"It depends on the individual": A psycho-social exploration of designated teachers' and virtual school advisory teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children in education.

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Abstract

In 2019, there were 78,150 (DfE, 2019) looked after children (LAC) in the United Kingdom. According to national statistics they are underachieving by at least 28% (DfE, 2017), across all key stages of education in comparison to the general population. LAC pupils are four times more likely to have a special educational need or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Within education there are two key organisations, schools and the virtual school, whose legal responsibility it is to coordinate and monitor the education of LAC pupils.

This study is a psycho-social exploration of VSAT and DT's experiences of supporting LAC pupils within education, both academically and emotionally. Eight interviews were conducted, four with VSATs and four with their link DTs in primary and secondary schools. Unstructured interviews were conducted applying a Free Associative Narrative Method (FANI) and each participant was interviewed once. An Activity Theory Diagram was included in the interview as an initial task, providing a conceptual map of the participants construction of the systems surrounding LAC children. Interviews were analysed using a reflexive inductive thematic analysis approach, with an additional psycho-analytic lens to explore participants unconscious emotional responses to supporting LAC pupils.

Three main themes were identified: the 'emotional labour' of supporting LAC pupils, systemic issues within the network and the participants perspectives on LAC pupils achievement. The findings highlight the challenges for educational professionals providing educational and emotional support and implications for Educational Psychologists are discussed.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1   Chapter Overview

The aim of this chapter is to introduce my research topic and provide a contextual overview of the current national and local situation regarding the needs and academic achievement of looked after children. I will describe the current national context, presenting relevant statistics to demonstrate my reasons for focusing on this area. I will provide contextual information about the local authority where the research is situated and orientate my personal interest in the research topic. Relevant legal terminology, as well the support structures for LAC pupils in education, will be explained. Research will be discussed to position my study within current debates and demonstrate its relevance. This chapter concludes with a rationale for adopting a psycho-social research approach to exploring the experiences of education professionals working with LAC pupils.

1.2   National Context

The Department for Education (DfE), define a 'looked after child' as a child who has been continuously looked after for at least 12 months and is in the care of the Local Authority. Under the Children Act 1989, the legal definition for 'looked after' by a local authority is "if he or she is provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours, is subject to a care order; or is subject to a placement order" (DfE, 2019, pp.16). In 2019, there were 78,150 looked after children (LAC) in the UK, an increase of 4% since 2018 (DfE, 2020). Many have experienced significant trauma from an early age, as a result of abuse or neglect, 63% (49,570 children); family dysfunction, 14% (11,310); family in acute stress, 8% (6,050); absent parenting, 7% (5,410) and child or parent's disability, 6% (4,580), (DfE, 2020).

Recent government statistics (DfE, 2020) ascertain that looked after children (LAC) are underperforming at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 in relation to their non-looked-after peers. In England, they are four times more likely to have a special educational need (SEN) and almost nine times as likely to have an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) (DfE, 2020). Furthermore, 47.5% of children identified in the category of SEN support have Social, Emotional

and Mental Health (SEMH) identified as their primary need, with 40.4% of pupils having an EHCP for SEMH. Subsequently, children in care with an EHCP are twice as likely to have SEMH as a primary need (DfE, 2020). Hence, the government data advises that when scrutinising attainment for LAC versus non-LAC pupils, the comparatively high level of SEN for LAC pupils needs to be considered. It is also important to acknowledge that absence rates for LAC pupils continue to rise and currently stand at 10.9% (DfE, 2020). Furthermore, a high percentage of LAC pupils are also at risk of exclusion with 11.67% having at least one fixed period exclusion in 2018, a slight decrease from 11.83% in 2017 (DfE, 2020). They are also five times more likely to move schools in year ten or eleven (Harris & Ayo, 2011), which can often impact on their key stage four results. These statistics indicate that LAC pupils are not making the expected progress required in education and that many require additional support to access the curriculum.

1.3   Local Context

This research will be undertaken in a LA on the outskirts of London. The 2019 (DfE) data identified the authority as having approximately 819 looked after children. The largest number in a LA in London, equivalent to 86 per 10,000 children in the under 18 population. Of the 819, 265 (32%) were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), the highest number for a local authority in the country. In 2017, the LA did not have the relevant education, employment or accommodation status for almost a third of the care leavers aged 17-18. The key stage 4 'attainment 8' scores, the average attainment score of pupils in up to 8 qualifications (DfE, 2019), of LAC pupils were lower than the London and England averages. However, the percentage of LAC pupils with an identified or recognised special educational need was the third lowest in London. The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) provides a fully traded model of service to the schools and the local authority. The virtual school purchase regular time from a senior educational psychologist (SEP) to provide supervision to their teachers, mainly around individual cases.

The aim of this research is to investigate the perceptions of the virtual school advisory teachers (VSATs) and their link designated teachers (DTs), to identify their thoughts and emotions around supporting LAC pupils academically and emotionally in education. The successes and challenges

for these staff will also be explored, with a view to identifying commonalities between them that can encourage an improved multi-agency approach to supporting LAC.

1.4   Terminology

A range of terms are used to identify children who are in the care of the state, such as 'children in care', 'looked after children', 'ward of the state' or 'children looked after'. Essentially, these terms all broadly refer to a group of children who have been taken into the care of the local authority, either through parental agreement (Section 20) or child protection proceedings (Section 47). A child can also move from being a child who is a ward of the state under section 21 to section 47. Regardless of whether they are in the care of the local authority through foster care, children's home (terminology) or supported accommodation, they should have access to a social worker, a teacher from the virtual school and, if in education, a designated teacher. Unless, they are adopted or legal restrictions are in place, a child's parent(s) will also be invited to be involved in decisions about their education either at Looked After Children reviews or Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings.

For the purposes of this research, literature referring to pupils who have been adopted, who are in private fostering agreements, in kinship care, UASC or under special guardianship orders (SGOs) will not be included in this research. The terms LAC pupil, children and pupils will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

1.5   Personal Interest in the Research Area

My interest in this research area originates from my experience of working as a designated teacher and from my trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) position in an inner London LAC Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Team.

I was a DT in an urban primary school (220 pupils), where approximately half the children had current or previous involvement with Children Services and thirteen became LAC pupils as a result. The role took up a significant amount of my time, supporting the children through

the child protection process, offering emotional containment and a space to share their experiences. Helping these children to acclimatise to being separated from their parents, and possibly their siblings, whilst feeling a responsibility to ensure that, not only did their life improve, but we also maintained a sense of continuity for them. Alongside the virtual school teacher, the school staff were often the adults who had an in-depth knowledge of the children's history, particularly when there were regular changes of social worker. Often their official file was incomplete, whilst we knew their lived history and their emotional and physical challenges. In a sense, we became the retainers of their narrative and I was regularly asked to give an overview of the child's history and experiences, including critical case reviews. It was emotionally demanding, trying to balance supporting the child emotionally and academically, with my own emotional responses to their lived experiences.

Within CAMHS I experienced a different perspective to this process. I was able to be part of a multi-agency NHS team positioned alongside LAC social workers. I became aware of concerns regarding LAC pupils access to, and engagement with, education, as many of the schools struggled to understand the impact of trauma on cognition and learning. Training at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust also provided me with an understanding of psychoanalytical and psychodynamic theoretical principles. Working with a Clinical Psychologist within this team, I was able to understand how these principles can encourage the development of an alternative lens, to consider what lies beneath the surface, rather than accepting situations at face value. I was able to explore the impact of unconscious emotions on professionals behaviour and interactions with others. It was apparent that there were often problems within the networks surrounding LAC pupils and our role was to facilitate joint thinking processes to resolve these.

Psycho-social research focuses upon the research subjects personal experience and the process providing them with an opportunity to share their story. The researcher is not considered to be an objective observer of the process, they also sit within the research and are usually represented in the first person (Woodward, 2015). Therefore, particularly in the light of my previous experience and interest in the subject, I will locate my contribution in the first person throughout this research.

1.6   The 'Corporate Parent'

The government have devised legislation and guidance to endeavour to reduce these statistics, in particular, the introduction of the Children and Social Work Act (2017), which legally defined the phrase and concept 'Corporate Parenting Principles'. This concept previously existed in principle, originally introduced as guidance in the Children Act (2004). The principles in the 2017 Act are designed to ensure that all local authority staff consider the needs of children who are 'looked after' and officially identify the local authority as a looked after child's 'corporate parent'. Thus, the local authority has a 'duty of care' to these children and 'council officers' need to ensure they adhere to the following:

a) "to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living"

(Children and Social Work Act 2017 (c16), pp.2)

With the 'corporate parent' role comes an expectation and a responsibility to ensure that all of a child's needs are considered. These children have been failed by their primary carers, thus the adults who assumes the mantel of 'corporate parent' is intrinsic to promoting an understanding of LAC pupils needs and are paramount to ensuring positive outcomes for them (DfE, 2018). Historically, the focus of professionals surrounding looked after children has been to ensure their removal from situations that place them at risk of significant harm. However, recent guidance emphasises the importance of recognising that LAC pupils not only have the same needs as other children but also face additional challenges. It acknowledges that an emotionally damaged child

needs more than just to be kept safe, they need to be nurtured, encouraged, held in mind and enabled to flourish (Geddes et al, 2017). The importance of ensuring that LAC pupils' academic needs are met is not disputed, however, they also require the opportunity to emotionally process their experiences. Many looked after children find it difficult to adapt to a different environment and change their 'survival behaviours', which can have a detrimental effect on their capacity to develop secure attachment relationships with adults (Farnfield & Holmes, 2014, pp.2) Consequently, they continue to experience rejection, with adults often finding it difficult to be able to contain the child's feelings of powerlessness, rejection or anger. At times, these emotions can be expressed as challenging and disturbing behaviours, sometimes resulting in exclusion from school (Rocco-Briggs, 2008).

1.7   Looked after children in education

Within education, there are two key organisations, schools and the virtual school, whose responsibility it is to take up the 'corporate parent' role: The virtual school (VS) in the local authority and the designated teacher (DT) within schools and colleges. Virtual schools are not physical schools, instead they are a team of professionals who are responsible for coordinating and monitoring the educational provision for every LAC pupil registered with their local authority (LA), whether they are placed within their own or another LA. They were introduced as a consequence of the Children Act (1989), but not enforced as a statutory duty until the introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014), finally, becoming a legal requirement in 2017 (DfE, 2014).

In 2008, the Children and Families Act implemented a requirement that all schools appoint a designated teacher for looked after pupils, to monitor their educational provision. Statutory guidance was issued regarding the expectations of schools' governing bodies when appointing the 'designated teacher' and adhering to the legislation. In 2018, a review of the guidance resulted in an amendment to the legislation to include previously looked-after children (DfE, 2018). The updated legislation also acknowledges that LAC children may have experienced disruption to schooling and have special educational needs. Furthermore, it recognises the impact

of social, emotional and mental health, trauma and attachment difficulties on their ability to engage in learning (DfE, 2018, pp.26).

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a mechanism for monitoring LAC's academic progress and implementing additional support for them. Its primary focus is the pupil's educational needs, but reference is also made to the emotional support a child may require, to address potential barriers to their educational progress. It incorporates a multi-agency forum, which includes the virtual school, the school, the social worker, foster carer, the pupil and sometimes their parents. The introduction of pupil premium plus (PP+) funding for LAC and adopted pupils in 2014 enabled the VS to commission a range of interventions and support in schools. The format in which the funding is arranged differs between local authorities, some retain the PP+ and in others it is assigned to schools. This arrangement also differs, depending on the care arrangement for the pupil, such as whether a child is looked after, adopted or in kinship care. Statutory guidance (DfE, 2018) continues to maintain a national focus on the educational attainment of LAC pupils, providing clear guidelines regarding the use of PP+ (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Guidance from DfE (2018) on the use of Pupil Premium Plus

Getting the most from PP+ [12]:

Approaches that are:	Which emphasise:
• Individually tailored to the needs and strengths of each pupil	• Relationship-building, both with appropriate adults and with peers
• Consistent: based on agreed core principles and components, but also flexible and responsive	• An emotionally intelligent approach to the setting of clear behaviour boundaries
• Based on evidence of what works	• Increasing pupil's understanding of their own emotions and identity
• Focussed on clear short-term goals which give opportunities for pupils to experience success	• Positive reinforcement
• Include regular, high quality feedback from teaching staff	• Building self-esteem
• Engage parents/carers in the agreement and evaluation of arrangements for education support (e.g. via the PEP)	• Relevance to the learner: relate to pupil's interests where possible – make it matter to them
• Supporting pupil transition (e.g. primary-secondary/KS3-4)	• A joined-up approach involving social worker/carer/VSH and other relevant professionals
• Raising aspirations through access to high-quality educational experiences	• Strong and visionary leadership on the part of both of the pupil's head teachers
• Promote the young person's awareness and understanding of their own thought process (metacognition) and help to develop problem-solving strategies	• A child centred approach to assessment for learning

The recent guidance (DfE, 2018) clearly states that interventions should be evidence based and designated teachers and VS Heads should work together. It incorporates definitive advice on the allocation of funding to support LAC pupils and a requirement for three PEPs per year for each pupil. Additionally, it has been updated to specify that VS teachers and designated teachers should access training, whilst also maintaining an awareness of current research and good practice.

1.8 **What does the research say?**

Connelly & Chakrabarti (2008), highlight the positive impact of being in care on the child's academic progress in core subjects; reading, writing and maths and statistics suggest that being in care has a positive impact for children who are fostered before the age of fourteen (Sinclair, Luke & Berridge, 2019). However, generally research has tended to indicate that LAC pupils are educationally underachieving (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Jackson et al, 2010, Raspin et al, 2019) and suggests that socioeconomic status influences both their cognitive ability and academic achievement (Noble, Norman & Farah, 2005). Suprisingly, very little research has explored LAC pupils' cognitive ability and the minimal research available has previously suggested that their ability is within the normal range (Rees 2013). Consequently, Rees (2013, p. 191) assessed 192 LAC pupils using the British Ability Scales (BAS II), establishing that approximately 40% of the cohort scored within the average range, 35% in the below or low average range, with 17% of the pupils tested achieved a general conceptual ability (GCA) score below 70, which would generally be considered indicative of a learning difficulty.

However, Jack, Whitehead and Wigford (2010, p.10) argue that LAC pupils find "it difficult to persevere" with standardised assessment measures. Noble, Norman & Farah's (2005) research's also suggest that childhood environment can adversely impact on a child's language development which can subsequently disproportionately influence their Executive Function. Rees (2013) also argued that cognitive functioning can be affected by neglect, trauma and abuse. Thereby, suggesting that IQ assessments of pupils who have experienced trauma may not accurately reflect their innate ability and may be heavily influenced by their environmental, emotional and developmental experiences. Unfortunately, despite the considerable expanse of

literature exploring trauma and brain development, there seems to be an absence of research investigating the cognitive capacity and functioning of LAC pupils (Rees, 2013).

Despite these statistics Drew & Banerjee (2018) intimated that there continues to remain a dearth of current research into how schools and virtual schools are addressing LAC underachievement. Within the current legislation, there is a now a move towards acknowledging the impact of trauma on LAC pupils ability to learn and to make progress, with particular reference to ensuring that all staff have an awareness of "the emotional, psychological and social effects of loss and separation (attachment awareness) from birth families" (DfE, 2018).

Legislation has an increased emphasis on ensuring the development of a "shared understanding between teachers, carers, social workers" and, more importantly, a focus on the "child's own understanding of how they are being supported" (DfE, 2018). Research has recently been undertaken focusing on exploring the impact of enabling adults to understand the children and young people's (CYP's) experiences (Turner & Gulliford, 2019) and providing an opportunity for a designated teacher to share their experience (Carroll, Herbert & Lee, 2018). However, the majority of current research focuses on interventions to support the pupils, rather than the adults or the systems surrounding the young person in education.

Rather than purely focusing on the implementation of interventions to improve educational attainment for LAC pupils, the contribution of the factors resulting in their LAC status need to be taken into account when exploring their under-attainment (McAuley & Davis, 2009). As quantified earlier, children are ascribed LAC status because they have been removed from their parents' care (or under voluntary agreement by parents) and their individual circumstances often contain "many complex interacting variables" (Turner & Gulliford, 2019, pp. 12). Considering the statistics, it is highly likely they have been at risk of significant harm, experienced substantial neglect or abuse (or both). These factors can influence their neurodevelopment, cognitive functioning, emotional development and result in attachment difficulties (McAuley & Davis, 2009; Rees, 2013).

The VS are crucial in identifying the psychological impact of trauma and intervening to support LAC pupils to access education (Drew & Banerjee, 2018). Turner & Gulliford (2019, pp.10) noted that, within a four-week period, a LAC participant had experienced "significant personal changes" which had impacted negatively on their education. Purely focusing on the inadequacies of social care is insufficient, instead we need to be examining in more detail the 'historical, social and political influences' on academic progress (Berridge, 2007, pp.9). Caution is also required when ascribing LAC underachievement to within-child factors, instead an awareness of the 'structural features' of the systems, which are responsible for their care and education is required (Harker et al, 2004). With an emphasis on a 'holistic approach' to working with LAC pupils (Harker et al, 2004), such as effective multi-agency working practices and a theoretical framework for meeting their needs and ensuring positive outcomes (Coman & Devaney, 2011). Connelly & Chakrabarti (2008) also emphasise the importance of the LAC pupil's relationship with their carer, identifying their encouragement as a key factor in developing resilience and academic progress.

Turner & Gulliford's (2019, pp.14) recent research into the use of Circle of Adults with LAC pupils who were at risk of exclusions, highlighted the importance of staff's ability to empathise with their pupils. They stressed the role of group process in providing containment and an opportunity for reflection, which they consider "supports the intrinsic motivation of staff to undertake subsequent actions". They argue that the group process feeds into the "relatedness dimension of self-determination theory" (Turner & Gulliford, 2019, pp.14) and results in an increase in staff engagement with achieving outcomes for pupils.

