children and adolescents, of which SEMH programmes were only a small part of the studies included in this review. Therefore, extending these conclusions to the ELSA project can only be tentative at this stage.

Humphrey (2013) explains that interventions are rarely implemented as designed. Durlak and DuPre (2008) found that although intervention fidelity is important for intervention success, positive results could be achieved with around

60–80 per cent implementation fidelity. As limited research has examined the implementation of the ELSA project, it is not known what aspects of the project schools may be adapting. Nicholson-Roberts (2019) sheds some light on this and found that in secondary schools CYP were in receipt of the ELSA intervention for a longer period than the 6-10 weeks as outlined by Burton (2009). The schools involved in this study found that running the intervention for longer (approx. 12 weeks) enabled more beneficial ELSA working, including a better opportunity to build the ELSA-pupil relationship, make up for missed sessions (e.g. due to pupil illness) as well as flexibly adapting to changes (e.g. significant change in pupil life during course of intervention such as bereavement). No research has yet examined whether a similar adaptation of the intervention occurs within the primary context. This is particularly pertinent given that the intervention was first designed for primary schools (Burton, 2009), meaning generally that more primary ELSAs train in comparison to secondary ELSAs. In addition, the primary school context is a wholly different system with different class set-ups, hierarchy and differing pupil needs. Therefore, further research into this area is needed, in particular within the primary context.

Carroll and Hurry's (2018) work further supports the importance of implementation. In a scoping review of the 168 published research articles, the researchers explored the education provision of secondary pupils with SEMH needs. The provision for this pupil population spanned across the universal, individual and group level. The authors found that underpinning all successful programmes in the review was a positive approach adopted by teachers and school leaders. This finding emphasises the importance of implementation in the efficacy of SEMH interventions. Humphrey's (2013) work supports this, explaining the importance of staff awareness and leadership support when implementing an intervention. Other research highlights similar factors including the importance of school staff having a shared vision (Durlak & DuPre, 2008), staff being committed and engaged in the intervention (Greenberg et al., 2005) and the importance of leadership support (Humphrey, 2013). In the Education Endowment Foundation guidance on intervention implementation, the importance of support from leadership and the school climate is also emphasised (Sharples, Albers & Fraser, 2018). Carroll and Hurry's (2008) work indicates the importance of these implementation factors in the efficacy of SEMH

interventions. Although this study focused on secondary provision, we can tentatively extend this conclusion to primary SEMH interventions such as the ELSA project.

In addition to the relevance of implementation to positive intervention outcomes, these studies play a key explanatory role in the research base. Authors argue that research into implementation provides explanation for why a particular programme works (Lendrum & Humphrey, 2013). Implementation research explores what makes interventions work in real world contexts, which is particularly relevant in schools where the context is intricate and unpredictable (Kelly, 2012). This understanding is essential in explaining why the implementation is (or is not) leading to positive outcomes (Humphrey, 2013). As there is no research into the implementation of the ELSA intervention within the primary context, it appears research is needed in order to understand how the intervention is implemented within school settings.

The above research indicates that interventions which are implemented well lead to more positive outcomes for CYP. It is now important to explore further what best practice implementation would involve.

2.3.3 What is Best Practice in Intervention Implementation?

Best practice implementation research considers elements of implementation, as well as the optimal conditions for effective implementation within a school context.

2.3.3.1 Elements of Implementation

Research indicates that each of the different aspects of implementation discussed below, influence the outcomes of SEMH interventions within schools (Humphrey, 2013).

Firstly, fidelity concerns the extent to which critical components of an intended programme are present when the programme is enacted (Kelly, 2012). For this to be the case, researchers need to clarify what the core intervention components are. Burton (2009; 2018) outlines several aspects of the ELSA intervention, however it is not clear what aspects are 'critical' for the intervention's success. This is particularly problematic given that the ELSA project is based on a range of theories and approaches, as opposed to one underlying theory. Lendrum and Humphrey (2008)

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explain these could be examined in efficacy and effectiveness trials, however the authors acknowledge that most school-based interventions developed in the UK do not pass through this process as they are time-consuming and costly. Hence programmes like ELSA are not fully assessed before they go to scale. In addition, it can be useful for professionals within the schools to adapt interventions for practical and professional reasons. It has been found that schools adapting interventions at a 'surface' level, which include minor changes such as adapting language to suit the target audience, can promote positive outcomes for students (Humphrey, 2013). It is not known the extent to which the ELSA intervention is adapted within school contexts.

The number of sessions delivered is another important implementation aspect to consider (Humphrey, 2013). The research indicates that those schools which implement an intervention with the required number of sessions achieve better outcomes than those who do not (Humphrey, 2013). If extended to ELSA, this could indicate that those schools who deliver the prescribed number of sessions (6-10 sessions) (Burton, 2018) would achieve better outcomes than those who do not. However, Burton's (2018) guidance is not based on specific research, and so there is little evidence why this is the ideal number of sessions. Schools may adapt the length of sessions and achieve better outcomes as a result. There is very limited research into the typical number of ELSA sessions which schools implement, with no research examining this in the primary context.

Another element of implementation is participant reach. This concerns which pupils access an intervention in school (Humphrey, 2013), which is an important consideration when thinking about the equality of access in interventions. The ELSA project is designed to support pupils with a wide range of needs, however there is no current research into how the referral process is implemented in school contexts, including whether certain pupil needs may be prioritised for this intervention over others. There is a clear need to examine this gap in the literature.

2.3.3.2 Optimal Conditions for Effective Implementation

It has been found that school staff implement SEMH interventions with different levels of fidelity, participant reach, etc. (Humphrey, 2013). It is not surprising

then that a second area of implementation research concerns why this variation occurs, and thus examines the optimal conditions for effective implementation.

Durlak and DuPre (2008), Forman et al. (2009) and Greenberg et al. (2005) have completed work in this field, examining conditions which influence intervention implementation. Their work has been synthesised by Humphrey (2013), who outlines key domains which influence implementation variation in schools including:

- Preplanning and foundations
- Implementation support system
- Implementation environment

Humphrey (2013) firstly emphasises the importance of the pre-planning and foundations in place prior to the adoption of an SEMH intervention in a school. This includes school staff being aware and committed to the intervention. No current research has examined whether school staff are generally aware, committed and engaged in the ELSA project in school contexts.

The implementation support system and environment emphasise the importance of supportive factors for those delivering the intervention (Humphrey, 2013), which have been found to facilitate effective implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Although there is some research into external support for ELSAs (Osborne & Burton, 2014), there is no current research into what this support may look like within the school context. The implementation environment also concerns the ethos and climate of the school in which the intervention is being implemented. This is again an area which research has not yet examined in relation to the ELSA project. However, research has linked these factors to effective implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman et al., 2009; Greenberg et al., 2005).

The primary task is a potentially important concept when considering optimal conditions for effective implementation in a school environment. A primary task is the task an institution must perform if it is to survive (Jennings & Kennedy, 1996). However, there can be discrepancies between what an organisation or group claims it sets out to do and what is actually happening, as people within organisations can pursue different kinds of primary tasks. The normative primary task is the formal or official task, the operationalisation of the broad aims of the organisation. The existential primary task is the task people within schools believe they are carrying

out, i.e. the interpretation they put on their roles. The phenomenal primary task is the task that people may not be consciously aware of, and it can be inferred from people's behaviour (Roberts, 1994).

The notion of the primary task is relevant to both the whole school and sub-systems within a school:

> *To be personally effective in our work roles, we need to be clear about the task we have to do; to be able to mobilize sufficient resources, internal and external, to achieve it; and to have some understanding of how our own task relates both to the task of the system in which we are working and to the task of the institution as a whole* (Roberts, 1994, p30)

It appears this notion applies to both the ELSA intervention and the whole-school climate. First, the ELSA intervention itself can be understood as a sub-system within a school environment, which itself has a primary task. This might be understood through an open system model (Roberts, 1994), where pupils with emotional literacy needs 'enter' the system, receive a weekly targeted ELSA intervention for 6-10 weeks, and the 'output' is the pupil with the SMART target set having been met. Those entrenched within the ELSA project sub-system, e.g. ELSA and ELSA Line Manager, will likely have a clear definition of the ELSA project's primary task. However, it will also be important that other staff in school are aware of the primary task of the intervention and what is needed from them to achieve the task, e.g. the importance of the class teacher role in ELSA referrals. If the primary task is not shared with staff, ill-defined or not feasible, then this provides:

> *Little guidance to staff or managers about what they should be doing, or how to do it, or whether they are doing it effectively* (Roberts, 1994, p30)

Lack of task definition or feasibility can lead to anti-task activity as a defence against anxiety (Roberts, 1994). This conceptualisation may be relevant to school staff's understanding of their role in relation to ELSA project implementation. Secondly, the whole-school primary task may also be relevant in understanding the implementation environment. It is difficult for schools to define their primary task, due to the wide-ranging functions of schools (Roberts, 1994). However, as Roberts (1994) emphasises, institutions work most effectively when staff understand how sub-systems (i.e. the ELSA project) fit into the task institution as a whole. Therefore, in

light of this, we might expect that the ELSA project functions more effectively where there is a clear link between the project's primary task (i.e. improving emotional literacy skills) and the institution's primary task as a whole, e.g. where there is a mental health ethos. However, research has yet to examine this connection, and it is only theoretical at this stage.

Implementation stages are another arguably essential factor in considering the barriers to effective implementation. This is because the stage of implementation a school is within will influence the barriers it faces. Kelly (2012) explains that implementing an intervention is a process which involves 6 stages that schools move through:

1. Exploration and adoption
2. Installation
3. Initial implementation
4. Full implementation
5. Sustainability
6. Innovation

Kelly (2012) explains the activities conducted in each stage differ. In the exploration and adoption stage, schools develop staff awareness to improve commitment and understanding of the programme. In the installation stage, the school have decided to adopt the programme. The school are in the process of installing the implementation infrastructure (e.g. attending training), changing policy and developing resources. Leadership support in this phase is essential to maintain focus on implementing the intervention with quality. During the initial implementation stage, pupils first access the new intervention. This is a time of vulnerability because staff may feel new to their role and have doubts about the intervention decision. Full implementation occurs once the new skills, operating procedures, data systems, communication links and new culture are integrated into the school. Sustainability involves financially sustaining the effective intervention. Innovation involves adapting the intervention to overcome intervention challenges. Researchers support this model, explaining that implementation is a process not an event, and should be treated so within the research base (Sharples et al., 2018).

It could be that the barriers schools face will vary at different stages of implementation, as different activities are conducted in each stage. Considering Humphrey's (2013) implementation factors, it appears certain aspects will be more relevant in different stages of implementation. For example, the implementation support system including leadership support, will be particularly relevant during the installation phase when individuals may have doubts and lack confidence in their new roles and in the new systems being developed. While this aspect may not be as much of a challenge once the intervention is in the full implementation phase. Therefore, research into the implementation of intervention may benefit from examining schools at different stages of implementation, to examine the optimal conditions within each implementation stage.

2.4 Focus of the Present Study and Research Questions

Given the findings from the literature review, it appears that relatively little is known about the implementation of the ELSA intervention in primary schools. In section 2.3, the importance of implementation research for SEMH interventions in school settings was highlighted. Implementation research is essential because the way interventions are implemented (e.g. fidelity, participant reach), in addition to the conditions under which they are implemented (e.g. what pre-planning and foundations are in place, the implementation environment and the implementation support system), have been linked to the outcomes of interventions (Humphrey, 2013). This research also plays an explanatory role, by identifying the factors that may facilitate the workings of an intervention (Lendrum & Humphrey, 2013). Therefore, implementation research is essential in developing our understanding of how best to support CYP with SEMH needs. However, very little is known about how the ELSA project is implemented in practice.

Specific gaps in the literature are presented in Table 2.4, and are linked to the implementation factors discussed in section 2.3 (Humphrey; 2013).

Table 2.4: Implementation Factors and Corresponding Gaps in the ELSA Research

Implementation Factor	ELSA Research Gap
Number of sessions	• How many ELSA sessions are typically run in primary schools?
Participant Reach	• What young people are prioritised for this intervention? • How are these decisions made?
Fidelity	• What does the referral process look like in practice? • What does stopping the intervention look like in practice?
Pre-Planning and Foundations	• Are members of staff aware of the ELSA intervention in school? • Are staff engaged with the ELSA intervention in school?
Implementation Support System	• What support is available for ELSAs within the school system?
Implementation Environment	• How does the school ethos and system act as a facilitator and barrier for the intervention?
Implementation Stages	• How do the facilitators and barriers for ELSA implementation differ across the different stages of implementation?

As indicated in the above table, there are several gaps in the ELSA literature. It is not known how many intervention sessions are typically run in primary settings. With regards to participant reach, there is no current research in the field which outlines how prioritising decisions are made. However, this is essential with regards to ensuring equality of access to the intervention. Considering fidelity, Burton (2009; 2019) provides guidance around how the intervention should be implemented in school, e.g. around who is involved in the referral process and what 'stopping' the intervention ideally looks like in practice. However very limited research has been located which outlines what these processes look like in schools, including whether practices have high fidelity with the manual or are adapted. No current research has

yet examined the referral process in practice. With regards to pre-planning and foundations, research indicates the importance of staff awareness, commitment and engagement with the intervention (Humphrey, 2013). Leighton (2015) has highlighted that colleagues and senior management in school can lack an understanding of the ELSA intervention, however due to several limitations outlined in Leighton's (2015) work (see Appendix 1), it is not known whether this challenge occurs in other school settings. With regards to ELSA support, research has examined the support provided outside of school (Osborne & Burton, 2014). Although some work indicates that ELSAs may feel lonely in their role (Rees, 2016), there is limited research which examines the nature of support provided for ELSAs within the primary school environment. Several research studies have highlighted potential facilitators and barriers to schools introducing this intervention including: lack of wider-staff and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) understanding of the intervention (Leighton, 2015), challenges ensuring protected ELSA time (Grahamslaw, 2010), time constraints of the role (Mann, 2014), the importance of whole-school understanding of pupils' SEMH needs and ELSA-teacher communication (Nicholson-Roberts, 2019). However, while these factors have emerged out of the literature, no research has yet deliberately examined the implementation environment in primary schools. Lastly, research indicates that implementation is a process with several stages as opposed to a single event (Kelly, 2012). We can tentatively argue that the facilitators and barriers for implementation will vary depending on the stage of implementation a school is in. However, research has not yet examined the facilitators and barriers across different stages of implementation.

This study therefore aims to examine the implementation of the ELSA project in primary school contexts, including the factors that act as facilitators and barriers for effectively implementing this intervention.

2.4.1 Research Questions

The main research questions for this thesis will be:

1. How is the ELSA project implemented in primary school settings?
2. What are the facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of the ELSA project in primary schools at different stages of implementation?

There are a range of sub-questions:

a. What is the nature of the support provided for ELSAs within the school environment?
b. What is the nature of the referral process of young people to the ELSA intervention?
c. What does finishing an ELSA intervention look like in practice?
d. To what extent do staff within ELSA project schools have knowledge and understanding of the ELSA intervention?
e. To what extent does the school ethos and school system act as a facilitator or barrier to the ELSA intervention?
f. How do the facilitators and barriers for ELSA project implementation differ across the different stages of implementation?

Sub-question (a) aims to examine the support ELSAs receive within the school environment, including how supported they feel in their role. The training manual (Burton, 2009) indicates ELSAs have a Line Manager in school, and this research will examine the nature of support this role provides in addition to other more informal means of support such as relationships with colleagues. Sub-question (b) aims to examine the nature of the referral process in practice. It is not known whether schools implementing this intervention follow Burton's (2008; 2019) guidelines around who is involved in the referral process. Furthermore, this research question examines how and why pupils are prioritised for the intervention. Sub-question (c) aims to understand how the ending of an ELSA intervention is handled in school, including factors that facilitate and challenge this process. Sub-question (d) aims to explore to what extent staff have an awareness and understanding of the project, which research indicates creates the optimal conditions for effective implementation for other SEMH interventions (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Humphrey, 2013). Sub-question (e) aims to examine how the school ethos and system either support or act as a barrier to the effective implementation of the project. The final sub question explores the implementation of the ELSA project at different stages of implementation as outlined by Kelly (2012). This will involve examining schools which have implemented the project for different periods of time.

Chapter 3 Methods

3.1 Philosophical Foundations of the Study

A pragmatic approach was adopted in the present study. Historically, employing qualitative or quantitative methods meant adopting an entire paradigm, which have incompatible positions with regards to the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge is constructed (epistemology). While positivism holds that there is one knowable reality, social constructionism states that there are multiple realities which are constructed through social interactions and culture (Creswell, 2013). The author views that one should not be "*imprisoned within one of these purported paradigms*'" (Gorard, 2004, p4). This means that methods can be distinguished from the epistemology and ontology from which they first emerged (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003). Pragmatism thus enables selecting methods of data collection which are most appropriate for addressing the research problem, and thus fits with the researcher employing both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires.

As pragmatism does not make a commitment to any one system of philosophy and reality, there is variation in researcher philosophical commitments in mixed methods research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). The author felt it important to consider her own personal views around epistemology and ontology, as a means to transparently outline how these views may impact upon the research. In line with Gorard (2004, p6), the author adopts a position of being:

> *ontologically largely realist (there must be something for us to research), epistemologically somewhat relativist (trying to make sense of and unify different perspectives), and methodologically fairly pragmatic (using whatever methods it takes to get the job done)*

This epistemological stance led to the researcher valuing the importance of gaining a range of perspectives in the case schools, by interviewing several different stakeholders. This stance also led the researcher to valuing the importance of understanding social context in the implementation of the ELSA project, and therefore the research examines implementation within the context of the school system through a case study design.

3.2 A Mixed Methods Multiple Case Study Design

A mixed methods multiple case study design best addresses the research questions of the study.

3.2.1 Why Adopt a Multiple Case Study Design?

Addressing the research questions of this study calls for a detailed understanding of the organisational systems, personal experiences and views within the school. A case study is an empirical inquiry that "*investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context*" and is especially relevant when the "*boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*" (Yin, 2018, p15). In the present study, there was a potentially unclear boundary between the school context and the implementation of the ELSA project. Schools are complex systems, and we might speculate that practices surrounding ELSA project implementation are tied up with other contextual factors such as the ethos of the school and existing SEMH provision, meaning a case study design is relevant in this study.

Furthermore, implementing the ELSA project within a school system is a complex process, which involves a range of individuals (e.g. the ELSA, SENCO, SLT) as well as a range of practice considerations (e.g. endings, referrals, ELSA support). Therefore, it seems appropriate to focus on a small number of cases (i.e. schools) in detail in order to understand such a complicated process within its context.

A case study is appropriate when "a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control" (Yin, 2018, p13). 'What' research questions can be suitable for case study research if they are exploratory in nature (Yin, 2018). The main research questions of the present study are a 'how' (how the project is implemented) and an exploratory 'what' question (what the facilitators and barriers are for implementation), therefore a case study suits the nature of the research questions being asked. In addition, the ELSA project is a current ongoing intervention in UK primary schools, and the researcher

was not able to manipulate the intervention – meeting the latter part of Yin's (2018) criteria.

A multiple case study design was adopted (i.e. containing more than a single case). Adopting a multiple case design is preferred to a single case design due to the substantial analytic benefits in having two or more cases (Yin, 2018). Two case schools were involved in the current study, which enabled more powerful analytic conclusions to be drawn in comparison to conducting a single case design. The author considered the additional benefits of including more than two schools. As ELSA project implementation in primary settings has not yet been researched before, it was judged to be more worthwhile to include two schools to enable a depth of understanding about both cases, while maintaining the analytic benefits of a multiple case design. Given the timeframes of the current project, it would not have been realistic to include more than two schools unless adopting a more surface level approach which the researcher did not view as being as useful.

Another aspect of this multiple case study is that it is comparative in nature. Multiple case studies can follow a total 'replication' model where all aspects of the cases are similar, however researchers can also adopt a 'comparative case method' where one distinguishes between the case situations in some way (Yin, 2018). This means the two cases are similar with regard to a large number of important characteristics, but dissimilar with regard to a variable of interest (Lijphart, 1975). In the present study, the researcher examined case schools which were similar with regards to certain characteristics (primary schools implementing the ELSA project). However, in order to address the research question of what the facilitators and barriers to implementation are at different stages of implementation, it was essential for the researcher to examine cases which were at different stages of implementation, meaning the two cases were distinguished with regards to this characteristic (the amount of time the ELSA project had been in place).

Yin (2018) explains that a multiple case study design involves 3 key phases: (1) define and design, (2) prepare, collect and analyse, and (3) analyse and conclude. Figure 3.1 outlines the specific approach to the multiple case study procedure adopted in this study.

Figure 3.1: Multiple case study procedure, adapted from Yin (2018, p58)
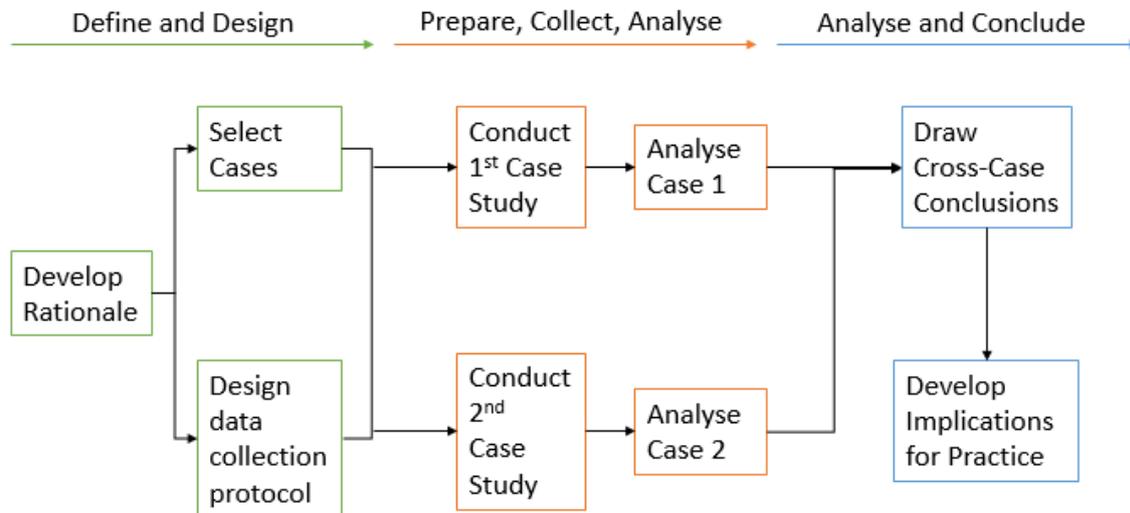
In this design, each individual case becomes the subject of a whole case study. The data is collected and analysed separately, which helps to retain the integrity of the case (Yin, 2018). In the final stage, cross-case conclusions can be drawn, where the researcher draws out similarities and differences across the cases.

Researchers have highlighted limitations with a case study approach, including difficulty in generalising from case studies to wider populations. However, Yin (2018) argues that case study research can produce analytic generalisations, where a research study creates theories that explain the data which can then be transferred to help explain other similar cases. Although these are not formal generalisations as in a large-scale survey or experimental design, inferences can potentially be made from a case study to similar contexts outside of the research (Simons, 2009). For this reason, rich descriptions of the case settings in this study are outlined so that readers can make wider situational inferences to similar settings.

3.2.2 Why Adopt Mixed Methods in the Present Study?

Case study designs are not bound to any worldview (Yin, 2018). In line with the author's pragmatic worldview, a mixed methods approach was adopted to address the research questions.

In order to address the sub-research question regarding the extent to which staff within the case schools have knowledge of the ELSA project, a questionnaire was used to directly ascertain from a large number of school staff the extent to which they judge they are aware of the project. This method develops a general picture with regards to whole-school awareness. Key stakeholders were also interviewed and asked about their views on whole-staff awareness to provide a more detailed picture in this area. In this way, and in agreement with Bryman (2006), mixed methods have the strength of providing a fuller picture of staff understanding in each case school by capturing both a general and detailed grasp of the issues. According to Creswell and Plano Clarke (2007, p5), using a mixed methods approach "*provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.*"

Semi-structured 1:1 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in order to provide the more detailed insights necessary to address the remaining research questions. It was not expected that all staff in the case schools would have full knowledge of the practices in these areas. Instead, it was best to interview key stakeholders who are more closely involved with the project (e.g. the ELSAs themselves, SENCOs, Link EPs). It was expected that these key stakeholders would have different perspectives due to the nature of their involvement with the project; for example the ELSA would have experience of the interactions within the sessions themselves, whereas the SENCO might have more knowledge around intervention processes (e.g. referral process). So, it was essential to speak to a range of key stakeholders in order to build a fuller picture of the implementation of the ELSA project within the settings.

3.3 Case School Recruitment and Sampling Participants

3.3.1 Recruiting Schools

Yin (2018) explains individual cases need to be carefully selected according to established criteria. These criteria enabled the selection of cases based on the comparative case method outlined above, where the cases share a range of similar characteristics, but differ with regards to an area of focus (how long the ELSA project has been in place). For this reason, the recruitment criteria for case schools were as follows:

- 1 mainstream primary school which has implemented the ELSA project for over 1 year, and where the ELSA has completed the full 6 days of training

- 1 mainstream primary school which has implemented the ELSA project for less than 1 year, and where the ELSA has completed the full 6 days of training

The researcher was aware that schools can begin to implement the project while the ELSA is in the process of completing the training. However, having completed the full training course was included in the criteria because it is an important characteristic for maintaining similarity between the cases within the comparative multiple case method.

Although the ELSA project is implemented in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units, the ELSA project in mainstream primary schools was focused upon in the present study. Although some research has begun to examine how the project operates in the secondary context (Nicholson-Roberts, 2019), no research has yet examined ELSA project implementation within the primary context, which is a clear gap in the literature. While the researcher could have examined implementation within special schools and pupil referral units, these settings make up a significantly smaller proportion of primary settings in the UK in comparison to mainstream schools. In addition, from the researcher's own anecdotal experience delivering ELSA training, ELSAs from mainstream primary settings were the majority of those attending the training. Therefore, researching mainstream primary was judged to be a more pressing matter because the analytic generalisations would be of benefit to potentially a much greater number of ELSAs and school settings.

A range of strategies were used to recruit schools including: asking EP and Trainee EP colleagues to circulate a leaflet about the project (see Appendix 2) with their link primary schools and researcher attendance at ELSA training and supervision sessions to promote awareness of the project. School 1 was recruited through the Link EP, who shared the leaflet about the research project with the school SENCO. Following this, the school SENCO expressed interest in the project, and following a meeting with the researcher, the SENCO agreed to be involved in the research. School 2 was recruited through researcher attendance at an ELSA training day, during which the researcher spoke about the project and shared the

information leaflet (see Appendix 1). Following this, the researcher sent follow up emails to the ELSAs and their line managers (see Appendix 3 for an example). The SENCO from School 2 then expressed interest in the project and agreed to take part. A SENCO from an urban secondary school expressed interest in taking part in the study. However, due to being a secondary school, this school did not match the recruitment criteria and so did not participate. With the exception of the aforementioned secondary school, no other schools offered to take part in this study. School 1 and 2 met the recruitment criteria. In School 1, the ELSA project had been implemented for approximately 2 years when data collection took place, while School 2 had begun implementing the project approximately 6 months prior to data collection. Both ELSAs in School 1 and 2 had completed all 6 days of training at the time of data collection. Contextual background information for both case schools is provided at the start of the findings chapter, in section 4.1.

As involvement in the project required time from several members of staff in the school, a 1.5 hour training session entitled 'Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Classroom' was delivered by the researcher to staff in both schools in exchange for their participation in the project. This training was delivered after interview data collection took place, however some questionnaire data was collected at the training session. Schools will also receive a report which shares the findings and includes unique recommendations for their settings.

3.3.2 Sampling Participants

Purposive criterion sampling was used to select appropriate participants in the case schools, which involved identifying individuals that met predetermined criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach can be very beneficial in implementation research because it involves "*identifying and selecting individuals…that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest*" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p534). Prior to data collection, the researcher considered which individuals in school would have knowledge and experience of implementation of the ELSA intervention with regards to the areas of interest (i.e. ELSA support system, referral process, endings, the project fitting into the school ethos and whole-staff awareness).

The researcher expected that the ELSA and ELSA Line Manager (who is often also the SENCO) would be those most closely involved with implementing the project. It was expected the ELSA would have the most knowledge and experience of the practices in the sessions themselves, and the Line Manager would have perhaps more experience of the processes around the intervention (e.g. referral process, ELSA support system). Therefore, both the ELSA and ELSA Line Manager were job roles expected to have a high level of knowledge and experience of the implementation of the intervention.