The current research is missing a key factor of LAC educational achievement, key educational professionals' experiences of supporting LAC pupils and the emotional impact of working with traumatised children. A survey of psychotherapists identified two main areas of focus for them when working individually with LAC pupils; attachment related issues and the impact of maltreatment and trauma on the young people (Robinson, Luyten & Midgley, 2017). Case study research also demonstrated that relationships with adults are key to supporting LAC children, with psychotherapists highlighting the importance of the therapeutic relationship in enabling the client to develop an attachment to the adult (Andersen-Warren & Kirk, 2011). There is an

increased understanding, within education, that LAC pupils need to develop the capacity to make attachments to adults (Farnfield & Holmes, 2014). Consequently, an appreciation of the emotional impact of working with LAC is required. Edwards (2016), explored this relationship from the perspective of teachers, suggesting that they had an awareness of the importance of positive interactions with LAC, but acknowledging their feelings of ambivalence and the 'emotional labour' of teaching LAC pupils. Her concerns focused on the impact on teachers and the need for systemic support, such as supervision, to manage their own emotional responses. An increased emphasis on the emotional needs of pupils has not yet been translated into an equal focus on the emotional experiences of school staff . An inequality which can result in negative behaviour patterns for staff and pupils, whilst reducing adult's capacity for reflection (Kennedy & Laverick, 2019).

It is hoped that the new Ofsted Framework (2019) will contribute to redressing this imbalance, with the wellbeing of staff receiving an increased focus, as it becomes imbedded in practice. Hanko (2002, pp.377) acknowledged the positive impact of providing teachers with opportunities to explore a child's "difficult to bear" feelings, particularly on their relationships with pupils. The guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the designated teacher (DfE, 2018) pinpoints areas the senior leadership team and the governing body need to consider when supporting the DT role, including resource implications and potential additional expertise required. Unfortunately, minimal reference is made to emotional or psychological support for the designated teacher, the potential 'emotional load' for VSATs and DTs or the impact of the role on their mental health.

Robinson et al's (2019) recent research into psychotherapists' consultation with professional networks surrounding LAC pupils, argued that it is imperative professionals are able to access opportunities to reflect on their practice. They identified concerns about professionals in the networks around LAC pupils "experiencing secondary trauma" (Robinson et al, 2019, pp.6) and pupils' potential experience of 'triple deprivation' (Emmanuel, 2006). A concept which illustrates the complex interplay between the child's experience of trauma and their own internal defences resulting from the same trauma. The process can be multifactorial, potentially resulting in a negative response from the professionals, when the child projects their feelings onto them,

thus causing a reinforcement of the "child's defences against anxiety" (Farnfield, 2014, pp.2). More often, the DT or the teacher, are the recipients of these emotional projections, as they are the safe person in a child's educational environment. Sometimes, they can also become the principal person in a network, holding a pupil's life story, because they have known the child the longest (Cant, 2008). Yet these staff receive very little supervision or opportunity to explore their own feelings about supporting LAC pupils (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015; Ellis, 2018, Harris & Ayo, 2011).

Despite national statistics, the evidence available from the research is piecemeal, presenting a range of data regarding the academic capacity and achievement for LAC, with little agreement on whether pupils are achieving or under-achieving. A national study indicated that the longer LAC have been in care the higher the probability that they will achieve (Sutcliffe et al, 2017). A further study in Wales focused on academic capacity versus actual attainment demonstrated that 67% of LAC were underachieving, but 33% were above their predicted level for reading (Rees, 2013). Whilst another study comparing LAC and non-LAC pupils in a special school for SEMH, demonstrated that LAC had higher levels of attainment but lower levels of resilience (Jackson et al, 2010).

1.9   Aim of the Study

The aim of my research was to explore the experiences of both virtual school and designated teachers, with a view to understanding the following areas: a) their emotional responses to the young people they work with, b) how supported they feel within their own organisations c) the barriers they perceive to be in place preventing LAC making progress, d) how their roles work together within a complex system and e) the impact, if any, of the unconscious emotional processes on their roles.

A psycho-social approach to the research was adopted, as it postulates the theory that "both researchers and research participants are understood to be 'defended' and to operate at both conscious and unconscious levels" (Ruch, 2014, pp.525). Considering the emotive impact of working with children who have experienced trauma and the 'corporate parent' role, this approach was considered the most appropriate to enable an unstructured interview space, with an

opportunity for the participant to be able to 'free associate' to enable their unconscious thoughts and feelings to come to the surface (Clarke, 2002).

The Third Generation Activity Theory (AT) diagram was utilised as a task in the interview. To provide a pictorial representation of the participants conceptualisation of the system surrounding looked after pupils and of the relationships within that system (Wilson, 2006). The professionals and LAC pupils are always located within the system (Andersen-Warren & Kirk, 2011), therefore its influence needs to be considered when exploring the participants' experiences. The process also provided an opportunity for me to observe where the interviewee placed LAC pupils on the diagram. These diagrams were then analysed by comparing the DT and VSATs individual depictions, grouped by their role.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

2.1   Chapter overview

This chapter summarises the approach taken to review literature relevant to the research topic and ascertain gaps in the current literature. A comprehensive breadth of research exists focusing on LAC pupils, reflecting a diverse range of disciplines, contexts and theoretical frameworks. Consequently, a thorough review was undertaken of the literature in relation to designated teachers' and virtual school teachers' experiences of supporting LAC pupils academically and emotionally. The search strategy employed is outlined in detail and demonstrates how the literature was evaluated in relation to the identified research questions. The papers included were based on a detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria and subjected to an evaluative process to evaluate their relevance to the research question (Long & Godfrey, 2004). The literature review intends to investigate existing literature relating to the following questions:

- What is already known about designated teachers' and virtual school staff's views of LAC achievement
- Whether the emotional impact on staff of supporting LAC pupils in education is referenced or acknowledged in the literature

The findings were synthesised into the following responses:
- Designated teachers' experiences of facilitating LAC pupils in education
- Virtual school staff experiences of facilitating LAC pupils in education
- Additional literature exploring the combination of more than one professional's experience of facilitating LAC pupils to make progress

The chapter closes with a presentation of the rationale for this study, based on the relevance of the current research.

2.2   Search Strategy

An initial search of EBSCO host, which incorporates a selection of databases such as PsychINFO, Education Source, PEP archive and SocINDEX, was carried out during August

2019. Further searches were also completed in February and March 2020 to identify any additional studies. Psychology databases, PsychINFO and PEP archive were selected due to their relevance to educational psychology, whilst Education Source and ERIC were considered relevant as the research topic is focused on the context of education. As much of the literature referencing LAC pupils is often published in Social Care publications, SocINDEX was also included. Due to the ambiguity of the language relating to the education of children in care, some searches were considered too numerous to be useful, even with providing limiters, yielding approximately 300,000 articles. Additional appropriate articles, studies and PhD theses were acquired through reviewing the references of pertinent articles, relevant theses, journals, as well as search engines such as Google Scholar and EThOS. Further articles were also obtained through social media avenues such as Twitter. Appendix A details the key searches and the number of articles contained in them.

The searches generated a total of 264 articles in total and a brief review of the abstract or the article excluded 183 items including 18 duplications, leaving 63 items remaining. These articles were briefly reviewed to establish whether they met the inclusion criteria. Eleven papers were included in the literature review, based on the inclusion criteria identified in Appendix B, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative research. Figure 2 also provides a Prisma Flow Diagram depicting each stage of this process..

2.2.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were implemented to filter articles based on their relevance to the research question. The searches originally included papers between 2000 and 2020 but were then limited to papers published between 2009 and 2020, reflecting changes in legislation regarding virtual schools and designated teachers' responsibilities, including the administration of PEPs. The criteria were established prior to searching the databases and only literature relevant to England was included, due to the different legislative and legal systems which exist elsewhere in relation to LAC pupils.

Careful consideration was paid to the accuracy and quality of all the documents included in the literature review, which comprised both qualitative and quantitative studies and articles. Some papers were rejected due to their date range or the quality of the information included. A range of critical appraisal review tools were considered with a view to evaluating the quality of the studies and their contribution to the literature, consequently an overview of the papers included was developed (see Appendix C), with reference to an evaluative tool (Long & Godfrey, 2004). This tool is designed to critically appraise elements of the literature, such as the quality of the research included, and the table outlines the purpose, context, participants and key findings of each study. For reasons of transparency and validity, a table of the papers excluded from the literature review is also included, elucidating the reasons for exclusion (see Appendix D).

Figure 2

Prisma Flow Diagram

PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram

Identification

Records identified through database searching
(n = 253)

Additional records identified through other sources
(n = 11)

Screening

Records after duplicates removed
(n = 246)

Records screened
(n = 246)

Records excluded
(n = 183)

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
(n = 63)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons
(n = 52)

Included

Studies included in qualitative and quantitative synthesis
(n = 11)

2.3   Discussion of the literature

The studies included in this literature review utilised a variety of methodological approaches and a range of methods. They mainly consisted of semi-structured or in-depth interviews, combined with quantitative data collection methods such as questionnaires. These approaches provided a wealth of information about views of DTs, virtual school and other education staff, alongside the views of foster carers and social workers. Only 9% of the studies included focused purely on the views of DTs, however, in recent years, researchers have undertaken comprehensive reviews or studies into the virtual school provision within the UK.

2.3.1   What does the literature say about the views and experiences of designated teachers?

Goodall (2014), a trainee EP, undertook an IPA research study into the experiences of six designated teachers in primary and secondary schools. One of the primary themes that she identified related to the perceived vulnerability of LAC pupils and the DTs' belief that the pupils required additional support within the school. Goodall also references the DTs' emotional involvement with the pupils and their difficulty in managing their feelings when the pupils transitioned out of the school.

The participants referred to the level of commitment required for their role, both in terms of time and emotional support for LAC pupils. The participants considered that it was a challenge to them to balance their other roles and provide the support required. In particular, Goodall (2014) referenced one DT managing his anxiety regarding the workload by distancing himself from the pupils and delegating tasks to other members of staff. Goodall (2014, pp.59) also refers to another DT "verging on fear always" and feeling under scrutiny.

Another key theme was the importance of relationships with other professionals and information sharing between them. However, despite this, Goodall indicated that many of the DTs worked on their own and had little or no contact with other DTs, which she considered had a potential impact on their capacity to support LAC pupils. Although the research demonstrated that the DTs presented with an in depth understanding of the emotional demands of working with LAC

and an awareness of their vulnerability, it contained limited reference to their opinions, or experiences of LAC pupils' academic achievement or progress in the discussion.

Woollam's (2010) research, also from the perspective of a trainee EP, comprised an appreciative enquiry (AI) case study in a local authority secondary school. She combined data from semi-structured interviews and a workshop to explore the use of AI, to identify factors which had a positive impact on LAC pupils' school experience. The research highlighted the relationship between the LAC pupil and the staff as key to ensuring the effectiveness of staff support, concluding that it was even more beneficial if the key member of staff had a good understanding of the child's home situation, their experiences pre and post care, as well as a positive working relationship with their carers.

LAC pupils felt that adults possessing an understanding and knowledge about their experiences reduced the need for them to continuously explain themselves and their circumstances to staff. The research also focused on the importance of developing LAC pupils' emotional well-being, including questioning their negative self-concepts, improving their self-esteem and self-confidence. However, although the participants emphasised the importance of PEP meetings, they did not consider it essential for pupils to be involved in the meetings.

Woollam's (2010) study referred to educational support, such as interventions, suggesting that high quality in-class support, provided as and when required by the pupil, was the most beneficial. Training for staff was another key area highlighted, when focused on specific areas pertinent to supporting individual LAC pupils, as well as advice about policy and legislation. A limitation of this study was the inclusion of the views of only one DT. Additionally, their views were not clearly identified as disparate from other staff, thus, making it impossible to detect their specific views about LAC pupils' progress or engagement. Consequently, the DT's individual voice is lost in the research and the recommendations are generalised.

PALAC (Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children) is a knowledge exchange programme developing research and supporting practice in schools with regard to education of looked after children. The programme has undertaken a few studies recently with a range of

virtual schools and local authorities. These included a review entitled the 'Education of Children in Care in the North East England' by Carroll, Black & Bettencourt (2019), exploring the views of both DTs and LAC pupils, as well as lesson observations. The study provided some useful figures regarding the DTs' time in their role and their additional responsibilities alongside the DT role. Out of a potential 958 DTs in the regional areas, approximately 456 participated in the survey, of which 46% had been in their role for five years or more and 85% were part of the senior leadership team, holding other roles such as Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), SENCO or Headteacher. The survey also aimed to collate information about approaches and strategies used to support the education of looked after children in their schools; whilst also asking the DTs about their views on the effectiveness of these interventions. They considered that the most effective was specific and named praise, not treating LAC pupils differently and making expectations for behaviour clear.

A strength of the project was obtaining information from LAC pupils about what they considered to be the most effective teaching approaches and only selecting pupils who were "thriving in their settings" and were seemingly engaging positively with education (Caroll, Black & Bettencourt, 2019, pp.10). The research argued that the majority of professional development focus for schools was on SEMH and attachment, respectively 86% (SEMH), and 58% (attachment). However, it also suggested that as a consequence, some barriers to learning were not receiving as much as training as required to meet the support needs of LAC pupils (pp.33).

2.3.2 What does the literature say about the views and experiences of virtual school staff?

Rivers' (2018) article, consists of a personal account from a virtual school head (VSH), alongside a historical review of relevant legislation and guidance. She raises questions about the quality of educational provision and the capacity of schools to support LAC children with emotional issues such as a lack of self-esteem. She outlines the extensive range of agencies involved with looked after children far beyond the systems or networks she has previously been involved in education, explaining that she feels the VS's role is to bring together the key partners involved with LAC pupils, to develop "a shared language around educational issues" (Rivers, 2018, p.158).

It is also apparent that Rivers considers the importance of key research, in particular the Rees Centre's study (Oxford University), which discusses the attainment of LAC pupils. She ensures that research informs the practice of the virtual school, such as developing a web-based PEP. Thus enabling key partners in the systems around the child to access the information, current and historical. Recently, the service has also included an additional section to their PEP focused on the emotional well-being of their pupils and encouraging the use of PP+ funding to support this focus.

She emphasises the importance of all education staff within a school developing an awareness of the needs of LAC pupils and providing them with the appropriate tools to support this process, whilst also ensuring that pupils are now able to contribute to the PEP about their experiences of education. Rivers also refers to the term 'corporate parent', explaining that this is a term she constantly keeps in her mind, as a measure for her actions as a virtual school head. Rivers' final point focuses on not underestimating the emotional challenge of working with LAC pupils which, similar to Edwards (2016), she terms 'emotional labour'. She references the devastation staff feel when pupils' relationships or educational provision breaks down despite everyone's efforts to maintain them.

Sebba & Berridge (2019), on the other hand, explored the role of the VS in a summary of two University led research projects. The research comprised interviews with sixteen VS headteachers, compiled from two mixed methods research projects discussing the educational progress of LAC pupils. Although they work with a range of professionals, including social workers and foster carers, the participants indicated that the DT was the main population on whom they focused their training and support.

The paper discusses the allocation of PPG funding and how "little is known about how PPG funding is spent" (Sebba & Berridge, 2019, pp.540). They indicate that there remains a gap in the data reviewing the effectiveness of the interventions funded by the VS. They imply that this lack of data impacts the ability of the VS to argue that their presence has an influence on outcomes for LAC pupils. There is some reference to academic support for individual LAC pupils and an

indication that in one case this enabled the student to make better than expected progress in his GCSE's.

Much of the study refers to the VSH's experiences of working with other professionals, their position in the authority, as well as issues such as school admissions, exclusions and the administration of PEPs. The development of resilience was also discussed, but there was very little reference to emotional support provided by the VS or the emotional impact on staff working with LAC pupils.

Drew and Banerjee (2018), compiled a review of questionnaire results obtained from a national online survey, of which 29 virtual schools completed the questionnaire. The results are based on a questionnaire regarding the type of provision delivered to schools, foster carers and LAC pupils, focusing in particular on the transition from primary to Secondary school. The survey identified the commissioning of one mental health intervention (Zippy's Friends) direct to pupils and two VS run nurture groups. Much of the support provided was to staff in the form of attachment training, to develop staff skills as Thrive practitioners. Whilst other forms of direct support included one to one tuition mentors to support with specific areas of difficulty (transition) and EP assessments.

Drew and Banerjee (2018) discussed the need for virtual schools to explore how they currently address educational and psychological issues for LAC pupils. They attributed a range of reasons for LAC pupils low academic progress, but agree, that on the whole, LAC make less progress. The findings from Drew and Banerjee's research suggest that the VS need to address the under-attainment of LAC pupils, by developing support to schools to "address underlying psychological factors" (Drew & Banerjee, 2018, pp.102). The research identified educational achievement of LAC pupils as the most highlighted focus for service provision. This focus was met using a range of interventions, such as one to one tutoring, mentoring and interventions. They also indicated that virtual schools are supporting the implementation of provision focused on developing the emotional well-being of LAC pupils.

Another area that the VS's were developing focused on an increased awareness of the LAC pupils needs and how they can be best supported in educational settings. Working with other key professionals including EPs was also referenced, as well as developing working relationships with other educational departments in the local authority. As part of the emphasis on developing relationships with other professionals, the links with DTs were highlighted, both in terms of providing them with specific training and supporting them in fulfilling their role. Thus, this demonstrates that the link is an important element of VS provision for LAC pupils and highlights the importance of schools and teachers for LAC pupils progress.

Similar to Rivers (2018), the research highlighted the importance of the virtual schools' multi-systemic role within the local authorities, emphasising the importance of developing key relationships as critical for LAC pupils' progress and emotional well-being. A criticism of the research is that it does not explore whether the LAC pupils supported by the virtual schools were making progress or underachieving. The authors also indicated that only 20% of the virtual schools in the UK contributed to the survey which is a relatively small response.

An additional study by Carroll, Brackenbury, Herbert, Lee, Roberts & Cameron (2018) published as part of the PALAC research projects was explored. This particular project comprised case studies in a range of VS across the country. Each individual project is focused on a particular area, such as interventions to support LAC pupils learning or their emotional development. Some of the projects reviewed demonstrated that the VS staff role in strategic development in schools is important to improve outcomes for LAC pupils.

Another project focused on joint working with EPs and demonstrated the effectiveness of approaches such as THINKSPACE (a reflecting team model) to explore individual cases, with reference to where anxiety about the child may be located within the system. Despite research examining a range of projects, there was minimal reference to the experiences of VS staff supporting LAC pupils. The only acknowledgement was in reference to the THINKSPACE project, indicating that individual cases can sometimes create high levels of anxiety in the professionals working with the pupils.

2.4   What is the contribution of literature covering a range of professional views?

Sebba, Berridge, Luke, Fletcher, Bell, Strand, Thomas, Sinclair & O'Higgins (2015) undertook the most recent UK wide study to examine the educational progress of looked after children. The study aimed to explore the link between the young people's individual care histories, discrete characteristics and their educational outcomes. Six local authorities were asked to select three pupils who had made less progress than expected and three who had made better progress than expected, between key stage 2-4. Although, the overall study focused on young people who were eligible to take their GCSE's in 2013, they also completed interviews with young people, their carers, designated teachers, social workers and virtual school heads. The interviews with VSH were discussed earlier in this literature review (Sebba & Berridge, 2009) and the results of the interviews with other key professionals were included in a technical report by Berridge, Bell, Sebba & Luke (2015). The researchers interviewed the young people, their social workers, carer and teacher (either a DT or another teacher).

An interesting and unexpected outcome from the study was that the majority of the young people had made better progress in secondary education than primary. For those children who had not made as much progress as expected, participants in the research identified issues with a lack of involvement from key professionals (foster carers, social workers or designated teachers) and communication breakdown between professionals, suggesting that they did not always present as a cohesive team working together for the child. One DT clearly indicated that they knew very little about the child or the support that they had received. As one VSH explained, LAC pupils need to be emotionally ready to engage in the learning process and key adults have a fundamental role in enabling this process. The research highlights the importance of relationships and their impact on the young person's educational progress, explaining that, in order for a young person to develop emotional resilience, they need the assistance of a key person in a parental role who they respect, to "want to do it for its own sake" (Berridge et al, 2015, pp.15).

The young people in the research also clearly acknowledged that figures in education provided them with their main educational support, far more than foster carers. These findings indicate

that educational professionals have a significant role in supporting LAC pupils academically and if they are not as engaged with the pupils, then this is likely to have a substantial impact on the pupil's progress. In their summary of their qualitative data in their study, Berridge et al (2015) suggested that the focus of research has been too extensively on the academic achievement of LAC pupils, whereas what is actually required is a more detailed and informed understanding of their progress.

Despite this mention of the importance of being emotionally prepared, the study did not refer to the impact or value of emotional support for LAC pupils, apart from with reference to the young people accessing CAMHS. Although, the majority of the VSH's indicated that the DT was the main population on whom they focused their training and support, the paper makes limited reference to the DTs own experiences of supporting looked after pupils. Instead many of their responses are in relation to the key areas raised by the LAC pupils themselves.

Simpson (2012), a trainee EP, utilised a mixed methods approach in her study, comprising semi-structured interviews with three VS staff and one DT, an appreciative enquiry and questionnaires sent to all DTs in the local authority. The main focus of the research was the role of the virtual schools, in particular exploring the collaborative view of the VS and DTs, with reference to developing the attainment and emotional wellbeing of LAC pupils. The emphasis was on whether the DTs feel supported by the VS and therefore confident in their role. However, overall, the focus of the research was far more related to the DTs' views of the VS provision rather than the experiences of DTs overall. From the DTs responses, Simpson perceived that the DT's presented as having high levels of confidence in their role, "self-efficacy, feelings of control & resilience" (Simpson, 2012, pp.171).

There was some acknowledgement within the research of the effect on DTs, with regard to the emotional impact of supporting LAC pupils with their difficult experiences. The VS staff also referenced the importance of addressing emotional issues for LAC pupils to ensure that they do not present as barriers to academic progress or achievement. In particular, they highlighted stability as a key factor influencing the child's capacity to achieve positive outcomes, both academically and emotionally. There was also an emphasis on recognising that a child's early

experiences can affect their emotional state, particularly if they have not had the opportunity to process these emotional needs, which in turn, can prevent them from being ready to engage with learning and reach their potential. The VS staff also identified staff expectations of LAC pupils as a barrier to their educational development. Another area highlighted was the importance of the VS supporting education staff when situations become emotionally challenging and recognising the potential impact on the emotional wellbeing of school staff.

The research also discussed the impact of the VS tracking, indicating that through the PEP process they could highlight children who required additional educational support. The participants indicated that their tracking process demonstrated an improvement in GCSE statistics, however, other interventions could not be substantiated through figures, for example, the prevention of a child being excluded.

Overall, Simpson's research demonstrated a collaborative vision in relation to raising attainment and the emotional well-being of LAC pupils. Simpson (2012) also considered the VS to be the key link between social care and education. The research contained some reference to educational professionals' experiences of supporting LAC pupils but was more focused on the views of the VS staff rather than DTs' individual experiences.

Simmond's (2015), a trainee educational psychologist, study involved the use of semi-structured interviews with two LAC young people (aged 17) and six professionals, including virtual school officers, a social worker and a DT. The study identified the following as influencing LAC pupils' progress and their stability, professionals' judgements, labelling or regard for LAC. Similar to Carroll et al (2018), she acknowledged the presence of professionals' anxiety also affected outcomes for the young person, particularly in relation to making decisions which impact them. The author also references the professionals' academic expectations of LAC pupils and how they view looked after children as being extremely important, in the sense that being a child in care is often inaccurately conflated with a reduced capacity to achieve.

The research also suggests that the involvement of too many professionals could have a negative impact on outcomes for LAC pupils, due to their difficulties with trusting adults and managing

relationships. Simmonds (2015, pp. 89) refers to the need for containment for the young people to enable them to feel safe and secure, which she links directly to the young people achieving "positive educational outcomes". Similar to Simpson (2012), Simmonds (2015), also references, stability and the negative impact of instability, particularly on LAC pupils emotional state, their emotional availability, capacity to be motivated or invested in their education. The study indicated that the capacity of the adults to support LAC pupils is affected by their ability to be emotionally available to the pupils. The professionals also discussed their need to find ways to manage their own emotional responses to the effect of managing LAC pupils' responses to the challenging experiences they have had. Simmonds' research also suggested that support needed to be provided for the professionals working with LAC pupils such as VSATs and DTs, to enable them to provide appropriate support.

Driscoll (2013) undertook a research project focusing on the transition of LAC pupils at the end of Key Stage Four. Her study included the views of four virtual school head and twelve designated teachers, as part of the initial stages of a three-year longitudinal research project, focusing on twenty LAC pupils in England from year eleven to thirteen. On the whole, the research's focus was the transition of LAC pupils to post sixteen provision, such as college, however, their responses also reflected their views on LAC pupils educational achievement.

The virtual school heads suggested that in their view, the local authority focus was mainly on ensuring pupils did not became absent from education and their key stage four attainment. They advocated that this focus did not acknowledge the LAC pupils potential to make further progress beyond year 11, which could result in them passing GCSE's at year 13. The VSH and the DTs argued that those who came into care around year eight or nine, needed support to manage their emotional difficulties before they were able to focus on educational achievement, but had the potential to progress to achieving GCSE's.

Driscoll (2013) suggested that all of the professionals involved in her study were advocates for the LAC pupils they supported, with a strong focus on preventing on exclusions, ensuring they attended and finding them appropriate school placements. However, despite their hard work, transition processes could be challenging for the pupils and the professionals who supported

them. Both the VSH and the DTs acknowledged, that despite their best efforts the transition to becoming more independent at sixteen could involve too many changes for the pupil to manage, which could often undermine progress they had made. Although focused on transitions post sixteen, this research indicated that not all virtual schools support pupils post sixteen, partially due to budget restraints. Driscoll's (2013) research provided some reference to the VSH and DTs experiences but these were quite limited and referred specially to transition for LAC pupils at age sixteen.

2.5   Rationale for the Research

In conclusion, it is apparent that within the last couple of years there has been an increase in research exploring the provision by virtual schools with a significant contribution from PALAC in particular. Although, there has been a growth in research exploring the experiences of DTs, it has not been as substantial. Overall, the literature that exists currently mentions the different types of interventions used to support LAC pupils and tends to focus on the type of provision (Drew & Banerjee, 2018; Woollam, 2010; Carroll et al, 2019; Carroll et al, 2018) or a review of processes (Carroll et al, 2018; Rivers, 2018; Sebba & Berridge, 2019). However, it has been argued that there is a lack of 'appropriate data' to evaluate the impact of these interventions (Sebba & Berridge, 2019 pp.552; Berridge et al, 2015), which, therefore, makes it difficult to quantify virtual schools' impact on LAC pupils' academic progress.

From reviewing the literature, the key proponent to strengthening the academic and emotional progress of LAC was identified as the child's relationship with significant adults (Woollam, 2010; Drew & Banerjee, 2018; Berridge et al, 2015). However, Simmonds (2015) argues that too many professionals involved in the system can also have an adverse impact on the pupil. Furthermore, much of the existing literature focuses on a single area, rather than looking at the interplay between key roles working in the system around the child. As indicated earlier, educationally, the VSAT and the DT are not only vital roles, but, alongside the social worker, have a statutory duty as corporate parents. Drew & Banerjee (2018), considered Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a 'valuable theoretical framework' to explore the role of the VS, at a systemic and an individual level. Rivers (2018) also highlights the extensive network of professionals potentially involved with LAC pupils, with other research frequently

referencing the importance of professionals engaging with each other (Goodall, 2014; Drew & Banerjee, 2018, Berridge et al, 2015). Despite the wealth of literature focusing on the needs of LAC pupils, from a range of disciplines, minimal attention has been paid in research to examining the influence of this network and its potential impact on support to LAC pupils.

There has been an increase in literature referencing the role of the VS and the DT in relation to LAC pupils, with some reference in the literature to the impact of supporting LAC pupils emotionally (Goodall, 2014; Carroll et al, 2018; Carroll, Brackenbury et al, 2018; Simpson, 2012; Simmonds, 2105). Goodall (2014) and Simmonds (2015) make specific reference to professionals developing anxiety about their role or the children, exploring how it can be located in the system around the child. Woollam (2010), however, argues that a LAC pupil's relationship with the DT is not as emotionally onerous as it is for a class teacher (pp.81). Challenging this argument is problematic, as there is limited research available exploring either relationship. Although some reference is made within the research to the emotional impact on staff of supporting LAC pupils (Rivers, 2018; Simpson, 2012). Considering the significant amount of trauma, the majority of children are likely to have experienced, the level of research available does not reflect the potential impact of the level of 'containment' some children may require (Simmonds, 2015).

Much of the research is constituted of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, which, although they provide useful information to inform research, have the potential to direct the content of interviews. There is clearly a paucity of research that provides both virtual school staff and DTs with the opportunity to discuss their experiences, without a pre-constructed theory underlying the research. There is clearly a need for research focused on the individual experiences of DTs, as there is a potential for them to become isolated. However, this research could also be extended to VSATs opinions or experiences, as their individual voices are not as prevalent in the research as those of the virtual school heads. Therefore, this literature review demonstrates that there remains a need to provide an opportunity to develop an understanding of DTs and VSATs views of LAC pupils' progress and awareness of the emotional impact of supporting LAC within education.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1   Research question, purpose and aim

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the research questions and aims of the study, and summarise my approach to the research. The chapter will outline the theoretical and methodological approach to the research, outlining reasons for positioning the research within a critical realist ontology and a psycho-social epistemology and methodology. Detail will be presented with regard to the research design, including the sampling strategy, interview and data collection procedures. My approach to data analysis and potential ethical issues will also be discussed.

3.2   Aim of the research

This study aimed to address the following research question:

What are virtual school advisory teachers and designated teachers experiences of supporting looked after children academically and emotionally?

The intention of this research was to be exploratory, to investigate the experiences of both virtual school and designated teachers, in relation to the underachievement of LAC pupils. The research is positioned within a critical realist (CR) ontology and psycho-social epistemology, with a psycho-social methodology. The research interviews also incorporated a task, utilising an Activity Theory framework, in the form of a third-generation diagram. The addition of this task was to enable me to develop an understanding of the systemic influences on the participants and where they positioned LAC pupils within that system.

Within the literature there is minimal reference to DTs and VSATs experiences of supporting LAC pupils emotionally and academically. There has been an increase in research focusing on the virtual school staff and evaluation of their provision recently, but there remains a paucity of research that explores these professionals' experiences using a psychoanalytic lens. Consequently, the research is primarily defined as exploratory, as its intention is to provide

participants with an opportunity to share their accounts in a format that has not been adopted prior to this research.

My principal aim in this study was to develop an understanding of the participants' actual lived experiences of supporting LAC pupils and to explore whether the professionals, who are identified as the 'corporate parent', believe that the pupils in their care are under achieving. I wanted to pay attention to their experiences of supporting LAC pupils educationally and emotionally, and their perception of the barriers they encounter. It was also vital that I considered the relationship between the pupils, and the educational professionals, recognising that it is underpinned by both the cognitive and emotional aspects of their relationship.

Psychoanalytic theory can enable us to develop a deeper understanding of these interactions and their emotional content, providing information about the potential impact on LAC pupils and their progress (Hinshelwood, 2009). As the interaction is multifaceted, we need to ensure that we consider the emotional impact of working with children who have experienced significant trauma in their early life. Through the use of Free Association Narrative interviewing process, I aimed to develop some comprehension of the conscious and unconscious emotional responses of staff supporting LAC pupils academically and emotionally.

3.3   Researcher's position: ontology and epistemology

3.4   Critical realist ontology

The term ontology refers to how we as individuals conceive of 'reality', with each ontological position arguing a different perspective on what the nature of 'reality' consists of (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Our understanding of the world and how we perceive our existence within it are dependent on our ontological hypothesis about knowledge. Until the late 19th century Positivism, a historically established scientific and philosophical paradigm, was considered the only ontological position regarding our knowledge and understanding of sciences. It argued that only one reality exists and its existence can be tested through objective scientific examination (Mertens, 2015).

A critical realist ontology, however, acknowledges the existence of the objective world whilst also accepting that elements exist beyond our capacity to observe them. It also suggests that "reality is stratified into three domains: empirical, actual and real" as depicted by the iceberg image (Figure 3), with the world created of entities that are endowed with power, that can be either visible or invisible. These entities can also be both physical and non-physical, such as thoughts or feelings (Haigh et al, 2019, pp.3). CR therefore postulates that there are aspects of our consciousness that can be outside of our knowing, including the psycho-social, with a complex interplay between our 'lived experience' (Woodward, 2015) and the social context within which we subsist. It emphasises the "nature of causation, agency, structure and relations", thus providing a structure to conceptualise the "social reality" (Archer et al, 2016, pp.1) and the complexity of the interaction of the social, societal (including legal frameworks), personal, psychological and emotional, for both LAC pupils and the professionals who support them.

Figure 3

Iceberg metaphor for critical realism ontology (Fletcher, 2017, pp.183)
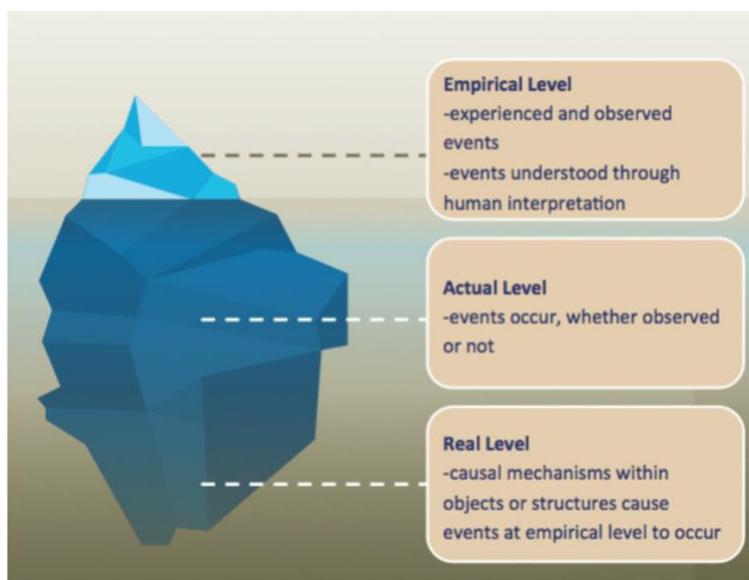
LAC pupils are subject to a legal system and a network of professionals, that are known but are not completely accessible to them. By positioning the research within a critical realist ontology, I acknowledged the reality of the legal framework and the system encasing LAC pupils, with its potential to both mobilise and immobilise the individuals within that system (Judd, 2003). They

are continually influenced, and if required, held accountable, by the legal framework within which they, and the pupils, exist. However, critical realism, also acknowledges the unknown elements of the system, thinking and emotions, which influence how these systems are experienced by LAC pupils and the professionals who support them. CR recognises that there is an objective 'truth' for these children, that they, and the professionals supporting them, are subject to a legal process, accountable for their care and educational progress, instead of their parent(s)[1].

Robson (2016) argues that CR incorporates elements associated with an emancipatory method, such as endorsing social justice and acknowledging the participants perspective. Fletcher (2017) also maintains that CR's strength lies in its focus on 'causation' and therefore, its ability to enable the resolution of problems within society. There are many issues influencing children in care, but two in particular, social class and deprivation, are pivotal factors which can be influenced by societal and policy change (Tucker, 2014; Berridge, 2006). I am not advocating significant changes to policy as a result of this research, however an opportunity to reflect, can influence our daily practice, with the smallest changes having the potential to impact on a pupils' experiences (Judd, 2003).