Senior Leadership within the school were also judged to be appropriate participants, with an especially relevant perspective into the intervention within the wider school system and ethos.

Although there has been no research to date into the process of intervention referrals and endings, Burton (2018) highlights the important role of teachers with regards to both processes – suggesting that referrals often come from class teachers in schools, the importance of ELSA-teacher communication throughout the intervention and during endings. Therefore, teachers were included as participants in the present study. As teachers' experiences of the project may be different within the same school, it was important to interview more than one teacher. Therefore, two teachers were included in the 1:1 interviews, and importantly those teachers that had experience and involvement with the intervention in some way, as it was not expected this would be the case for all class teachers.

Both the school Link EP and the ELSA EP Supervisor were expected to have relevant knowledge and experience of ELSA project implementation. As Link EPs often work at a systemic level in their school contexts (Beaver, 2011), arguably Link EPs would have a helpful insight into how the intervention fits into the school system and ethos. The ELSA EP Supervisor may not have as much knowledge and experience of the school ethos and system, but due to their role in training and supervising the ELSAs in the case schools, will likely be aware of the facilitators and challenges of implementation. Therefore, both EP roles provide beneficial perspectives in exploring the research questions.

The following key stakeholders in each school were therefore invited to take part in the semi-structured 1:1 interviews:

- An ELSA

- SENCO / ELSA Line Manager

- A member of SLT

- Two teachers (who have been involved in the project in some way, e.g. referred a young person)

- School Link EP

- EP ELSA supervisor

This sampling strategy of including a range of participants with different experiences, roles and perspectives aims to glean a broad, detailed account with the possibility of triangulation of perspectives into how the ELSA project is implemented in their school settings, and the facilitators and barriers to effective implementation.

Table 3.1 details the individuals interviewed in School 1 and 2 according to the established role criteria.

Table 3.1 Role Criteria and participants interviewed in School 1 and 2

Role Criteria	School 1 – who was interviewed?	School 2 – who was interviewed?
ELSA	1 ELSA	1 ELSA
ELSA Line Manager / SENCO	1 ELSA Line Manager (Inclusion Officer, not SENCO)	1 ELSA Line Manager (also the SENCO)
Member of Senior Leadership Team	1 SENCO	1 Head Teacher
2 Teachers (with experience / knowledge of ELSA)	2 Teachers (with experience / knowledge of ELSA)	2 Teachers (with experience / knowledge of ELSA)
Link Educational Psychologist	2 Link EPs	1 Link EP
ELSA Educational Psychologist Supervisor	1 ELSA EP Supervisor	1 ELSA EP Supervisor
Total Interviews	**N = 8**	**N = 7**

School 1 have two Link EPs, both of whom were interviewed, resulting in eight interviews being undertaken in School 1 and seven interviews in School 2.

Although the researcher acknowledges the importance of the child's voice, young people did not participant in the current research. The researcher acknowledges that while CYP may have had a valuable contribution on the topic of ELSA project implementation, they may not have had as much to say about the research topic being examined in comparison to the stakeholders involved, especially on topics such as implementation processes (e.g. ELSA support system) which the CYP may not have had a great deal of experience or full knowledge of. The interviews likely would have been short and may have created sensitivities within the case schools. Within the scope of this research, interviews with the young people would have added further time and research pressures, including taking

additional time to set up in the schools as well as posing additional ethical challenges to address. Therefore, CYP did not participate in the research.

With regards to the quantitative data, all staff members were approached to complete the questionnaire which examined the extent to which they felt they had knowledge and understanding of the intervention in school. In order to ensure maximum questionnaire participation, the staff were provided with several opportunities to complete the questionnaire including: researcher attendance at staff meetings, giving time at the mental health training session (detailed above) for staff to complete the questionnaire, and the researcher directly approaching staff in school and asking them to complete the questionnaire.

An ethical challenge was encountered in the sampling participants phase. As SLT had agreed to take part in the research project in the school recruitment phase, the researcher was concerned the extent to which participants were taking part in the interviews because they had been asked to do so by SLT. Indeed, the interviews with members of staff were generally organised through the SENCO in both schools. Thus participants may have viewed the interview as a task requested by SLT as opposed to something they volunteered to do. One way to address this challenge was by emphasising the voluntary and confidential nature of participating in the project.

3.4 Research tools

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which meant the interviews were guided by the interview schedule as opposed to being dictated by it (Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviews can be particularly valuable in case study research, because they provide means to explore participant's multiple experiences and perspectives (Yin, 2018). This approach also enables the researcher to follow up on participant views during the interview to capture more detailed and nuanced responses.

Semi-structured interviews were felt to be more appropriate than other data collection techniques, such as focus groups, because of the individualised nature of

the interview. For example, in a focus group challenges could have arisen in truly capturing the range of different perspectives of the participants, including participant reluctance to openly respond in the presence of colleagues as well as risks in individual group members becoming dominant.

Interview schedules (see Appendix 4-6) were developed with the research questions in mind. Three separate schedules were developed for the: (1) ELSA / SENCO / SLT, (2) Teacher and (3) EP. The five main topic areas within all three schedules were the same, because the researcher felt it important to ensure all participants had the opportunity to comment on every area in order to capture the full range of perspectives. It was expected that some participants may have greater and lesser extent of knowledge around the research topic areas, and so the wording in each of the schedules was sensitive to this.

The schedules were used to ensure the researcher did not lose sight of the research questions during the interview (Willig, 2008). The schedules were developed in line with advice from Willig (2008) who emphasises that semi-structured schedules should include a relatively small number of open-ended questions. Topic headings were used to identify the five main research areas: referral process, ELSA support, intervention endings, staff awareness and school ethos. Within the schedules, the researcher highlighted the topic headings and one question within each section as bold. This aimed to trigger the conversation about each topic, with the aim of the interviewee then leading the conversations – with the researcher encouraging the interviewee to elaborate by demonstrating active listening (including repeating what the participant said) but also nudging the participant into saying more, e.g. 'you said…tell me more about this'. The specific questions which are not in bold were noted as potential follow up areas for the researcher to ask about if they were not addressed by the interviewee.

The EP interview schedule was piloted with a Trainee Educational Psychologist who is an ELSA supervisor at their LA placement. A SENCO whose school had recently signed up to the ELSA project piloted the ELSA / SENCO / SLT interview schedule. It was not possible to pilot the teacher interview schedule, however given the similar nature of the 3 interview schedules, it was judged that lessons learnt from the piloting the other schedules could be transferred. Following

the piloting of the schedules, it was decided to reduce the number of questions and instead focus on following the lead of the participant. The five topics were also reordered following the piloting. The researcher decided it was best to start by discussing the referral process, as this made sense in terms of discussing events chronologically – as involvement always begins with the referral. Following piloting, two more general questions were added at the start of the schedules, asking participant's sense of the overall strengths and limitations of the project in school, to promote the participant's initial views leading the discussion.

3.4.2 Questionnaire

In addition to the use of semi-structured interviews, a short questionnaire (see Appendix 7) was disseminated to all staff in the case schools (including teachers, TAs and administrative staff). The questionnaire aimed to address the research question about the extent of staff awareness in the case schools. This is an issue which all staff in the case schools could comment upon. A questionnaire enables the researcher to reach a large number of respondents in a time effective way (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

There are not any existing measures which examine awareness, understanding and knowledge of the ELSA project across school staff. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher, with reference to existing literature. As advised by Foddy (1993), the questions used were: as straightforward as possible, avoided asking two or more questions at the same time and did not include the use of negatives. These considerations enhanced the clarity of the five questions involved (see Appendix 7). A range of response options were used in the questionnaire.

At the end of the questionnaire, the researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to add 'any other comments'. As ELSA project implementation is an under-researched area, it was important the participants had the opportunity to elaborate on their responses and to identify any new issues which had not been covered by the closed questions (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004).

The questionnaire was piloted with 2 TAs known to the researcher, who at the time of piloting did not raise any concerns with regards to the clarity of the questions.

3.5 Data Analysis and Reporting

3.5.1 Analysis of Qualitative Data

The data for each case study was collected and initially analysed separately, and thus treated as a whole case study in its own right, thus retaining the integrity of the case (Yin, 2018).

The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which identifies, analyses and reports patterns (themes) in the data. This approach is not committed to any theoretical paradigm, and thus suits the author's pragmatic stance. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach was selected because they provide clear guidelines for completing thematic analysis, which ensures a more rigorous approach to the analysis. It is essential for researchers to outline how they approached their analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following steps were followed for both case schools:

- *Phase 1 (Familiarising yourself with the data).*
  - o The audio recordings of the interviews were manually transcribed to produce verbatim transcripts. The transcription process can be an excellent way to familiarise the researcher with the data (Willig, 2008).
  - o The author immersed herself in the data. Transcripts were read and re-read on a line-by-line basis.
- *Phase 2 (Generating initial codes)*
  - o A code is the most basic segment or element of the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The entire data set was worked through systematically, giving full equal attention to all the data. Initial ideas for codes were marked with pen in the margins of the paper transcripts. See Appendix 8 for an example of a page of transcript which have markings along the side with initial codes.
  - o Once all paper transcripts had been worked through systematically, the transcripts and identified codes were entered into the software package NVivo. This software package allowed the researcher to review coded extracts and identify themes across the large data set.
- *Phase 3 (Searching for Themes)*

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- o The codes and coded extracts were sorted into potential themes. Different combinations of codes within differing themes were trialled.
- o Within this stage of the analysis, there were a very large number of identified candidate themes and lower level sub-themes. A mind-map was used at this stage to help the researcher organise the codes, see Appendix 9 for a map of School 1 data at this stage. One aspect of the thematic map at this stage was called 'Intervention Process', which upon reflection was a miscellaneous theme for when the sub-themes did not fit within other themes, which Braun and Clarke (2006) note is common at this stage of analysis. Advice was also taken at this stage through research supervision with regards to ensuring the theme names were clear descriptors of the data. The author then moved into reviewing and refining these themes in the next stage.

- *Phase 4 (Reviewing Themes)*
  - o First, all coded extracts for each theme were read and it was considered whether the original data translated well into the themes. Then the researcher considered the data set as a whole – considering whether the thematic map 'accurately' reflected the data set.
  - o At this stage, it was evident to the researcher that some candidate themes were not suitable themes. A researcher diary was kept to transparently track the process of reviewing the themes (see Appendix 10 for an example extract). For example, it was decided the 'Intervention Process' theme was not a suitable theme, as noted in the researcher diary on 31st January, "*Sub-themes within 'intervention process' are too diverse – not really a theme, need to reconsider – everything is the intervention process*". Another example of a reviewed theme at this stage was one termed 'Dumping Ground for Naughty Children' in School 2. Following research supervision, it was agreed this sub-theme title did not accurately reflect all the data within the theme so it was rephrased in order to do so.

- *Phase 5 (Defining and Naming Themes)*
  - o In this phase, two to three sentence definitions were created for each theme (see Appendix 11 for definitions for each theme and quotation

examples for both School 1 and 2). During this process, the researcher considered Braun and Clarke's (2006, p 93) guidance that theme names need to be "*concise, punchy and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about*".

- *Phase 6 (Producing the Report)*
  - The analysis is reported in chapter four, which aims to present a "*concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p93). The write-up includes particularly vivid examples of data extracts, which are embedded within an analytic narrative which goes beyond the description of the data and makes an argument in relation to the research questions.
  - The analysis through phases 1-5 were completed separately for both School 1 and 2. However, at phase 6, the researcher engaged in Yin's (2018) third and final phase of multiple case study research, where cross-case similarities and differences are highlighted. The researcher noted how the themes of the analysis for School 1 and School 2 were very similar, although the sub-themes within each school were different. For this reason, the researcher presents each theme in turn in the findings section and details the different school sub-themes within these. The researcher provides a summary at the end of each theme, which draws out the similarities and differences between each case. The researcher also utilises different font colours in the reporting of the findings in order to retain distinction between the cases.

Thematic analysis can be approached in a semantic (i.e. descriptive) or interpretive way. In the present study, at the earlier phases of analysis (e.g. initial coding in phase 1 and 2), the codes were identified with explicit or surface meaning of the data. The analytic process then involved a progression from coding at a descriptive level towards summarising this semantic content at an interpretive level in relation to literature explored by the researcher, for example with regards to the psychological concept of attachment.

During the analysis, the researcher met with a fellow Trainee EP who was also completing thematic analysis of interview data in a multiple case study design for their DEdPsy thesis, and therefore was judged to have an excellent level of

transferable research knowledge and skills to the analysis of data in the present study. The Trainee EP was consulted at the coding stage of analysis as advised by Yardley (2008). Comparing the researcher's coding with the Trainee EP helped to ensure that the analysis was not confined to one perspective and makes sense to others (Yardley, 2008). The Trainee EP coded three pages of the unmarked ELSA interview transcript for School 1. Her codes were compared with the researcher's own codes for this section of data, and there was a high level of similarity between the codes. The instances of dissimilarity were discussed and consequent amendments were made to the initial coding framework, including amending the code 'externalising' to 'externalising behaviours' and 'friendship issues' to 'friendship issues are common'. Both instances were agreed to provide more clarity of what is meant by the codes in the code names. Codes and naming of themes were also discussed in research supervision to enhance the plausibility and coherence of the analysis.

3.5.2 Analysis of Quantitative Data

Questionnaire data were analysed separately for each case school, using SPSS Statistics software. A frequency analysis was conducted to assess the research question regarding to what extent the staff in the case schools have knowledge and understanding of the ELSA project. A cross-tabulation was also undertaken in order to compare the extent of knowledge within different staff job roles.

Data was also produced from the 'Any other comments' box at the end of the questionnaire. The data produced can have an "*uncomfortable status of being strictly neither qualitative nor quantitative*" (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004, p1), and this can present difficulty at the analysis stage. Upon reflection, there were only 8 comments made across the two schools, and these data appeared to merely corroborate and slightly elaborate upon answers to the closed questions. In this situation, researchers suggest that formal analysis of this data may not be worthwhile (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004).

The questionnaire data for each school is reported at the start of chapter four with the aim of providing a contextual background for each school, prior to presenting findings of the qualitative analysis.

3.6 Ethics

Ethical approval was received from the University College London Institute of Education Doctoral Ethics board in March 2019. The research was conducted in line with the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2014).

An ethical challenge encountered concerned the anonymity in the reporting of findings in a case study design. If job roles are stated alongside quotes, then members of staff in the case schools could review the findings chapter and deduce which case school they are from (e.g. from rich descriptions of school size, ethos, how long the intervention has been in place). For those roles where there is only one member of staff with that job role in the school (e.g. SENCO or ELSA), a member of school staff could potentially link the quote to the individual's identity. This challenge was considered thoroughly and discussed in research supervision. In order to address this challenge, job roles are not reported in the presentation of analysis (chapter four) unless essential to understanding the context of the quote or evident from the quote itself. In addition, the full DEdPsy thesis will not be shared with the case schools by the researcher, instead a short report will be circulated to each school with unique recommendations for their settings and quotes will not be used in these reports.

An additional ethical challenge encountered regarding participant sampling concerns participants potentially viewing the interviews as a task requested by SLT, as opposed to being voluntary (as outlined in Section 3.3.2: sampling participants). This was addressed by emphasising the voluntary and confidential nature of participating in this project. While all participants originally invited to interview decided to take part following this discussion, the researcher felt this was reflective of voluntary informed consent. Indeed, through the interview process, participants often appeared to enjoy taking part. The interviews often lasted longer than 45 minutes, and several participants vocalised the value of the reflective space provided in taking part in the interview.

Through the process of the approval from the University College London Institute of Education Doctoral Ethics board, several further ethical considerations were made. Participants were fully informed of the aims of the research prior to participation (see the information sheet in Appendix 12). Consent was gained prior to

participation in the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 13). The original audio interview recordings were destroyed (by deleting the file from the audio recorder) following transcription. The files holding the transcription of the data were held on a password protected laptop, and the questionnaire forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet. Although the topics discussed in interview were not viewed as likely to cause discomfort or distress, participants were reminded that they could omit certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

3.7 Quality Assurance

Validity considerations can take different forms in quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Validity in qualitative research concerns how well the research has been carried out, and to what extent the findings are useful and trustworthy (Yardley, 2008). In the qualitative strand of the research, several procedures were followed in order to assure the quality of the data. Firstly, triangulation was a key aspect of the present study which enhances the validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This involved gathering data from a range of different key stakeholders, thus enabling an enriched understanding of the phenomenon (ELSA project implementation) by viewing it from differing perspectives (Yardley, 2008).

A second procedure for enhancing the validity of the qualitative strand of the study is the provision of rich thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013). This involves providing detailed descriptions of the case schools, including the size, ethos and how long the intervention has been in place. These thick descriptions are provided at the start of chapter four (see section 4.1). The provision of thick descriptions supports the transferability of the findings – so readers can judge the similarity of their own situation to the case school and make informed decisions about the applicability to their own settings. Similarly, Yardley (2008) refers to 'sensitivity to context' as an indicator of quality in qualitative research.

It was also important to consider whether the same findings would have been reached if the analysis were conducted by another researcher. This has been termed dependability, which is viewed as the qualitative parallel to reliability (Lincoln &

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Guba, 1985). This was partially addressed through research supervision and peer coding, as discussed in section 3.5.1., enhancing the dependability of the findings.

With regards to the quantitative questionnaire, it is important the questions clearly linked to the research questions and elicit accurate information (Coughlan et al., 2007a). Steps taken to address the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, including development in relation to relevant literature, are explored in section 3.4.2.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter is structured into two main sections. Firstly, a descriptive overview is outlined for each school which includes information provided by the questionnaire sent to all staff. Secondly, the thematic analysis of the qualitative data is presented, each theme and sub-themes are discussed in turn and summarised at the end of each section.

4.1 Case School Context

4.1.1 School 1 Context and ELSA Approach

School 1 is a mixed-gender community primary school in an Inner-London Borough, which caters for pupils aged 3-11. The school is a larger-than-average-sized primary school, with two forms of entry and approximately 500 pupils on roll. The most recent Ofsted inspection grading in 2017 was 'Good'. The school serves a diverse community and most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group of which are Bangladeshi. Over three-quarters of pupils in School 1 speak English as an additional language, which is much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium is more than double the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND) is just above the national average, and the proportion supported with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is slightly lower than the national average.

There is one ELSA in the school. The school began implementing the ELSA project approximately 2 years before the start of data collection. In School 1, the project is part of a tiered wider programme supporting children's SEMH, and ELSA somewhat bridges the gap between higher and lower tiers of support. Lower levels of support include: children being able to post concerns in a communication box, access to library or art club at play time, mental health ambassadors and a whole-school restorative approach to behavioural challenges. Support at higher levels include: direct therapeutic support with the Inclusion Officer and referrals to outside agencies, e.g. Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or the EP. School 1 demonstrates a comprehensive approach to running the ELSA project, with a high level of fidelity with the manual and guidance (Burton, 2009). There is protection of

the ELSA's planning time, a decorated intervention room, timetabled sessions and provision of resources. Focused efforts are made to build awareness and understanding of the project across staff, pupils and parents through a range of strategies, e.g. notice boards in the school hallway. Stakeholders explained that this comprehensive approach to the ELSA project is linked to the mental health ethos within the school, with SLT valuing the aims of the ELSA intervention.

Across the School 1 questionnaire data (see Appendix 14 for full detail), there is a general awareness of the ELSA project across staff, with 86% of participants citing awareness of the project. However, there is potentially a lack of detailed knowledge of the intervention in the school – with only 5% of staff citing that they have either a 'good' or 'high level' of knowledge of the intervention. The majority of teachers involved (80%) cited they have 'limited knowledge' of the ELSA project, which could be a barrier to effective implementation given their role in the referral process.

4.1.2 School 2 Context and ELSA Approach

School 2 is a mixed-gender voluntary aided Church of England primary school, which caters for pupils aged 3-11. School 2 is located in a different Inner-London Borough to School 1. School 2 is smaller than average as it is one-form entry and has approximately 200 pupils on roll. At the most recent Ofsted Inspection in 2018, School 2 was graded as 'Good'. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is much larger than the national average. More than two thirds of pupils are from a Black African heritage. Four in ten of the pupils speak English as an additional language, which is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with SEND is well below the national average, but the proportion supported with an EHCP is above the national average.

There is also a Nurture Style Provision (NSP) in School 2, which is termed NSP as opposed to a Nurture Group because the staff who run the NSP have not completed an accredited Nurture Group training course. The NSP is run by the same person who acts as the ELSA. A small number of identified pupils with complex behavioural needs, who do not manage in mainstream class, access some of their learning through the NSP provision. The Boxall Profile, a detailed assessment of

social, emotional and behavioural functioning, is completed for the identified young people and is used to set targets in the provision.

There is one ELSA in School 2. The school began implementing the ELSA project approximately 6 months before the start of data collection. In this school, the intervention and the NSP sit at the top of the triangle of hierarchy in the school behaviour policy, as opposed to the ELSA project being part of a wider SEMH or wellbeing policy. This appears to closely link the ELSA project to behavioural needs. As outlined by the school SENCO / Deputy Head and as in the behaviour policy, in this triangle of hierarchy, most children manage their behaviour in class with quality first teaching and in-class behaviour strategies (e.g. report cards). Some children need some extra support, such as a 30 min weekly intervention led by a HLTA. Through this graduated approach, if there is no impact made through these approaches, then identified pupils access the support of the ELSA individual, though NSP in the mornings and 1:1 ELSA intervention sessions in the afternoons. This means those identified CYP spend much of the school day out of mainstream class.

The school SENCO explained that the ELSA runs the NSP in the morning, with identified CYP with complex externalising behavioural needs accessing their learning through the NSP as opposed to in mainstream class. In the afternoon, the ELSA is due to run ELSA intervention sessions with those same young people, with a different young person accessing ELSA support each day (e.g. child 1 accesses ELSA intervention on Tuesday afternoon, child 2 accesses on Wednesday afternoon, etc.). However, at the time of data collection, the interview data suggested that the ELSA was having difficulty being able to consistently run structured block ELSA intervention sessions. While the school were aiming for the ELSA to deliver these block intervention sessions in the afternoons, the data indicated that the ELSA was often interrupted during these sessions. Instead, ELSA support often operated in a reactive way – with the ELSA using her skills and knowledge to support children when their behaviour escalated. The ELSA in School 2 was also found to adapt and apply her ELSA skills and knowledge developed from the ELSA training to her NSP teaching in the mornings, for example running circle time in the NSP which was included in the ELSA training.

The ELSA project is new to the School 2 LA, and the ELSA in School 2 was in the first cohort trained by the EPS. This possibly means that the EPs delivering the project did not have a great deal of experience with the ELSA model and training at the time, as well as potentially a lack of experience and awareness of common barriers to implementation and how best to support schools in these.

The questionnaire data (see Appendix 14 for full detail) highlighted that the majority of staff (95%) in School 2 are generally aware of the ELSA project. However, only 16% of respondents cited having a 'good' or 'high' level of knowledge, indicating that while staff are aware, they do not feel they have detailed knowledge about the ELSA project.

From the qualitative data there was the suggestion that with the exception of the ELSA and School SENCO / Deputy Head, staff in School 2 have misconceptions of the ELSA role. This includes viewing her work in the NSP in the mornings as her ELSA work. Therefore, asking the staff themselves to rate the extent of their knowledge and understanding may not be reflective of how accurate their knowledge and understanding is.

4.2 Integrative Analysis of Findings from the Separate Thematic Analyses for School 1 and 2

Findings from the two separate thematic analyses suggest five themes (labelled 1-5) for each school (see Figure 4.1 for School 1 and Figure 4.2 for School 2) and a set of sub-themes.

Figure 4.1 School 1 Thematic Map

Figure 4.2 School 2 Thematic Map

School 2 Thematic Map

- Role of Behaviour Policy and Key Individuals Involved
- Complex Externalising Behavioural Needs
  - 1. Identifying Pupils for ELSA

- Small School with Religious Family Ethos
- Valuing the Role and Protecting Resources
  - 2. School, Ethos, Priorities and Values and it's Impact on ELSA Practices

- ELSA Skills and Initiative
- Network of ELSA Support
- Unique Link EP Support Role and Challenges
- Difficult Feelings in ELSA Work
  - 5. ELSA Support System and Skills

- 3. ELSA Remit and Function within Wider Provision
  - Incorporating ELSA and Existing Nurture-Style Provision
  - Reactive Nature of Intervention
  - Staff Misconceptions about the Role
  - Degree of Shared Responsibility for Behavioural Needs