3.5   Psycho-social epistemology

Epistemology refers to our conceptualisation of knowledge and the "relationship between the knower and would-be known" (Mertens, 2015). Epistemology within psycho-social research, is understood as "how the status of the knowledge generation process is understood" (Hollway, 2008, p.2). Unlike positivism, the research and the 'object' of the research, are not considered to be independent of each other (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Redman (2016) suggests that psycho-social studies can be depicted in a variety of ways, with two main definitions in existence. Redman refers to Frosh's (2003) discussion about providing a

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[1] It is important to note here, that the parents may also become part of the system if the children are taken into care under Section 21.

space for the 'individual' and 'society' to be "intimately connected" and considers Hoggett's (2015) description of psycho-social research as "an application of psychoanalysis to the social sciences" as an alternative description of psycho-social research. For the purpose of this study, I consider that these definitions are not mutually exclusive. As Frosh claims (2003, pp.1555), "the dialectic here, to use an old-fashioned term, is paradigmatic: the social is psychically invested and the psychological is socially formed, neither has an essence apart from the other". They are equally applicable to my research question, providing an opportunity to explore the complexity surrounding the research question in depth.

Positioning my research within a psycho-social epistemological approach enabled me to relate to the participants on an emotional level, to develop an attunement to their experience and explore their unconscious defences. According to Joffe & Elsey (2014, pp.173), the psycho-social research substantiates "psychoanalytic insight that some of the most important aspects of our thought and behaviour arise via emotionally laden, nonconscious processes". Hollway and Jefferson (2000, pp.160) deduce that, "by learning how respondents unconsciously defend themselves against unpalatable truths, researchers can better understand their narratives". The approach offered an opportunity to establish a balance between my intellectual research and my empathy for the participant, thereby offering my 'reflexivity' as a research tool. Jervis (2009, pp.163) explains that "learning how respondents typically defend themselves from painful truths may help researchers to better understand the data they collect, enriching their research findings".

A psycho-social epistemology provided an opportunity to comprehend and understand the complexity of the structure within which a LAC pupil and the education professionals both exist and participate. Through its focus on the relationship and the "relationality of inner, personal worlds and social world" (Woodward, 2015, pp.53), the interview process provided a space in which to investigate and analyse the interdisciplinary nature and interweaving of the social, emotional, group and individual, thus considering its impact on the key players in the system, both conscious and unconscious. As Stopford (2004, pp.18) elucidates, these interactions are occurring in the here and now of the research encounter and are "both participative and diologic". Hollway and Jefferson (2013, pp.4), refer to the interaction between the participant

and I, as the "unconscious intersubjective dynamics in the interview relationship", where I am situated within the research encounter as much as the participant.

Consequently, due to this dynamic, the approach was not without its challenges. It relied heavily on my ability to develop my own emotional awareness and reflexivity, during the various stages of the research process. The interaction between the participant and myself, also resulted in the activation of a number of emotional defences for both individuals, concepts which will be explained in further detail in the next section.

3.5.1 Reflexivity

As indicated earlier, psycho-social research emphasises the importance of paying attention to my own participation in the research and being able to be reflective about my own emotional processes within this relationship (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The relationship between us was not separate from the research process and our interaction was an important component of the process, with my own emotional responses to the participants, providing information about the relationship and the participant.

Hollway (2009) suggests that the researcher not only needs to have an awareness of their own prejudices and values, it is essential that they are sufficiently reflexive to be able to understand and notice their own identification and object relations. To ensure reflexivity was a continuous element of the research process, I chose to keep a reflective diary and to attend supervision, to explore my responses to both the research process and the content of the participants' interviews.

Through individual supervision with a research supervisor, I was able to focus on the development of the content of the research, how the psycho-social research would be applied and reflect on the recruitment process. I explored responses to, and reflections on the individual interviews with the different participants through psycho-social supervision with my peers and a different research supervisor. In psychoanalysis, the supervision process is known as the 'third' or the use of the 'other' to develop an understanding and awareness of your own involvement in the research process (Hollway, 2009). I also made notes immediately after each interview, to

reflect on the content, the participants' responses and my own emotional responses to both the content and the interviewee. Further reflection took place during the transcription process and analysis of interviews for themes.

3.6 Methodology

3.6.1 Psycho-social research

The key element of psycho-social research is its interpretative nature, its' reliance on the capacity of the researcher to coordinate and decode the content of the research and consider possible underlying meanings of the participants' narrative (Woodward, 2015). It proposes that social processes, including relationships, construct 'subjectivity', with the research context included as a social process, suggesting that the meaning created between the researcher and researched is reflective of the contexts within which they are positioned (Frosh, 2003). Therefore, my involvement in the interviews was not neutral, I was as much part of the interview as the participant. Consequently, I aimed to establish a collective approach with my participants in which knowledge and understanding were co-produced (Hollway, 2008), by trying to remain reflexive and refraining from imposing my own meaning on the content of the interview. I also strived to ensure that I listened to their experiences rather than directing the interview process, to ensure that a power imbalance did not occur between the participant and me (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

3.6.2 Free Association Narrative Interviewing (FANI)

The Free Association Narrative Interview Approach (FANI) was developed by Hollway and Jefferson. The concept originally derived from Freud's psychoanalytical technique, an approach based on the psychoanalytic concept of defences, conscious and unconscious thought. Its primary aim was to probe beyond an individual's defences into their potentially unconscious, emotional responses which Freud considered to be pre-determined (Joffe & Elsey, 2014), with the view that the unconscious is often the motivator of an individual's behaviour. The approach incorporates four pivotal principles: 1) use open ended questions; 2) elicit a story; 3) avoid using 'why' questions and 4) use respondents' ordering and phrasing (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). These

questions are designed to elicit my capacity to listen and the participants' to free-associate, thus producing data which has meaning to the participant.

The aim of Free Associative interviewing is to develop an open process in which the interviewee feels able to express and explore their own narrative. The interview questions are not pre-scripted, they are open questions in response to the participants narrative, which are intended to encourage the interviewee to 'free associate' with whatever is in their mind. Free association is a key element of the method and is designed to enable the interviewee to connect with their unconscious thoughts. I included the approach in this study because it provided an opportunity to "investigate how people think and feel about topics that elicit such defences, using a narrative approach" (Joffe et al, 2014, pp.177).

The Grid Elaboration Method (GEM), as devised by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), is the usual method applied in free associative interviews as a catalyst or starting point for participants to free associate through words, drawings or feelings. I considered that in this instance, replacing the GEM with the Activity Theory Diagram could provide an opportunity for the participants to develop their own "conceptual map" of the systems surrounding LAC pupils.

3.6.3   Activity Theory

Activity theory (AT), or 'cultural-historical activity theory'(Wilson, 2006) is a concept that has been through many evolutions and has foundations in more than one discipline, such as sociology, psychology and political theory (Leadbetter, 2008). Activity Theory (AT) originates from Vygotsky's theories of mediated learning, however, in the case of AT, the belief is that actions are always mediated by the influence of social and cultural elements. Consequently, AT provides a structure to analyse activity, influenced by the rules, the tools used, and rules of labour (Wilson, 2006). Engestrom (1987) expanded these ideas to create the third generation AT (see Figure 4) and devised five principles to summarise Activity Theory.

Engestrom (2001, pp.136) considers these principles to consist of the following:

- the main focus of analysis is a "a collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented activity system" which is seen in relation to other AT systems;

- the importance of the perspective of multi-voices within the activity systems, incorporating the multitude of viewpoints within the community;

- analysis must include an awareness or understanding of the history of the system. This awareness will enable the development of new systems and understanding;

- the centrality of contradictions and its role in transformation and change as sources of tensions, contradictions exist in AT systems, but through examination, they can facilitate change.

- the possibility for transformation in activity systems and the potential movement through the zone of proximal development (as defined by Vygotsky). It argues that, by exploring contradictions, established ways of working can be questioned and changed.

The Third Generation Activity Theory diagram was used in the interviews, to provide a pictorial representation of the interviewees' conceptualisation of the system surrounding looked after pupils.

Figure 4

Activity Theory Diagram (Engestrom, 1987)

Third Generation Activity Theory (Engestrom)

Instruments

Subject — Object ——→ Outcome

Rules Community Division of Labour

The structure of a human activity system (Engestrom, 1987, p.78)
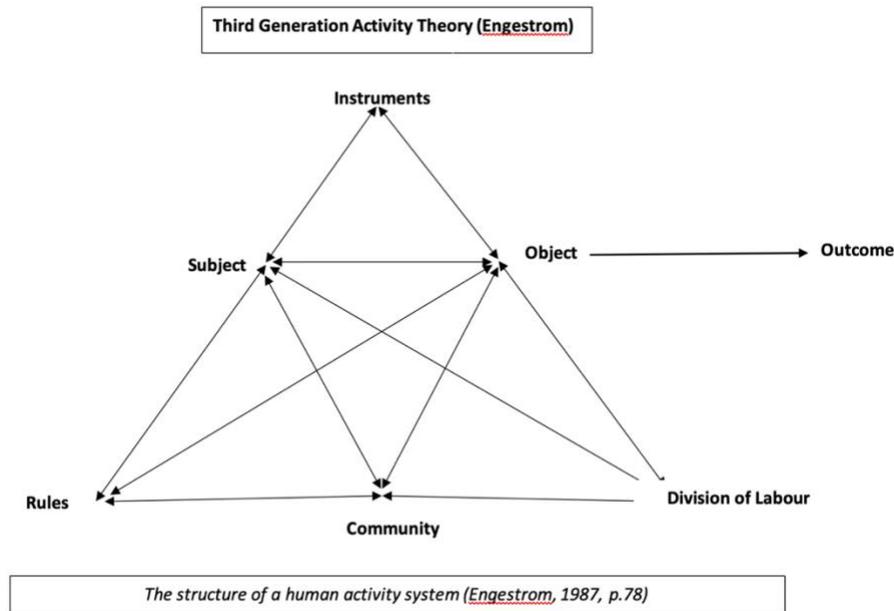
Leadbetter (2008, pp.274) suggested that Activity Theory can be applied in a variety of formats to support educational psychologists' practice at an individual, organisational and multi-agency level. She considers that one of its strengths is its ability to reinforce the "importance of context and environment" and its flexibility to be used in conjunction with a range of theoretical approaches.

The use of activity theory provided a conceptual framework to analyse and explore human behaviour within the specific "socio-cultural-historical context of the community concerned" (Wilson, 2006, pp. 5) as it is not inextricably linked to a particular theoretical position. Asking individuals employed within the same systems to complete an activity diagram provided an opportunity to comprehend their depiction of the context within which they work. Additionally, it enabled me to explore potential differences between the professionals' completed diagrams based on their job title or perception of the context surrounding LAC pupils.

The intention in incorporating this diagram as a task at the beginning of the interview was to provide the participant with an opportunity to share a visual picture of their construction of 'organisation in the mind', with organisation in this context referring to the overall systems surrounding a LAC pupil. 'Organisation in the mind' according to

Armstrong (2005, pp.6) is described as the "client's conscious or unconscious mental constructs of the organization: the assumptions he or she makes about aim, task, authority, power, accountability". It is important to note that it additionally refers to the "emotional resonances" of the client, in this case the participants. Armstrong (2005) clearly states that the "emotional experience of the organization as a whole is a function of the interrelations between task, structure, culture, and context (or environment)". Therefore, I considered that the most appropriate format to gain an insight into the participants' internal world was the use of the AT diagram in a Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI), in terms of both their experiences of working with LAC pupils, and their conceptualisation of the organisation of the complex system surrounding these pupils.

The structure of the diagram provided a format that could be subjectively interpreted by the participants, without imposing my own preconceived representation of the systems surrounding a LAC pupil. It also provided an opportunity for the participant to choose where they would place the LAC pupil within this system, demonstrating how they represented or personified a LAC pupil.

An advantage of utilising Activity Theory is its propensity to highlight contradictions, strengths and weaknesses within the communities or systems. Furthermore, the use of the AT diagram as an introductory task at the beginning of the interview, enabled the interviewee to complete the visual picture unencumbered by my perspective. I ensured that participants were given time to complete the diagram without any direction and encouraged them to consider their own meanings for each heading. I tried to ensure that the participant and myself did not "co-construct a narrative about their own positions" (Matthews & Singh, 2015, pp.150), therefore lessening the possibility that the diagram depicted my own organisational map of the systems surrounding looked after children, rather than the participants. Hollway & Jefferson (2013, pp.xi) demonstrated that "the FANI method remains a fruitful way to produce data that help access this complex (socio-cultural-historical-personal) sphere of experience". Consequently, the inclusion of the Activity Theory diagram complemented and aided the psycho-social focus on the interaction between the context and the individual.

3.7 Psycho-Analytical Concepts in psycho-social research

Psycho-social research draws on some fundamental concepts drawn from psychoanalytic theory, including an emphasis on unconscious communication through concepts such as defence mechanisms, including splitting, projection, transference, countertransference and containment The psycho-social approach emphasises researching 'beneath the surface' (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, pp.2), thus providing a deeper understanding of the relationships between the individual and the social environment (Lapping, 2011).

Psychoanalytical theory initially derived from Freud's work, but has been explored, developed and expanded by other theorists such as Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. Freud developed a structural model of the mind, defining the 'id', 'the ego' and the 'superego', the basic human instincts and, in particular, the 'survival instinct' (Curtis, 2015). He also formulated an understanding of the brain entitled the topographical model which postulated the notion that we have both a conscious and an 'unconscious' mind. (Bibby, 2011).

3.8 Defence Mechanisms

A fundamental theory underpinning psychoanalysis is the 'defence mechanisms' concept, which refers to the repression or denial of feelings, thoughts or memories which are considered too threatening to the subject (Curtis, 2015). In particular, Hollway and Jefferson (2000, pp.19) refer to the agreement between psychoanalytical theorists that individuals have a 'dynamic unconscious' which "defends against anxiety and significantly influences people's actions, lives and relations". Consequently, psycho-social research acknowledges that the interview process may cause the researcher and participant to access a range of uncomfortable feelings which could trigger their 'dynamic unconscious' (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009), subsequently, resulting in the 'defended subject' and the 'defended researcher' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

Kleinian psychoanalysis expanded the idea of the defences and the defended subject, including the concept of defence mechanisms to which "denial, splitting and projection" are pivotal. These mechanisms are present to protect the mind from anxiety, by either denying its existence or

projecting it elsewhere. Splitting, however, is "protecting things that are experienced as 'good'", either by projecting the good onto someone else or keeping the 'good' for ourselves and projecting the 'bad' onto someone else. (Bibby, 2011, p.9).

3.8.1 Transference and countertransference

Transference is an unconscious process which consists of the transmission of emotions or affect from one person to another. However, it is usually based on a relationship where there is an element of dependency from one person to another. In this circumstance, an individual is likely to approach relationships, with an unmet emotional need from childhood which they will shift onto the person from whom they need something (Curtis, 2015).

In its simplest form, countertransference, can be described as the response to the unconscious feelings evoked in the person to whom transference has occurred, effectively their emotional response to transference (Curtis, 2015). Jervis (2009, pp.146) suggests that "Heimann clarified the situation with her classic paper 'On countertransference, arguing that analysts achieve an unconscious awareness of the contents of their analysands' psyches long before they reach any intellectual understanding'. Jervis, (2009) advocates that counter transference for researchers may also be experienced in physiological responses or feelings as well as emotions that can be unfamiliar. By adopting a receptive attitude similar to that of an analyst, researchers may reach deeper levels of understanding of their participants' experiences.

Jervis (2009, pp.156) also discusses different types of countertransference. She refers to the work of Racker (a psychoanalyst) who defines countertransference as having two forms of identification "an empathic or 'concordant identification' and a simultaneous 'complementary identification'; the latter deriving from the analysand's (the person who is being analysed) unconscious projection of an internal object into the analyst". In essence, Jervis is arguing that the analyst feels both concordance with their client (how they felt as a child) and 'complementary identification', a sense of how the parent has been internalised by the client as a child. Consequently, Hollway (2013, pp.18) argues that conflict can arise in psycho-social research, through trying to develop a balance between being completely unstructured versus

'intrusion' of the researcher in the form of their 'subjectivity' via processes such as countertransference.

3.8.2 Projective Identification

Projective identification (PI) similarly is based on the unconscious projection of attitudes and feelings from past relationships (Weiss, 2002). Jervis (2009, pp.147) refers to Melanie Klein's concept of 'projective identification' as "an unconscious process wherein unwanted parts of the self are emotionally split off and projected into an object (often another person) which is becomes identified with unwanted emotions. Bion's interpretation of projective identification, as the everyday unconscious process of communicating emotionally, underpins Hollway's (2008, pp.7) conceptualisation of "relational thinking" in psycho-social research.

3.8.3 Containment

Bion's concept of 'containment' (1962) has been adopted by psychoanalysis and psycho-social research, particularly in relation to explore the process of how 'affect is managed in human relations' (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, pp.12). The concept of container/contained refers to an adult's ability to manage a baby's difficult emotions in a manner that enables a child to feel able to manage their emotions safely (Youell, 2018), thereby enabling a child to develop their thinking or cognitive capacity as, according to Bion, the two are intrinsically linked (Hollway, 2008).

Ruch (2013) argues that containment can be an important element of the research relationship, particularly in relation to ethical issues such as 'beneficence' and 'non-maleficence' within the research context. If managed effectively by the researcher, it is possible for the participant to perceive the researcher as containing their emotions.

3.8.4   Group Processes (Bion)

Within an organisation, one person can sometimes become the 'holder' or 'expressor' of the projected emotions for the whole group. Often, the individual may be feeling an emotion that the group are not able to express or acknowledge themselves (Halton, 2003). Furthermore, unconscious group processes can influence an individual's capacity to maintain or express an opinion which is disparate.