- 4. Central Role of Attachment
  - ELSA-Child Bond Over Time
  - Absence of ELSA Endings
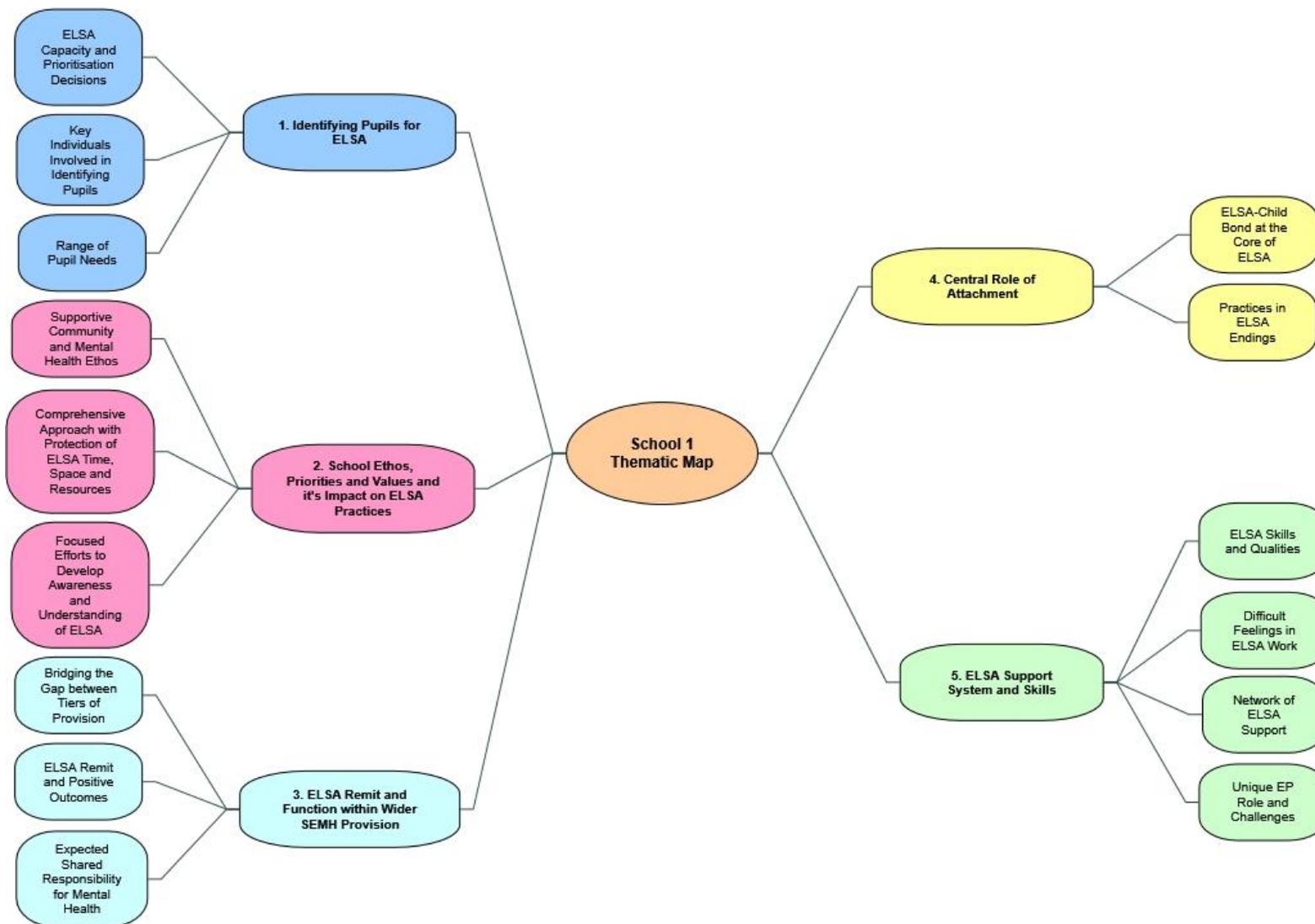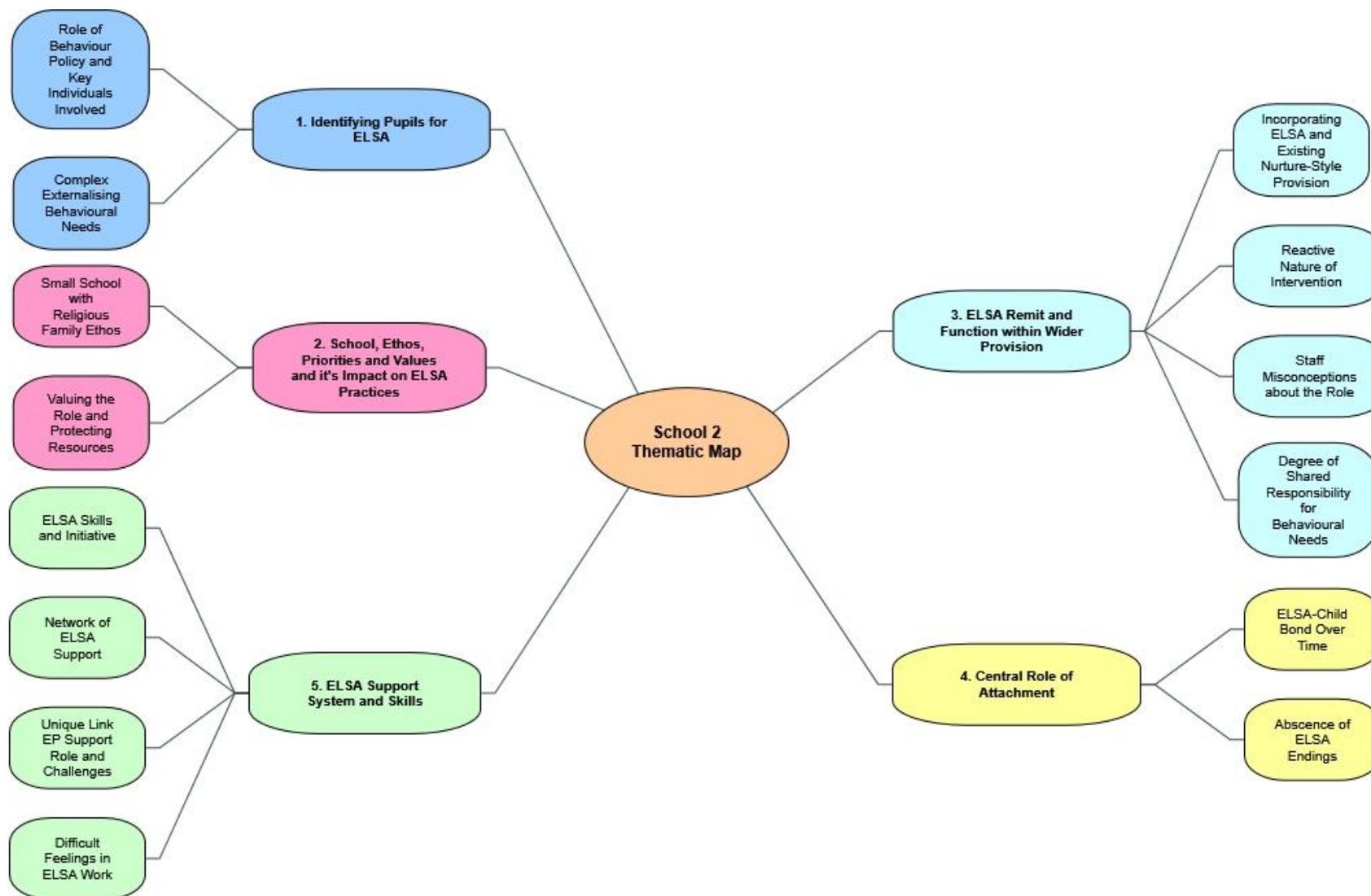
The themes in School 1 and 2 are largely the same, although the sub-themes within each analysis were found to be slightly different. In order to highlight the similarities and differences between the cases, each theme is presented in turn and the different school sub-themes are detailed within these. In order to retain the distinction between the cases, data extracts and titles are reported in black for School 1 and dark blue for School 2. Further quotation examples for all themes are reported in Appendix 11. A comparative summary section is included at the end of each theme, which outlines the key similarities and differences in each context in relation to the theme. For anonymity purposes, job roles are not reported unless essential to understanding the context of the quote or evident from the quote itself.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Identifying Pupils for ELSA

This theme concerns how young people are identified for the ELSA intervention in School 1 and 2, including type of pupil difficulties which lead to referral and how referral decisions are made in each school context.

4.2.1.1 School 1 Theme 1: Identifying Pupils for ELSA

Range of Pupil Needs

In School 1, a wide range of pupils with different needs access the ELSA intervention, including: bereavement, developing friendships, anger, anxiety and transitions. The young people have different target areas depending on their differing needs:

> *We have a real variety, yeah, of different reasons for referral…They all have different targets depending on what their need is because they are so different [Stakeholder – S1]*

While the data indicates that pupils with externalising behaviours access the intervention, pupils with internalising difficulties were also reported to access ELSA support. For example, a class teacher explained that she referred a young person due to low self-confidence:

> *She wouldn't necessarily put her hand up and that could also have an impact in her finding her voice or being confident. [Teacher 2 – S1]*

Therefore, it appears in School 1 there are a range of pupil needs which lead to ELSA involvement.

Key Individuals Involved in Identifying Pupils

In School 1, different individuals are involved in identifying pupils for the ELSA intervention. Stakeholders emphasise that referrals are primarily made by class teachers, who complete a referral form which is submitted to the ELSA Line Manager. Wider staff, SLT and parent input, as well as discussions in safeguarding meetings, can also lead to referrals:

> *So if a teacher has got a concern, or anyone in the school, the head teacher. We have safeguarding meeting once a week so something may come up from a safeguarding meeting and we say okay that's a referral to ELSA… or it could come from the parent [Stakeholder – S1]*

It appears that although referrals mainly come from class teachers in School 1, a range of other key individuals are involved in identifying young people for the ELSA intervention. Young people themselves were not cited as being involved in the referral process, e.g. being able to self-refer.

ELSA Capacity and Prioritisation Decisions

School 1 can experience ELSA capacity difficulties, and prioritisation decisions need to be made with regards to which children will receive the intervention. These prioritisation decisions are made through collaborative discussions focused on the particular child's needs and how they might benefit:

> *There is no fixed criteria, I suppose it would be a discussion that would include me [SENCO] and X [ELSA Line Manager]…and think about all the factors that are going on in that child's life and whether we feel that we putting that support in place is going to have an impact for that child at that point in time* [SENCO – S1]

Therefore, prioritisation decisions are made through collaborative discussions between the SENCO and ELSA Line Manager in School 1. The ELSA was not reported to be involved in these discussions.

4.2.1.2 School 2 Theme 1: Identifying Pupils for ELSA

Complex Externalising Behavioural Needs

In School 2, the CYP who access ELSA support, either through reactive means or in a more structured session, are those who demonstrate complex externalising behavioural needs. This means the CYP who access ELSA support have similar needs and so the same targets and plans are adopted for all of the young people:

> *At the moment, I can do the same plan for the four children because they have quite similar needs [ELSA – S2]*

The young people who access ELSA support are those who also access the NSP in school:

> *It's predominately the same children, because they are our key children who are showing that they need support for that [Stakeholder – S2]*

Those who have been identified for ELSA support are those showing complex behavioural needs and they are not accessing mainstream class. Stakeholders gave examples of what this behaviour can look like:

> *And he tipped up and threw the tables around, and that's what he was doing in year one, flipping the tables…He didn't want to sit on the carpet, he would be crawling under the table. And then if you try to get him out, he would just throw things around the classroom…I think there was double figures of adults that he'd hurt within a week [Stakeholder – S2]*

In comparison to School 1 where a range of CYP with different needs access the intervention, it appears in School 2 ELSA support focuses on those with externalising behavioural needs.

Role of Behaviour Policy and Key Individuals Involved

The tiered behaviour policy in School 2 plays a central role in SLT deciding which young people will have access to the intervention. There does not appear to be a clear distinction in terms of referral steps between accessing the NSP or ELSA

sessions in School 2, as both groups are the highest tier of support in the behaviour policy:

So in our behaviour policy, we have a sort of a triangle of hierarchy…99.9% of our children will manage that just within the classroom with quality first teaching. Some might need a little extra reminder…And so, then we would do maybe like a little chart… I've then got a HLTA, who does some sort of interventions…If we're not seeing an improvement from there…then that's when I would think about referring them and putting them in X's [ELSA's] groups. [ELSA]. [SENCO – S2]

It appears young people would be considered for the ELSA's groups (NSP or ELSA intervention sessions) if lower tiers of support were not making a clear impact. This approach to referral means that the ELSA is already working with these young people in the NSP. As referral works through the behaviour policy, access to ELSA support appears closely linked to the presence of behavioural difficulties.

A formal referral process is not in place in School 2, e.g. use of referral forms as in School 1. SLT explain that although this is something the school are developing, due to the small nature of the school, this does not seem to be fully necessary:

We are developing a kind of a, like a referral procedure. But we're such a small school, and you know, those procedures are helpful, but not always necessary [Head Teacher – S2]

The absence of a formal referral process may be due to the small nature of the school, or may also be attributed to the ELSA project being a new intervention within this school with developing policies and practices.

Similar to School 1, a range of individuals could highlight concerns which lead to a referral, including parents or staff in School 2. The SLT [Head Teacher and SENCO / Deputy Head] make the final decision with regards to the appropriateness of the intervention for a young person, in the context of the behaviour policy:

Well, so myself and the Deputy Head who is also the SENCO, between us we would make those decisions [Head Teacher – S2]

Similar to the way School 1 operates, the ELSA is not involved in the final decisions about appropriateness of the intervention for CYP.

4.2.1.3 Comparative Summary –Theme 1

There is a difference between the type of pupil needs which lead to ELSA support in School 1 and 2. In School 1, pupils with a range of needs (e.g. internalising needs, bereavement, and friendship difficulties) access the intervention. In comparison, pupils who access ELSA support in School 2 are those that present with complex externalising behavioural needs, who also access the NSP in school. At this stage there does not appear to be a clear distinction between ELSA intervention and NSP referral processes in School 2. Referral in School 2 is considered in the context of progressing through the tiers of the behaviour policy, which appears to link the ELSA project closely to behavioural needs. It could be that these challenges in School 2 are reflective of being in the early stages of ELSA project implementation, and also reflective of challenges incorporating the project with existing SEMH provision in school (see theme 3 sub-theme: Incorporating ELSA and Existing NSP).

In both schools, concerns are raised by a number of different individuals, including teachers, TAs or parents. In School 1, it appears there are more formal processes in ELSA intervention referral – with the use of referral forms completed by class teachers, which are not used in School 2. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is as a result of School 2 being a smaller school, or whether this is more closely linked to the fact that ELSA is a very young project in School 2 with implementation practices and procedures still developing. In both schools, final decisions about appropriateness of the intervention are made by those in more senior positions (SENCO and ELSA Line Manager in School 1 and Head Teacher and SENCO / Deputy Head in School 2), as opposed to the ELSA herself being involved.

4.2.2 Theme 2: School Ethos, Priorities and Values and its Impact on ELSA Practices

This theme outlines how the ethos, priorities and values within School 1 and 2 impact on the ELSA practices in place.

4.2.2.1 School 1 Theme 2: School Ethos, Priorities and Values and its Impact on ELSA Practices

Supportive Community and Mental Health Ethos

Key stakeholders in School 1 identified that ELSA fits well within their school ethos, which is a very supportive community for both staff and pupils:

And the culture of the staff, we're all very supportive of one another, and the children know that, and we're very supportive of the children…So, they know that we're here for their best interest. So, in that sense, our school absolutely fits with ELSA…we are quite a tight community. [Stakeholder – S1]

As an extension of being supportive, stakeholders noted how School 1 places a high value on mental health. For example, the Link EP 1 explained:

In my [efforts]…to learn more about the school and what they value, mental health is definitely high on their agenda. And, you know, they've been involved in various projects over the past year supporting young people to be more aware of their own mental health. And they have mental health ambassadors in the school. And so, I think the idea of mental health and wellbeing is very high on their agenda … and I think ELSA just fits in very neatly into that ethos and just promotes, you know, that understanding of everyone taking care of themselves. [Link EP 1 – S1]

This mental health ethos within School 1 is present across a range of practices in the school. The ELSA intervention fits well within this environment, and this project is consistent with the wider school ethos and values.

Comprehensive Approach with Protection of ELSA Time, Space and Resources

School 1 demonstrate a comprehensive approach to running the ELSA project, with, timetabled sessions, protection of the ELSA's planning time, a decorated intervention room and provision of resources. The school appear to be committed to running the intervention in a comprehensive and strategic way, with a high level of fidelity with the training manual.

The ELSA has a clear distinction between her afternoon ELSA work and morning TA role, with clear time boundaries in each day:

I work as a Teaching Assistant in the mornings from 8.30 until 12. And then my ELSA role begins at 1.30 until home time which is 3.25 [ELSA – S1]

The ELSA also has protected planning time for her sessions every week. This is a time when she can plan the intervention sessions and get the resources ready.

Due to the protection of the ELSA's time and space and absence of such systemic issues, the intervention can function effectively:

[The ELSA]…she seems really happy in her role and, you know, very enthusiastic and I think that's because some of the systemic issues that perhaps might impact on other ELSAs in their schools, I think that's not so much there in this case school because it is so valued and because mental heath is so high on their agenda [Link EP 1 – S1]

Protection of the ELSA's time and resources potentially stems from the school's priorities and values, where SLT place high value on mental health within their culture and ethos:

And I think that just filters down I'd say, you know, it comes from the top really, they have senior leaders in school who really value thinking in this way about young people's emotional wellbeing, their mental health and also supporting staff with theirs…And so, I think in schools where you do have a stronger sense of that, I think ELSA perhaps works more effectively, because then there is a real kind of ringfencing of the ELSAs time. And that reflects the value that they place on it. And then, you know, it comes down to things like just even having the allocated space in the school that's the ELSA room, and it's decorated. And that's what I found in this case school, you know, there's a regular timetable for ELSA. There are weekly meetings with the line manager, there is a room that is dedicated to ELSA. [Link EP 1 – S1]

Therefore, it seems a school's priorities, ethos and values have an important impact in terms of whether the ELSA's time and resources are protected and consequently whether the intervention runs effectively.

Focused Efforts to Develop Awareness and Understanding of ELSA amongst Staff, Pupils and Parents

In School 1, stakeholders value pupil, parent and staff understanding and awareness of the ELSA programme. In line with their comprehensive approach, key stakeholders reflected on a range of strategies used to develop understanding of the programme across these groups. For example, there is a notice board in the school reception to raise parent awareness. However, challenges around accessibility of the board were raised in the interviews:

> *I am hoping the board works, but we don't know. Language as well is a big issue; you know if they can't read the English. [Stakeholder – S1]*

Consistent with the questionnaire data reported in section 4.1.1, there is agreement across stakeholders that staff are generally aware of the intervention but there is potentially not a full depth of knowledge of the intervention:

> *I think the teachers of the pupils who have been identified are aware of what it is and what is happening. I think generally people know what ELSA is, they know where the ELSA room is. They know that it takes place, and that X [ELSA] has got that role. I suppose I would wonder how much deeper understanding there might be about exactly what she is targeting or what the sessions might look like. [Stakeholder – S1]*

One teacher explained how she thinks she has the right level of awareness of the intervention:

> *I don't exactly know what tasks they do. But I think that, you know, I don't need to know exactly what activities are going on, I just need to know the goal of it and the purpose of it ….And if I'm going to know about the tasks, I might as well do the session myself. [Teacher 2 – S1]*

Although Teacher 2 does not have detailed knowledge of intervention activities, she views that her level of knowledge is appropriate.

There is also an iterative nature to staff awareness. Stakeholders consider how they can maintain staff awareness when new staff join the school:

So, in September when we have new staff, we need to think about how we let them know about it. [Stakeholder – S1]

4.2.2.2 School 2 Theme 2: School Ethos, Priorities and Values and its Impact on ELSA Practices

Small School with a Religious Family Ethos

School 2 is a small school with a religious family ethos:

So first and foremost, it's a church school. So the Christian values are quite strong…we're quite small school and I think we've got a family feel. [Head Teacher – S2]

The ethos in School 2 appears to impact upon ELSA practices. For example, the ELSA comments how she uses stories from the Bible and quotes in her intervention work:

Because it's a very religious school as well, we can use the Bible, we can use quotes…as part of the ELSA. [ELSA- S2]

For example, Bible stories which emphasise the importance of supporting and helping others (e.g. The Good Samaritan) may be told and discussed as part of the intervention.

The small family nature of the school also appears closely related with the high degree of parent communication in ELSA practices:

And then getting the parents in once a week as well to let the parents know how it's going. [ELSA – S2]

Similar to School 1, the ethos and culture in School 2 appears closely linked with ELSA practices.

Valuing the Role and Protecting Resources

School 2 value ELSA work and protect ELSA resources. The ELSA received a pay increase as a result of taking on additional responsibilities. The school have also protected planning time for both the ELSA and NSP work:

> We set aside every Monday afternoon, she's got PPA, so she's got time to plan and prepare for her ELSA sessions, to also make sure she's a got range of activities available for any children dropping into X class [NSP] [SENCO – S2]

There is also a dedicated room which the ELSA uses for leading the NSP and the ELSA intervention, which the school are in the process of adapting for purpose. Therefore, within this family context, the school are valuing the ELSA role, protecting a room and resources. However, there were concerns raised with regards to the ELSA having protected time to deliver the structured block intervention sessions, which is explored in theme 3 (sub-theme: Reactive Nature of ELSA Intervention).

4.2.2.6 Comparative Summary – Theme 2

The ethos, priorities and values in both schools are closely linked to ELSA project practices. School 1 adopt a comprehensive approach to running the intervention, with dedicated and protected ELSA time, space and resources. School 1 stakeholders also make focused efforts to develop awareness of the intervention across pupils, staff and parents. This considered approach appears closely linked to the mental health ethos in School 1, where SLT place a high value on mental health support such as the ELSA intervention. It was similarly found that the ethos, priorities and values of School 2 are closely linked to the ELSA practices. Linked to the religious nature and family feel of School 2, the ELSA has regular communication with parents and uses Bible stories and quotes in her intervention work.

4.2.3 Theme 3: ELSA Remit and Function within Wider SEMH Provision

This theme concerns the place of the ELSA intervention within the wider school SEMH provision, including challenges incorporating the programme with SEMH provision as well as important considerations such as defining the ELSA professional remit.

4.2.3.1 School 1 Theme 3: ELSA Remit and Function within Wider SEMH Provision

Expected Shared Responsibility for Mental Health

In School 1, there is an expected shared responsibility for mental health needs across staff. It is expected that class teachers support lower level concerns in the classroom:

Smaller concerns are dealt with by a class teacher…because teachers do sometimes go "Oh I have a problem, this needs to happen", but they haven't actually thought about it – have they had that conversation with the child? Do they know the bigger picture? What is going on, it is something that happens every day or is it just a one off? [Stakeholder – S1]

It appears key stakeholders are fostering a shared responsibility of these issues across all school staff. Teachers in School 1 also emphasise a sense of shared responsibility and awareness of intervention goals:

We'll sort of have a shared goal, we know what we want to get out of it. We're not just doing it, we have an objective and we're all aware. [Teacher 2 – S1]

It seems there is an expected shared responsibility for mental health, as well as shared ELSA intervention goals across staff in School 1.

Bridging the Gap between Tiers of Provision

Within a climate of funding cuts, School 1 were no longer able to buy-in a school counsellor. The ELSA project aims to bridge the gap left by the absence of the school counsellor. However, staff in School 1 question the extent to which the programme fully bridges this gap:

Sometimes I think yeah ELSA is brilliant but it fixes smaller problems. Larger problems I still feel we would benefit from having something else in school because referrals to outside agencies take a long time… [ELSA] will maybe help in the classroom but actually that child has been through so much, there should be more than ELSA. But it wouldn't meet the threshold for CAMHS, because CAMHS threshold is so high and they are inundated with referrals, they only take the most serious ones on. So, there is still a gap. [Stakeholder – S1]

When asked what this might look like, it was explained:

To pay for a counsellor or therapist in school. We have so many big needs in the school that are more than setting a target for the child, parents need to be brought into it, therapy needs to be done [Stakeholder – S1]

In School 1, the ELSA intervention empowers the school to somewhat bridge the gap between lower and high levels of support. However, staff question the extent to which the ELSA project fully bridges the gap between tiers of provision. With stakeholders explaining that the ELSA intervention is not able to fully meet the needs of CYP with high levels of needs, who do not meet CAMHS thresholds. Stakeholders note that sometimes a more holistic systemic approach is needed such as counselling which the school do not currently have in place. This could be a career pathway for ELSAs; with further training they could provide a higher tier of support within the school context.

ELSA Remit and Positive Outcomes

School 1 stakeholders emphasise the importance of whether work falls under the ELSA remit, i.e. whether a case is suitable for the ELSA intervention as opposed to other provision. Stakeholders are clear that the ELSA intervention targets a particular area, as opposed to other more in-depth SEMH involvement:

I think the thing for us is that we are not trying to tackle everything with ELSA…We are trying to keep ELSA as quite focused, not trying to resolve everything but having it honing in on a particular skill [SENCO – S1]

An element of the ELSA remit is having a specific SMART target which is being worked towards in the sessions.

Within this remit, School 1 have seen positive outcomes from the intervention, which have been cited through parent comments and behavioural changes noticed by teachers in school. For example, Teacher 1 explained:

Yeah, and it has helped. When I looked at where she was at the beginning of the year, she was very quiet, she wouldn't really talk about how she was feeling….but now I wouldn't say she always puts her hand up but I have seen it a lot more recently. Yeah, and I think she is clear to express how she is feeling. [Teacher 1- S1]

Although the ELSA remit predominately involves structured block sessions with targets in School 1, the stakeholders noted that ELSA practice also adapts to the school's needs. For example, stakeholders discussed setting up time in the ELSA's day so any pupils can have a one-off session:

Put something in X's [ELSA] day, not ELSA, but kind of check-in system where any child can have access if they want to speak to her [Stakeholder – S1]

Therefore, the ELSA role and remit can adapt over time to suit the school's needs.

4.2.3.2 School 2 Theme 3: ELSA Remit and Function within Wider SEMH Provision

Incorporating ELSA and Existing NSP

In School 2, the ELSA leads the NSP. Stakeholders voiced initial challenges in incorporating these structures. The ELSA's role in the NSP means she has had a great deal of experience supporting young people with behavioural needs before taking on her current responsibilities:

I've been doing an abbreviated version of the role for about two and a half years, but I've only recently started as an actual ELSA [ELSA – S2]

The ELSA-EP supervisor reflected on the importance of the role an ELSA has prior to starting their training. It appears already having a similar role in school, where they are supporting emotional wellbeing, poses additional challenges to embedding the ELSA model into systems that are already in place:

I think it's because it has to do with kind of whether or not the person was already in a role in school where they were already supporting emotional wellbeing. So I think the schools that have put in place more structured programmes... they're starting from scratch. So they've kind of used what they've learned in the training, and they're putting that model in place. Whereas I think the other schools, including the case school, they're kind of trying to incorporate what they've learned into structures that are already in place in school. And I think it's harder to change those [ELSA-EP Supervisor – S2]

Therefore, it appears an ELSA's role prior to completing their training is relevant to the barriers they face in early implementation stages. An ELSA having two different but linked roles within the school appears to pose challenges, including barriers incorporating the ELSA project with pre-existing systems within the school. Staff in School 2 emphasise that the project is "*just in its infancy*" *[Stakeholder – S2]*, so the challenge of incorporating these structures may be reflective of the early implementation stage School 2 are in.

Degree of Shared Responsibility for Behavioural Needs

The data indicates a potentially low degree of shared responsibility for complex behavioural needs across staff in School 2. It appears the ELSA is responsible for these young people in school:

> *There seems to be a certain few children that are seen as kind of her children in school. So as soon as they do anything challenging, they will get sent to her…it is her responsibility rather than the rest of the staff [EP Supervisor – S2]*

This was echoed in statements by other staff in school:

> *X's [ELSA] has got her children [Teacher 1 – S2]*

Although the above stakeholders indicate that the ELSA has a high level of responsibility for the young people with behavioural needs, SLT emphasise that they expect more of a shared responsibility across staff. For example, Teacher 2, who is also the Pastoral Lead for the school, explained that she is trying to promote staff across the school engaging in ELSA strategies in the classroom that promote the mental health, including giving praise and compliments:

> *I think if we can borrow ideas from ELSA and implement it…Encouraging staff to make sure that they praise the children, a lot of positive reinforcement and to feel good about themselves, give those compliments [Teacher 2 – S2]*

Given the above quotes, it appears there is an expected shared responsibility as opposed to all members of staff taking on full shared responsibility for CYP with mental health and behavioural needs.

Staff Misconceptions about the Role

The data indicates that while the ELSA, SENCO and EP Supervisor have a clear understanding of what the ELSA role entails, it appears staff in School 2 do not understand the difference between her ELSA role and her work in the NSP:

> *At the moment, as a school, I don't think people really see the difference between the two roles [SENCO- S2]*

When asking many school staff about the ELSA project, their answers often indicated that they viewed her role in the NSP as the ELSA role itself:

> *I don't think he accesses the ELSA room, we now call it X class [NSP], as much as he did in year one [Teacher 2 – S2]*

One attempt to incorporate these two roles involves the ELSA having a full-time ELSA post, which denotes her role in both leading the NSP and in her 1:1 ELSA sessions.

> *We've given her a role as a full-time ELSA to manage that, because we felt that even when she's not doing a specific ELSA session, she's still an emotional literacy support system if that make sense. Because she's still supporting those children. So it's a full-time role that she's doing, but in two different parts of it [SENCO – S2]*

However, the full-time ELSA job title in itself may act as a barrier to understanding that the ELSA project involves structured block sessions – making it different from the 'two hats' element of most ELSA roles.

Reactive Nature of the Intervention

The ELSA runs the NSP in school in the mornings, and the aim is for the ELSA to run the structured block ELSA intervention sessions in the afternoon. However, stakeholders explained that in practice, the ELSA was often being interrupted in her afternoon 1:1 sessions:

> *There was one time when she was in the middle of doing one of them, because she had like the faces out, you know, for the work. And then I had to take one of them round there. And she was "uh I'd just started" [Teacher 1 – S2]*

Interruptions appeared to happen as a result of staff misconceptions about the role,

where they viewed the ELSA role in a reactive way, similar to the way the NSP operates – where children come in and out depending on their needs. In this way, staff misunderstood the intervention as reactive:

> *Some people were still sort of seeing it as the dumping ground for the naughty children, that sort of thing…I think a lot of people it was just, you know, send them to X [ELSA] if they're being naughty [Stakeholder – S2]*

This has meant the ELSA faced challenges running the structured block sessions in the afternoon as planned. The ELSA does not have protected time to deliver these sessions:

> *It means that she hasn't been able to implement the programme as effectively she'd like to…It's more that she's got a certain group of children who are sent to her on quite a regular basis… there isn't that protected time…she isn't necessarily doing that six week intervention with the child [ELSA-EP Supervisor – S2]*

Although the ELSA has encountered challenges in consistently running the block interventions, she has been able to creatively apply and adapt teaching from the ELSA training into the work she is doing in the school day, including using this in her NSP teaching:

> *I'm incorporating it within the teaching I'm doing within the class [NSP]… So, some of the lesson plans that we did, I came back and have done them, including circle time, and there was the flowers, white lights, good to be me. [ELSA – S2]*

There were developments during the process of data collection in order to address the challenges School 2 were experiencing. This involved being clear with staff about what is expected in order for the ELSA to deliver her afternoon sessions:

> *And then we had a staff meeting where there was a timetable set out and you know, this is what's going to happen, and this is what X [ELSA] needs to do her ELSA stuff in the afternoon [Teacher 1 – S2]*

4.2.3.3 Comparative Summary – Theme 3

A key difference between the ELSA project implementation in each school is the extent to which the ELSA remit is clear. In School 1, there is a specified ELSA remit which functions between higher tiers of provision (e.g. CAMHS) and lower tiers of provision (e.g. communication box), and the programme involves setting a SMART target focusing on how an issue presents within the school context. School 1 have seen positive outcomes within this professional remit, including stakeholders noticing behaviour changes for young people accessing the intervention. In comparison, in School 2 there appears to be a lack of clarity in the ELSA remit – it is not wholly clear where her ELSA role starts and NSP role ends. In addition, the practices within the NSP appear similar to an internal exclusion room, which selected CYP are 'sent' to when displaying behavioural difficulties, which appears to stray from typical Nurture Group implementation guidance. The NSP and ELSA intervention structures appear heavily interlinked, and the school have had difficulties in incorporating and distinguishing between these systems.

The ELSA in School 2 has encountered challenges in running the structured block intervention sessions. The majority of staff in School 2 do not yet understand the difference between the ELSA role in her morning work in the NSP and in her afternoon work running the ELSA intervention sessions; she is often sent children who are presenting with behavioural difficulties at any time of the day. This meant the ELSA has needed to apply her skills and knowledge from the ELSA training creatively, such as during her teaching in the NSP, and also in a reactive way, as opposed to being able to run consistent block intervention sessions. This lack of clarity of the ELSA role across school staff led to the ELSA being interrupted in her afternoon structured block sessions, indicating the importance of whole-staff awareness and understanding of the ELSA model. Developments were made to address these challenges, including staff meetings to raise awareness, which indicates some of these challenges may have been reflective of the early stage of implementation School 2 were in.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Central Role of ELSA-Child Attachment

This theme concerns the central importance of the ELSA-Child attachment in the implementation of the project, and concerns the practices and considerations in ELSA intervention endings.

4.2.4.1 School 1 Theme 4: Central Role of ELSA-Child Attachment

ELSA-Child Bond at the Core of ELSA

The ELSA-child attachment is central to this intervention. The bond between the ELSA and her pupils appears to extend beyond a typical TA-pupil relationship:

> *With the ELSA role, you do have that little bit more protection of them in terms of you know why they are here, their situation, you do have that little bit more, 'are you okay'? [ELSA – S1]*

Due to the close attachment relationship, the ELSA faces additional challenges beyond the TA role with pupil disclosures, with the ELSA experiencing difficult feelings in passing that information on:

> *With her, I totally I had her back, you know when it's one of those children that it is like I could take her home, I could look after you. She just needs attention and care. I must admit when the first disclosure came up, obviously I had made a disclosure before as a TA, but being in the ELSA role, I kind of felt like a grass. Because I felt like I was betraying what she had told me…I did at first, you know when you feel, am I doing the right thing? But I know I am doing the right thing. Because all I am concerned about is her safety and her wellbeing [ELSA- S1]*

It appears due to this close attachment, the ELSA in School 1 finds disclosures an emotionally difficult process.

Practices in ELSA Endings

Due to the close attachment between the ELSA and child, endings are an important transition. ELSAs can find endings a difficult experience:

I think more often than not ELSAs find endings quite difficult…And, and I think it's probably because it is such an intense relationship that you form with that young person. [Stakeholder – S1]

The ELSA in School 1 reflected on how she can find endings an emotionally difficult process due to the close attachment relationship, for example she explained:

She was so lovely...once I had started doing it, I thought how am I going to say goodbye to this child? How am I going to end with this child? [ELSA- S1]

The endings of ELSA intervention sessions are also very difficult for pupils:

You build a relationship with them, you have helped them, it is really hard then for the children…there was one child who started saying "I feel ill, I feel ill", but it was because of that relationship ending and because she felt no one was there. But picking her up and saying "Okay, I know you feel ill. Tell me about this", you know just to check-in. She was then able to manage it. [Stakeholder – S1]

It seems that staff acting as alternative attachment figures facilitates CYP feeling contained in the process of ELSA intervention endings.

As endings are such a difficult process for both the child and ELSA, practices in endings are essential. Such practices include counting down in the sessions, communication with parents and the ELSA having ongoing contact with the child after sessions are completed. For example, the ELSA Line Manager explained:

I think endings are really important, so I always discuss with X [ELSA] well before the ending about you know doing the countdown, they reflect on the work they have done – they take pictures of each session that will be put in a book or a folder. So, it is like a celebration of an ending. So, the child is pre-warned, the countdown…they always do a folder that you hand to the child at the end. X [ELSA] would go to the parent and let them know the work had finished and she will be bringing her folder home. [ELSA Line Manager – S1]

It seems that endings are an important process, and it is essential that time is taken to ensure certain practices are adhered to. The ELSA explained that communicating

to the teachers is imperative in endings, however this is not always possible due to demands on teacher time:

> *I do try and catch the teachers…but they are so busy and it is quite hard to catch them [ELSA – S1]*

Another key aspect to consider with endings is how long the sessions go on for. Stakeholders in School 1 agreed that the intervention generally lasts longer than the recommended 6-10 weeks:

> *A lot of our sessions have run longer than they should do, because 7 sessions or whatever the recommended amount, to build up a relationship with a child, you can't do that in a session. It is important that you build up a relationship. So, in our school, ELSA does generally run on for at least a term [Stakeholder – S1]*

The extended length of the intervention in School 1 appears to acknowledge and honour the importance of the close ELSA-pupil attachment.

4.2.4.2 School 2 Theme 4: Central Role of ELSA-Child Attachment

ELSA-Child Bond over Time and Overdependence

In School 2, the ELSA and the CYP she works with have built up strong attachment relationships over several years, which have developed through work in the NSP:

> *I've had them since nursery and they are now year 2, so really massive bond [ELSA – S2]*

Stakeholders raised concerns that due to this close relationship built over time, the CYP may become overdependent on that relationship. This appeared linked to the difficulties running 1:1 structured block ELSA intervention sessions, as the other children not accessing the 1:1 that day would find it very difficult being separated from the ELSA:

> *They've got to warm to somebody else. Even if I can hide myself somewhere….If I can hide myself somewhere, they still find me. And if they don't see me, it causes problems [ELSA – S2]*

The interview with the ELSA in School 2 was interrupted after 15 minutes as she was separated from one of the pupils who came to find her:

I'm going to have to go – one of the lads is at the door [ELSA – S2]

One teacher explained how these difficulties with separation presented in class, where a pupil would repeatedly ask and engage in disruptive behaviour in order to go to the ELSA room:

She would just draw on her whiteboard, nothing to do with what we're doing. And then go to the table and then just say, "Can I go to the library? Can I go to the library [ELSA room]?" And then start banging on the table and disrupting the other children for her to go there [Teacher 1 – S2]

It seems there is a strong ELSA-child bond built over time in School 2 through the ELSA work and also in other roles, such as in the NSP. However, due to the strong relationship built over time, the pupils have difficulty separating from the ELSA.

Absence of ELSA Endings

In School 2, there is an absence of intervention endings for the pupils who access this support. While they may finish 'blocks' of ELSA input focusing on a certain theme, they will then access another block – meaning ELSA input is always ongoing:

I can't see them stopping…once those four finish one block, they start the next. Because they have got so many needs the four of them. So, they've got the need for the emotion, then the next block I'll probably do 2:1, instead of 1:1. Getting them to share with each other play games with each other. Then the next block, I'd like them to do beads of life together. [ELSA – S2]

So that was one of the things that came up in our supervision, actually, because it doesn't seem like there's an end point for any of the children [EP Supervisor – S2]

The absence of ELSA endings appears closely linked to the ongoing support the ELSA provides the same children in the NSP. When asked about the targets or goals of the ELSA intervention, these goals appeared closely related to the aims of

the NSP, with stakeholders often focusing on the pupils being able to manage in mainstream class:

> *What we want is self-sufficient children and self-regulating children. And so that's what we would be looking for, in trying to withdraw that support… the ultimate thing will be for them to be able to survive in managing a mainstream class [SENCO – S2]*

These targets are very closely linked to the existence and aims of the NSP in the school. As targets, these would not be realistically achieved in the recommended 6-10 sessions, which might partly explain why there appears to be an absence of intervention endings.

4.2.4.3 Comparative Summary – Theme 4

In both School 1 and 2, the close attachment between ELSA and child was found to be of central importance. In School 1, due to this close attachment relationship, both the ELSA and child can find endings a very difficult process. For this reason, practices within intervention endings are well considered by stakeholders in School 1, including use of a countdown, teacher communication and ongoing contact outside of sessions. Block intervention sessions generally last for at least a term in School 1. In comparison in School 2, there is an absence of intervention endings – with young people accessing ongoing input from the ELSA. There appears to be an overdependence in the ELSA-child relationship in School 2, with the children having difficulties separating from the ELSA.

4.2.5 Theme 5: ELSA Support System and Skills

This theme outlines the unique ELSA skills and qualities which facilitate the effective implementation of the intervention. This theme also outlines the importance of the network of ELSA support at the Line Management, wider-school and EP level.

4.2.5.1 School 1 Theme 5: ELSA Support System and Skills

ELSA Skills and Qualities

The ELSA in School 1 is a highly skilled TA, with personal qualities that support the effective implementation of the project. The ELSA appears very resourceful, prepared in her work and adaptive to the needs of the young people she works with:

> *I always make sure the work for the following week is always ready, while you are in that mind-set. And you know if anything comes up from the session, and you think oh we could do some work on that. [ELSA – S1]*

Therefore, the ELSA has a set of skills and qualities in School 1 which facilitate the effective implementation of the intervention.

Difficult Feelings in ELSA work

Stakeholders reflected on the emotional toll which ELSA work can have. It is work which requires a high degree of empathy, and engaging in and supporting very difficult experiences and feelings. For example, the ELSA reflected on supporting a young person experiencing bereavement:

> *I had a child in year 2 who lost her dad and that was really sad, because obviously she was so young as well. So we did a memory book all about her dad, so I've dealt with the bereavement bit and I felt a bit uncomfortable [ELSA – S1]*

The ELSA explained that she has personally grown, is more aware of individual differences and has become more emotionally resilient through completing her ELSA work:

> *And I mean I can't go and take her home with me, as much as you would like to – to protect her, all I can do is what I am allowed to do…we were all saying that at supervision actually, it has like toughened us up a bit…I realise now people are different, families are different, not everyone has been brought up like me and my sister, not everyone is like how me and my children are. So, it has opened my eyes. It is emotional, but it has toughened me up a bit, I'm not as teary as I used to be [ELSA – S1]*

Network of ELSA Support

The ELSA has a network of support in School 1, with the Line Manager acting as the key support figure. Given the emotional toll of the work, this support is essential. The ELSA Line Manager provides consistent weekly support, which provides emotional support by de-personalising challenges the ELSA faces as well as thinking practically about how best to respond:

I meet her once a week, every Tuesday afternoon and just go through who she is seeing, how it is going, any barriers she is coming up against…So she might come to me and say I'm really struggling with a child and they don't like coming to a session, and so my role would be okay it's not about her, how can we get through that, how can we respond to the child? [ELSA Line Manager – S1]

The ELSA Line Manager has a background in mental health, which has been noted to facilitate the provision of effective support:

I think part of the reason it works well is because X [ELSA Line Manager], who supervises her has quite a lot of experience herself. Her background is a Learning Mentor, she has had quite a bit of training around mental health. [Stakeholder – S1]

Although the ELSA is the only one trained in her school, she accesses peer support from the colleagues she trained with:

And with the group that I have got, the supervision group I go to, we have set up a WhatsApp group…I know if I need support, I can text them [ELSA – S1]

Unique Link EP Support Role and Challenges

Stakeholders highlighted the valuable role of EP support in ELSA project implementation. The school Link EP can play a unique support role by containing difficult feelings:

And yeah, and then I think just in terms of what we offer as EPs, you know, the kind of the containment and, just to be there to listen to any of the anxieties, worries or concerns and really help the ELSA and their Line Manager to find solutions [Link EP 1 – S1]

In School 1, Link EP support has occurred through informal discussions. The Link EP 1 is also due to meet key stakeholders and provide support more formally:

And so we've got a session booked in…to have a look at some of those request for involvement forms. And for me to kind of model some of the questions that I might ask around, you know, whether or not this is an appropriate referral. [Link EP 1 – S1]

However, the traded nature of EP work poses challenges to working in this way. Schools can view Link EP time as work at the individual level, as opposed to more systemic ELSA support:

But it can be tricky because schools only see their EP time, you know, often for individual casework [Link EP 1]

Therefore, the Link EP will be providing systemic support around the ELSA intervention in School 1, however there are challenges for all schools in accessing this kind of support.

4.2.5.2 School 2 Theme 5: ELSA Support System and Skills

ELSA Skills and Initiative

The ELSA in School 2 is highly skilled, with a range of personal qualities which support the effectiveness of her work:

She's aware, she's committed, she's enthusiastic. She's also quite confident in her approach. And in that way she's given lots of responsibilities for how they work with some pupils that they have some concerns about. [Stakeholder – S2]

Difficult Feelings in ELSA Work

The EP Supervisor explained that the ELSA can find her role stressful, which includes a high degree of responsibility for children with complex behavioural needs.

I think she finds it quite stressful. And I think she feels like it's quite a lot of pressure because some of the children she's working with are really challenging. And so she said that she felt that she needed the supervision and

she needed to talk to everybody. And she was a bit frustrated that she hadn't had a chance [EP Supervisor – S2]

This quote highlights that the ELSA felt that she hadn't had sufficient opportunity to talk about her feelings and experiences in her new role, and perhaps the half-termly supervision was not felt as frequent enough. However, this viewpoint was only expressed by the ELSA EP Supervisor, so there is limited support for this theme in comparison to other themes. However Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that the number of instances of a theme across the dataset does not necessarily mean one theme is more important than another.

Network of ELSA Support

Support from the ELSA Line Manager in School 2 emerged as a key source of support for the ELSA, in addition to staff in the school who are also very supportive.

I've got Mr. Headteacher. Class teachers are amazing. Class TA is amazing. Mrs. SENCO is out of this world…she's really supportive. Her pastoral care is amazing...So really, the whole school [ELSA – S2]

In comparison to School 1, where it appears the ELSA Line Manager is the main form of support for the ELSA, in School 2 the ELSA emphasises the whole school acts as her support network. This may be linked to the small family feel of the school (as discussed in sub-theme: Small School with Religious Family Ethos).

Some barriers to peer support were raised by key stakeholders, including that only one ELSA was trained in this school:

I think one of the things in this school is they only sent one person to the training… I think ideally, it'd be good to have more than one trained ELSA in school so that they can kind of support each other, and have that peer supervision [EP Supervisor – S2]

Unique Link EP Support and Challenges

The EP Supervisor and Link EP referenced how valuable the EP role is in supporting systemic factors, however a range of challenges to this form of support were raised including the extent of Link EP knowledge and the nature of traded

services. Due to the setup of the course, there is no formal EP input beyond the training and half-termly supervision, which can act as a barrier:

I think that's one of the limitations of the training. We did have on day 6 a line manager day. So the line manager comes along, they do an activity together where they think about kind of what ELSA is going to look like in their school. And this school did do that. But then there's still obviously the issues. Because I think sometimes it isn't until you go to put it in place that you kind of know what might be a challenge. So it's almost that there needs to be some further input afterwards [EP Supervisor – S2]

This further input might look like Link EP input, however the Link EP in School 2 was not fully aware of the ELSA project as she has not been involved in delivering ELSA training or supervision:

Well, I'd say my understanding of ELSA is very limited [Link EP – S2]

In addition, challenges around whether the SENCO would commission the school to engage in this kind of work was also raised. This school is very focused on individual-based EP work, often with the aim of progressing to an EHC plan as opposed to more systemic working:

Yeah, their idea of when they say EP support, I don't know if I'm interpreting it wrong, but ultimately they would like to proceed to the EHC assessment at some point [Link EP – S2]

4.2.5.3 Comparative Summary – Theme 5

The ELSAs in both School 1 and School 2 have range of skills and qualities which support the effectiveness of their work. However, their skills and qualities cannot be said to drive the success of the intervention alone. It appears School 1 and 2 both have very experienced and skilled ELSAs, however in School 1 the intervention is run by a systematic approach, while School 2 are encountering challenges with running structured block ELSA intervention sessions. Therefore, it appears other factors such as the school ethos, priorities and values, wider SEMH provision and staff awareness are relevant to successful implementation of the project.

Stakeholders in both schools expressed that the ELSAs can experience

difficult feelings, with the nature of their work having an emotional toll. Having a strong support system is essential. Both ELSAs receive consistent (i.e. weekly) support from the ELSA Line Manager. Both School 1 and 2 stakeholders identified the Link EP as a valuable support role, but challenges were raised in terms of accessing this support. It appears while some schools may receive Link EP support, others may not, indicating this is not a consistently received avenue of support.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the findings of this study, including the thematic analysis of the qualitative data and a summary of the questionnaire data. Overall, the findings highlight the different implementation approaches schools can adopt, as well as indicating facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of the ELSA project.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Overview of Key Findings in Relation to Research Questions

This study examined the reflections of key stakeholders relative to the organisation and implementation of the ELSA project in two primary schools that had been involved with the project for different periods of time. The research highlighted a number of tensions, and factors that enabled the ELSA project to take place or acted as barriers to its successful use in schools. This chapter outlines the findings of the present study in relation to the research questions and relevant literature, considers implications for practice, limitations and strengths of the current study in addition to directions for future research. The research aimed to answer two overarching research questions with six sub-questions to be addressed. Findings will be considered first in relation to the six research sub-questions, before discussing the findings in light of the overarching research questions.

5.1.1. Sub RQ 1: What is the nature of the support provided for ELSAs within the school environment?

The themes relevant to this sub-question include: 'ELSA Difficult Feelings in Work', 'Network of ELSA Support' and 'Unique EP Role and Challenges'.

The data highlights that intervention work can evoke difficult feelings for ELSAs with the work having a high degree of emotional impact, which has similarly been found in the secondary context (Begley, 2016; Nicholson-Roberts, 2019). This appeared as a result of needing to support or contain difficult emotional experiences, including bereavement, as well as supporting children with very challenging behaviour.

From the perspective of the 'Container and Contained' model (Bion, 1985), for ELSAs to provide emotional containment for the CYP they work with, they need to feel containment themselves. Similar to the way that teachers feeling uncontained can have a detrimental impact on their work (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015), the ELSA-EP Supervisor in School 1 echoed this sentiment in relation to ELSAs, explaining the emotional toll on ELSAs potentially impacts the efficacy of their work. It appears

imperative that ELSAs are supported not just with regards to practical guidance, but also with in relation to their emotional wellbeing.

The data highlighted that the ELSA Line Manager acts as the key figure of support in both schools. The Line Manager in School 1 provides two layers of support – both emotional and practical. This might be in terms of first de-personalising challenging experiences and then thinking practically about next steps. The Line Manager in School 1 has a great deal of relevant experience, including accessing training in mental health and emotional support, which facilitates the effective implementation of the project in this school. The ELSA project arguably extends the practice of those with the lowest level of qualifications (TAs) supporting those who are most vulnerable (Blatchford et al., 2015). Therefore, this high degree of practical support through an experienced and knowledgeable Line Manager within schools is essential. This is especially important as the data indicate that Line Managers act as the ELSAs first port of call when experiencing challenges in their work. There may be a role for EPs to help schools consider the best person to provide this Line Management support. The consistency of Line Management meetings, i.e. weekly at a set time and day, as well as opportunity for ad hoc support, were viewed as essential for supporting the ELSAs in their work.

The ELSA in School 1 explained that her work has enabled her to become more emotionally resilient. There appears to be an element of ELSAs building up their resilience over time with experience, and from a containment perspective (Bion, 1961) we may speculate the important role of a supportive network in developing these resiliency skills.

Both ELSAs in this study were the only ones trained in their school, which may have contributed to difficult feelings in their roles as they did not have access to peer supervision within their school contexts. This appears to corroborate Rees' (2016) findings that ELSAs can experience loneliness in their roles. However, the ELSA in School 1 had addressed this to some extent by having a WhatsApp group with the peers in her cohort, while this was not cited as an available source of peer support in School 2.

The Link EP role was identified as a valuable support role, in terms of containing ELSA anxieties and difficult feelings in the work, as well as providing

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support at a systemic level for implementing the project through their relationships with key figures in the schools. However, the data indicates that this is not a consistently received avenue of support for schools implementing the project, due to challenges in accessing this support. Firstly, several EPSs have become traded services following the Localism Act (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). The traded service model means that EPSs cover costs by schools and other education providers buying in EP time. Consequently, a limitation of Link EPs supporting ELSA project implementation is that schools may not commission EPs to work in this way. In School 1, the school have commissioned the Link EP to work in this way, while in School 2 the Link EP time is viewed as primarily for individual as opposed to systemic working. Another challenge at the EPS level, concerns whether the school Link-EPs are aware and have knowledge of the intervention in order to provide this kind of support. Due to the nature of the ELSA project (Burton, 2009), only a select number of the EPs in the service will have a role in training ELSAs. The EP in School 2 was not directly involved in the training and did not feel she had sufficient knowledge of the project to provide this support to the school.

5.1.2 Sub RQ 2: What is the nature of the referral process of young people to the ELSA intervention?

The findings relevant to this sub-question are found in the over-arching theme 'Identifying Pupils for ELSA'.

Data indicates how dissimilar referral processes can be across different primary school contexts. The type of pupil needs which led to the ELSA intervention in School 1 were diverse and included: internalising difficulties, externalising difficulties, challenges with friendship issues, bereavement and difficulties with transition. In comparison, although the project was developed to support pupils with a range of SEMH needs (Burton, 2009), CYP who accessed ELSA intervention support in School 2 are those that present with complex externalising behavioural needs as opposed to a more diverse range of needs. The latter approach to referral raises issues about equality of access to the ELSA intervention, where only those young people with externalising difficulties are accessing support.

Another relevant referral factor is school size. In both schools, concerns could be raised by a number of individuals (teachers, parents, TAs or through safeguarding meetings). School 1 is a larger-than-average primary school, and there are several formal referral steps which are taken, including completing a referral form and collaborative meetings between the SENCO and ELSA Line Manager to decide the appropriateness of the ELSA intervention for the child. This process is adhered to for all CYP where concerns are raised. School 2 is a one-form entry small school, in which the SLT do not view a formal referral process as wholly necessary, instead due to the close family nature of the school, they can be considerate of the CYP's needs.

An impact study highlighted that those on the waiting list had lower ratings on SDQ scores in comparison to those accessing the ELSA intervention (Burton et al., 2010). However, this study indicates that prioritisation is a much more nuanced and considered process than which young people have 'higher' or 'lower' levels of needs. In School 1, collaborative discussions were at the heart of this process – which considered a fuller picture of the child's need and whether it was the right time for that young person in order to have the highest level of impact.

In both schools, final decisions about appropriateness of the ELSA intervention for particular children were made by those in senior positions (SENCO, ELSA Line Manager or Head Teacher). This practice appears to stray from Burton's (2019) guidance that ELSAs be fully involved in discussions and decisions about referral. This finding is corroborated by Leighton's (2015) work, which similarly found that ELSAs are not involved in referral decisions or discussions.

5.1.3 Sub RQ 3: What does finishing an ELSA intervention look like in practice?

ELSA-Pupil attachment is first considered, as this is central to considerations about endings.

5.1.3.1 ELSA-Pupil Attachment

In support of existing research (Barker, 2017; Begley, 2016; McEwen 2015; Miles, 2015), this study highlighted the central importance of the ELSA-pupil relationship in this intervention, where the ELSAs in both schools had developed

strong attachment relationships with the pupils they were working with. Although an ELSA is not a typical caregiver as viewed in the original attachment theory (Ainsworth et al.,1978; Bowlby, 1988), the data indicated the interactions between ELSA and child are often those where the child is sensitively responded to. Though these processes, the CYP develop secure and responsive relationships with the ELSA. Due to this close attachment, the ELSA in School 1 voiced how she felt like a 'grass' in passing on disclosures to the appropriate members of staff, finding this a more emotionally difficult process in comparison to disclosures made in her TA role.

The prominence of the ELSA-pupil attachment in this study and others (Barker, 2017; Begley, 2016; McEwen 2015; Miles, 2015), may go some way to addressing the challenge that the ELSA project does not appear to be underpinned by one specific psychological approach or theory. While the training manual (Burton, 2009) explicitly references a range of underpinning psychological approaches and theories, we might speculate that the mechanism which makes the most difference for CYP in receipt of this intervention is the relationship between the ELSA and child. The ELSA training could be adapted to have an emphasis on the relationship between the ELSA and young person as a key message running through the 6 days of training. This identification of a key theory may enable schools to have some clarity about what a whole-school adoption of ELSA project principles would look like. One example may be adopting the Attachment Aware Schools approach, which includes elements such as school ethos, specific training about attachment and trauma-informed practice as well as promoting strategies and collaborative partnerships with the wider community (Rose, Mcguire-Snieckus, Gilbert & Mcinnes, 2019).

5.1.3.1 Attachment and ELSA Endings

The data indicated that due to this close attachment, the ELSA and CYP can find both separation and endings a difficult process. This might be viewed through the lens of attachment loss and separation anxiety (Bowlby, 1969). In School 1, endings were cited to take an emotional toll both on the ELSA and the child. Whereas in School 2, there are an absence of intervention endings – with CYP accessing ongoing different blocks of ELSA intervention input, again emphasising

how this intervention can be implemented in very different ways within school contexts.

In School 1, the importance of considerations and practices around ELSA intervention endings were considered. Practices include use of a countdown each week, celebrating the work completed with the handover of a folder of work at the end and communicating with the class teacher and parents about the ending. However, the ELSA expressed that class teachers are often busy, and liaising with them is not always possible. This challenge of teacher workload has been echoed nationally in The Teacher Workload Survey (DfE, 2016). This highlights issues with the possibility and practicality of engaging teachers in the process of endings as advised by Burton (2009; 2018). However, given the central role of attachment in endings, we can understand why teachers being aware and a source of emotional sensitivity and support for a CYP would be important. One key practice cited in School 1 was the importance of ongoing contact, attachment and responsive support by the ELSA, but also other staff members. The ELSA Line Manager explained an occasion when a young person whose ELSA intervention sessions had ended complained of feeling ill. The ELSA Line Manager then provided comfort and support for this young person, with an understanding of her needs. Therefore, both the ELSA and wider staff providing ongoing support, as well as a shared responsibility and understanding of young people's emotional needs appears to facilitate endings in this intervention. This degree of shared responsibility for pupils accessing ELSA support (those with complex behavioural needs) did not appear as present within School 2, with data highlighting that the CYP accessing ELSA support are 'her children'. This may pave some of the way in explaining the absence of ELSA intervention endings in this school, where there is an over-dependency on the ELSA and a degree of separation anxiety. In this school, there is an apparent absence of wider staff responsibility for the needs of these pupils, meaning that an ending would not be facilitated by other staff in the school being significant alternative attachment figures who are there to hold and contain the child in the process of this ending.

In School 1, data indicate that CYP in receipt of ELSA support accessed the intervention for longer than the recommended length. The sessions in School 1 run for at least a term. This apparent extended intervention length, beyond Burton's (2009; 2018) recommendation of interventions lasting 6-10 weeks, accords with

Nicholson-Roberts (2019) finding that secondary schools generally run the intervention for longer than the recommended time. The importance of beginnings and endings is the reason cited for this extended length of the interventions. The ELSA explained beginnings are essential in the building of a relationship with a young person, and this can take at least three sessions, then time needs to be spent working towards the target, and about three sessions are spent in ending the work. This approach appears to acknowledge and value the attachment between the child and ELSA, including consideration spent over building that relationship of trust in order to effectively engage in the sessions, as well as taking time to acknowledge that the piece of work is ending. This additional time spent appears to be a professional judgment the school have made based on the experience of running this intervention. Taking this additional time appears quite crucial in ensuring an effective ELSA intervention for this school. Therefore, this adaptation to the intervention appears to accord with Durlak and DuPree's (2008) work that positive results could be achieved with 60-80% implementation fidelity. Considering these findings, there may be an amendment to the ELSA project guidance around additional time taken within the intervention to ensure a relationship is carefully built as well as endings are prepared for. However, in light of School 2's data where there is an absence of endings and the pupils are over-dependent on the ELSA, amending the model to incorporate significantly longer ELSA interventions may be accompanied by challenges surrounding pupil dependency. Instead, it may be better for additional guidance to be provided in the ELSA training for how to build up these relationships in a shorter amount of time and how to avoid over-dependence. EPs are well placed to provide this guidance as this is a central aspect of their role (Beaver, 2011).

5.1.4 Sub RQ 4: To what extent do staff within ELSA project schools have knowledge and understanding of the ELSA intervention?

The questionnaire and interview data highlighted that staff across both case schools were aware of the ELSA project in their schools, but did not have a depth of awareness about the intervention.