Due to the context of this research, the contribution of AT and the network within which the participants work, Bion's theoretical framework of group dynamics, was beneficial in developing an understanding of the motivations and interaction of individuals within the system. Bion's depiction of group processes comprises two mental states in existence within a group; 'basic-assumption mentality' and 'work-group mentality' (Obholzer & Roberts, 2019). These two states of mind are based on the belief that all groups have a purpose, however, they also have a collective unconscious response which can sometimes overwhelm their capacity to complete a task. When in 'work-group mentality', the group is able to perform well and balance potential difficulties, emotional responses and relationships (French & Simpson, 2010). However, if the group are overwhelmed by unconscious feelings, such as anxiety, their unconscious defences can be activated and they can lose focus on their task (Bibby, 2011).

Bion's theory suggests that if a group feels under threat, they may activate one of three basic assumptions (BA): basic assumption dependency (BAd), where they seek out a leader to resolve everything for them, often resulting in the creation of an enemy or the projection of difficult emotions onto an 'other'; basic assumption fight/flight (BAf), where the group will search for a leader to facilitate fight or make decisions for them; or basic assumption pairing (BAp), which involves finding a 'pair' to provide solutions for the group. All of these basic assumption behaviours are activated to manage anxiety in the group, rather than their original task 'work-group mentality' (Eloquin, 2016). Generally, most groups tend to oscillate between the 'basic-assumption' and 'work-group' mentality, dependent on if their unconscious responses are activated (French & Simpson, 2010).

3.9   Research Design

The research is an exploratory qualitative study, consisting of individual unstructured interviews with specific educational professionals, namely virtual school advisory teachers (VSATs) and designated teachers (DTs) in schools. An unstructured interview is informal, where the researcher has a broad area of interest but allows the discussion to flow as naturally as possible (Robson, 2016). I interviewed VSATs and DTs.

3.9.1   Participants and Sampling Process

I sought participants from within one borough where I was a trainee EP. I adopted a criterion sampling process (Mertens, 2015) to recruit the VSATs, with an additional snowball process selected to recruit the DTs following on from interviews with the VSATs. The criteria for the VSATs included having qualified teacher status and being employed in the borough as a VSAT. The criteria for the DTs, was that they had been recommended by the VSATs, were qualified teachers, had been in their role as a DT longer than a year and worked with a minimum of two LAC pupils.

The VSATs were recruited initially through the virtual school acting head, who I had been placed in contact with by the link EP for the virtual school. The acting Head requested a meeting to discuss potential interest in the project and this meeting resulted in changes to the recruitment process for the DTs. During this timeframe a new head of virtual school was appointed, who was very interested in the research and provided further information required.

I contacted all the VSAT teachers employed by the LA, with four agreeing to participate in the research, however, during the process one of the VSATs left the service. I sent an additional recruitment email and an existing participant encouraged other VSATs to engage with the research, which resulted in an additional VSAT agreeing to take part. I gave VSATs the opportunity to choose between their own workplace or the researchers, for the interview. Three respondents requested my workplace, with only one choosing to book a space in her own environment.

Each VSAT then agreed to contact one or two DTs who they worked with, to invite them to take part in the research. The intention was to provide a functioning link between the two education professionals employed by the same local authority, with the potential for a specific child to be held in mind during the interviews, without directly referring to them by name or intentionally choosing a particular pupil to focus on. The recruitment of DTs took part in stages, I was able to organise two interviews quite quickly after the VSAT interviews. The last two interviews proved more challenging to organise and I eventually had to request the assistance of some of the EPs in my service. The EPs contacted the schools that the VSATs had highlighted and asked the DTs if they would be interested in participating. In the main, I selected the first DTs to respond to the invitation for interview, apart from one participant who was excluded as she did not fit the criteria. All DTs were offered a choice of venue for interviews but chose to be interviewed in their own school with the majority of the interviews taking place at the end of the school day, to minimise interruptions.

3.10 Data collection

I gathered data using semi-structured interviews, interviewing participants once, for approximately an hour and a half. I recorded the interviews and subsequently transcribed them. The interviews began with an exploration of the AT diagram, with each participant being given a blank diagram to complete. I asked each participant where they would place LAC children and the systems surrounding them on the diagram. The aim of the interview was to be as informal as possible and any questions arose out of the discussion. I intentionally tried to avoid the use of 'why' questions, focusing instead on questions related to themes arising out of the discussion, using phrases such as 'tell me more about x'. Only one interview was completed with each participant, due to time constraints and the inclusion of eight participants.

3.11 Data Analysis

3.11.1 Thematic Analysis

I elected to apply Thematic analysis as a tool for identifying themes within the research using Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp.78) suggested process, to ensure that the approach was undertaken

in a format that was "theoretically and methodologically sound". The aim in using this approach was to enable me to clearly establish, organise and analyse themes within the data that were considered important to the research questions or were elucidated from the data. This approach to data analysis fits well with the psycho-social epistemology and methodology because it emphasises the ability of the researcher to be reflexive about the themes derived from the data, whilst also providing an opportunity to apply a 'latent' approach to analysis. Latent thematic analysis focuses on interpreting the data at a deeper level, exploring the meanings beyond purely the semantic.

The six phases of thematic analysis are outlined in Table 1 and I followed these as a guideline. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000a), I transcribed the interviews as the first stage of interpretation of the data, with repeated listening to the audio recordings. As part of the transcribing process, I paid attention to the participants non-verbal responses, including their facial expressions, gestures and eye contact. I also noted their tone of voice, pauses, their expression of emotions, alongside my own responses to the participants, including thoughts or affective responses. I elected to use MaxQDA, a software programme to organise and code the transcripts into different themes. The interview transcripts were transferred into MaxQDA, then each interview was grouped into two subsets delineated by the participants' role, consisting of four interviews. Each interview within the subset was re-read, creating initial codes for the individual transcripts related to the research question. These codes were then reviewed by subset, creating themes and sub-themes which covered all four interviews. I chose to use an 'inductive analysis' of the data, with the intent that the themes I selected from the data were not chosen to fit a "pre-existing coding frame" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.83). Therefore, I also acknowledged and explored themes that did not 'fit' the research questions. An example of an interview with relevant codes is included in Appendix E.

Table 1

Phases of Thematic Analysis

	Phase	Description of the Process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

3.11.2 Psycho-social interpretation of the 'whole'

Hollway and Jefferson (2013, pp.5) emphasise the importance of ensuring that the data, the participants' experience, is not broken down into individual parts to be understood. They accentuate their focus on the principle of "working with the whole data and paying attention to the links and contradictions within that whole". Therefore, once I had analysed the data for themes I tried to ensure that each participant was assessed as a whole, by reviewing their interviews, their completed AT diagram, my notes about the person and the interviews, as well as

reflections noted in supervision. I aimed to ensure that a psycho-social analysis of the whole had been considered, with a focus on their "gestalt" rather than the individual parts of them.

3.11.3 Analysis of Activity Theory Diagrams

As part of the analytical process, I reviewed the individual diagrams both as individual representations of the participants but also to identify themes arising from the research. The diagrams were then collated together by the role of the participants, to explore the level of influence, if any, their role had on their depiction of the systems surrounding LAC pupils. An additional focus was the identification of any significant differences between the diagrams, when I compared them as individuals and then as two distinct groups. I also analysed the AT diagrams to explore whether any contradictions in the system were emphasised, or areas highlighted that needed further exploration in relation to the research question.

3.12 Ethical Considerations in Psycho-social research

3.12.1 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) (see Appendix F approval letter and Appendix G ethics application) and I carried out the research in accordance with British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). I also requested approval for the research from the principal EP for the company and the virtual school head. Designated teachers were approached by their link virtual school advisory teacher, with the information sheet and consent form distributed via email. I refrained from contacting the DT until the consent form had been returned to me, indicating that they were agreeable to taking part in the research.

3.12.2 Consent

I emailed the information sheet (Appendix H) and consent form (Appendix I) to participants with a general description of the research project prior to their agreeing to take part in the research. I asked the participants to read through and ask questions regarding consent at the beginning of the

interview, before signing a hard copy of the form. A copy of which, I stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and University of Essex guidelines (BPS, 2018). I also provided information about how the participant's data was collected and stored during the process, as per General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, 2018).

I provided a brief explanation of the reasons for the research and storage of the data prior to starting the interview. I asked the participants verbally if they minded the interview being recorded. I also reminded them of their right to withdraw at any time during the research process and that, if they wished, I would terminate the interview at any time. Psycho-social research emphasises the awareness of power relationships and differences in status levels. The nature of the interviews, in particular exploring unconscious thoughts or feelings, can have implications for the belief that consent can be given through a reasoned decision.

3.12.3 Power Imbalance in the research relationship

As a trainee EP, I endeavoured to maintain an awareness of the power imbalance between myself and the participants, where distribution of power could be considered unequal dependent on the type of relationship we have. Hollway & Jefferson (2013, pp.82) argue that the researcher needs to create a 'safe space' for the participants and provide the opportunity to renegotiate consent throughout the process, with the option to withdraw at any point. They suggest that the principles of "honesty, sympathy and respect" are essential to this process. I concurred with their argument that honesty and respect are essential, however disliked the inclusion of sympathy, arguing that sympathy sits within the imbalance of power in a research relationship, suggesting that we should feel sorry for the participants within their situations (Gerdes, 2011). I preferred the term 'empathy', which denotes a level of compassion and understanding of the interviewee's situation, of being alongside them and fully listening to their experience (Rogers, 1975). Additionally, once I had completed the research process, I arranged a meeting to inform participants of the findings of the study. This was a voluntary meeting, providing participants with the opportunity to reflect on their participation and the research outcomes.

Bowker (2011, p.329) argues that as psycho-social research "values empathetic, intersubjective communication", he is interested in the limited discussion regarding "acknowledging such dynamics as a potential 'good". Much has been discussed with regard to the power imbalance within the relationship and the potential harm (or maleficence) that could be evoked through exploring a participant unconscious and their emotional defences. In discussing beneficence, the capacity of the researcher to have a positive impact, (Ruch, 2013) in relation to psycho-social research, Jervis (2009) indicates that the relationship can be beneficial to the participant and provide them with an opportunity to explore their emotional responses to the topic at hand.

3.12.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

I changed all the names for the purpose of this research and I kept participants' confidential information in a locked file, ensuring adherence to the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, 2018). I transcribed participants' recordings anonymously using initials to denote their job title and a number to identify the person. Pseudonyms were adopted for the participants and any identifying features were anonymised.

With the small number of participants involved and the design of the study, it was possible that participants might be able to identify one another from quotes and comments included in the research. I made every attempt to ensure that participants and other stakeholders would not be identifiable to anyone not directly involved in the research.

3.12.5 Issues of trust, reliability and validity

Psycho-social research, through its focus on the co-construction of knowledge during the research process, challenges the traditional ideas of reliability and validity (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). Yardley (2008) also argues that these criterion for judgement of the research are not appropriate for qualitative research overall, instead she recommends adhering to the following four principles to ensure qualitative research is completed to a high standard. Firstly, she advocates demonstrating sensitivity to the context and the data. This approach is imperative with psycho-social research as it reinforces the need to be aware of the participant's perspective and

ensuring that the researcher's ideas are not imposed on the data. This will be partially achieved by ensuring themes and codes are developed from the data, rather than being pre-conceived or directed by my own views. Furthermore, it involved ensuring that I had an awareness of potential ethical issues arising from the research.

Ensuring that commitment and rigour (the second principle) were applied involved ensuring that I fully engaged with the data and developed a thorough, critical analysis, also another significant element of psycho-social research. In order to ensure transparency and coherence, the third principle, I endeavoured to emphasise the maintenance of reflexivity throughout the research process. This involved ensuring that I clearly outlined the process, identified how themes were elucidated from the data, using the data to develop a refined case for the research (Bryman, 2012). A final focus on the 'impact and importance' of the research, involved ensuring that the aim and outcome of the research has potency (Yardley, 2017). As a researcher, my objective was to develop a study, which provides a 'thick description' (Bryman, 2012, pp.392), or a 'rich' picture of the experiences of VSATs and DTs, which could make a meaningful contribution to the literature available.

Chapter 4   Findings

4.1   Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will provide an overview of the themes which emerged from interviews with the DTs and VSATs. The interviews from the four participants for each group were transcribed individually and analysed applying 'reflexive' thematic analysis, following the principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Participants interview transcripts were then grouped according to role and reviewed as a complete data set, extracting themes from four interviews. Themes arising from each data set are explored in relation to the research questions outlined in the previous chapter. At the beginning of each section, the findings focus on the participants interpretation of the AT diagram and their responses to this process. A psycho-social interpretation of the participants responses and my own reflections on the interviews will be explored throughout this section, with a summary of pertinent points at the end of each section.

4.2   Virtual school advisory teachers

4.2.1   Overview of participants

Table 2

Overview of VSAT participants

Name	Previous Experience	Time in Role	Age group covered	Caseload
Sally	Teacher – mainly secondary but some primary experience	Six months	Year Five and Six	50+
Eva	Secondary teacher – Science	Permanent since Sept 2019 – temporary monitoring PEPs since February 2019	Year Eleven	50+
Naima	Primary Teacher	Permanent for approximately a year	Reception, Year One and Year Two	50+
Mary	Secondary. Worked in PRUs and special schools beforehand	Two months	Year Eleven	52

Four VSATs were interviewed, all of whom were qualified teachers having previously worked in schools, colleges or a pupil referral unit. All of the VSATs were relatively new to

the role and as indicated earlier a new Virtual school head had been appointed in 2019. She had implemented changes in the processes and organisation of the VSATs role, resulting in changes to its focus and the range of pupils the VSATs worked with.

The VSATs identified many challenges within their role, including the level of their individual caseload, which ranges between fifty to sixty pupils, located either within the borough or across the country. Consequently, the number of agencies and therefore professionals, including schools, that each VSAT engages with could be numerous.

The use of the Activity Theory diagram supported with focusing some of the discussion on specific areas and providing a visual map of the VSATs perception of the system. However, even within these categories' links were made by the participants to other areas of their work or refocused back on their individual cases. Thus, indicating that the VSATs were continually attentive to how they could best meet the needs of the children. At times, discussions about their role could be muddled, focusing on specifics issues related to their own role then linking back to another element within the system. Identifying key themes enabled the elucidation of core concepts but did not eradicate the possibility of interweaving between them. An overview of the main themes from the VSAT interviews is provided to demonstrate the core areas (Figure 5).

The use of Activity Theory enabled the researcher to develop a systemic understanding of the VSAT role, despite the complexity and at times, confusion. Conflicts tended to arise around individuals or agencies within the system, whom VSATs considered were not fulfilling their role correctly.

Figure 5
Main Themes from Virtual school advisory teachers
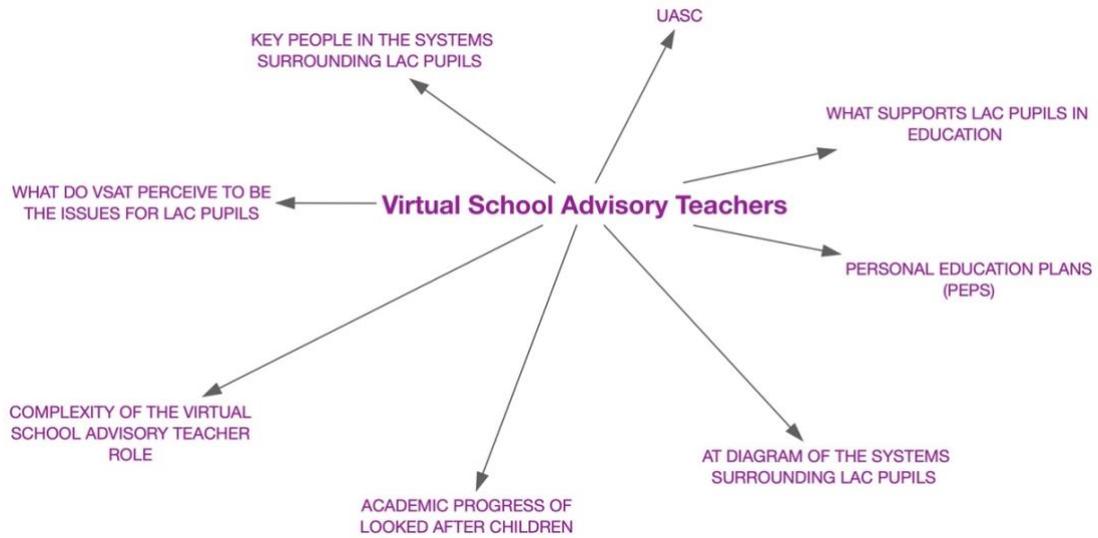
4.3   Theme 1 – Activity theory diagram interpretation

The Advisory Teachers utilisation and interpretation of the activity diagram varied considerably, as demonstrated in the map below (Figure 6). Thus, drawing attention to their individual variations in the conceptualisation of the structure surrounding looked after children and how they perceived LAC pupils in relation to the system.

Figure 6

Compilation of VSATs completed AT diagrams
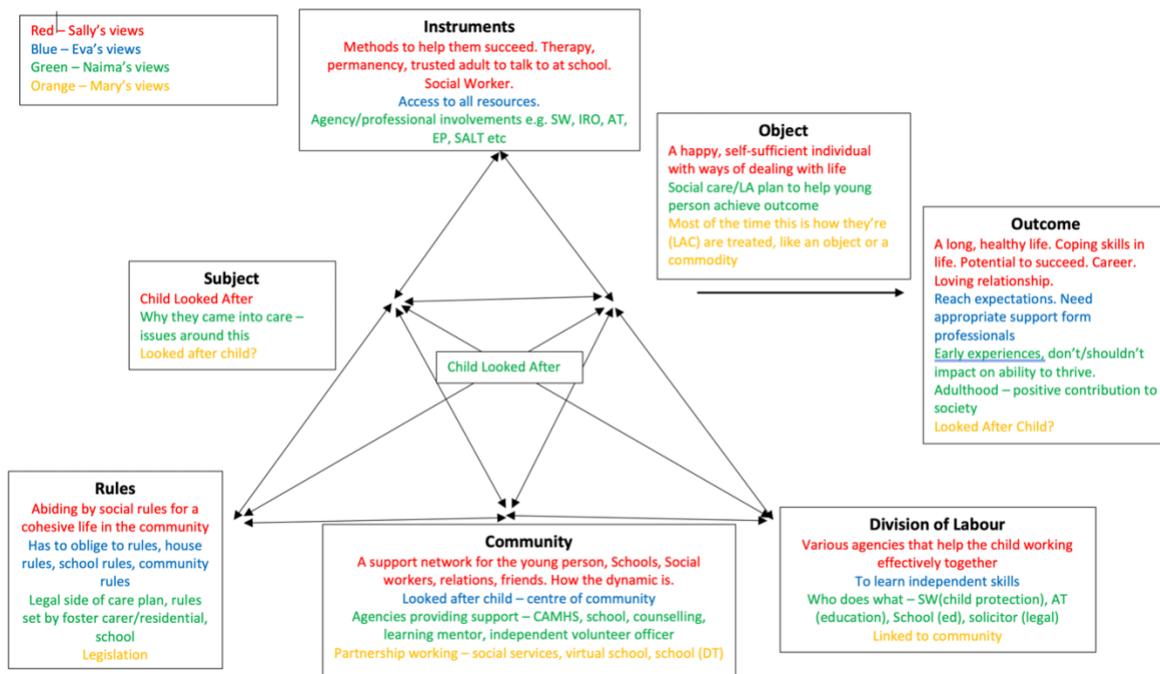
4.3.1 Use of the diagram throughout the interview

Sally utilised the AT diagram as a reference point throughout her interview and directly related her vision of the systems around the pupil onto the structure. She viewed the diagram as interrelated rather than separate components of the system, thus drawing a direct correlation between the community and young person. Eva, on the other hand, found it challenging to complete the diagram, requesting support from the interviewer; "well, to be honest, I don't understand this diagram." (Eva, line 20). English is a second language for Eva which may have prevented her engaging with the diagram. As the interview progressed, she became less focused on the language used and more on her thoughts about the needs of LAC pupils, which enabled her to better articulate her views.

4.3.2 How do VSATs locate the LAC pupil in the activity theory diagram

The participants location of the child in the diagram, and reasons for doing so, were varied. The majority of the VSATs choice of positioning for the LAC pupil was related to their views about outcomes for the child, therefore these two sections have been linked together. Eva's view of LAC pupils were demonstrated by her choice about where to locate the pupil in the diagram;

> "well centre of community really, they need support, they are very vulnerable." (Eva, line 26)

The outcome would then be that the child would 'need appropriate support from professionals' and 'reach expectations'. Sally located the CLA as the subject, identifying the object as an objective where

> "the outcome of course, the objective is for the young person to have a long healthy life as they grow, healthy of course, coping skills in life, potential to succeed, a career loving relationships and you know, all that every person deserves" (Sally, line 5)

Mary, however, was reluctant to locate the LAC pupil as the subject, outcome or object because she believed that;

> "most of the time, that's how looked after children are treated, like an object." (Mary, line 8)

Her response instead, was to refer to LAC pupils as the "centre of our job" which would hopefully lead to a positive outcome for them. Unfortunately, her experience is that some schools treat LAC pupils as a commodity;

> *"Oh, just another LAC that I've got in my school and therefore just another pep, and therefore just another opportunity to ask for PPG." (Mary, line 8)*

Naima also chose to locate the LAC pupil in the centre of the AT diagram because they are;

> *"in the middle of everything" (Naima, line 12)*

The VSATs positioning of LAC pupils in the diagram, demonstrated their determination to maintain a focus on the needs of children at all times and their emotional commitment to the role.

4.4   Community

Within the community section on the diagram, the VSATs focused on language such as 'support network for the young person" (Sally) and "agencies providing support" (Naima) The language for this section has a systemic emphasis, focusing on the agencies and individuals working together. Eva chose to locate the child in this section, unequivocally situating the child at the centre of the community. Whereas, Mary refers more directly to "partnership working" and the system working together to support the pupils;

> *"So, with community I think it is obviously the partnership working that we have, in terms of social workers, and virtual school, the carers, just trying to have it a bit more joined up." (Mary, line 10)*

4.5   Division of labour

Interpretation of this section varied, with some ATs making direct links to Community. Naima, had a more distinct explanation, clearly delineating the roles of the individuals and their distinct responsibilities "SW (child protection), AT (education), School (ed) and solicitor (legal). Mary advocated this section should be linked to community and rules but did not elaborate on her reasoning. Sally highlighted the number of professionals that can be involved in a case and emphasised the importance of remaining focused on the child;

> *"that reminder to yourself and everybody, that the looked after child is the most important thing because all this is going on and they need to feel empowered and in control, in order for them, you know, to have any autonomy or you know, to feel any influence over their own lives" (Sally, line 180)*

Foster carers were noticeably absent from the AT diagrams, apart from Eva's reference to LAC children helping their foster carers. I wondered what this reflected about the ATs experience of foster carers, their level of engagement with them or the value they attribute to the role of the foster carer.

4.5.1 Rules

The responses in the rules section were mainly divided between; a) seeing rules as the rules the LAC pupil needs to follow with their home environments or within society, or b) in relation to legislation and the legal rules applicable to the whole system. Naima chose to include both, but clarified her thoughts about the impact of legislation suggesting that;

> *"sometimes that might not always work in our favour'* (Naima, line 10)

Mary supported this view, providing a specific example, relating to LAC pupils contact with their parents. She debated the rules regarding contact arrangements, questioning whether they were always in the best interest of the child;

> *"But what if a child wants more than the allowed contact? How does that work? Because obviously Social Services has to work for them to specific rules." (Mary, line 15-16)*

4.5.2 Instruments

Interpretation of instruments was predominantly related to resources, such "access to all resources" (Naima) with ATs referring to agencies, individuals or interventions. Sally categorised "methods to help them succeed", including permanency and "a trusted adult to talk to at school" as instruments, also emphasising;

> *"but also for them to learn the ways to, you know, to empower them to be able to deal with life and you know, deal with their emotions and that." (Sally, line 4)*

4.5.3 Outcome

The VSATs depiction of the outcome were generally focused on aspirational goals for LAC pupils. Naima's perspective of the outcome was;

> *"So the whole point of all this, is have the outcome that their early experiences, all those adverse childhood experiences don't impact or they shouldn't really impact their ability to thrive because the theory being all of these have supported or sort of taught new strategies that they didn't have before." (Naima, line 27)*

Sally also identified outcomes as aspirations for the child, mentioning 'long, healthy life', 'potential to succeed', 'career' and 'loving relationships'. Naima intimated that although early experiences cannot be eradicated, it's important to hold a hope that with intervention and support the pupils will be able to live a happy, fulfilling life. Although, she suggested that her desired outcome is not reflective of pupils' actual experiences;

"I think that this is not true though – it's not true (sigh)." (Naima, line 25)

Naima seemed to encounter emotional conflict when reflecting on her wish for the pupils and their actual experiences.

4.5.4 Contradictions in the system

Engestrom considered that contradictions were central to activity theory, highlighting the "issues, conflicts and tensions" (Wilson, 2006). This was apparent in the VSATs tendency to concentrate on within child strengths and areas of need, rather than examining the system as a whole. A contradiction was highlighted in their depiction of AT diagram, revealing a conflict between focusing on their role in the system or the individual children. Demonstrating the VSATs aspirations to be able to meet the needs of individual LAC pupils whilst also signifying the challenge and complexity of their role. Analysis of all of the AT diagrams also highlighted the omission of the PEP process from any part of the diagram, yet at the same time, the PEP was discussed throughout the interviews as an integral part of the VSATs role, both as a mechanism and a challenge. I reflected on this and wondered if it represented an unconscious desire for the removal of the PEP process or demonstrated that the VSATs did not consider the PEP an essential component of the system. Alternatively, it could have been reflective of their conflicting experiences of the PEP process.

4.6 Theme 2 – Systemic perspective of the network

Figure 7
Sub Themes – System surrounding LAC pupils
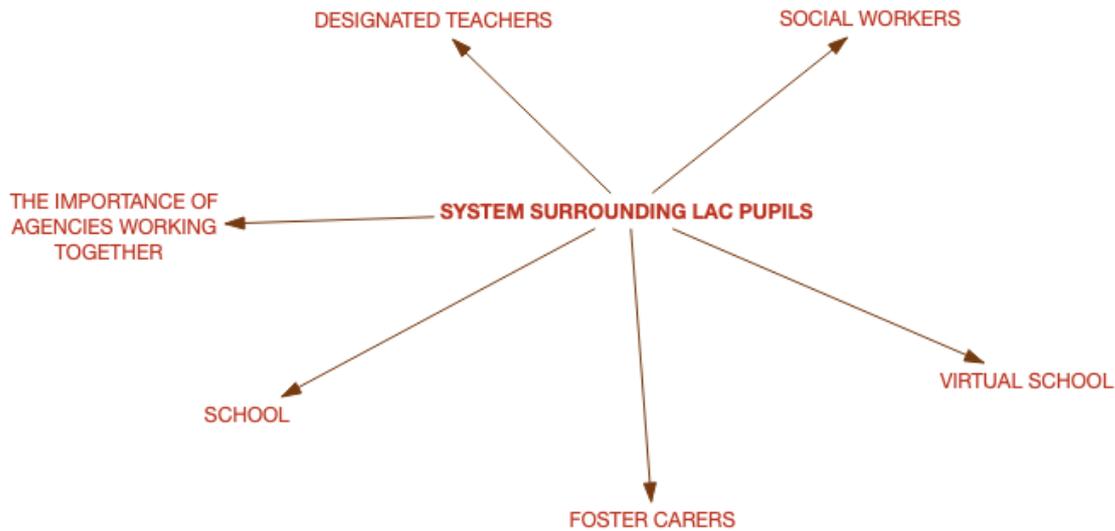
4.6.1 Role of other agencies within the system

References to other organisations in the interviews were mainly related to multi-agency collaboration. Subjects such as workload, change of staff and lack of funding were consistent across the interviews, as was the focus on the commitment and engagement of the individuals within the professions. The positives and negative associations with all of the agencies became apparent, with representatives of some of the key agencies, perceived as not fulfilling their role. Eva referred directly to DTs, but her comments were indicative of all the professionals. There were those who went above and beyond their role and others who did not consider the needs of LAC pupils to be important;

> *"I know this designated teacher doing everything they can, but other just hmmm it's they're just raw data this child you know." (Eva, line 100)*

Some professionals were perceived to have a limited awareness of the requirements of their own role, resulting in reliance on others in the system, such as the VSATs;

> *"cuz sometimes I go to a school, over to you, well it should really be you, but don't worry I'll do it because they don't have a clue." (Naima, line 237)*

This theme also arose in relation to social workers, linked to constant changes in personnel and the VSATs belief that they are often overworked. Mary referred to an incident where she observed a young person openly challenge her social worker in a meeting;

> *"where the young person has stripped the social worker, you said this, you don't do what you're meant to do." (Mary, line 221)*

I experienced discomfort during this part of the interview, as I felt that Mary had experienced some pleasure in the young person challenging the social worker. I wondered whether the LAC pupil had articulated feelings that Mary felt she had to withhold or repress.

At the same time, each VSAT showed compassion for, and acknowledged the pressures, on the social workers, recognising the consequences of constant changes in personnel. However, their overall perception was that some social workers had limited knowledge of the education system and consequently, the impact of changes to the care plan were not always communicated to professionals in education;

> *"but so many times moves happened, and then I'll get an email off one of the schools, they've moved here (laughing out loud). You can't do that – but they just did."* *(Naima, line 92)*

Using the AT diagram as a visual mapping process of the VSATs conceptualisation of the systems around LAC pupils, demonstrated how rarely EPs were referred to in the diagram. I wondered what this reflected about the VSAT understanding of the educational psychologists role and their awareness of EPs involvement in the network.

4.6.2 The importance of agencies working together

The participants views of multi-agency working, ranged from being enthusiastic about the contribution of other agencies to an acknowledgement that they have very little contact with other organisations. Sally considered working with other professionals to be an important and valuable aspect of her role;

> *"And, you know, you really are in awe at their knowledge, at what they know and, and, and it's a privilege to work with, you know, with these professionals."* *(Sally, line 31)*

The nature of the comments were dependent on the individual, agency or local authority being discussed. Naima's frustrations related to working with more than one local authority to organise funding for a pupil, with discussions about funding regularly impacting on education placements for children;

> *"I've had cases where a child is out of young person is out of school for two terms because the one who is sourcing the placement have found it but the one who is financing it haven't approved the finance and then the place is gone."* *(Naima, line 90)*

However, Mary, observed that when individuals from agencies develop a good working relationship, it has a significant positive impact on the child's experience;

> "I was at another meeting where everybody seemed to really know each other. The child was in there, but then the child didn't really need to be because everything was as it should be and the carer was fantastic actually." (Mary, line 110)

The VSATS obviously experienced frustration with the system, specifically with regard to processes or other professionals, that could prevent LAC pupils receiving the support they need. I also wondered whether the system, the processes and other professionals involvement, could render the VSATs feeling powerless to make significant changes to the lives of LAC pupils.

4.7 Theme 3 – Complexity of the virtual school advisory teacher role

Figure 8

Main Themes for Complexity of VSAT Role
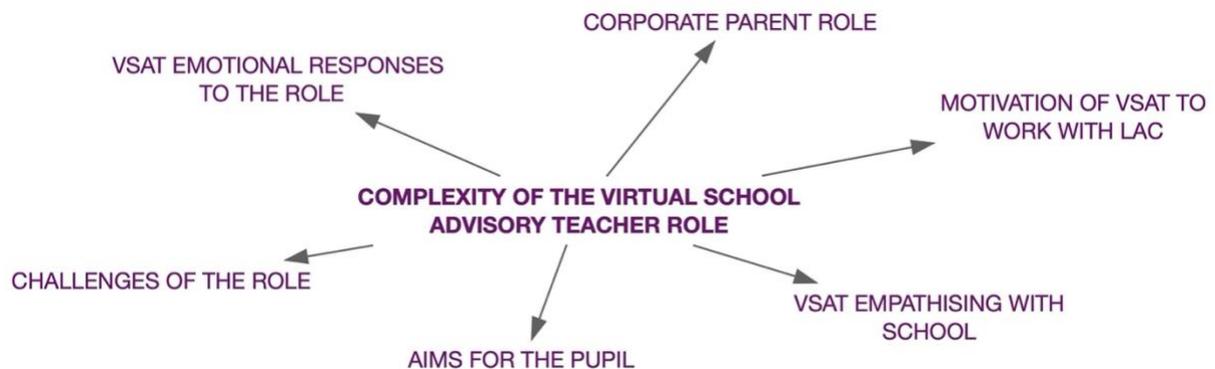
4.7.1 Corporate parent

Although the phrase 'corporate parent' was not referred to directly, the VSATs descriptions of their role denoted a commitment to the pupils' education reminiscent of a parent. Naima explained that as far as she is concerned, her soul responsibility is the child's education;

> "So my remit is to make sure that they get what they need, and they're having that push, that pushy parent and that's that's that's me." (Naima, line 33)

She talked about focusing on high aspirations for the young person and putting things into place to enable them to make progress. Eva also focused on supporting LAC pupils and hoping that she can make a difference to them;

> *"They don't have parents; we are trying to be as good as we can." (Eva, line 188)*

The challenge within the system supporting LAC pupils is clarifying accountability for LAC children and determining who has the ultimate decision-making responsibility. Through discussion, some VSATs became more aware of their limited knowledge and understanding of other professionals' roles, recognising that this was something they wanted to investigate, particularly in relation to 'corporate parent' responsibilities.