The concept of the primary task (Jennings & Kennedy, 1996; Roberts, 1994) is central to why staff knowledge and understanding of the ELSA intervention is

essential. In School 2, the data highlighted staff misconceptions about the ELSA role – with those entrenched in the sub-system (i.e. the ELSA and ELSA Line Manager) having a clear definition of the ELSA project primary task, while other staff did not understand the difference between her role running the ELSA intervention in the afternoons and her role in the NSP provision in the mornings, where identified children come in and out depending on their behavioural needs. This meant the ELSA project primary task across wider staff was ill-defined, where staff did not know the importance of the structured 6-10 week block sessions which are not interrupted (Burton, 2009). This resulted in practice which was counter-productive towards the primary task, involving the ELSA being reactively sent children with behavioural needs. This meant she was often interrupted during the block sessions. During this early implementation stage, we might also understand this counter-productive practice to the ELSA project primary task as a defence against anxiety within this school system (Roberts, 1994). The data highlights staff having difficulty in teaching and having responsibility for those with quite significant behavioural needs in the mainstream classroom. The feasibility of the ELSA in School 2 having uninterrupted block sessions meant that another member of staff (whether it was the class teacher or a different TA) needed to take on a new responsibility for those identified young people who would usually be sent to the ELSA at a time of behavioural challenge. Staff then may have found this proposed systemic shift of greater shared responsibility for the identified young people with significant behavioural needs difficult to adapt to. This may have contributed to the ELSA being interrupted during her block sessions, and the ELSA project resultantly working in a predominately reactive way. ELSA literature highlights that:

> *ELSAs need to resist pressures to become involved in crisis management. They should not be the only members of staff in school equipped to deal with distressed children* (Burton, 2018, p25)

Burton (2018) emphasises that the proactive nature of the structured sessions where a young person builds a relationship of trust with the ELSA is central to the intervention, and when an ELSA does not work through structured block sessions, they cannot be understood as delivering a genuine ELSA intervention. However, Burton's (2018) statement that ELSAs need to resist the pressure to work in a reactive way seems to detract from the fact that ELSAs working in a reactive way

may stem from very complex processes within the school system which the ELSA is unlikely to be able to influence alone. It appears the SLT will need to play a key role in clarifying and ensuring feasibility of the ELSA project primary task. In addition, SLT will need to play a role in containing any staff anxiety in new ways of working, which may well bring more shared responsibility for behavioural needs across school staff.

5.1.5 Sub RQ 5: To what extent does the school ethos and school system act as a facilitator or barrier to the ELSA intervention?

5.1.5.1 School Ethos and ELSA Practices

The data highlighted that the implementation environment (Humphrey, 2013), including the school context and ethos has a clear impact on ELSA practices. ELSA appears to function best within a school ethos which values and priorities mental health, and where there is a shared responsibility for mental health across staff. We can make sense of this in relation to the concept of the primary task (Jennings & Kennedy, 1996; Roberts, 1994). Institutions work most effectively when staff understand how sub-systems fit into the primary task of the institution as a whole (Roberts, 1994). Within the strong mental health culture and ethos of School 1, ELSA is not viewed as a standalone intervention but instead as a sub-system of the school which valuably contributes to the whole-school primary task of improving their students' mental health and wellbeing. Within this ethos, the school have adopted a systematic approach to the intervention. There is a protection of ELSA planning time, a decorated ELSA room, a timetable for ELSA sessions as well as budget for resources. Stakeholders in School 1 made direct links between this systematic approach and the implementation environment, where there is a strong mental health ethos. Therefore, ELSA potentially functions best within a school ethos which values mental health, in which the ELSA intervention can be understood as contributing to the whole-school primary task.

5.1.5.2 ELSA Remit and Function within Wider SEMH Provision

An additional implementation environment (Humphrey, 2013) factor, relates to the clarity of the ELSA remit in the case schools. It appears ELSA functions best in schools where the ELSA remit and place within wider SEMH provision is clearly

defined. For School 1, the ELSA's remit was in line with guidance from Burton (2018) of working towards SMART targets, which are within the ELSA's level of professional competence. The ELSA had a clear remit between higher and lower levels of SEMH provision.

Perhaps reflective of the early stages of intervention implementation, School 2 had difficulty incorporating ELSA with the existing NSP. There appeared difficulties distinguishing between these two provisions within the school, with a considerable overlap between the targets/goals for both interventions (i.e. returning to mainstream class). The challenges distinguishing between these structures were exacerbated by the ELSA's role in the NSP in the mornings, where she was often applying ELSA tools and resources creatively within this class. Whereas in School 1, the ELSA has clear role boundaries with her TA 'hat' on in the morning and ELSA 'hat' on in the afternoon.

ELSA schools can therefore face additional challenges when attempting to incorporate ELSA with existing SEMH provision, especially when the ELSA has an existing role within this provision. It appears there are some benefits in bringing ELSA skills and tools to other provisions within the school. However, in line with Burton (2018), it appears the ELSA project is most effective when clear boundaries between the ELSA role and other aspects of the individual's role in school are established, which is clearly communicated to the pupils the ELSA works with as well as staff in the school.

5.1.6 Sub RQ 6: How do the facilitators and barriers for ELSA project implementation differ across the different stages of implementation?

Within this comparative case study design, the only differing criteria between the schools was the amount of time ELSA had been in place. Although admittedly there was also a difference in school size, with School 1 having approximately double the number of pupils on roll. For School 2, ELSA was a very young project – having begun implementing the project approximately 6 months prior to data collection. In comparison, School 1 had begun implementing the project approximately 2 years prior to data collection.

Appendix 15 maps the findings in School 1 and School 2 onto the implementation stages (Kelly, 2012), and provides guidance around the optimal conditions for effective implementation within each stage. It appears the barriers to ELSA implementation may be most prominent in the earlier stages of implementation, where schools need to fit the core elements of the ELSA project into their existing system which is significant change for a school. The school need to integrate the project into existing SEMH systems as well as promoting whole-staff awareness, understanding and commitment of the ELSA project primary task (Jennings & Kennedy, 1996; Roberts, 1994). It appears the initial pre-planning and foundations as Humphrey (2013) puts it, are essential in laying the groundwork for effective implementation. It appears that if schools move to the initial implementation stage (where pupils access this intervention) before laying this groundwork (e.g. defining ELSA role boundaries, building whole-staff awareness), they can risk facing a great deal of challenges as School 2 encountered in this study.

In line with research by Humphrey (2013) and Kelly (2012), both schools adapted the intervention to suit their climate. For example, in School 1 one-off ELSA drop-in sessions were run. While in School 2, ELSA skills and tools were creatively applied in the NSP. However, Kelly (2012) advises it is important that these adaptations are not made until after the school have followed the intervention manual with fidelity. Otherwise it is difficult to judge outcomes, where a school could not tell if negative outcomes were due to adaptations or the intervention itself. However, in reality schools may find it difficult to follow this guidance, as programmes are not developed to fit individual school circumstances. It appears a balance needs to be struck between schools adapting ELSA to fit their needs and circumstances, but doing so in a professional and informed way.

5.1.7 Main RQ 1: How is the ELSA project implemented in primary school settings?

Overall, it appears primary schools can implement ELSA in very different ways, in relation to several factors such as: ELSA endings, referrals, ELSA support system and extent of staff understanding. Further detail on these areas are provided in the research sub-questions above. The findings for School 1 and 2 are mapped

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onto Humphrey's (2013) implementation factors and corresponding ELSA research gap below in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Mapping Findings onto Humphrey's (2013) Implementation Factors

Implementation Factor	ELSA Research Gap	School 1	School 2
Number of sessions	• How many ELSA sessions are typically run in primary schools?	ELSA runs for at least a term. Number of sessions vary by each child.	Sessions are ongoing, absence of endings
Participant Reach	• What young people are prioritised for this intervention? • How are these decisions made?	Range of pupil needs. Decisions made through collaborative discussion between SENCO and ELSA Line Manager.	Pupils with complex externalising behavioural needs. Final decisions made by Head Teacher and Deputy Head.
Fidelity	• What does stopping the intervention look like in practice?	2-3 sessions taken over endings, range of practices adopted in view of close attachment between pupil and ELSA	Absence of ELSA endings
Pre-Planning and Foundations	• Are members of staff aware of the ELSA intervention in school?	Yes, but lack depth of awareness	Yes, but there are misconceptions about the role
Implementation Support System	• What support is available for ELSAs within the school system?	ELSA Line Manager as key source of support	ELSA Line Manager as key source of support, as well as wider colleagues
Implementation Environment	• How does the school ethos and system act as a facilitator and barrier for the intervention?	Mental Health ethos acts as a facilitator for the intervention	Existing SEMH provision, with the NSP, acts as a barrier for the intervention
Implementation Stages	• How do the facilitators and barriers for ELSA implementation differ across the different stages of implementation?	School 1 able to sustain effective implementation in the later stages of implementation.	Barriers are prominent in the earlier stages of implementation

5.1.8 Main RQ 2: What are the facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of the ELSA project in primary schools at different stages of implementation?

This research highlights that a range of factors within different school systems provide both facilitators and barriers for implementing this project effectively. The facilitators noted in this research project include:

- A highly skilled ELSA with a range of personal qualities,
- A school ethos which values mental health, and where clear links can be made between the values of the ELSA project and the school ethos as a whole,
- Whole-staff understanding and knowledge of the ELSA project primary task (Jennings & Kennedy, 1996; Roberts, 1994),
- Ample opportunities for ELSA support and containment at a peer, line management, EP Supervisor and Link EP level,
- Clear ELSA project remit, which is suitable for the ELSA's professional competency, with use of short-term SMART targets,
- Protection of ELSA planning time, time to complete the sessions, space (i.e. ELSA room which is fit for purpose) and resources,
- Shared responsibility for mental health across the school,
- Practices and considerations in ELSA intervention endings which acknowledge the importance of the ELSA-Pupil attachment formed, including wider-staff being responsive alternative attachment figures,
- Referral process with routes for pupils with a range of needs, including both externalising and internalising difficulties, to ensure an equality of access,
- Opportunities for peer support where only one ELSA is trained in school, i.e. via ELSA cohort WhatsApp group.

Barriers identified include:

- Teacher workload acting as a barrier to their availability to be involved in intervention discussions, e.g. during ELSA intervention endings,
- Incorporating and clearly distinguishing between the ELSA project and other SEMH provision. This appears a barrier which is particularly challenging in the

earlier implementation phases, when the school are integrating ELSA with existing school systems,

- Lack of boundaries and clarity between the ELSA role and his/her other roles in school,

- Staff misconceptions about ELSA and lack of understanding about the ELSA project primary task,

- Absence of peer support networks, where only one ELSA has trained in school,

- ELSA project work having a high degree of emotional impact on ELSAs,

- Lack of equality of access in ELSA intervention referrals

- Absence of ELSA project endings and lack of shared responsibility for mental health needs, which can lead to pupil over-dependence on the ELSA and separation anxiety.

5.2 Implications for Practice

5.2.1 Implementation Resource for Schools

An implementation resource (see Table 5.2) has been created for schools, which draws on the findings of the present research in conjunction with implementation literature. This resource is aimed at Senior Leadership / SENCOs, and may also be discussed in conjunction with the ELSA. The resource aims to provide guidance and support specific to the stage of implementation the school are in. This resource can be adapted in light of further research into this area. It will also be important for schools using this resource to consider the similarity of their settings to the case schools in this study. This implementation resource will be most beneficial and transferable to similar contexts to the schools in this study.

Table 5.2: Implementation Resource for Schools

Implementation Stage	What Stage of ELSA implementation are we in?	What should we being doing to ensure best ELSA implementation practice?
Stage 1 - The exploration and adoption stage	You are either considering signing up for the ELSA project or you have recently signed up to the ELSA project. The identified ELSA(s) haven't yet started the 6 days of EP-led Training	- Familiarize yourself with the core components of the ELSA project - Who is best to train to as an ELSA in our school? Remember it is essential a highly skilled TA is selected, see The ELSA Person Specification. - Can more than one ELSA be trained? This will support peer supervision practices - Ensure wider-staff (e.g. teachers, TAs) are aware of this new programme being implemented in the school context and what will be involved. You might use email or staff meetings. It is important that staff have opportunities to raise any concerns at this stage about feasibility of the project in the school system. - Consider how you will financially account for the resources and time required for the ELSA intervention. - Consider who will best act as the ELSA Line Manager? This could be the SENCO but doesn't have to be. This person will provide both practical and emotional support for the ELSA. Their level of knowledge and experience is important.
Stage 2 – Installation stage	You have decided to adopt the ELSA programme, and the ELSA is in the process of completing or has recently finished his/her 6 days of ELSA training.	***This is perhaps the most important stage of implementation. The pre-planning and foundations before you start running the sessions are essential.*** ELSAs and their Line Managers will have reviewed the Line Manager Planning Activity on Day 6 of ELSA training, which include questions about ELSA time, referrals and resources. The following considerations will also be important at this stage of implementation: ***Leadership Support and Transparent Communication:*** Leadership support is essential to maintain focus on implementing the intervention with quality. It will be important to maintain regular transparent communication between those who know the most about what is needed to implement the intervention with quality (ELSA and ELSA Line Manager) and more senior members of the school (e.g. Deputy or Head Teacher). ***Defining ELSA's Place in your Existing SEMH Provision:***

Implementation Stage	What Stage of ELSA implementation are we in?	What should we being doing to ensure best ELSA implementation practice?
		• Prior to stage 3 (where pupils access the ELSA intervention), it will be important Senior Leadership, with the ELSA and ELSA Line Manager, consider how the ELSA project fits into the school's wider SEMH provision. For example, within a tiered system, the ELSA project might sit between lower levels of provisions in school (e.g. quality first teaching, a 'worry box' in class) and higher levels of provision (e.g. in-school counselling or CAMHS referral). The ELSA project needs to be distinguished from other forms of support in school, and must be distinguished from behaviour management responsibilities. • Does the ELSA's existing role in school also involve SEMH support in some way? It will be important to take extra time to really consider the boundaries between these roles. *School ethos and Shared Responsibility for Mental Health:* • Consider how does the ELSA project fit into your whole-school ethos? This intervention will work best when you can make direct links between the aims of the ELSA project (to promote emotional literacy skills of pupils) and your wider school aims and values, and communicate this clearly to staff. • The intervention works best where there is wider shared responsibility for mental health across all staff members, how can this be fostered further? *Referrals:* • ELSA supports pupils with a wide range of needs, including those with friendship difficulties, anxiety, behavioural difficulties and bereavement, to name a few. Your referral procedures should ensure pupils with a range of need access ELSA support. • Foster wider staff awareness and understanding about their role in making appropriate referrals. *Staffing* • Staffing considerations will need to be made at this stage. For example, if the ELSA is conducting his / her sessions on Monday afternoons, what duties did s/he previously have during this time? How can we ensure these duties are covered and s/he is not interrupted during the ELSA intervention sessions? *Reacquainting wider-staff with ELSA aims*

Implementation Stage	What Stage of ELSA implementation are we in?	What should we being doing to ensure best ELSA implementation practice?
		• Prior to pupils accessing this intervention in stage 3, steps should be taken to restate the nature and aims of the ELSA project to all staff, including what is needed from them to achieve the aims of the intervention (e.g. uninterrupted sessions, their role in the referral process), as well as opportunities for them to voice concerns about feasibility. This might be completed through a staff meeting, with an email sent around beforehand so staff have ample opportunities to consider this change in the school system and what it means for them. • Restating how ELSA fits into the whole-school ethos will be beneficial at this stage. *I'm encountering difficulties at this stage, what should I do?* It's completely natural if you are experiencing challenges and barriers at this stage. This may well be a time of wider-staff anxiety due to the range of considerations, change of duties and level of change within the school system. This may be an opportune time to have a meeting between the school Link Educational Psychologist (EP), ELSA, Line Manager and Member of Senior Leadership. The Link EP can use consultation skills to problem-solve and provide support in integrating this intervention into existing school structures, while maintaining the integrity of the ELSA intervention (i.e. proactive not reactive, short-term structured block interventions with SMART targets).
Stage 3 – The initial implementation stage	You have started running ELSA sessions with pupils	***You are ready to begin running ELSA intervention sessions, what will be important during this stage?*** **Support** • Weekly ELSA Line Management meetings will be set up, but you may also want to consider ad hoc support for the ELSA when needed at this time of change and vulnerability. Line Managers may expect to deliver higher levels of support in comparison to later stages of the implementation at this time. • Remember the ELSA will not be able to adequately support pupils unless s/he is feeling supported themselves! **Endings** • Consider what will your practices be in ELSA intervention endings?

Implementation Stage	What Stage of ELSA implementation are we in?	What should we being doing to ensure best ELSA implementation practice?
		• Best practice in endings considers the close attachment relationship between the ELSA and pupil. You might consider using a countdown, handing over work in a folder, ongoing informal contact, as well as wider staff playing a role in acting as alternative attachment figures in the school setting. • There are risks with pupil overdependence if ELSA intervention sessions are run for a prolonged period of time, i.e. longer than 6-10 weeks. *Fidelity* • At this stage, it is important you follow the ELSA model as designed (i.e. proactive not reactive, 6-10 week structured block intervention with SMART targets). *I'm encountering difficulties at this stage, what should I do?* It may be beneficial to return back to the considerations at Stage 1 and 2 – have you fully addressed the pre-planning and foundations stages? A joint meeting with the Link EP (as stated above) may be a valuable option if these challenges persist.
Stage 4 – Full implementation	You have been delivering ELSA sessions for some time now, and ELSA feels part of 'business as usual'	*At this point, you may feel ELSA is well-integrated in the school structure, but what other considerations are especially important at this stage?* *Ongoing Awareness* • Ensuring ongoing awareness and understanding of the ELSA intervention across school staff, including new staff. Staff induction days at the start of the academic year may be a good time to introduce the ELSA project to new staff members. *Re-Visiting Pre-Planning* • If there is significant teacher/staff turnover, then the issues and activities related to initial implementation will remerge and need attention. • Considerations around ongoing financial sustainability of ELSA. *School Ethos:*

Implementation Stage	What Stage of ELSA implementation are we in?	What should we being doing to ensure best ELSA implementation practice?
		• You might further consider integrating ELSA principles into the wider school ethos. Attachment is a key process in the ELSA intervention, could your school access training about attachment to help cement these principles at a school-wide level? **Innovation** • You may be encountering certain challenges with the intervention, and want to adapt certain aspects of the ELSA project to suit your needs as a school. It is important these adaptations are informed and based on your professional experience. It may be beneficial for the ELSA to discuss these planned adaptations with their EP supervisor at half-termly supervision.

The implementation resource emphasises the importance of the pre-planning and foundations (Humphrey, 2013) in the Exploration, Adoption and Installation Stages (Kelly, 2012), which take place before pupils begin accessing the intervention. These include considerations such as: selecting a highly skilled TA, building wider-staff awareness, opportunities for staff to voice concerns about project feasibility, leadership support, making clear links between the aims of the ELSA project and wider-school ethos, equal opportunities in referrals, staffing changes and what schools can do if they encounter difficulties in these stages. The resource also highlights what considerations are important at the Initial Implementation and Full Implementation stages (Kelly, 2012). At the Full Implementation stage, schools may consider adopting ELSA principles at the wider-school level. As this research project and others (Begley 2016; Nicholson-Roberts, 2019) highlight, attachment is a central component of the ELSA intervention. For this reason, school-wide adoption of ELSA principles may involve schools completing attachment training at the Full Implementation stage.

This resource aims to draw attention to the importance of SLT support, and their role in integrating the core components of this intervention into existing school structures. It will be important for wider-staff to have opportunities to voice concerns and anxieties, as it is when these concerns aren't addressed that anti-task practices can emerge (Roberts, 1994).

While the implementation resource outlines useful considerations and behavioural changes for school, in light of the demands following such practices may have on their time, SLT and SENCOs may find following this guidance difficult. For this reason, changes to the ELSA project and training itself are considered in the next section. Such changes may be considered to further embed beneficial practices for effective implementation.

5.2.2 Implications for EPs and ELSA Training Practices

This study found that Link EP support is beneficial, but an inconsistently received avenue of support for schools. With further research evidence, the ELSA model could be adapted to involve this support. In the current model, the ELSA project involves 6 days of training and half-termly supervision. This model could be extended to also include a 1.5 hour (half-session) consultation with the school Link

EP during the Installation Stage or early in the Initial Implementation Stage (Kelly, 2012), when challenges may often occur. Due to a Link EP's meta-perspective and consultation skills (Beaver, 2012), they would be in a strong position to support key stakeholders in these discussions. A draft agenda for this meeting is provided in Appendix 16. Adaptations to this agenda could be made in light of further research. This meeting might take place approximately one term after the ELSA has completed the 6 days of training, but the Link EP and SENCO could liaise about when they view this would be most beneficial in the school system. The pricing for the ELSA project could be amended to accommodate this change.

An extended implication of the benefit of Link EP support and the finding that Link EPs often do not have a good extent of knowledge of the ELSA project, is that EPSs could train all their EPs about what the project is and the role Link EPs can have in supporting this project in their schools. EP service development time could be used for this endeavour.

The training materials may also be adapted to account for the findings of this study. The message of the underlying importance of ELSA-Pupil attachment could be integrated throughout days 1-6 in the training, as opposed to only being explored in one training day. The importance of ELSA intervention endings in light of attachment theory can also be considered with the ELSAs, and a new activity could be included in the training around what practices and considerations will be important in intervention endings in light of this close attachment relationship. ELSA Line Managers can be made aware of the importance of wider school practices in supporting endings. This might include promoting a shared responsibility for mental health and a range of staff members who are able to act as alternative responsive attachment figures, especially during ELSA intervention endings. ELSAs may also be made aware in the training that their ELSA work may have an emotional toll, and the importance of seeking support when needed. An extension of this might be to explore how ELSAs can find pupil disclosures to have more of an emotional impact in light of the close ELSA-pupil relationship, and again the importance of seeking support from their Line Manager and EP-Supervisor if needed.

During Day 6 of the training, the ELSA Line Manager attends the afternoon session, and engages in discussions with the ELSA about how this project will be

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implemented (including aspects such as ELSA time, space and resources). This activity may be extended to include consideration about how the project will fit into the existing SEMH provision within the school, including the importance of defining a suitable ELSA remit within these structures. As well as considering what practices could be undertaken to ensure wider-school understanding and support, prior to progressing into the Initial Implementation Stage (Kelly, 2012). This training day may also be adapted to consider ways of clearly defining the ELSA role boundaries, including how to distinguish between other duties the ELSA has in the school and his/her ELSA role. The ELSA Line Manager may take away the Implementation Resource (see Table 2.2) to discuss with the SLT within the school.

A final implication of this study is the possibility of an ELSA career path. This study found that even with the ELSA project in place, there can remain a gap within school SEMH provision, where a more holistic systemic approach such as counselling would be beneficial. It would be premature to conclude this based on this study alone. However, with future work, the EPS perhaps in conjunction with counselling training institutions, could consider what further training and support could be provided to experienced ELSAs to enable them to provide a higher level of support within their school contexts.

5.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Current Research

5.3.1 Limitations of the Research

Case study research has been critiqued for lack of generalisability (Yin, 2018). Critics may argue that just because School 1 and School 2 implemented the ELSA project in the way they have, and encountered the facilitators and barriers discussed, you can't generalise from only two cases to the wider population of all UK primary schools. The researcher acknowledges this concern, and in response this study does not aim to produce data which is generalizable in the same sense as in a large-scale survey or experimental design. Instead, it is argued that findings from this study can be transferred to help explain other similar cases, meaning inferences can be made from the case schools in this study to other similar cases outside of the research. To enable transferability sensitive to school context, rich descriptions of both case schools are provided in Section 4.1. In addition, schools which do not

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resemble the case studies will also be able to learn from this research, and the findings could help inform their thinking and planning about what might be relevant in their context.

While no concerns were raised at the piloting stage, upon reflection some questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix 7) could have been amended to enhance their clarity. For example, question 5 could have been made clearer by including examples, e.g. "How often do you refer to or use knowledge of the ELSA project in your day-to-day practice? E.g. referring a child to ELSA, adopting strategies suggested by the ELSA, etc." In addition, although the questionnaire asks the participants to rate their knowledge and understanding of the ELSA project, this could have been enhanced by another question which directly assessed the participant's knowledge, e.g. "Which of the following statements best describes what the ELSA project is", and providing the participants with a multiple choice list to choose from. For School 2, this would have been especially relevant as the qualitative data highlighted staff misconceptions about the role, therefore asking them to rate their knowledge and understanding was not reflective of the accuracy of their knowledge and understanding. An additional question which directly assessed the accuracy of staff knowledge would have enhance the validity of the questionnaire.

The validity of the findings could have been enhanced by employing member checking, which involves checking the analysis with the participants. This provides opportunities for participants to challenge the relevance of the thematic categories (Willig, 2008). However, due to time constraints in the research project and schools, it was not possible to do this.

A comparative case design was adopted in this study, where the schools shared a range of similar characteristics, but differed with regards to an area of focus (how long the ELSA project has been in place). However, it could be argued that the schools selected differed on many other variables. The contexts of School 1 and School 2 are outlined in Section 4.1 (Case School Context). In particular, the schools differed with regards to size (with School 1 having approximately double the number of pupils on roll to School 2) and the religious affiliations (with School 2 being a voluntary aided Church of England primary school, and School 1 being a community

primary school with no noted religious affiliations). It is possible the difference in school size in School 1 and 2 confounds the difference in experience. For example, on the one hand one might argue that the lack of referral process in School 2 reflects their experience at the early stage of implementation, but it may also reflect the difference of school size. For this reason, the author acknowledges the difficulty in drawing strong conclusions about the effects of stage of implementation of ELSA, as the schools differed on many other variables. Therefore, comparing schools which shared more similar characteristics would have enhanced the clarity with which cross-case conclusions can be drawn from this study.

From the findings of this study, it appears that barriers to implementing the ELSA project could be more common in the early implementation stages. In retrospect, the author would have liked to have asked key stakeholders in School 1 whether they had encountered issues in the early implementation stages. If this was the case, this would have provided further support for this potential conclusion.

A final challenge encountered concerns researcher apprehension about how the participants viewed the research. The researcher was concerned that participants may have felt 'assessed' in how they were implementing the ELSA project – wondering if the researcher was examining if the schools were implementing the intervention 'correctly', almost akin to school experiences when Ofsted visit. This may have resulted in social desirability issues, where participants reported practices which they deemed as correct as opposed to answers which reflected reality. This issue was addressed by clearly outlining the purposes of the research at the start of the interview (through the information sheet, see Appendix 12), allowing ample opportunities for questions, emphasising confidentiality and maintaining a curious approach throughout the interviews. In one interview the researcher sensed this issue overtaking the interview, and in this situation it was important for the researcher to restate the purpose of the questions during the interview itself, e.g. amending "what barriers have you encountered in the implementation of the ELSA project?" which may be viewed as assessing the individual and their practices, to asking this question and including why this was being asked / what this information could be used for, e.g. "For other ELSAs starting to implement this project in their schools, are there any particular barriers you have encountered that it would be helpful for them to know about?".

5.3.2 Strengths of the Research

The present study has examined ELSA project implementation in primary mainstream contexts, a topic which has not yet been researched before.

A range of factors outlined as indicators of quality in Coughlan et al.'s (2007a; 2007b) papers were reviewed and addressed in this research. One of note is the systematic review of ELSA literature conducted in Chapter 2 which, to the researcher's knowledge, has not yet been completed before. Care was taken to systematically review the ELSA literature, in addition to implementation research and frameworks (Humphrey, 2013; Kelly, 2012), which led to an identified gap in the literature and refinement of research questions.

As advised by Yin (2018) and Coughlan et al. (2007a), systematic procedures were followed to ensure rigour and quality in this research. The data was triangulated across a range of different stakeholders, enabling a rich understanding of the phenomenon (Yardley, 2008). In line with the researcher's pragmatic worldview, the data was also triangulated across both qualitative and quantitative data, which helps to provide a deeper understanding of the issues addressed. Dependability of the data analysis was enhanced through peer coding, which supports the assurance that the same findings would have been reached if the analysis was conducted by another researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5.4 Future Research

This research highlighted that the ELSA project can be implemented in school contexts in very different ways. Therefore it will be essential that any future research which examines the impact of the ELSA project takes into account how the project is implemented for the participants involved in the research. We are not able to generalise from one school's positive outcomes of ELSA to another, unless we know how they have enacted this intervention within their setting.

While Burton (2009; 2018) provides guidance about what the key aspects of the ELSA project are, we are unclear which aspects are 'critical' for the intervention's success from a fidelity point of view (Kelly, 2012). This is especially pertinent given that this study has highlighted that schools often adapt the ELSA intervention to suit their school's needs. Therefore, further research could examine how ELSA project

adaptations influence outcomes. This could guide schools in terms of what innovations or adaptations may mean for pupil outcomes in their settings.

This research examined ELSA project implementation in mainstream primary schools, due to the higher proportion of ELSAs who train from this setting. This study did not have the scope to examine ELSA project implementation within special schools or pupil referral units, which is an important area which future research could examine.

This study highlighted that ELSAs and pupils can find endings to be a difficult process, due to the close attachment relationship built. Further research which examines what practices best facilitate the process of endings would be beneficial for schools in implementing this intervention.

5.5 Final Summary

This study examined the reflections of key stakeholders relative to the organisation and implementation of the ELSA project in primary schools at two different points in the implementation process. The research highlighted a number of tensions, and factors that enabled the ELSA intervention to take place or acted as barriers to its successful use in schools. One of the key findings of this research is that ELSA project implementation varies in different primary school settings, with practices that do not always adhere with fidelity to ELSA project guidance. For example, with regards to endings, intervention length was longer in one case school than guidance outlines (Burton 2008; 2018). While in the other case school, there was an absence of ELSA intervention endings. Other practices which did not adhere to ELSA guidance in School 2 concerned ELSA support often operating in a reactive way, as well as supporting CYP with complex externalising behavioural needs as opposed to supporting a wider range of SEMH needs. A range of factors were found to facilitate effective implementation including: a mental health ethos within the school, a highly skilled ELSA and a shared responsibility for mental health across the school. Factors which acted as barriers to the successful use of the ELSA programme included: lack of school-wide understanding and support of the ELSA project's primary task (Roberts, 1994), difficulties incorporating and distinguishing between the ELSA intervention and other SEMH provision, blurring of ELSA role boundaries, the emotional impact of ELSA work and pupil overdependence on the

ELSA. The findings of this study emphasise the importance of a carefully considered systematic approach to implementing the ELSA project in primary schools, in a way that is consistent with the overall programme aims and practices.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Systematic Review of Published and Unpublished Papers on the ELSA Programme

Authors	Type of research, e.g. doctoral thesis, Journal article	Focus of the study	Sample	Method / Measures	Key findings	Critique	Personal rating of quality	My impressions (what is this telling me?)
Area of research: ELSA in Home Context								
Barker (2017)	Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: Newcastle University	Exploring pupil and parent perspectives of the ELSA intervention	Two pupils (aged 9 and 10) and their parents. 4 participants were involved in total, all female.	Semi-structured interviews, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	• The pupils and parents felt the intervention impacted positively on pupils' emotional literacy development including; developing confidence, coping strategies and skills in managing and expressing emotions. • Important elements of the intervention process included: a need for informed consent, sessions being fun, making the child feel special, space to talk and problem-solve and the therapeutic nature of the ELSA-child relationship.	• The use of IPA enables a rich and complex account of the intervention and acknowledges the importance of pupil and parent views. • The children who were interviewed were primary aged. There might be concerns about the pupils' abilities to express their experiences through language given their age. However, the author emphasises the importance of	7	The study provides contextual information which enables transferability. The study provides a rich account and gives pupils and parents a voice which has been

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						gathering pupil voice and considered the language used in the interview schedules to address this limitation. However, visuals such as comic strips in McKewen's research might have aided this further. • Children's accounts were based on ELSA sessions approximately 8 months before. Retrospective memory has a range of limitations and may be influenced by how the children felt about the ELSA at the time of the interview. • This work is not generalisable, however the author does not hold this epistemological commitment. • The research phenomenon (pupil and parent perception of the intervention) appears clearly identified, and consistent with the research question.		missed in previous research.

						Furthermore, the use of IPA appears an appropriate qualitative methodology, given the researcher's focus on experiences which enables a rich and complex account of the intervention. • Lastly, although the work is not claimed to be generalisable, the author did not discuss the potential transferability of this work. Transferability is relevant in qualitative research, and concerns whether the results can be transferred to other contexts or settings. To assess transferability, it is important that readers can judge the similarity of their setting to the setting in the study so they can make judgments about the applicability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A discussion of the transferability of the study would have enhanced the rigour		

						of the study (Coughlan el al., 2007b).		
Claridge & Wilding (2016)	Journal Article: Educational Psychology in Practice	Explore parents' experiences and constructions of aspects of the ELSA programme	7 Parents of children who participated in ELSA	Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis	• Thematic analysis of the data indicated that parents perceived the programme to impact positively on social and emotional aspects of development, with skills transferring to the home context. Parents also noted several ways in which the programme could be enhanced including: improved home–school communication; agreed and measurable targets and outcomes; and plans for children's next steps. The interviews also highlighted that parents can often view the ELSA intervention as addressing 'within-child' factors, resultantly the authors recommend that it may be useful for schools and EPs to emphasise the systemic changes within home, classroom and school contexts that the programme aims to achieve. In supervision, EPs should be supporting home-school relationship and communication.	• Published and peer reviewed unlike most ELSA studies • This research addresses a gap in the literature – the parental experiences and evaluations of the programme. The evidence base was inconclusive in terms of impact in the home context, and this study helps to address this gap. • Techniques such as member validation and triangulation across other data sources would have enhanced the validity of the study. • Schools from two different local authority were recruited which included areas varying in socio-economic status. The sample included parents of primary aged children, including only one father. So generalisability	7	Indicates parents view the programme to have positive impact.

						• cannot be argued, particularly with respect to fathers and secondary aged pupils. • Not known whether changes are due to the intervention – could be other changes, the expectation of change (expectation bias) or attention from an interested person.		
Area of research: ELSA training								
Leighton (2015)	Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: University of Sheffield	How ELSA training affected the ELSA's engagement with their school community in developing their	7 Trainee ELSAs participated in total.	7 took part in semi-structured interviews, and 5 completed reflective journals. Analysis using thematic analysis	• The ELSAs reported the training had improved their competence and confidence including supporting children's understanding of their emotions and discussing pupils' emotionality with parents and school staff. • Obstacles to the ELSA role were reported from senior management team and colleagues, including lack of knowledge and encouragement which was perceived as due to lack of understanding of emotional literacy.	• Issues around trustworthiness, as the researcher was also one of the ELSA trainers. They may have reported what they thought the trainer wanted to hear. • The intervention and a range of resources were offered for free, which also could have shaped the participants responses • Are the methods suitable for the research question? Asking how the training affected the	5	There seems to be quite a large issue around gaining the ELSAs views of a training program which was offered for free with range of free resources and interviewed by one of the trainers. This limits the

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		CYP's EL awareness?				ELSA's engagement potentially appears unsuitable for a qualitative methodology. • The study could have been enhanced by triangulating data across other stakeholders in the school community		trustworthiness of the research.
Rees (2016)	Unpublished doctoral thesis: Cardiff University	To explore the self-efficacy and trait-emotional intelligence of TAs before and after having completed the ELSA training and the perceptions the	Opportunity sample of 95 TAs including questionnaire and focus participants.	Mixed methods approach involving questionnaires and focus groups. Statistical analysis of questionnaire data, and thematic analysis of qualitative data was conducted.	• Statistical analysis of the quantitative data collected from questionnaires revealed that the self-efficacy and trait-emotional intelligence participant scores increased after having completed the ELSA training. Thematic analysis of qualitative data indicated that systemic issues arose as a main concern – including lack of support from the school. Another area of concern included lack of TA self-efficacy, and loneliness and fears of the role.	• Strength of mixed methods approach: providing both general and detailed understanding of the research issue (Bryman, 2006) • Questionnaire not piloted, which would have provided more reliable data as it is not clear the factors on the questionnaire were relevant • Addresses gap in Grahamslaw (2010) study, by administering within participants design	8	Indicating the role of training in enhancing self-efficacy and trait-emotional intelligence, and limitation of systemic factors.

		ELSAs have regarding their future role.						
Grahamsl aw (2010)	Unpublish ed doctoral thesis: Newcastl e University	Mixed methods evaluation of ELSA interventi on in North East England, with a focus on ELSA self-efficacy for working with children's emotional literacy.	17 ELSAs focus group, questionnai res for: children who have received (n = 48) and not received ELSA support (n =50), questionnai res for ELSAs who have trained (n = 64) and	Mixed methods including a questionnaire to assess ELSAs self-efficacy beliefs.	• Both the quantitative and qualitative data supported the researchers hypothesis that post ELSA training self-efficacy beliefs of the ELSAs would increase and that self-efficacy beliefs of the children who receive ELSA support would increase. Support assistants which were found to have the greatest impact on children's emotional self-efficacy beliefs had: completed the ELSA training, protected time to plan their ELSA work and protected time to attend refresher training events. • Over half of qualified ELSAs did not think they had protected time to complete their work.	• The results are relevant to McEwen's (2015) findings, that ELSAs have more impact if they are confident in their role. Grahamslaw (2010) provides evidence that the training enhances TA self-efficacy and confidence to complete this role, which according to McEwen (2015) is central to the efficacy of the intervention. • The questionnaire was developed for the purpose of the research on the basis on a focus group as a self-efficacy questionnaire for support assistants does not exist, and piloted.	5	Hard to generalise, and the research covers perhaps too many areas – perhaps more meaningful and generalisable results could have been gained by focusing on one area

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			TAs who will be trained as ELSAs n =58).				• Although the total sample size is large, the sample size of each sub-group is limited which hampers generalisability.		

Area: ELSA-EP supervision

Osborne & Burton (2014)	Published Journal Article. Conducted in Hampshire	Examined the inter-professional supervision relationship between ELSAs and EPs.	270 ELSAs	Use of questionnaires to examine ELSA views on supervision receiving.	• The responses indicated that the majority felt that their supervision needs were being met and that they had a good relationship with their supervisor and other group members. Supervision was generally considered to be a useful mechanism for discussing cases, sharing ideas and problem-solving. Consequently, the majority felt better able to support pupils as a result of this support. Difficulties were raised with the group supervision process, including time to discuss all the issues in the group and relevance of some ELSAs issues to their own.	• Published and peer reviewed, unlike most ELSA studies • Large potentially generalisable (to Hampshire at least) sample • Although some bias around ELSAs knowing they are submitting the questionnaires to EPs who delivered the training and are their supervisors. • Perspectives from EPs not gathered, just the ELSAs so not triangulated • This might have benefited from qualitative work, as this is one of the first studies examining this area, the research could have benefitted from qualitative measures	5	Indicates strengths and limitations of supervision, with a large potentially generalisable sample. Although could have included qualitative in addition to quantitative given the new research area.

						to gather ELSA views around this.		
Area: ELSA-pupil relationship								
Miles (2015)	Unpublished doctoral thesis: Cardiff University	12 ELSAs	Exploration of aspects of the ELSA-pupil relationship which enhance and act as obstacles.	Semi-structured interviews with ELSAs, and thematic analysis.	• Thematic analysis indicated the importance of the bond, rapport, task agreement and goal agreement and the importance of personal characteristics which are reflected in therapeutic literature.	• In accordance with Barker (2017) which also indicates the therapeutic nature of the ELSA-child relationship. • Focus on KS2 children, benefit of homogenous sample but could factors be different for different ages? • Most enthusiastic ELSAs volunteered to take part, bias in sample • The author did not interview the children, only gather information on ELSA perspective of relationship.	6	Helpful new area – focusing on the Elsa-child relationship. However, this study would have benefitted from gathering pupil views on relationship in addition to ELSA views.
McEwen (2015)	Unpublished doctoral thesis	Exploration of experiences of ELSAs and young people	ELSAs (n = 8) and young people (n=7)	Semi-structured interviews of ELSAs and young people, and thematically analysed	• It was found the relationships of the ELSAs and young people was key to the change process, and factors which influenced this relationship were identified as ELSA qualities such as self-confidence, confidentiality of the sessions and the	• Strength in interviewing young people and ELSAs, gaining both perspectives unlike Miles (2015). • Steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study including; participants were involved in analysis	8	Contained piece of work, and author acknowledges limitations. This piece of work is in accordance with Miles (2015) and

					sessions being enjoyable and fun.	of research and inter-rater reliability of coding process. • Large sample for qualitative work, although may not generalise to larger population. • Limitations of retrospective memory, and the students current feelings towards ELSA may have influenced how they described earlier sessions. • Potential limited language of pupils involved – children may have said emotion words they knew rather than giving an accurate and valid descriptions of their feelings about ELSA.		Barker (2017), which indicates the importance of the ELSA-pupil relationship.
Area: ELSA in Secondary School Context								
Begley (2016)	Unpublished doctoral thesis: UCL Institute	Qualitative evaluation of young peoples and TAs	Young people (n = 3) and TAs (n =3)	Semi-structured interviews and analysed with an approach which drew on IPA.	• Relationship with ELSA is at the heart of the intervention – the importance of the relationship and interpersonal attunement. • Participants self-concepts were essential to how	• Strength in the idiographic approach, enabling the opportunity to gain authentic voice of participants and deep interpretative insights	8	Insights into secondary ELSA.

	of Education	experiences of engagement in ELSA intervention in secondary school.			they experienced the intervention	• Strength in examining secondary school as this has not yet been examined before.		
Nicholson-Roberts (2019)	Unpublished doctoral thesis: UCL Institute of Education	Multiple Case Study examining how ELSA operates in two secondary schools	Seven key secondary school ELSA stakeholders in each school, including; ELSAs, Teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators and pupils.	Semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders in each case setting. Thematic analysis of both schools' data, and a cross-case thematic analysis which compared the projects in the schools.	• The ELSAs discussed applying a range of psychological principles in their work, including containment and attachment • The intervention length was longer in the case schools than ELSA guidance outlines • Facilitating factors reported by participants included: ELSAs' unique qualities; ELSA-pupil relationships; flexibility within the intervention enabling a pupil-centred approach; and the support and supervision that ELSAs receive from SENCOs and EPs. • Challenges affecting the implementation of ELSA projects in secondary schools, identified by the	• Strength in the focus on the operation of the intervention in the secondary context, as this has not been examined in previous research. • Discussion of how rigour and validity is achieved in this qualitative work • Given the staff and pupils were happy to spend time participating in ELSA research, it could be these schools implemented this intervention better in comparison to the typical school which may lead to bias. • The understanding of the implementation could have been	8	Implementation of ELSA is key in secondary settings

					participants, included: difficulty developing whole-school understanding of pupils' SEMH needs; limited ELSA-teacher and ELSA-parent communication; difficult emotional effects on ELSAs; and negative effects for pupils, including the risk of pupil dependency on ELSA.	enhanced by including educational psychologists (school and supervisory) in the sample, as these figures act as key stakeholders.		
Area: Impact of ELSA project on pupil wellbeing								
Burton, Osborne and Norgate (2010)	Unpublished Local Authority Report	Examines the impact of ELSA on primary and secondary aged pupils from schools in Bridgend	Although the sample was initially larger, some data in the control group was discarded to enable matching of the control and intervention groups. For	Pre and post measures of intervention group who accessed ELSA intervention and control group who were on the waiting list to access ELSA. Assessed using three measures: • Teacher-rated SDQ • Emotional literacy checklist for teachers	Across the teacher measures (SDQ and Emotional Literacy Checklist), there was a significant improvement for the intervention group, however significant differences were not found in the control group. In the pupil rated emotional literacy checklist, no significant changes were found in either control or intervention group. The authors suggest lack of significant in pupil self-report differences could be due to young	• Very small sample for quantitative work, hard to make generalisability claims • Use of only quantitative measures, the use of qualitative would have enabled an understanding of why these changes occurred and what specific behaviour changed • Authors do not consider the importance of how the schools are implementing the ELSA intervention – is this different across the schools	6	Potential indication of positive impact of intervention from teacher standpoint, but not the pupils.

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			each of the measures:	• Emotional literacy checklist for pupils	people considering their emotional literacy across home and school, whereas teachers are basing their reports on only school-based observations. Indicating that perhaps the intervention benefits do not transfer to home.	involved in the study? • Gathering of pupil and teacher views to triangulate the data • Literature review is well organised • No consideration of ethics in the report • No discussion of piloting study		
			Teacher-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ): Control group (n=30) Intervention group (n=30) Emotional Literacy Checklist for Teachers: Control group (n=30)					

			Intervention (n=30)					
			Emotional Literacy Checklist for Pupils: Control group (n=24) Intervention (n=24)					
Burton, Triall and Norgate (2009)	Unpublished Local Authority Report	Examines the impact of the ELSA programme on pupil wellbeing	Matched (pre- and post-intervention) teacher rated questionnaires (n = 107) Matched (pre- and post-intervention) parent-	Pre and post-intervention teacher rated SDQ Pre and post-intervention parent rated SDQ	• Significant difference between teachers' pre- and post-total SDQ scores, indicating that teachers perceived there to be an improvement for the child. Significant decreases were found in SDQ ratings of peer problems, conduct issues, emotional problems and a significant increase in pro-social behaviours. No significant difference was found for pre- and post-teacher ratings of hyperactivity. For parent questionnaire, a significant decrease in total SDQ scores and	• Fairly large sample, however no control group, so we cannot guarantee that changes which occurred are due to ELSA • No discussion of ethics • No piloting mentioned • Research design and data gathering instrument clearly outlined • Use of only one measure (SDQ), could have been strengthened with use of other	5	When considered alongside Burton, Norgate and Osborne (2010), the importance of context (e.g. home or school) appears important in terms of the behaviour CYP exhibits after ELSA.

			rated questionnai re (n = 52)		hyperactivity were identified.	measures and a qualitative aspect		
Mann (2014)	Unpublish ed doctoral thesis: University of Nottingha m	Addresse s gap in the literature around impact of ELSA project on pupil wellbeing.	TAs (n = 5) and Pupils (n = 5)	Mixed methods design employed, including pre and post-test non-equivalent groups design. The Emotional Literacy Checklist and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire measure pre and post-test changes in teacher and pupil participant scores. Qualitative methods were also used, which included thematic analysis of focus group and questionnaire	• It was not possible to determine whether the ELSA project had an impact on pupils' emotional well-being, likely due to the small sample size. However, thematic analyses suggested that participants perceived the ELSA training to be of value in terms of their personal and professional development and the support gained. Time restraints were highlighted as a restraint to the role.	• Efforts were made to reduce threats to the internal validity of the quantitative portion, however these threats created by sample size and sampling bias limit the extent to which firm conclusions can be drawn from the findings. Similarly, efforts were made to address robustness for the qualitative portion of the data; such as undertaking member checks on the analyses and utilising a framework to support the process of thematic analysis	7	Examination of essential and unexamined area, but sample size limits the conclusions which can be drawn.

				data from the ELSAs.			
Hills (2016)	Journal Article: Educational and Child Psychology	Evaluation of the ELSA project from the perspective of primary age children.	Pupil questionnaire participants (N=53) and pupil interview participants (N=9). Pupils were between the ages of six and eleven years.	A two-phase, sequential mixed methods approach, using questionnaires in the first phase and semi-structured interviews in the second phase.	• Factors contributing to the perceived effectiveness of the ELSA project include: the importance of the therapeutic relationship with the ELSA, having a space to talk and think about feelings and building resilience, confidence and self-esteem. • The children also identified aspects of the ELSA project that they felt could be improved upon including: feeling prepared before starting (e.g. understanding reasons for referral) and understanding what happens in ELSA endings.	• Strength of including voice of the child in evaluating the project. Creative ways to ascertain the voice of the child were used, including offering opportunities to draw how they felt and the drawings are included in the paper. • Care was taken at the piloting stage, where the questionnaire and interview schedule (both created by the researcher due to absence of existing measures) were piloted with 10 pupils. • Ethical considerations are made • The author defends why mixed methods was appropriate for the study, however philosophical assumptions informing these are not discussed	8	Research examines an under-researched area – pupil views in ELSA project. Research highlights importance of therapeutic relationship with ELSA, as well as pupil desire for more clarity around ELSA beginnings and endings.

| Krause et al., (2020) | Journal Article: Educational Psychology in Practice | Examines qualitative impact of ELSA project on wellbeing from the perspective of pupils | Pupils (N=13) from two primary schools and two secondary schools (five males, eight females; aged between 5 and 16 years old) | Qualitative semi-structured interviews with pupils from two primary and two secondary schools | • Thematic analysis identified the following themes: "Feelings and Emotions", "Engagement", "Resilience", "Hopes and Aspirations" and "Relationships".
• The findings indicate the important role of the ELSA-pupil relationship, and potential over-reliance of pupils on the ELSA. The authors highlight the importance of whole-staff awareness of ELSA and embedding ELSA in the school context as a means to address pupil over-reliance.
• The findings suggest the ELSA programme has a perceived positive impact on multiple components of pupil wellbeing in Seligman's 'PERMA' model and the New Economics Foundations (NEF) report. | • This study has the strength of examining ELSA impact from a wellbeing as opposed to solely emotional literacy perspective, alike in existing impact literature. Given the ELSA curriculum, which focuses on a wide range of theories and practices relevant to wellbeing, it is not clear that ELSA would only have emotional literacy impact – so this study has a strength of focusing on this unexamined area before.
• Generalisability issues with 4 schools involved, and potential social desirability effects for pupils in interviews.
• Factors relating to rigour of the research (e.g. credibility, dependability) or ethical considerations were not discussed | 7 | Examination of impact of wellbeing from pupil perspective, not just emotional literacy – indicating ELSAs impacts are more wide reaching. |

					• Given the wide ranging and complex difficulties in defining wellbeing, this study has the strength of clearly outlining two models (PERMA and NEF) which are focused on in this study, however more could have been done to defend why the author was adopting these models and not others. • The authors thematically analyse the primary and secondary data together, however this could have lost potential richness in data specific to each setting. • Inclusion of other individuals (ELSA, parents, teacher) would have supported triangulation of findings.		

Appendix 2: ELSA Research Leaflet for Schools

UCL
Institute of Education

ELSA Research

This is an opportunity for your school to take part in a research study about the challenges and enablers for the **ELSA** project. The research will involve confidential 1:1 interviews with key members of staff, and a short 5 minute questionnaire circulated to all members of staff. In exchange for participation, schools will be offered a 1 hour Trainee Educational Psychologist led session for staff about innovative school practice in relation to children's/staff mental health and wellbeing.

Whole School ELSA Research
———
Confidential 1:1 Interviews with:

- ELSA
- SENCO
- Teacher(s)
- A member of SLT
- Educational Psychologist(s)

———
A short questionnaire circulated to all staff

———
Complimentary Trainee Educational Psychologist led session for participant schools

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST TO:
Hannah Fairall
Trainee Educational Psychologist
hannah.fairall.17@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix 3: ELSA Follow-Up Email

Good morning,

It was great to meet you at the ELSA supervision day last week, where I introduced the opportunity for your school to participate in an ELSA research study.

How will your school benefit from participation?

In exchange for participation in the research, the school will benefit from:

- A training session for staff around innovative school practice in relation to pupil and staff mental health led by an Educational Psychologist in Training
- Following the research, a report will be given to your school sharing the findings, which will include unique recommendations for your setting regarding enhancing ELSA implementation in school

What is involved in participating in the research?

This research study aims to explore the challenges and enablers for ELSA project implementation in school settings.

This study involves confidential 1:1 interviews (approximately 30 minutes in length) with 7 key members of staff in your school including;

- ELSA
- SENCO
- 2 Teachers
- A member of Senior Leadership Team
- Link Educational Psychologist (EP)
- ELSA EP Supervisor

The research will also involve a short questionnaire circulated to all members of staff.

Research findings will not involve any personal identifiers, and thus will be confidential.

The results of this study will be presented within the researcher's thesis, as part of the researcher's Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.

Please contact me as soon as possible if you are interested in participating in this opportunity. And do not hesitate to ask me any questions you have.

Best wishes,

Hannah Fairall

Educational Psychologist in Training

hannah.fairall.17@ucl.ac.uk

07xxxxxxx

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule - SENCO/ ELSA/ SLT

- Provide Information sheet and consent form
- Once the consent form signed, start the audio recording and commence interview

(*Note to self – always ask questions in each section in bold, aim to ask open-ended questions and have the conversation led by interviewee. The specific questions below which are not in bold can be used if they are not addressed by the interviewee)

Introduction

1. Tell me about your current role in this school
2. Tell me about your understanding of the ELSA project in school
3. In your view, what are the strengths of the ELSA project in school?
4. In your view, what are the limitations of the ELSA project in school?

Part A: Referral Process

I'm interested in finding about how young people become involved in the ELSA intervention in this school.

1. **How do children become involved in the ELSA intervention in school?**
2. How are decisions around becoming involved in the ELSA intervention made?
   a. Who does this involve?
3. In your experience, what are the strengths and limitations of the current process of young people becoming involved in ELSA?

Part B: ELSA Support

I'm interested in finding out about how the ELSA is supported in his/her role in school

1. **How is the ELSA supported in his/her role in school?**
2. How do other staff support ELSA?
3. In your view, is the ELSA role more separated or more integrated from other staff in school?

Part C: ELSA Endings

I'm interested to find out about the longer-term processes in school for young people who have received the ELSA intervention.

g. **Is the ELSA intervention an on-going or time-limited intervention in this school?**
h. **If time-limited, what does a young person 'finishing' or 'stopping' the ELSA intervention look like in this school?**
i. If no one has yet to stop or finish the intervention;
   i. What is your vision for the process of when a young person finishes or stops accessing the intervention?
   ii. Will others in school be aware they accessed the intervention?
      1. If yes, who will be made aware?

2. And how will they be made aware?

<u>Part D: School Ethos and Wider School Awareness</u>

I'm interested in finding out about the wider school ethos and wider school awareness of ELSA

1. **Tell me about the wider school ethos and culture within this school**
   a. How does ELSA fit into the existing ethos and culture of the school?
2. **To what extent do you think members of staff in the case school are aware of the ELSA project?**
   a. PROMPT – teacher awareness?
   b. PROMPT – TA awareness?
   c. PROMPT – wider support staff awareness?
   d. PROMPT - what is the extent of their knowledge and understanding of the project?

Ending

Is there anything else you want to discuss that we have not talked about?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule - Teacher

- Provide Information sheet and consent form
- Once the consent form signed, start the audio recording and commence interview

(*Note to self – always ask questions in each section in bold, aim to ask open-ended questions and have the conversation led by interviewee. The specific questions below which are not in bold can be used if they are not addressed by the interviewee)

Introduction

1. Tell me about your current role in this school
2. Tell me about your understanding of the ELSA project in school
3. In your view, what are the strengths of the ELSA project in school?
4. In your view, what are the limitations of the ELSA project in school?

Part A: Referral Process

I'm interested in finding about how young people become involved in ELSA in this school – is this something you are aware of?

1. **Do you know how children become involved in the ELSA intervention in school?**
2. Have you been involved in referring a child to ELSA?
   a. If yes, what was involved?
   b. If yes, tell me about what led to the referral
3. In your experience, what are the strengths and limitations of the current process of young people becoming involved in ELSA?

Part B: ELSA Support

I'm interested in finding out about how the ELSA is supported in his/her role in school – is this something you are aware of?

1. **Do you know how the ELSA is supported in his/her role in school?**
2. **How do other staff support ELSA?**
3. **In your view, is the ELSA role more separated or more integrated from other staff in school?**

Part C: ELSA Endings

I'm interested to find out about the longer-term processes in school for young people who have received the ELSA intervention. Is this something you are aware of / feel able to comment on?

1. **Do you know if the ELSA intervention an on-going or time-limited intervention in this school?**
2. **If time-limited, what does a young person 'finishing' or 'stopping' the ELSA intervention look like in this school?**
3. **If no one has yet to stop or finish the intervention:**
   a) Do you know about the school's vision for the process of when a young person finishes or stops accessing the intervention?

b) Will others in school be aware they accessed the intervention?
- If yes, who will be made aware?
- And how will they be made aware?

<u>Part D: School Ethos and Wider School Awareness</u>

I'm interested in finding out about the wider school ethos and wider school awareness of ELSA. Is this something you are aware of?

1. **Tell me about the wider ethos and culture within this school**
   a. **How does ELSA fit into the existing ethos and culture of the school?**
2. **To what extent do you think members of staff in the case school are aware of the ELSA project?**
   a. PROMPT – teacher awareness?
   b. PROMPT – TA awareness?
   c. PROMPT – wider support staff awareness?
   d. PROMPT - what is the extent of their knowledge and understanding of the project?