4.7.2 Emotional responses to the role

Despite Naima's hopes and desire for a positive outcome for LAC pupils she was of the opinion that interventions and support are implemented too late. Consequently, they are not able to achieve the outcomes she would like for them. She reflected poignantly on her experience stating;

> *"Oh, yeah, my experience is we get to them late, too late." (Naima, line. 33)*

Until this point in the interview, Naima had been very practical and pragmatic about her role and supporting LAC pupils. However, I sensed a range of emotions from Naima, including sadness, frustration, disappointment and helplessness;

> *"it's not even about the amount of work, it's, it's about the emotions that you invest in it because you know, you really do see, I really did believe that that's a his, his life had turned you know, he was getting the help he needed". (Naima, line 47)*

The VSATs emotional investment in the children on their caseload requiring additional support to manage or prevent exclusions, was evident. During all of the interviews, I had a continuous awareness of the underlying 'emotional labour' of working with looked after pupils, particularly in relation to the child's 'back story'. Mary talked about the emotional impact of the content of the children's cases, referring to it as their 'back story' and explaining her initial response when she was first appointed to the role;

> *"I don't know if it shocked me, if it's because of me personally but I was shocked by some of the cases. I don't know, I've not actually asked around if that's how other teachers felt" (Mary, line 78)*

She talked openly about the challenges of managing her emotional responses to children's cases and her difficulty with accepting the trauma inflicted on the children by adults;

> *"And then again on a human level how humans can treat others" (Mary, line 173)*

She articulated that considered counselling to process her responses. However, Mary's response to the difficult emotions was to always refocus on the remit of her job, a potential defence mechanism against the atrocities she read about;

> *"I always have to be mindful that I'm there for the education aspects, not necessarily the emotional aspect, which is really hard." (Mary, line 34)*

Eva also demonstrated a mixed response in her emotional responses to the role. She oscillated from continually focusing on her positive feelings about the job;

> *"Yeah, well, I love my job. I love it. I love my job I really do. I'm happy they accepted me." (Eva, line 156)*

To then sharing some of the areas she found difficult;

> *"Don't get me wrong I am so stressed and tired. I'm thinking, Oh, my God, I'm not managing." (Eva, line 205)*

However, she then returned to the phrase she repeated regularly, *"I love my job"*. Seemingly, also an emotional defence against the more challenging elements of the role. Throughout the interview she would refer to elements that were challenging, then refocusing my attention on supporting the academic progress of the pupil and to monitor the PEP process;

> *"I'm just going to PEP, this, the role is very limited" (Eva, line 145)*

In comparison, Sally talked openly and visibly showed her own emotional responses to her role, acknowledging how difficult it was to manage and the impact it had on her personally;

> *"So that leaves the social emotional side that's of the I mean, that's one of the things that kept me a bit awake last night for an hour, trying to it just popped up trying to solve that problem and help solve that problem." (Sally, line 16)*

The emotional responses of the VSATs demonstrated a conflict for the participants. A difficulty with managing the individual cases versus ensuring the needs of all the children on their caseload are considered and legal obligations are met. Being able to emotionally accommodate to hearing these stories, can be wearing and the potential impact on the adults within the system is considerable. Mary, also believed that teachers need to be provided with

emotional support to manage the stress of working with some LAC pupils, particularly as she considers that within education teachers' feelings are not considered:

> *"before I am a teacher, I am a human being first. Maybe we should talk on a human level first rather than a professional level, that was quite frustrating. I think a lot of the time teachers are seen as not having emotion." (Mary, line 162)*

4.7.3 Challenges of the role

Figure 9

Sub themes - Challenges of the role
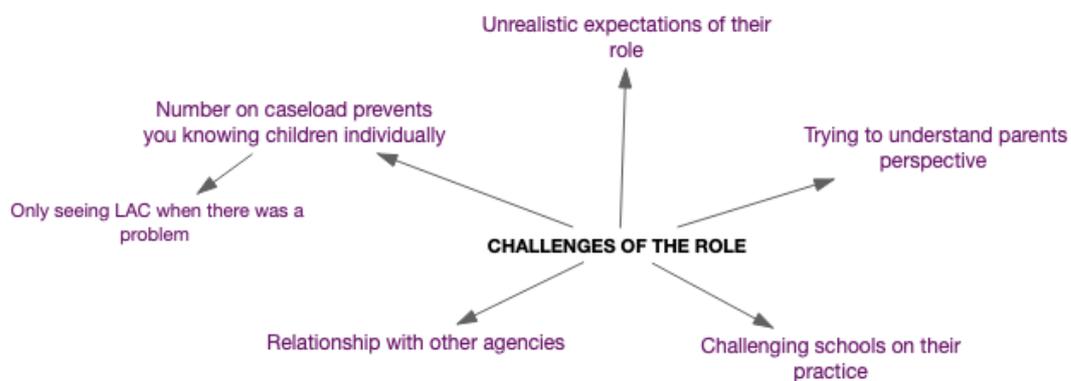
As with many of the subthemes, there is crossover between the emotional impact of the role and the challenges for VSATs. Clearly Sally's response in the section above, included discussing a significant challenge for the VSATs, trying to mitigate the impact of the care system on the children;

> *"And its, it's really I think when the system doesn't take their emotional needs into consideration that is really, you know, I mean Oh I think though, sorry I'm getting really emotional (gets quite upset here – cries) something that is really sad."(Sally, line 140)*

Sally was referring to short notice placement or educational changes, where the consequences for the child have not been considered or thought through, due to a range of factors. For Naima, her challenges related to the system but were focused on the interaction between agencies;

> *"another thing that kind of frustrates all of us, is different agencies that don't all, necessarily all link up." (Naima, line 88)*

Sally clearly articulated that another challenge has been to learn to accept the reality of these children's situations, to find strategies manage her emotions, and support the children by refocusing on her education remit;

> *"all that you can do is the best to help them academically or, educationally and to help them through school. And erm, and to focus on that educational part really. And so that's, that's the challenge."* (Sally, line 52)

Mary divulged that one of her coping mechanisms was to use the education element of her role, as a strategy for remaining professional during a meeting. She focused an occasion, where she found it difficult to contain her anger towards the parents;

> *"okay, so I'm here for this child. My job is to be an education advocate. So that's what I'm going to do. "*(Mary, line 175)

Eva's challenge was more practical, managing the number of children on her caseload, not knowing the children and fitting all the PEP meetings required into one term;

> *"I have 52 children on my caseload so it just at the moment, it's quite intense, we are just doing PEPs, it's like PEP city at the moment."* (Eva, line 36)

Naima also felt that they often only saw the children on their caseload if there was a problem, when they would be called in to find a solution;

> *"you know, i.e. they're at risk of exclusion or they've had X amount of fixed term exclusion, we have to go in and try and sort out some kind of plan"* (Naima, line 55)

Naima and Sally also explained that they had learnt to become more comfortable questioning schools regarding their use of PPG+ and the accuracy of their data. Although they found it challenging a first, it is a process which was necessary if schools had a 'reputation';

> *"where if the data isn't correct, then, you know, you're having to pull people up on not doing their job correctly. And it's, it's not an easy thing to do."* (Sally, line. 30)

Mary's found it challenging when DTs did not acknowledge or respond to numerous correspondence regarding a child, particularly if the school was not local. She also felt that other professionals' expectations of the VSAT could be unreasonable or beyond the remit of education;

> *"And then the social workers are asking the what they should do regarding education and the child's not here, I don't know what you want me to do, I can't go and find them and take them to school."* (Mary, line 119)

Frustration was also expressed with regard to other professional's lack of knowledge about the VSAT role. Eva referred to the potential impact of the decisions made regarding pupil's education by non-education professionals. She discussed the presentation of a child's case to a 'fair access panel' in order to find alternatives to exclusion;

> *"it has been withdrawn because well, social services were aware of this FAP panel but they didn't want her to be presented. So it has been withdrawn." (Eva, line 115)*

This case highlighted the convoluted decision-making progress for LAC pupils and VSAT's frustration when education is their responsibility, yet Eva was prevented from finding alternative solutions for the pupil. In this instance, the social worker assumed the mantel of 'corporate parent' and overruled other professionals, instead of working with the VS to find a solution.

4.7.4 PEPs

Figure 10

Sub Themes - Personal education plans
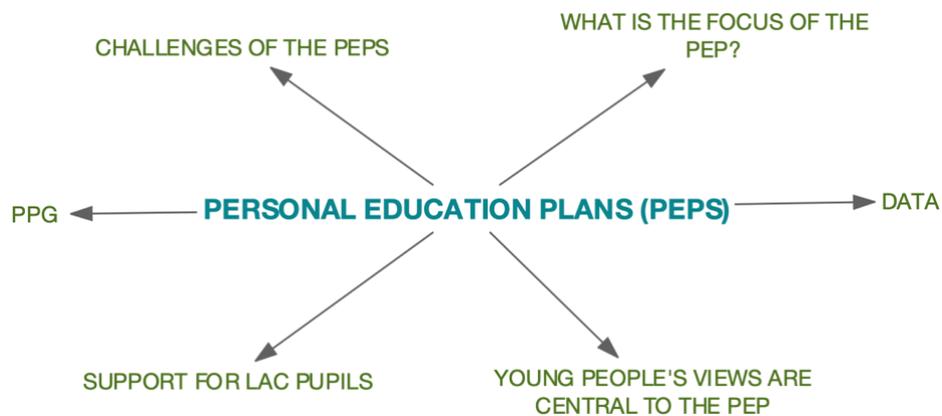
The issues raised here are specific to PEPs and are generally process focused, with the main theme being the problems associated with the initiation and management of PEPs;

> *"But it is frustrating when you know, the PEP is part of the care plan. We know this, so answer your emails and help me get this PEP because my presence isn't mandatory but the social workers is and if they're not responding, and they're not getting us to, it's not sort of setting the dates or even telling me; Look, here's my availability you go ahead and do it. What can I do?" (Naima, line 92)*

The VSATs seemed to perceived themselves as having limited power, particularly when trying to ensure pupils have three PEPs per year. They cited limitations on the social workers

time, which resulted in PEPs not being initiated. There were also issues with schools not completing the PEPs or providing accurate data. The number of professionals who are expected to attend the meetings can also be a potential issue, as the child can find them intimidating and the focus on their needs may become lost;

> *"but it's just seems that so many people because of law, are there for one child, which is fine. I feel like sometimes it can be conflicting. It might not necessarily be working in favour of the child." (Mary, line 18)*

Conversely, Eva also considered a PEP meeting to be an opportunity to meet or find out more about the pupil.

4.7.5 Motivation of VSAT to work with LAC pupils

The VSATs motivation and feelings about their role, were closely aligned to their desire to support LAC pupils and wanting to feel that they can make a difference. Whilst also ensuring LAC pupils have access to someone they can trust;

> *"Obviously, because the main point is not to give up the children because this is for some of them it just feels like everyone gave up on them." (Eva, line 53)*

Sally chose to apply for the role because she wanted to be able to understand and help LAC pupils more than she was able to as a class teacher;

> *"But what I really love about this is you can, you know, do the best you can, really try to make a difference and make sure the PEPs are really, really good quality" (Sally, line 196)*

The interviews demonstrated that all of the VSATs were working very hard to encourage LAC pupils to engage in education or learning. Although, their engagement with the pupils tended to be restricted to one visit per term and with limited direct work, it was apparent that where a problem arose, they would do everything they could to meet the needs of the pupil.

4.8 Theme 4 – Academic progress of LAC pupils

Figure 11

Sub Themes from Academic progress of LAC pupils

WHAT DO VSAT CONSIDER LAC
NEED TO BE ABLE TO MAKE
PROGRESS

WHAT CAN PREVENT A LAC
PUPIL MAKING PROGRESS?

WHAT IS VSAT VIEW OF LAC
CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC
PROGRESS

ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF LOOKED AFTER
CHILDREN

IMPACT OF CIRCUMSTANCES
NOT WITHIN THE CONTROL OF
EDUCATION
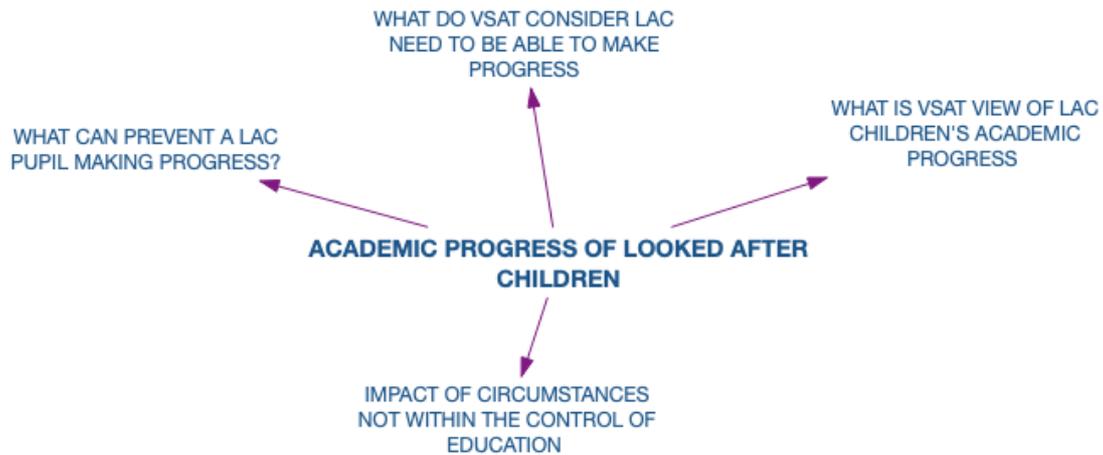
4.8.1   What is the VSATs view of LAC pupil's academic progress

The responses to this theme varied, with some VSATs considering pupils are achieving above age-related expectations and have high expectations of themselves. Other VSATs did not consider this view to be reflective of the majority of pupils;

> *"because a lot of the PEPs I've been to, grades are below expected, attendance is bad, you know, it's just trying to figure out how to help them." (Mary, line 96)*

Naima expressed frustration about her experience that despite their potential to succeed, very few of the children on her caseload were making progress;

> *"it was so frustrating because I could see, this particular young person had the ability to go to university, really, really bright, but he had erm early trauma in his life." (Naima, line 35)*

Overall, participants responses demonstrated a commitment to the belief that LAC children are able to make progress. They also suggested that all progress needs to be acknowledged even if it is not accelerated progress. Eva was of the opinion that every case is unique, therefore you cannot provide a general overview of all LAC children's academic progress or achievement;

> *"what I said, every situation is different, you can't just compare one situation to another one" (Eva, line 145)*

Sally, also emphasised the importance on focusing on the individual pupil's educational journey;

"because every human being is different, and we all learn so very differently." (Sally, line 35)

4.8.2 What supports LAC pupils in education?

Figure 12

Sub Themes - What supports LAC pupils in education?
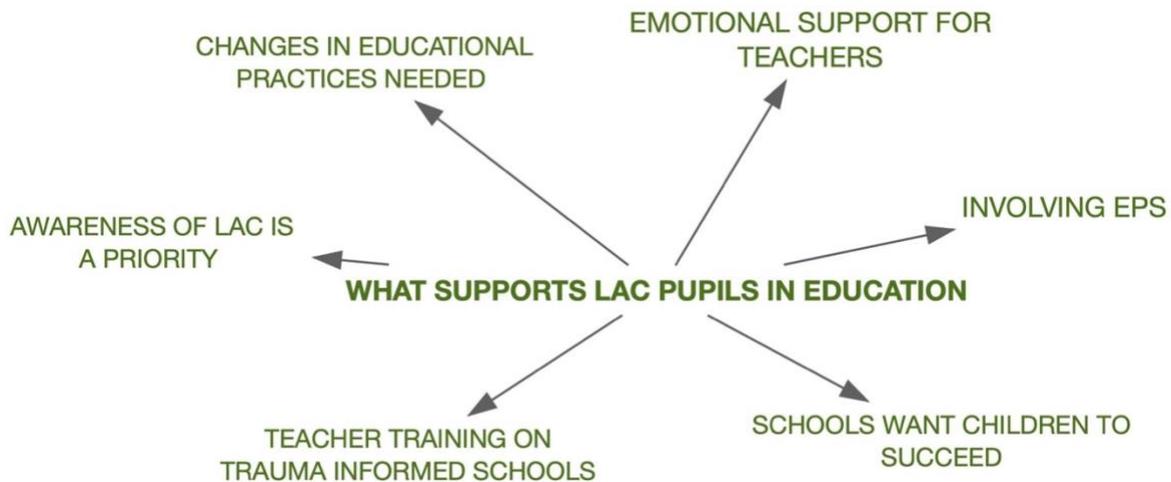
4.8.3 What do VSAT consider LAC need to be able to make progress?

The general view of the VSATs was that a child's emotional wellbeing has to be prioritised if they are to progress academically. Even Naima who focused primarily on the education needs of LAC pupils and the remit of the VSAT role, acknowledged the importance of emotional support for LAC pupils;

> *"absolutely, emotions have to come first. Because if you don't have that, not resolved, addressed and strategies to cope with all those complex emotions. How are they gonna learn?" (Naima, line 165)*

The VSATs identified a range of additional support which they considered enabled the pupils to make academic progress. In the main, the focus was on direct support to individual children, including financial support for academic interventions and emotional support, such as counselling. Naima, highlighted the need for the support to be in place as early as possible;

> *"if we put in the support and money and whatever is needed early on, when they do get to sort of year nine where we see this shift. We're not losing them." (Naima, line 33)*

The responses also focused on other areas, such as developing relationships with key adults;

> *"I think it's important to have somebody that you can trust."(Eva, line 32)*

Other key areas included; guaranteeing that life story work took place, ensuring care plans were communicated and changes managed appropriately, but also checking that the child had an awareness of why they were in care. Sally also reiterated Eva's focus on the importance of schools ensuring that they develop an awareness of the child as an individual;

> *"It's, it's making sure that you're embracing the child and their needs and you're going out of their way, because they are a human being and they need help." (Sally, line 100)*

Mary supported this view;

> *"this looked after child has a name, has a story." (Mary, line 215)*

4.8.4   What do VSATs consider can prevent LAC pupils making progress

Figure 13

Sub Themes - what can prevent a LAC pupil making progress
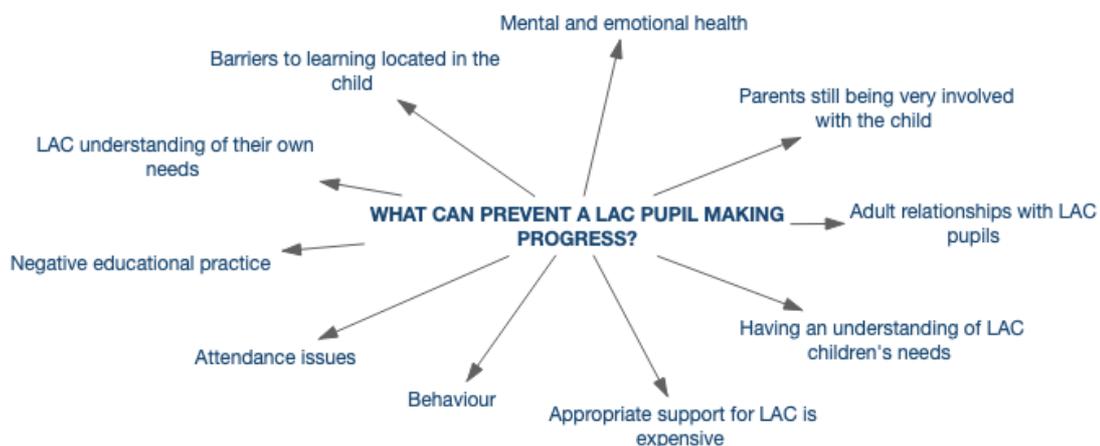
The factors which VSATs considered prevented LAC pupils making progress seemed to separate into two specific areas: either individual within child factors or circumstances related to their environment, including the behaviour or knowledge of the adults supporting them. Behaviour and exclusions were often considered a result of within child factors and were referred to quite regularly in all of the interviews.

Sally's reflection on adult's responses to LAC pupils extreme behaviour, were indicative of many professional's negative responses to the pupils, which seems to be one of the major areas for preventing LAC making progress;

> *"I think it's the fear of the unknown of not knowing what's you know, behind the reasons for them behaving the way they do, or, you know, not knowing much about that background, not understanding it." (Sally, line 100)*

Sally's thoughts on this subject were reflective of a psycho-social focus on people's unconscious responses, I considered this view to be an accurate interpretation of many adult responses to LAC pupils. Sally had recognised what potentially prevents professionals engaging properly with LAC pupils needs and providing them with the assistance they require.