Ending

Is there anything else you want to discuss that we have not talked about?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule - Educational Psychologist

- Provide Information sheet and consent form
- Once the consent form signed, start the audio recording and commence interview

(*Note to self – always ask questions in each section in bold, aim to ask open-ended questions and have the conversation led by interviewee. The specific questions below which are not in bold can be used if they are not addressed by the interviewee)

Introduction

1. How long have you been supporting case school as Link EP / ELSA Supervisor?
   a. What does the support you provide look like?
2. What is your understanding of the ELSA project in the school?
3. In your view, what are the strengths of the ELSA project in school?
4. In your view, what are the limitations of the ELSA project in school?

Part A: Referral Process

I'm interested in finding about how young people become involved in the ELSA intervention in this school. Is this something you are aware of for the case school?

1. **How do young people become involve in the ELSA intervention in the school?**
2. Are you aware how decisions around becoming involved in the ELSA intervention are made?
   a. If YES, can you explain this process?
   b. If YES, who does this involve?
3. Are you aware how pupils are identified in school for the ELSA intervention?
4. In your experience, what are the strengths and limitations of the current process for becoming involved?

Part B: ELSA Support

I'm interested in finding out about how the ELSA is supported in his/her role in school – is this something you are aware of?

1. How is the ELSA supported in school?
2. In your view, is the ELSA role more separated or more integrated from other staff in school?

Part C: Longer-term processes

I'm interested to find out about the longer-term processes in school for young people who have received the ELSA intervention.

1. **Is the ELSA intervention an on-going or time-limited intervention in this school?**

2. **If time-limited, what does a young person 'finishing' or 'stopping' the ELSA intervention look like?**

Part D: School ethos

I'm interested in finding out about the wider school approach to the ELSA project.

1. **What is the wider school culture and ethos?**
2. **Can you tell me about the wider school approach to the ELSA project?**
3. Do you think that the members of staff in the case school are widely aware of the ELSA project?
   a. PROMPT – teacher awareness?
   b. PROMPT – TA awareness?
   c. PROMPT – wider support staff awareness?
   d. What is the extent of their awareness?
4. How does / would wider school staff knowledge of the ELSA intervention impact on practice?
   e. E.g. for teachers?
   f. E.g. for TAs?
   g. E.g. for wider support staff?
   h. E.g. for SLT?

Ending

Is there anything else you want to discuss that we have not talked about?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 7: Questionnaire

My name is Hannah Fairall and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am currently undertaking research to examine the facilitators and barriers for the implementation of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) project in UK primary schools. I would like to find out more about wider school awareness and views around the ELSA project.

Please note that it is <u>not</u> expected that you have any prior knowledge of ELSA project in order to take part in the research. This questionnaire has 5 questions and should take no more than 2-3 minutes to complete. As no previous research has been carried out on this topic, your input will provide valuable insight.

The study has been granted ethical approval by the UCL Institute of Education

Research Ethics Committee. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw

at any time, without having to give a reason. Data will be held securely and

confidentially. By completing this questionnaire, you are consenting to participate in

this research.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on the email addresses below if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Best wishes,
Hannah Fairalll, Trainee Educational Psychologist
Doctorate in Child, Adolescent and Educational Psychology | UCL Institute of Education
Email address: hannah.fairall.17@ucl.ac.uk

Questionnaire

Please Circle Your Response

1. I am a:
   a. Teacher
   b. Teaching Assistant
   c. Higher Level Teaching Assistant
   d. Member of the Senior Leadership Team
   e. Administration staff
   f. Support staff
   g. Other (please specify)

2. Are you aware of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) project in school?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of the ELSA project?
   a. No knowledge at all
   b. Very limited knowledge
   c. Limited knowledge
   d. Good knowledge
   e. High level of knowledge

4. How relevant do you believe knowledge of the ELSA project is for your everyday practice?
   a. Not relevant at all
   b. Slightly relevant
   c. Moderately relevant
   d. Relevant
   e. Extremely relevant

5. How often do you refer to or use knowledge of the ELSA project in your day-to-day practice?
   a. Never
   b. Rarely
   c. Sometimes
   d. Often
   e. Always

6. Do you have any other comments?

Appendix 8: Example of Initial Coding Markings on Transcript

P: Hopefully for parents and other children to see what ELSA is, what we do. I have a lot of children, they say I want to come to ELSA and they don't really understand. I think there is a part of them that thinks we play games, and yeah depending on the child we may end with a game of connect 4 or something like that but we are actually working. So yeah, I am seeing them for a purpose and for a reason. I find that quite hard, because the other children say 'Why can't I come to ELSA?' you know, it's like you don't need to. But the board is new, and the idea is that we will change it every term. At the moment it is about moving on, and changes and about how they make us feel. Then in September it is going to be about friends, and what makes a good friend. And then change it every term to try and match what they might be going through at that time.

I: Yeah, yeah. Going back to something you said before, you said you get a sense that young people in the school know you are ELSA, and they know people come to ELSA but maybe they don't have an accurate understanding?

P: Yeah, personally I think maybe there should be a little bit in assembly or something. Especially now in the press, there is so much about mental health and children's mental health, I think it would be a good idea to do a little assembly on this is ELSA, this is what we do, and to explain it properly. I think some children think because the room is colourful, they are just coming in here to do a colouring. They don't understand that we are working, we have a target. Obviously, they wouldn't understand that bit - that I am working on smart target for that child.

I: Yeah, do you get a sense that most children would know you are the ELSA?

P: Yeah, they do know I am the ELSA. And the joke is that when I first came up as ELSA, obviously the association is Frozen and they used to think that I would sing like 'Let it Go', but now thank god that's warn off. It's calmed down, the frozen theme is going. But yeah, I would like if there was a little briefing with parents, about if they have any issues. I'm hoping the board helps, because on the board it does explain what an ELSA is and if you have any concerns about your child then speak to X [ELSA line manager] who can then pass them on. But I am hoping the board works, but we don't know. Language as well is a big issue; you know if they can't read the English.

I: Then maybe they would not access it.

P: It would need to grab attention too; I have tried my best to make it colourful with stars. I have tried to make it stand out. And where it is as well, it is in a good place – it is as you come in. But we don't really get many parents coming in that way.

I: And I wonder if it is difficult to pitch to all the audiences? Of parents, children?

P: Yes, yes, I think it stands out to the children as it is really colourful, even the worksheets on it are colourful.

I: Has it been discussed with the Head or SENCo about generating that awareness more? Was that where the board came from?

P: The board was my idea, because one of the SLT was doing a board check and I said I wouldn't mind having a board. When I had done the board after school, I went to the Head and Deputy Head, the Deputy Head said I had put too much information on it, I had put a

Appendix 10: Sample from Researcher Diary

31st January

School system overarching theme removed – all data is about school systems, also doesn't fit the data within well enough. Decided to create separate for 'ethos, values and impact on practices'. Also scrapped parent communication and teacher communication themes as fits into considerations with endings and referral processes.

Where should positive outcomes go? It could go in ethos, values, but then it's not really an ethos, value or priority – arguably is it an impact of those though? Because they value ELSA, it has a positive impact? I think that is my conclusion though, not necessarily in the data. I think it best fits into 'Fitting ELSA into wider SEMH provision' actually because the ELSA outcomes function within the ELSA remit. Perhaps I could change the overarching theme to 'ELSA remit and function within wider SEMH provision'? To discuss in supervision

A lot of themes are a 'developing' awareness or shared responsibility – that sense that school systems are messy, and a process – not all staff are 100% there.

Sub-themes within 'intervention process' are too diverse – not really a theme, need to reconsider – everything is the intervention process.

Appendix 11: Theme Definitions and Quotation Examples

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">***Theme 1 – Identifying Pupils for ELSA***</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">***Definition:*** This theme concerns how young people are identified for the ELSA intervention in School 1 and 2, including pupils needs which lead to ELSA referral and how referral decisions are made in each school context.</td></tr>
<tr><td>***School 1 Sub-Themes***</td><td align="center">***Quotation Examples***</td></tr>
<tr><td>*Range of Pupil Needs*</td><td>*We have a real variety, yeah, of different reasons for referral…They all have different targets depending on what their need is because they are so different [Stakeholder – S1]*

Maybe getting a bit frustrated when he can't do his work. So instead of dealing with in a sensible way, he'd say things like that he's bored, or he'd start misbehaving when really he needed to understand that actually, he's just struggling with his work. [Stakeholder – S1]

the one who struggled with behaviour management and a lot of anger management [Stakeholder – S1]

friendship issues, like maintaining friends, making friends [Stakeholder – S1]

they are struggling a bit with friendships or they are new to the school, and they don't seem to fit in [Stakeholder – S1]

We got another child that was new to the school and that's about developing friendships and knowing what makes a good friend, because he hasn't really quite gelled in his class. He in in year 5 so there was a bit of a sense of him being an outsider. [Stakeholder – S1]</td></tr>
</table>

	Some are because the child is withdrawn and quiet. [Stakeholder – S1]
	And the other children, one of them has got low self-confidence and trying to build up his self-esteem. [Stakeholder – S1]
	One girl I have been working with, the year 6, there was a lot of anxiety going on and there weren't particularly any behavioural concerns, and she had just become quite isolated and she had been prioritised. So that was really positive. [Link EP 2 – S1]
	Yeah so at the moment, X [ELSA] is working with a lot of year 6 children for transition as this is a time of year where they are getting ready for secondary school, so from the beginning of the year we identified a group of children for them to be referred to ELSA in the last term for transition support. So, she is working with them just on that. [Stakeholder – S1]
Key Individuals Involved in Identifying Pupils	*So if a teacher has got a concern, or anyone in the school, the head teacher. We have safeguarding meeting once a week so something may come up from a safeguarding meeting and we say okay that's a referral to ELSA… or it could come from the parent [Stakeholder – S1]*
	We have different avenues where concerns are coming up [Stakeholder – S1]
	Mainly the referrals come from the teachers [Stakeholder - S1].
	Oddly enough the TAs notice the friendship issues before the teachers because they are in the playground more than the teachers [Stakeholder – S1]

ELSA Capacity and Prioritisation Decisions	*Sometimes lots of our referrals come through and there is only one X [ELSA]. We have to make the referrals we feel for ELSA, but there is a waiting list, she can't take all children on [Stakeholder – S1]*
	There is no fixed criteria, I suppose it would be a discussion that would include me [SENCO] and X [ELSA Line Manager] but we would potentially have a wider discussion, and think about all the factors that are going on in that child's life and whether we feel that we putting that support in place is going to have an impact for that child at that point in time [SENCO – S1]
	Sometimes they might have various other things that are going on that it is not the ideal time for them. Or it might be that they are at a critical point and that this is the moment to seize, you know grab this opportunity to do something with them. [Stakeholder – S1]
School 2 Sub-Themes	***Quotation Examples***
Complex Externalising Behavioural Needs	*So, it's [ELSA] to deal with their behaviour [Stakeholder – S2]*
	But how we identified these children...well, I mean, it was very obvious, we had three or two children who were really, really struggling in class, you know, being violent, being aggressive. And were unable to manage very, very, very, very short bits of time in a classroom without getting very violent, very agitated. [Stakeholder – S2]
	So if you ever went near him, he would be crawling under the table. He didn't want to sit on the carpet, he would be crawling under the table. And then if you try to get him out, he would just throw things around the classroom. [Stakeholder – S2]

	It's going to be a behaviour that is having a huge impact on maybe their learning or the learning of others around them. On their ability to manage within mainstream school [Stakeholder – S2] *And we see a lot of aggressive behaviour, we see children who can't regulate their own behaviours and get cross. [Stakeholder – S2]* *They were displaying a lot of anger with transition…Not understanding the work, not being able to tell us that they didn't understand it, instead, they would get angry and tip the room. [Stakeholder – S2]* *At the moment, I can do the same plan for the four children because they have quite similar needs [ELSA – S2]* *And it was just seeing them throwing tables, throwing chairs [Stakeholder – S2]*
Role of behaviour policy and key individuals involves	*That's why I say it's a sort of a triangle of hierarchy. It is a very minute number at the top that need such extra support [Stakeholder S2]* *So in our behaviour policy, we have a sort of a triangle of hierarchy…99.9% of our children will manage that just within the classroom with quality first teaching. Some might need a little extra reminder…And so, then we would do maybe like a little chart… I've then got a HLTA, who does some sort of interventions…If we're not seeing an improvement from there, if*

	that's not making an impact, then that's when I would think about referring them and putting them in X's [ELSA's] groups. They get more time dedicated to them... And so that's kind of the process of how they get through to X [ELSA]. [SENCO – S2]
	So, most of the children she's doing her ELSA to work with, she works with in a wider context as well [Stakeholder – S2]
	So it can come from anywhere it can come from the parents, it can come from things that we see [Stakeholder – S2]
	And we've got a graduated approach towards behaviour and supporting behaviour. And so, at the classroom level what we want to do is support our children as much as we can within classrooms with those principles, and then specifically for very few number of children who are really really struggling at the moment with behaviour in school, they've got a safe space, a safe base inside the school, to kind of, you know, to run from really. The idea is that they spend their time in class, but there's a programme in place to support them in doing that. [Stakeholder – S2]
	Well, so myself and the Deputy Head who is also the SENCO, between us we would make those decisions [Head Teacher – S2]

Theme 2 – School ethos, priorities and values and impact on ELSA practice	
Definition: This theme outlines how the ethos, priorities and values impact on the ELSA practices in place.	

School 1 Sub-Themes	Quotation Examples
Supportive Community and Mental Health Ethos	*I think in this school particular, I think they have a very good kind of overview of the children. There's a real kind of warmth there and kind of wanting to do the best for them [Stakeholder – S1]*

	I think we have a high culture of support and we are quite a tight community. I don't want to sound too cliché, but it is a very supportive environment, both for staff and for children. And they know that. [Stakeholder – S1]
	And on that note, with our first topic for the year was on communities. Everyone's learning about their community and how to, you know, contribute positively to their community and learning about the history of our community and our area. So yeah, there is a really positive ethos. [Teacher 1– S1]
	In my [efforts]…to learn more about the school and what they value, mental health is definitely high on their agenda. And, you know, they've been involved in various projects over the past year supporting young people to be more aware of their own mental health. And they have mental health ambassadors in the school. And so, I think the idea of mental health and wellbeing is very high on their agenda … and I think ELSA just fits in very neatly into that ethos and just promotes, you know, that understanding of everyone taking care of themselves. [Link EP 1 – S1]
Comprehensive Approach with Protection of ELSA Time, Space and Resources	*I think now it is up and running, it's timetabled on a regular basis. You know I think she got the resources she needs. So, I feel in terms of how she is supported to do it in school, I think it is running well actually. I mean she has planning time each week which is obviously important, and she goes to the supervision as well. I think she is quite happy how things are [Stakeholder – S1]*
	planning is something you definitely need – you couldn't wing it, I suppose you could wing it if you had to. But it is best if you have got your resources ready, even down to your colouring pencils

	and felt tips. Having it all ready and having that time, as you know what you are going to need [ELSA – S1]
	So, it's [planning time] 3 nights a week from 3.30-4.30, I get to download my resources, print, copy and get myself ready [ELSA – S1]
	And I think that just filters down I'd say, you know, it comes from the top really, they have senior leaders in school who really value thinking in this way about young people's emotional wellbeing, their mental health and also supporting staff with theirs…And so, I think in schools where you do have a stronger sense of that, I think ELSA perhaps works more effectively, because then there is a real kind of ringfencing of the ELSAs time. And that reflects the value that they place on it. And then, you know, it comes down to things like just even having the allocated space in the school that's the ELSA room, and it's decorated. And that's what I found in this case school, you know, there's a regular timetable for ELSA. There are weekly meetings with the line manager, there is a room that is dedicated to ELSA. [Link EP 1 – S1
	If you have a TA or learning mentor who…might not have the time that's ringfenced for ELSA because the school's priority is getting children's… attainment up. If there is kind of more of that focus in school and that kind of pressure from senior leaders in the school, then I think things like ELSA kind of trickle off. And sessions aren't as consistent. And therefore, you know, young people don't have the time to be really developing and sustaining those skills [Link EP 1 – S1]
Focused Efforts to Develop Awareness and Understanding of ELSA	*ELSA has a notice board downstairs for parents, and it's also on our website* [Stakeholder – S1].

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	It would help them with referrals as well, because they could think does the child need ELSA or maybe it is not ELSA that the child needs. So, I think it would be good. There is an understanding but there is definitely room for improvement. [ELSA – S1] *So yeah, I feel quite confident I know what's going on in the ELSA sessions. I know why the children are there [Teacher 1 – S1]*
School 2 Sub-Themes	**Quotation Examples**
Small School with Religious Family Ethos	*Oh, very family. Very, very nice school. [Stakeholder – S2]* *So first and foremost, it's a church school. So the Christian values are quite strong. And many schools are sort of values based schools, and the difference in a faith school is that the values come both ways. So you've got families generally having similar or shared values and you've got the school, and there should be a meeting in the middle. So that's, you know, supporting all God's children, all that kind of stuff is very prevalent. [Head Teacher – S2]* *Sort of the values that we have are the things like forgiveness. So when obviously they're hurting, you know, X [pupil] really hurt X [ELSA] the other week. So, you know, but it's showing that forgiveness towards the children. [Stakeholder – S2]* *And I do feel that it's one of our strengths as a school because we're a small school. So we know each family, who have siblings coming in. This year, I've got quite a few siblings of children I have taught previously. And the parents are very comfortable with me. So it's just about nurturing the family as a whole. [Teacher 2 – S2]* *we are a small school [Stakeholder – S2]*

Valuing the Role and Protecting Resources	*We've also made the role an official role, we've had the job evaluated. So she's being recompensed at the right level [SENCO – S2]*
	The room itself isn't really ready yet. We want to put in a sink in there, a door, and redecorate. So, the room itself is a repurposed library. So it was a year, just getting that room kind of ready, it is fit for purpose now. But it's still very much an old library, but the plan is to improve that [Stakeholder – S2]
	I think the SENCO is really good in terms of kind of providing resources and the budget for that. It sounds like she's got a space in school where she can work. [EP Supervisor – S2]

Theme 3 – ELSA Remit and Function within Wider Provision
Definition: This theme concerns the ELSA intervention's place within the wider SEMH provision within School 1 and 2, including challenges incorporating the ELSA intervention with other SEMH provision, as well as important considerations such as defining the ELSA professional remit.

School 1 Sub-Themes	Quotation Examples
Expected Shared Responsibility for Mental Health	*I think there is that shared responsibility about being vigilant about children's needs. [SENCO – S1]*
	So I'm constantly trying to get it reinforced, just so that there is a kind of shared responsibility. You know, emotional wellbeing, it's everyone's responsibility in school really. And so, you know, whilst ELSAs may be the champions, everyone should be doing their part really. [Stakeholder – S1]
	And also for ELSAs to feel that they're not the only ones in school holding this child or young person, and so kind of being able to identify another member of staff who they might go to, but also to

	do check ins and that sort of thing. [Stakeholder – S1]
	Smaller concerns are dealt with by a class teacher…because teachers do sometimes go "Oh I have a problem, this needs to happen", but they haven't actually thought about it – have they had that conversation with the child? Do they know the bigger picture? What is going on, it is something that happens every day or is it just a one off? [Stakeholder – S1]
	If a teacher has a problem with a child, they will ask X [ELSA] and X will come to me, and will say teacher has asked me – can they make a referral? We will discuss it. It may be there is another route the teacher needs to follow but sometimes teachers go "oh we need a quick fix like ELSA" but they haven't thought about any other strategies before it gets to ELSA. [Stakeholder – S1]
Bridging the Gap between Tiers of Provision	*With funding cuts, and everything that happened, we couldn't buy the therapist in…and then there was a gap, and we had no one in school. So, since having ELSA, that has kind of filled that gap. [Stakeholder – S1]*
	I feel as though they kind of feel more empowered to manage some of the maybe less complex cases where they feel that they can kind of intervene quite early. That they can develop a programme or package of support for that pupil, and then just monitor it. So, I think there's something about kind of them feeling empowered [Stakeholder – S1]
	Smaller concerns that are dealt with by a class teacher in the classroom, and bigger concerns that we would refer out to someone like CAMHS and so ELSA kind of bridged that gap [ELSA Line Manager – S2]

ELSA remit and Positive Outcomes	*Falls under the ELSA remit…does it fit – is it ELSA? Is it more – does it need to go to CAMHS? [Stakeholder – S1]*
	We decide what the target is going to be, it is a SMART target, so it is not going to be out of this world. It is going to be a small smart target, and we work towards that. [Stakeholder – S1]
	When referrals come in from the safeguarding side, if it is something outside of school, that can't be the reason for ELSA. Because that is not part of ELSA, it can't be because there has been domestic violence. You can't say that to a parent, because that is not what it is covering. We have to be really clear and say, okay this is going on out of school, what is the impact inside of school? So, we are noticing friendship issues in the playground, so that is what we are going to focus on. So, it does fix a small part but there is the whole picture. [ELSA Line Manager – S1]
	There have been some children that they were crying all the time in school, but now they have gone, that's not the case. So for children, they are more happy in school. [Stakeholder – S1]
	ELSA did help him. I could definitely see that [Teacher 2]
	I did go to meet her Mum and she said, you have really helped her, these sessions have really helped her [ELSA – S1]
	So, a child I had in year 5, the teacher was like I could really notice the difference with handling her anger. She used the techniques she learnt in her, she used them in class
School 2 Sub-Themes	**Quotation Examples**

Incorporating ELSA and Existing Nurture-Style Provision	*How do we embed this into kind of the systems already in place? [Stakeholder – S2]*
	So in the morning, I would see it as more group work, more behaviours for learning, more support with learning strategies, more support with helping children to manage their emotions, in terms of developing the behaviours for learning, I suppose…And more individual I think in the afternoons. In the morning, it might be a group session. It might be meeting needs like, young man who is very, very low ability. Mainly because of the way his behaviour has presented, and he's not been in class a lot, it's about filling some gaps and supporting him with his self-esteem from that point of view. But then in the afternoon, it will be much more targeted to his needs. [SENCO – S2]
	We signed up to ELSA last year, the emotion literacy support assistant. It coincided with wanting to set up a nurture style provision for children who are having difficulty with behaviour in this school, and wanting to support them with that. And just the two things happened at the same time, we wanted to set up a nurture provision, and the ELSA training was offered. [Head Teacher – S2]
	But I think within her supervision group, it was quite evident that there were kind of half of them who are kind of putting ELSA programmes in place and being quite structured and saying, okay, this child is going to see us for this amount of weeks, and this is what we're working on. And then there's this case school and a couple of others, where the person that they sent on the training and was already in the kind of ELSA role just without haven't done the training, in terms of supporting children's emotional wellbeing and working with children with SEMH needs. [EP Supervisor – S2]

	Yeah, last year, they accessed the class about 15% I'd say. And then we do all the teaching and learning in here [NSP] [ELSA – S2]
Degree of Shared Responsibility for Behavioural Needs	And they felt that maybe more is needed to be done for teachers to kind of understand some of the underlying needs of the children as well *[EP Supervisor – S2]*
	And yeah, because otherwise they're causing disruption and it wasn't really working at the beginning…there was a there was a lot of noise going on, so you're trying to teach and then there's all this stuff going on and you know and X [pupil] going in and out, in and out, the door. And you know, they're young and so any noise they're distracted, and so it was stopping the learning of the other children, them being in class. I mean with X [pupil] he will just refuse to work or cause problems, you know, sit there banging his pen on the table, you know, things like that. So if it wasn't there, you wouldn't be able to teach very well. [Teacher 1 – S2]
	I think it's challenging for X [ELSA], but, you know, thinking about the wider school [Stakeholder – S2]
Reactive Nature of Intervention	And she spoke about kind of using techniques. So if they've got really angry and they've had like an outburst in class, she might use the firework model that we spoke about in the training. But it's more like we said in that reactive way [EP Supervisor – S2]
	Even this morning, just before you came in, one of my teachers has send a child out already. [Head teacher – S2]

	So I know for her in supervision, she was saying that in some ways, it's been quite frustrating because she's constantly kind of having children sent to her. [EP Supervisor – S2] So as soon as a child has engaged in any challenging behaviour, they are sort of sending them to her. *[Stakeholder – S2]* And I think it sounds like sort of other children when they're challenging, they might get sent to her room. So she might do a bit of work with them. *[Stakeholder – S2]*
Staff Misconceptions about the Role	*I know that the ELSA from the case school has been a bit frustrated because although her Line Manager supports ELSA and understands it, and has previous experience, I don't necessarily think the rest of the staff do and they just see her as the behaviour person in school…it doesn't sound like the rest of the staff are aware of exactly what she does or what the training involves [EP Supervisor – S2]* *Interviewer: And in this school what does a young person finishing or stopping the ELSA intervention, what does that look like?* *HT: That would be my deputy to answer that question. For me, we're going to run this provision in our school in the same way we run a special needs provision in our school…the idea isn't that they stay there forever. That they integrate back into school, back in their class [Head Teacher – S2]*

Theme 4 – Central Role of Attachment
Definition: This theme concerns the central importance of the ELSA-Child attachment in the implementation of ELSA, and concerns the practices and considerations in ELSA endings.

School 1 Sub-Themes	Quotation Examples
ELSA-Child Bond at the Core	*That thing of really good relationships being at the core [Stakeholder – S1]*

	The children I am working with…one of the children I used to see him in year 5 and year 6 anyway so I have got that kind of bond with him [ELSA – S1]
	I have got to say, now he is in year 6 and he is one of the children that I get on so well with. We have got such a bond [ELSA – S1]
Practices in ELSA Endings	*Because every child I have had, you have to work down to the ending and the goodbye, go back over the work, look how far you have come, look how well you have done. If it hasn't worked, you know I'm so proud of you, this is what we have done in our ELSA sessions, what have you enjoyed? [ELSA – S1]*
	It takes at least 3 sessions to get to know the child, for the child to open up then you've got to work towards the target. Then the end she [ELSA Line Manager] believes should be 2-3 weeks, it shouldn't be rushed. [ELSA – S1]
	I do think sometimes ELSAs particularly at the beginning held cases for too long…It's probably because it is such an intense relationship that you form with that young person. But we always talk about, you know, the potential for there to be an over-dependency and a need for the young person to start to generalise those skills [EP Supervisor – S1]
	As much as I can, do try and catch the teachers…but they are so busy and it is quite hard to catch them, but I always email them for example child's ELSA will be ending on 1st July, this was his target and whether the child thinks they have completed their target [ELSA – S1]

	X [ELSA] will still check-in with them for the following term so there won't be ELSA sessions and there won't be targets set but there will be a check-in time so she just manages the child that way so they don't suddenly feel they have been dropped and let go. [Stakeholder – S1]
School 2 Sub-Themes	**Quotation Examples**
ELSA-Child Bond over Time and Over Dependence	*She's building up a really good relationship with the children [Stakeholder – S2]* *And X [ELSA] was the only one that she would let change her. So there was that relationship there [Stakeholder – S2]* *And actually, the ELSA was saying that some of the children she's working with are very dependent on her. And she's already starting to think about kind of what's going to happen when they go to secondary school because at some point, that relationship is going to have to end and I think she already felt like their current model kind of maybe leads to children becoming quite dependent on adults. So that was something that we kind of spoke about being a bit of an issue [EP Supervisor – S2]* *They've got to warm to somebody else. Even if I can hide myself somewhere….If I can hide myself somewhere, they still find me. And if they don't see me, it causes problems [ELSA – S2]*
Absence of ELSA Endings	*I can't see them stopping…once those four finish one block, they start the next. [ELSA – S2]*

	So that was one of the things that came up in our supervision, actually, because it doesn't seem like there's an end point for any of the children [EP Supervisor – S2]
	But for me, it's the longer game, it's getting them back into class [Head Teacher – S2]
	But I mean, the ultimate thing will be for them to be able to survive in managing a mainstream class [Stakeholder – S2]
	[In order for ELSA involvement to stop]…they wouldn't need to be showing that they can come in and sit down and do the work that the other children are doing. [Stakeholder – S2]

Theme 5 – ELSA Support System and Skills
Definition: The unique ELSA skills and qualities facilitate the effective implementation of ELSA. This theme also outlines the importance of the network of support they access, at the Line Management, wider-school and EP level.

School 1 Sub-Themes	**Quotation Examples**
ELSA Skills and Qualities	*I am constantly on the website, I am always looking for ideas [ELSA – S1]*
	I think she has been a great person to have been picked [Stakeholder – S1]
	It's led really well. And like X [ELSA], I know she's very good at her job. And, you know she tries her best to get the outcome. [Stakeholder – S1]
	So, I always make sure the work is ready for the following week, depending on how that session went. If it went a different way, then you change the work [ELSA – S1]

ELSA Difficult Feelings in Work	*But yeah, I do feel like I've got the support but it was emotional, at one point I was like 'I can't do this', but now I am kind of like no I can do it – I am strong enough to do it, I've just got to do what I can do. [ELSA – S1]*
	Yeah, it was a bit emotional for me to hear what she was saying and being a Mum myself [ELSA – S1]
	I imagine that's kind of quite an emotional toll it does take on them… And then I think that also possibly impacts on the work, on the relationship that they formed with the child [EP Supervisor – S1]
Network of ELSA Support	*I can't complain about the support I get from X [ELSA Line Manager], it is amazing [ELSA – S1]*
	She [ELSA Line Manager] has done lots with children herself, so she has got a very good understanding of the challenges that the ELSA might face. She is in a good position to support her, which I think really helps. [SENCO – S1]
	Yeah I also have X [ELSA Educational Psychologist] who I can email, and be like help! And yeah touch wood, I have not had to do that. [ELSA – S1]
	I remember when I first started working with a certain child after the second session, I remember going to X [ELSA Line Manager], and I was just like "it's really tough, I don't think I can do this – he doesn't need me, he needs more than me". He was referred for some anger issues and calming down techniques, and the session I had with him, he broke a ruler, and I just thought I can't do this, I just don't think it is me that he needs. So when I was

	speaking to X [ELSA Line Manager], she said try doing the contract together, what you expect from the session, and I'm not going to lie I was dreading the following session with him because I just thought he doesn't want to be here. But he came in and we did do a contract together [ELSA – S1] *I spoke to X {ELSA Line Manager], I got a lot of support from X [ELSA Line Manager], she was just like remember your training. [ELSA – S1]* *And if I did get upset, when the session ended I would thank them for their time, take them back to class, and then I could always go down to X [ELSA Line Manager] and say to her, 'oh' (sad noise) or 'ahhhh' (angry noise) – you know whatever emotion it is. So yeah. [ELSA – S1]* *Yeah and I think it is because when I have done my training and as a learning mentor, I used to have supervision from a therapist and done the Place to Be counselling training, so that is my background, and so a lot of it is about self-awareness, your own self-awareness, how you are able to support others. So that is my background, and I think you have to have a level of self-awareness and it is hard working 1:1 with children. Not every session is a happy one, that is not what it is there for so it is for X [ELSA] week by week learning those different things. [ELSA Line Manager – S1]*
Unique EP Role and Challenges	*And I think that if possible, like every school should have that conversation with their Link EP, ELSA Line Manager, SENCO and ELSA, because then I think that might throw up some of the strengths about ELSA being brought into the school, but then some of the sticking points or the things that might need to be thought about [EP Supervisor – S1]*

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	I think sometimes actually, you know, the Link EP they have that relationship with the SENCO and with other staff members…I think having that personalised touch, you know, from somebody with whom you have a relationship is far better, it has much more of an impact, I would say, for obvious reasons [EP Supervisor – S1]
	So, for me, I see my role in that school is one that is developing more around the ELSA work. And with the intention of kind of being more directly involved which is something really positive [Link EP 1 – S1]
	In our service, we're doing some training with our wider team to really give EPs a good and firm understanding of what ELSAs do in schools and how they could be helpful as the Link EP knowing that school context in supporting, you know, the delivery of that work [EP Supervisor – S1]
School 2 Sub-Themes	**Quotation Examples**
ELSA Skills and Qualities	I think the person that they sent on the training, she's really keen to kind of put what she's learned in place, and I think they have chosen somebody well. And she is kind of really reflecting on what she's learnt [EP Supervisor – S2] I think they chose well in terms of the person they sent on the training, she's quite invested in doing it and she's kind of keen to apply the techniques. [Stakeholder – S2]
ELSA Difficult Feelings in Work	*I think she finds it quite stressful. And I think she feels like it's quite a lot of pressure because some of the children she's working with are really challenging. And so she said that she felt*

	that she needed the supervision and she needed to talk to everybody. And she was a bit frustrated that she hadn't had a chance [EP Supervisor – S2]
Network of ELSA Support	*Mr. X [Headteacher], he will come out, he will look through the door, give me a thumbs up and we'll give the thumbs up even if we're in a restraint. So, we are getting there. The teachers are amazing. They're very supportive [ELSA – S2]*
	But me and X [ELSA], there was a song that we were learning in singing assembly "together, we are stronger". So anytime one of us is down, we still sing that…it's just like our support song [Teacher 1 – S2]
	I mean we do catch up ad hoc all the time, X [ELSA] and I talk every day… But we formalised things on a kind of on a weekly basis…She knows that the doors open and we can, you know, the slightest thing that goes wrong, we can always just sort of talk and problem solve [SENCO – S2]
Unique EP Role and Challenges	*And I think it's a case of kind of her and her line manager maybe having a review of kind of what's going well, and what isn't, and then thinking about how they can change things and what support they might need. And I think that's where the EP in the school plays a key role. So I'm not the link EP, but it might be that her line manager, the SENCO, could maybe involve the EP in thinking about how do we embed this into kind of the systems already in place. [EP Supervisor – S2]*
	Well, I'd say my understanding of ELSA is very limited [Link EP – S2]

	Yeah, their idea of when they say support, I don't know if I'm interpreting it wrong, but ultimately they would like to proceed to the EHC assessment at some point [Link EP – S2]

Appendix 12: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study:

The ELSA Project in Two Primary Schools: Reflections from Key Stakeholders on the Factors that Influence Implementation

Department: Psychology and Human Development
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher: Hannah Fairall (hannah.fairall.17@ucl.ac.uk)

You are invited to take part in a research study about the implementation of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) project. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research us being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You can also ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the project's purpose?

This study aims to examine the wider facilitators and barriers of the implementation of ELSA project in school settings. In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. You will predominately discuss implementation factors, including the referral process, school ethos and longer-term processes around the ELSA project.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to take part in this study as you are a key member of staff in a school system which implements the ELSA project. Several members of staff within this school and other schools will be involved in this study including; ELSAs, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), Teachers, members of Senior Leadership Team and Educational Psychologists. Schools that employ ELSA in this

area will be approached to take part in this study, and those who are willing and able will become the participants.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw you will be asked what you wish to happen to the data you have provided up that point. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

4. What will happen if I take part?

Participation in this study involves participation in a one-off 1:1 semi-structured interview with the researcher.

5. Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in the researcher's thesis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one other than the research will be allowed access to the original recordings.

6. What are the potential disadvantages and benefits of taking part?

The risks for participants are limited; the topics discussed in the interview are unlikely to cause discomfort or distress. However if this does occur, you are able to omit answers to questions or withdraw from the study.

Participation in this study enables development in understanding the workings of the ELSA project, and will help to shape future research.

7. What if something goes wrong?

If you have any complaints during the research process, you can discuss this with the researcher (Hannah Fairall). If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research ethics committee - ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

8. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Any information or personal details will be kept confidential. The data gathered from the interview will be kept on a password protected laptop, which can only be accessed by myself (Hannah Fairall). In the presentation of the findings, your identity will be kept confidential.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

9. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this study will be presented within the researcher's thesis, as part of the researcher's Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. If you would like to obtain a copy of the results, please contact the researcher with the contact details provided below.

Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in health and care research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you can ask the researcher before the interview begins.

If you have any questions after participation in the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address is hannah.fairall.17@ucl.ac.uk.

Many thanks,

Hannah Fairall

Appendix 13: Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to Hannah Fairall in person.

I have read and understood the information leaflet about the research. ☐

I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations they will not be attributed to me. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used. ☐

I agree to the interview being audio recorded ☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications ☐

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Hannah Fairall

UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL
hannah.fairall.17@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix 14: Analysis of Questionnaire Data from School 1 and 2

Questionnaire Data: School 1

Questionnaires from staff (n = 37) in School 1 were completed by the following participants:

- Teachers (n = 15)
- Teaching Assistants (n = 10)
- Higher Level Teaching Assistants (n = 1)
- Member of SLT (n = 2)
- Administration Staff (n = 2)
- Support Staff (n = 2)
- Nursery Nurse (n = 1)
- Trainee Teacher (n = 4)

Overall, across the questionnaire data (see Table A.1), there is a sense of an overall awareness of the ELSA project across staff in School 1, however potentially a lack of a depth of awareness of the intervention – with only 8% of staff citing that they have either a 'good' or 'high level' of knowledge of the intervention. While 70% of staff view the ELSA project as 'Relevant' or 'Extremely Relevant' to their practice, it appears staff lack a depth of awareness of the intervention.

Table A.1 Descriptive statistics for Questionnaires – School 1

Are you aware of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant [ELSA] project in school?	
Yes	*No*
86% (n = 31)	*14% (n = 5)*

How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of the ELSA project?				
No Knowledge at all	*Very Limited Knowledge*	*Limited Knowledge*	*Good Knowledge*	*High Level of Knowledge*
14% (n = 5)	*27% (n = 10)*	*51% (n = 19)*	*5% (n = 2)*	*3% (n = 1)*

How relevant do you believe knowledge of the ELSA project is for your everyday practice?					
Not Relevant at all	Slightly Relevant	Moderately Relevant	Relevant	Extremely Relevant	Missing
11% (n = 4)	3% (n = 1)	14% (n = 5)	46% (n = 17)	24% (n = 9)	3% (n = 1)

Have you referred to or used knowledge of the ELSA project in your day-to-day practice?				
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
62% (n = 23)	19% (n = 7)	14% (n = 5)	3% (n = 1)	3% (n = 1)

A cross-tabulation was completed in order to compare the extent of ELSA knowledge to individuals in different job roles in School 1, the results are presented in Table A.2.

Table A.2 Level of ELSA Knowledge in Different Job Roles – School 1

Job Role	No Knowledge or Very Limited Knowledge	Limited Knowledge	Good Knowledge or High Level of Knowledge
Teacher	20% (n = 3)	80% (n = 12)	-
Teaching Assistant	50% (n = 5)	30% (n = 3)	20% (n = 2)
HLTA	100% (n =1)	-	-
Member of SLT	-	100% (n = 2)	-
Administration Staff	50% (n = 1)	50% (n = 1)	-
Support Staff	50% (n = 1)	-	50% (n = 1)
Nursery Nurse	-	100% (n = 1)	-
Trainee Teacher	100% (n = 4)	-	-

Those in School 1 who have 'good' or 'high' levels of knowledge of ELSA are either TAs or Support Staff, however this is not the case for all TAs and Support staff – with 50% of each group in the sample expressing 'No Knowledge' or 'Very Limited' Knowledge. The majority of teachers involved (80%) cited they have 'Limited' knowledge of ELSA, which could be a barrier to effective implementation given their role in the referral process.

Respondent level of ELSA knowledge was compared to respondent belief that ELSA is relevant to everyday practice. The results are reported in the bar chart in Figure A.1.

Figure A.1 Comparing Staff ELSA Knowledge and Relevance to Practice – School 1
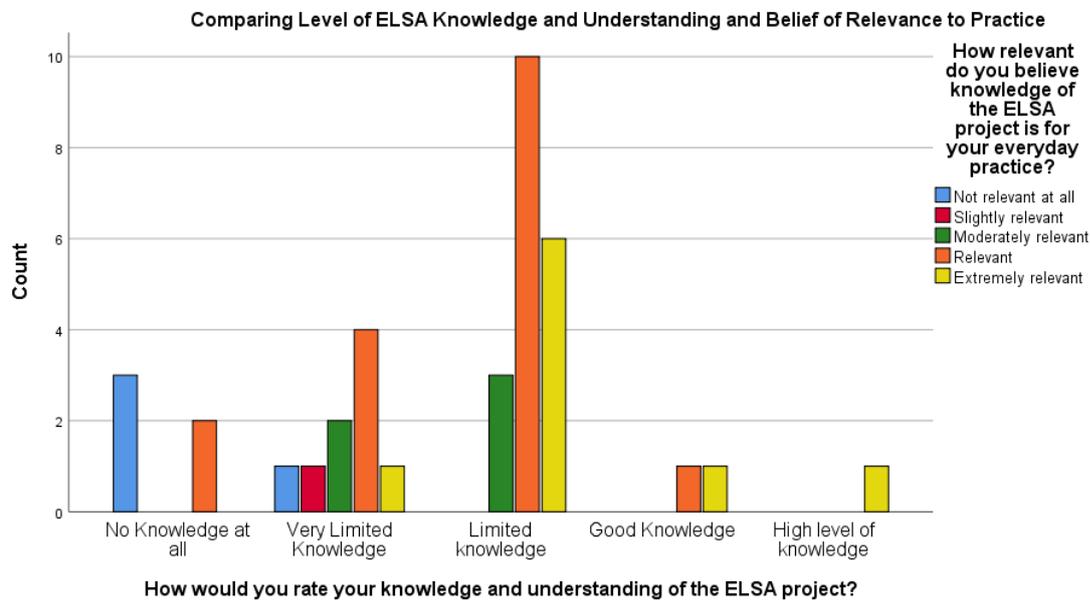
All of respondents with 'good' or 'high' levels of ELSA knowledge cite that knowledge of ELSA is 'Relevant' or 'Extremely Relevant' to their everyday practice. In addition, 100% of respondents who believe ELSA is 'Not Relevant at All' to their everyday practice also reported having 'No Knowledge at all' or 'Very Limited Knowledge'. However, this relationship is not evidently linear – with 35.3% of those in the sample that believe ELSA is 'Relevant' to their practice having 'No Knowledge' or 'Very Limited Knowledge'. This data indicates belief of relevance to practice and knowledge of ELSA are potentially closely linked in School 1, however further research is needed. If this is the case, attempts to build ELSA knowledge across

school staff may involve explaining to staff why knowledge of this intervention is relevant to their practice.

Questionnaire Data: School 2

Questionnaire from staff (n = 19) in School 2 involved the following participants:

- Teachers (N = 11)
- TAs (N = 3)
- HLTA (N = 1)
- Member of SLT (N = 1)
- Administration Staff (N = 1)
- Support Staff (N = 2)

The majority of respondent staff in School 2 are aware of ELSA (95%), only 16% of respondents cited having a 'good' or 'high' level of knowledge. The majority of respondents (73%) expressed that ELSA is either 'Relevant' or 'Extremely Relevant' to their everyday practice, but it appears that the majority of staff do not feel they have detailed knowledge about ELSA.

Table A.3 Descriptive statistics for Questionnaires – School 2

Are you aware of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant [ELSA] project in school?		
Yes	*No*	*Missing*
95% (n = 18)	*-*	*5% (n = 1)*

How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of the ELSA project?				
No Knowledge at all	*Very Limited Knowledge*	*Limited Knowledge*	*Good Knowledge*	*High Level of Knowledge*
11% (n = 2)	*37% (n = 7)*	*37% (n = 7)*	*11% (n = 2)*	*5% (n = 1)*

How relevant do you believe knowledge of the ELSA project is for your everyday practice?

Not Relevant at all	Slightly Relevant	Moderately Relevant	Relevant	Extremely Relevant	Missing
-	5% (n = 1)	16% (n = 3)	42% (n = 8)	31% (n = 6)	5% (n = 1)

Have you referred to or used knowledge of the ELSA project in your day-to-day practice?					
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Missing
37% (n = 7)	16% (n = 3)	16% (n = 3)	11% (n = 2)	16% (n = 3)	5% (n = 1)

A cross-tabulation was undertaken in order to compare the extent of ELSA knowledge to different job roles, see Table A.4.

Table A.4 Level of ELSA Knowledge in Different Job Roles – School 2

Job Role	No Knowledge or Very Limited Knowledge	Limited Knowledge	Good Knowledge or High Level of Knowledge
Teacher	54% (n = 6)	36% (n = 4)	9% (n = 1)
Teaching Assistant	67% (n = 2)	33% (n = 1)	-
HLTA	-	100% (n = 1)	-
Member of SLT	-	-	100% (n = 1)
Administration Staff	100% (n = 1)	-	-
Support Staff	-	50% (n = 1)	50% (n = 1)

In School 2, those with a 'good' or 'high' level of ELSA knowledge are those in an SLT role, a member of support staff and a teacher. The majority of teachers have either 'No Knowledge' or 'Very Limited Knowledge' (55%).

Respondent level of ELSA knowledge was compared to respondent belief that ELSA is relevant to everyday practice. The results are reported in Figure A.2.

Figure A.2 Comparing Staff ELSA Knowledge and Relevance to Practice – School 2
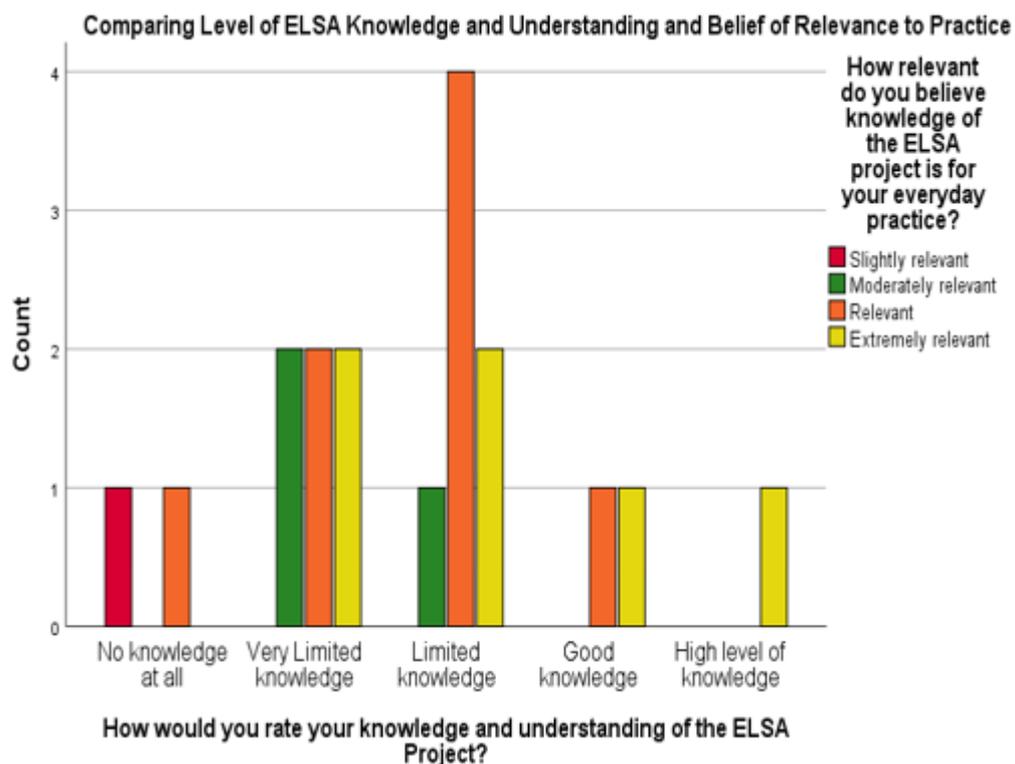
In School 2, no respondents selected that knowledge of ELSA is 'Not Relevant at All' to their everyday practice. The only instance of a respondent viewing that knowledge of ELSA is 'Slightly Relevant' to everyday practice had 'No Knowledge at All' of ELSA – again indicating a potential link between these two constructs as in School 1, however further data would be needed to demonstrate this.

Appendix 15: Mapping Findings onto the Stages of Implementation, and Optimal Conditions for Effective Implementation

Implementation Stage	Features within this stage according to Kelly (2012)	Application School 1 and 2 Findings	Optimal Conditions for Effective ELSA Implementation
Stage 1 - The exploration and adoption stage	Schools develop staff awareness to improve commitment and understanding of the programme.	• For School 2, whole-staff awareness and understanding was not fully developed as the first stage of implementation. Instead, this was returned back to following the installation stage and initial implementation stage. This meant staff across the school did not fully understand the ELSA primary task, and what was needed to achieve this. • For School 2, whole-school understanding and commitment was not ascertained prior to signing up for the ELSA training	• All staff are made aware of ELSA (e.g. via staff meetings, email) prior to the ELSA beginning the training programme, with whole-staff opportunity to raise any concerns about achieving the ELSA primary task within the school system. • Whole-staff commitment can be fostered by explaining how the ELSA programme fits into the whole school ethos and aims – linking the ELSA primary task to the whole-school primary task. • The above guidance could be included in the initial EPS contact with schools who sign up to this intervention • Fostering awareness and commitment is an ongoing process, not something contained only within the first implementation phase. Key ELSA stakeholders

		For School 1, school staff understanding and commitment is an ongoing iterative process, which has not been restricted to the early stages of the project. Focused efforts to develop awareness across parents, pupils and staff are adopted, including use of a display board and the school website. • School 1 and 2 selected highly skilled TAs to become ELSAs	(e.g. ELSA, ELSA Line Manager) to consider how to ensure ongoing awareness, including for new staff starting at the school as well as for parents and pupils. Key stakeholders may include ELSA on the school website, use display boards in school or leaflets at reception. • Selecting highly skilled TAs to train to be ELSAs, see ELSA person specification for guidance (Burton, 2009)
Stage 2 – Installation stage	The school have decided to adopt the programme and are in the process of installing the implementation infrastructure (e.g. attending	• For School 2, key elements of this phase involved developing the ELSA room, as well as amending the behaviour policy to include ELSA within the behaviour triangle of hierarchy. • For School 2, incorporating ELSA with existing SEMH provision was a barrier in this stage of	• Leadership support in this phase is essential to maintain focus on implementing the intervention with quality (Kelly, 2012). The ELSAs themselves are likely to be the ones who know the most about what is needed to implement this intervention with quality, however they will not be in a leadership position in school. Therefore, it will be important for regular transparent communication between those who know the most about what is needed to implement

| | training) and changing policy and procedures in school, and developing resources. | implementation. This included difficulties distinguishing between the ELSA's role in each provision, as well as staff misconceptions about the ELSA role.

• For the ELSA in School 2, starting ELSA meant that the young people who would usually be with her in the afternoons needed to warm to somebody else and the CYP found it hard being separated from the ELSA.

• School 1 appeared to have moved through this phase previously, with the key implementation infrastructure in place at the time of data collection. | the intervention with quality (ELSA and ELSA Line Manager) and more senior members of the school (e.g. Deputy or Head Teacher).

• Prior to stage 3 (where pupils start access the ELSA support), it will be important school leadership, with the ELSA and ELSA Line Manager, consider how ELSA fits into the wider SEMH provision. A key element of this will be distinguishing between the ELSA 'hats'. If the ELSA's existing role in school also involves SEMH support in some way, it will be important to take extra time to really consider the boundaries between these roles. This may be a beneficial time for the Link EP of the school to join these discussions, and use consultation skills (Beaver, 2012) to problem-solve and provide support in integrating this intervention into existing school structures, while maintaining the integrity of the ELSA intervention (i.e. proactive not reactive, short-term structured block interventions with SMART targets). |

			• Staffing considerations will also need to be made at this stage. For example, if the ELSA is conducting her sessions on Monday afternoons, what duties did s/he previously have during this time? How can we ensure these duties are covered and s/he is not interrupted during the ELSA sessions? Attachment considerations may well be relevant to these staffing discussions, if the ELSA usually spends time with certain CYP during this time – a close attachment relationship may well have built up and sudden change and separation during this time may be detrimental to these CYP. Change will need to be transparently communicated to the young people. A gradual shift may be beneficial for these young people, enabling them to warm to another adult with this separation from the ELSA gradually building up over time. For example, the ELSA may start his/her ELSA work for only 1 afternoon a week and built this up to 2 afternoons later in the term. • Prior to pupils accessing this intervention in stage 3, steps should be taken to restate the ELSA primary

			task to all staff, including what is needed for them to achieve the primary task (e.g. uninterrupted sessions, their role in the referral process), as well as opportunities for them to voice concerns about feasibility.
Stage 3 – The initial implementati on stage	During the initial implementation stage, the students first experience the new intervention which is a time of vulnerability as individuals may feel new to their role and have doubts about the intervention decision.	• For School 2, this stage is where a great deal of implementation barriers emerged with the ELSA being interrupted during the structured block sessions, and needing to work in a reactive way. This appeared linked to lack of whole-staff awareness and understanding of the ELSA primary task, lack of distinguishing between the ELSA role in the NSP and ELSA, as well as pupil difficulty separating from the ELSA when she was due to carry out her 1:1 work. A way to address these challenges may have been to	• This is a time of vulnerability for pupils (Kelly, 2012), but also for the ELSA starting her new role and for wider staff needing to amend their practice to accommodate this intervention. Support and containment will be really important at this stage. • Weekly ELSA Line Management meetings will be set up, but schools may also consider enabling ad hoc support for the ELSA when needed at this time of vulnerability. The ELSA will not be able to contain pupil emotions unless s/he is contained him/herself (Bion, 1985)

		spend more time making considerations in the earlier stages of implementation.	
Stage 4 – Full implementati on	Full implementation occurs once the new skills, operating procedures, data systems, communication links and new culture are integrated into the school.	• School 1 adopt a comprehensive approach, including ELSA timetabling, a decorated ELSA room, protection of ELSA planning time and resources. Key stakeholders remain vigilant in ensuring the programme adheres to the ELSA manual, and acknowledge the iterative nature of ongoing staff awareness of the intervention.	• Ensuring ongoing awareness of ELSA primary task across school staff, including new staff who start at the school. Staff induction days at the start of the academic year may be a good time to introduce ELSA to new staff members. • In line with Kelly (2012), if there is significant teacher/staff turnover, then the issues and activities related to initial implementation will remerge and need attention
Sustainability (To be considered at all stages)	This is not strictly viewed as a stage, it is important for schools to purposefully	• School 1 and 2 have made financial sustainability considerations. For School 2, the ELSA is receiving a higher salary in her ELSA role, and leadership	• For schools to financially account for the resources and time required for the ELSA intervention. This might be initially considered at Stage 1 prior to signing up for the project, but these considerations will be ongoing through Stages 1-4.

	consider sustainability across all implementation time points (Kelly, 2012). Financial sustainability concerns accounting for time and resources needed to implement the intervention.	explained that having ELSA is in their three-year financial plan. • For School 1, funding cuts meant that the school could no longer afford to have a school counsellor. ELSA then aimed to somewhat bridge the gap which was left.	
Innovation *(To be considered at* *all stages)*	Innovation involves adapting the intervention to overcome	• School 1 adapted intervention length to be longer than recommended 6-10 weeks, in order to allow time for the beginnings and endings –	• As advised by Kelly (2012), it is best for schools to first implement an intervention with fidelity before adapting and innovating ELSA. This is because adapting prior to achieving fidelity makes interpreting ELSA outcomes following the innovation

	intervention challenges.	honouring the importance of the ELSA-pupil relationship. School 1 cited achieving positive outcomes with this adaptation.	difficult. So ideally, innovations would not be considered until Stage 4.
		• School 1 have adapted ELSA to involve one-off drop-ins for pupils not accessing structured block sessions, in order to discuss one-off issues, such as a friendship problem in the playground	
		• Due to the needs of the young people accessing ELSA, School 2 adapted the ELSA intervention to have an absence of ELSA endings.	
		• School 2 have adaptively included ELSA skills and tools in her NSP teaching, e.g. using circle time during the NSP teaching	

Appendix 16: Draft Agenda – Meeting Regarding ELSA Implementation during the Installation Phase

Suggested attendees - Link EP, SLT, SENCO and ELSA

(Link EP to lead to meeting)

1. Introductions and clarifying the purpose and hopes for the meeting

2. General update from the school on how things are going. Initial strengths of the implementation so far, and particular sticking points / concerns arising

3. Protection of ELSA time, space and resources
   a. What are the current plans to ensure the ELSA has protected, time, space and resources? Any initial concerns arising?

4. ELSA Support Systems
   a. What are the current plans? Any issues arising?

5. Wider School Awareness
   a. To what extent are wider staff aware?
   b. What has been tried so far to facilitate staff awareness?
   c. Are staff having the opportunity to voice concerns about feasibility of the project?
   d. Problem solve around - what else can we do to ensure wider staff are clear about ELSA project, place within school system and relevance to their role?

6. ELSA within Wider SEMH Provision
   a. What is ELSAs place within wider SEMH provision?
   b. How is ELSA distinguished from other similar provision?
   c. How are the boundaries between the ELSAs existing role in school and his/her new ELSA role managed? How do we ensure boundaries are not blurred?

7. Wider Ethos and Shared Responsibility for MH
   a. How does ELSA fit into the school ethos? What links can we draw?
   b. How can we ensure a wider shared responsibility for MH across school?

8. Referral
   a. What are your ideas for the current referral process?
   b. How can we ensure equality of access?

9. Any remaining issues / things we have not discussed?

10. Have we achieved what was hoped at the start of the meeting?