Eva explained that a range of approaches were employed by the virtual school, to avoid exclusions being recorded on a child's record such as: managed moves, placements at Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or alternative provisions. Naima supported this view and explained that by the time VSATs are involved, the cases have usually become much trickier;

> *"they're quite disengaged and quite angry and they're very, I mean, more, feel more rejected than they do already." (Naima, line 56)*

Mary, also referred to teachers removing children from class and the emotional impact it would have on the child;

> *"So, you throwing a year 7 or year eight pupil out of the classroom, might not be the best thing because they are just used to people rejecting them anyway – you're just adding to it." (Mary, line 151)*

Understanding the reasons underlying a child's behaviour and ensuring that the adult's response to the child demonstrated an awareness of their underlying needs, were considered influential in managing behaviour effectively. Unfortunately, the VSATs considered some exclusions to be a consequence of the adults' responses demonstrating limited knowledge of the child's experiences;

> *"she'd been so immersed in domestic violence. She only knew if there was conflict, hit. That was her understanding and the school thought, right let's just exclude. Well, no, actually, let's support this young person." (Sally, line 100)*

Behaviour and attendance, were not considered mutually exclusive, as Eva noted when discussing a child's behaviour difficulties remaining unidentified due to her absence.

Attendance was influenced by a multitude of factors and VSATs referred to difficulties with encouraging children to attend, or placement changes affecting their capacity to attend. However, for some children, attendance was a significant difficulty. Eva suggested that attendance does not usually decline suddenly and previously unidentified reasons could be the cause;

> *"she stopped attending and maybe she just, people thought her behaviour was due to some issues, but actually part of it was a special needs which hasn't been picked up early enough." (Eva, line 70)*

4.8.5 Impact of circumstances not within the control of education

Placement and the importance of permanence were highlighted as the most important factors outside of education that could affect a child's ability to make academic progress. Eva felt that the home situation of a pupil was crucial to a child's progress;

> *"What I can say that home situation affecting their attendance, affecting their wellbeing, affecting their educational attainment." (Eva, line 162)*

Sally also referred to the need for a child to have a stable background as well as the potential negative impact of contact with their parents;

> *"it could be when they visit their, they have visitation with their parents, or their parents don't turn up and straightaway the next day or something horrendous happens." (Sally, line 62)*

Others acknowledged that for some children, even just attending school was progress, due to their emotional difficulties;

> *"He will go to break and lunchtimes. But he won't engage. He just hasn't got any capacity in himself to engage" (Mary, line 46)*

Participants suggested that despite support put in place by organisations such as CAMHS, historical trauma has the capacity to emotionally overwhelm these children;

> *"the trauma that our, our CLAs have gone through, and how that actually affects their brain and their ability to conform like a young person, child who haven't had these adverse childhood experiences." (Naima, line 80)*

Thereby impacting on their ability to focus on learning or developing relationships with their peers. Sally considered being taken into care can impact all areas of a child life and may affect their perception of themselves;

> *"I wonder how that difference in language impacts on her, you know, go from, you know, using different terminology and having to not lead a different life, but it is kind of having to edit yourself."* (Sally, line 76)

The VSATs also acknowledged that for many children, the process can be hugely positive and radically change their life;

> *"when they are looked after child, their life does become a lot more stable. The attendance goes up, their punctuality goes up as well."* (Sally, line 64)

4.9   Theme 5 – Change in educational practice

This theme emphasised the necessity for school staff to have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of LAC children and to increase their capacity to provide appropriate support, to ensure the management of the child's experiences within an education environment;

> *"they might have training on trauma, some psychology lesson, but not the real day to day, how can you deal with this."* (Mary, line 157)

The general consensus was that if school staff had a better understanding of how to manage LAC pupils experiences, were trauma informed and followed advice given by VSATs, it would improve their response to LAC pupils;

> *"So different strategies and approaches in schools erm yeah, they are, they do make an incredible difference. And I think that's something that needs to be looked into more."* (Sally, line 93)

Naima acknowledged that the difficulties are sometimes due to the schools being unprepared, or not trained, to deal with the level of support a LAC pupil sometimes needs;

> *"You know, sometimes they just they're just not equipped to deal with some of the sort of behaviours that the young person is demonstrating because they're not able to express how they're feeling or they have the all this anger or whatever emotions they are feeling, they're just not able to express that verbally"* (Naima, line 60)

Overall, their view was positive and suggested that an increased awareness of the impact of attachment and trauma would be beneficial, even in teacher training. Mary thought that perhaps EPs could support both the VS and schools with training and advice;

> *"Maybe EPs can be a bridge? between the system and teachers."* (Mary, line 164 - 166)

4.10 Psycho-social interpretation of VSAT interviews

At times, the VSATS, also seemed to be managing a high level of frustration with the processes, such as PEPs and many mentioned only working with children when there was a problem. The VSATs seemed to engage emotionally with these young people and demonstrated empathy and concern for their experiences. However, they also seemed to feel powerless to prevent the negative events in the pupils life. For example, placement breakdown or unexpected moves at a key point in their life can be extremely damaging for LAC pupils but VSATs have absolutely no control over these events.

References to the emotional impact of working with LAC pupils was made, with some participants finding it easier to acknowledge than others. Sally and Mary were able to share their feelings regarding the enormity of their role, whereas Naima seemed to touch on the subject briefly and quickly move on to something else. This seemed to be the engagement of 'defence mechanisms' (Curtis, 2015) potentially to repress emotions, such as anxiety, that might feel too overwhelming. Splitting and projection, were also employed, with other professionals within the system being polarised and identified as 'good' or 'bad'. I wondered whether these behaviours were reflective of the participants own unconscious feelings, such as their anxiety about adequately meeting LAC pupils needs (Pellegrini, 2010), or a projection of their own frustrations onto others.

4.11 Designated teachers (DTs)

4.11.1 Overview of designated teachers

Table 3

Overview of participants

Name	Type of school	Role (inc other responsibilities)	Number of LAC pupils (if known)	Time in role
Tanya	Primary school (451 pupils)	DSL, SENCO, Senior Leadership	Seven	Fifteen years
Cora	Secondary school (1300 pupils) – part of a large academy chain	DSL, SENCO, Senior Leadership	Approximately ten	Two or three years
Emma	Secondary school (719 pupils). Small local authority school.	DSL/SENCO	Approximately ten	At least five years
Stella	Large Junior school – 500+ pupils	DSL, Assistant Head	Seven	Two or three years – been in the school for ten plus years.

Four teachers were interviewed, two of whom worked in a secondary schools. One, a large school part of an academy chain and the other a smaller individual faith school. Of the primary DTs, one held the role in a four-form entry junior school and the other in a two-form entry primary school. Three of the teachers were also the SENCO for the school, two were Assistant Heads and all four were part of the leadership team. They had all been in their post as DT for at least two years, with one or two having worked at their school for at least five years. The number of LAC pupils in the school varied, with the minimum amount being five and the highest thirteen.

Figure 14 outlines an overview of the key themes. Again, extricating specific themes within the interviews was problematic, without other themes being interwoven. It was apparent that the DTs commitment to the pupils had an impact on how they perceived their role but was also heavily influenced by the school ethos.

Figure 14

Main themes from DT interviews
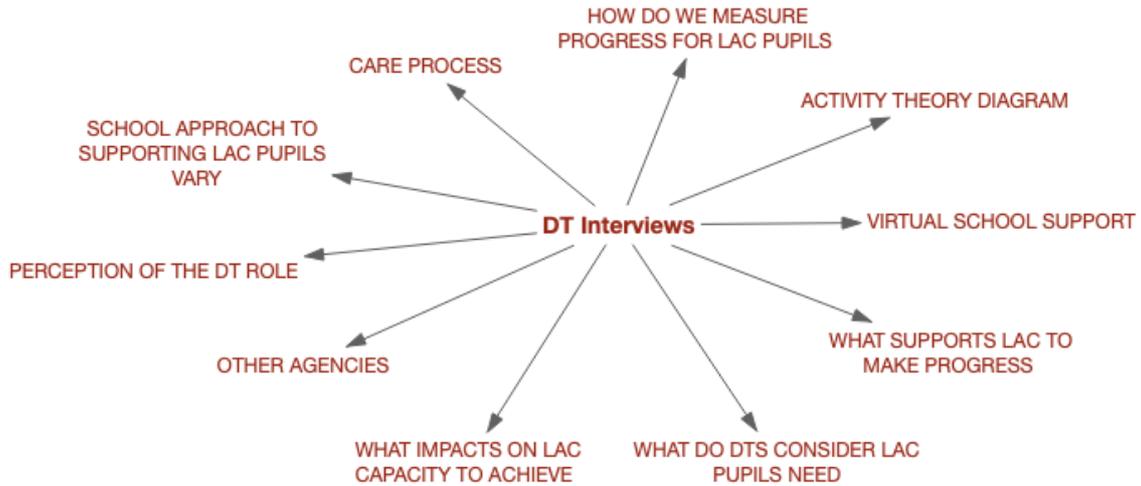
4.12 Theme 1 – Activity theory diagram interpretation

Figure 15

Compilation of DTs completed AT diagrams
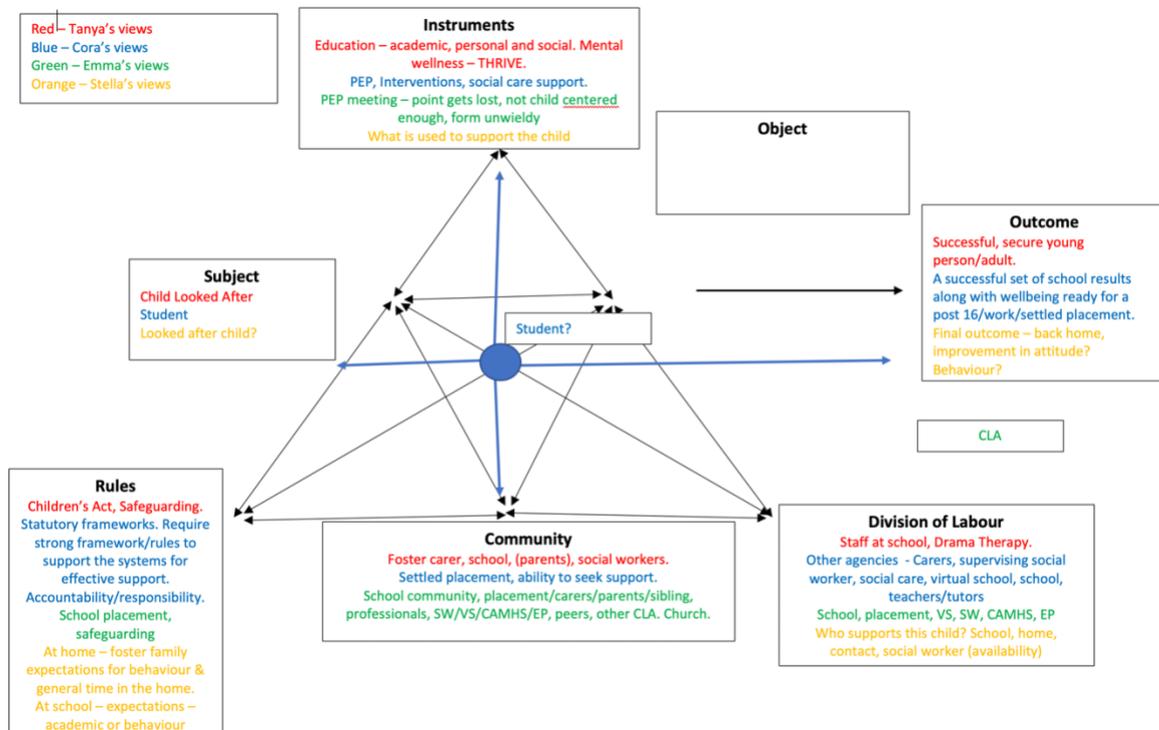
The DTs depiction of the activity diagram was not as varied as the VSATs and their organisation of the systems was much more coherent (Figure 15). I wondered whether this was reflective of their level of experience in their role or an awareness of the network as a whole.

4.12.1 Use of the Diagram throughout the interview

Cora in particular, referred to the AT diagram throughout the interview and often used it to structure her thoughts and responses in our discussion. She utilised it as a reference point to discuss the systems surrounding the looked after child and how they provide additional support for LAC pupils in her school:

> *"it erm, requires strong framework rules, to make everything, to support the strength of the system otherwise, the system would fall down, if virtual school aren't checking the PEPs, then the kids aren't getting the tutoring or the extra support that they need, and then it would all crumble."* (Cora, line 27)

Stella, however, seemed quite suspicious of the activity, continually asking me questions such as *"is that what you're looking for?"* (Stella, line 25). She responded to the process by trying to establish whether I required specific answers to the diagram. Her participation in the task was reflective of the interview itself, as it took some time before she began to talk openly about her experiences. She seemed concerned about my motives for using the diagram to start the interview and found it difficult to contribute without a formal interview structure.

Tanya completed the diagram quite quickly and did not discuss any of the information she had included. Initially, the process felt quite one dimensional and she seemed to view the task as separate to the interview. As the interview progressed, she responded to my contributions and some of her later comments related to conceptual elements she had included in the AT diagram. Emma's engagement in the whole process was very different, as was my response to her, as I found that I resonated with much of the content she brought to the discussion. She was extremely interested in the diagram and exceedingly forthcoming about her experiences. Emma seemed to be passionate about her role as a DT, seeming to value an opportunity to talk about her role.

The DTs included the PEP within the diagram, discussing it in relation to the system, evaluating it positively and critically. They also referred to EPs and considered their involvement to be significant enough to be included as part of the AT diagram.

4.12.2 DTs location of the LAC pupil in the AT diagram

Throughout the interviews I was aware that consideration was paid, by most of the DTs, to the view of the LAC pupil and the child's emotional experiences. Emma explained that she would have preferred to have placed the child in the middle of the diagram but did not feel that it would be appropriate;

> *"But then it feels like a horrible place to be, because it feels like it is very overwhelming." (Emma, line 23)*

Two of the DTs located the LAC pupil as the subject, whereas another, Stella, placed the pupil in the middle of diagram;

> *"I'd place the child in the middle because all of these things. The community they're within?" (Stella, line 13)*

Cora chose to place the student in the centre of the diagram;

> *"so, the looked after child will be in the middle, for me closer to the outcome, because we need the things that support the student," (Cora, line 33)*

Closely linking the pupil to the outcome and community, demonstrating that she felt that there should not be any separation between the two;

> *"But for me, it is the outcome of all of that together which is the most important." (Cora, line 33)*

adding later

> *"so support the systems. So it does put the person in the middle."(Cora, line 27)*

Emma added an extra element to the grid, referencing the lack of child centered focus for the system and its process;

> *"And I think also that a lot of time a lot of these conversations, things are done to, rather than done with the engagement of a child and that is really interesting." (Emma, line 14)*

4.12.3 Community

Under community, Tanya referred to 'foster carer, school, (parents), social workers' but also talked about her feeling that for many LAC pupils; *"their trust in professionals is pretty damned." (Tanya, line 55)*

Cora referred to *"settled placement, ability to seek support"* and further clarified the importance she places on community because;

> *"they need a settled placement and they need to be able to take their place in there. There are a number of people involved." (Cora, line 33)*

Cora also clarified that she feels that community and division of labour are closely linked because of the responsibility that the adults have for a looked after child;

> *"So of course, for the child's social care is quite often their next of kin equivalent isn't it."(DT 2, line 25)*

Emma outlined her depiction of community;

> *"I see community as being all the people working around the child etc. within the school community," (DT 3, line 8)*

She then defined exactly who, adding the following: school community, placement/carers/parents/sibling, professionals, SW/VS/CAMHS/EP, peers, other CLA, and the church.

4.12.4 Division of labour

Overall the responses from the DTs were more cohesive and consisted of an overall consensus. Their contributions included varying levels of analysis of their diagram but was also closely linked to Community. Cora's depiction of this category was very much related to a 'who does what' and separating responsibility for different elements of the LAC pupil's life into sections,

> *"virtual school then govern what we can do, so I could put recommendations through but if the virtual school don't okay, it, then it's a different route that it has to be gone down. And then obviously, it's the teachers, that are putting things or tutors putting things in place." (Cora, line 25)*

In the diagram, she referred to *'other agencies – carers, supervising social worker, social care, virtual school, school, teachers/tutors'*. Demonstrating that she feels that there is a clear division of labour, of which school is purely one part, not the whole. Emma's depiction highlighted a range of organisations or professionals, explaining that the experience varies depending on the people involved;

> *"And I think that I mean, again, it varies between what social workers it is, what Virtual School it is, what CAMHS person it is, what EP it is," (Emma, line 14)*

However, her view is that on the whole, the school take a substantially higher level of the responsibility for LAC children;

> *"I think I sometimes feel like we take the load, really take the load. And I think financially as well as other things." (Emma, line 100)*

Tanya referred to *'staff at school, Drama Therapy'* despite having previously referred to a range of professionals in community, she only focused on division of labour in relation to school support. I wondered whether her response was an unconscious echo of Emma's belief that the school retains the most responsibility.

Stella's reference to division of labour was more inclusive of other agencies and was entitled *"who supports this child? School, home, contact, social worker (availability)"*. Neither Tanya nor Stella added any additional comments to their diagram for this section, perhaps feeling that their contribution was self-explanatory.

Overall, the DTs inclusion of a wider range of professionals within the diagram could be reflective of their role within the school. Either, it was reflective of their working practice, or it demonstrated a desire to secure increased involvement from others.

4.12.5 Rules

The interpretation of rules was varied, both in terms of the meaning applied to the term and who participants considered the rules applied to. Emma's depiction focused on rules for the *"school placement"* and *"safeguarding"* as the *"rules for the professionals working with the child,"* (Emma, line 12). Cora emphasised rules being a strength for the system to support LAC pupils within education and as a protective factor for the pupils;

> *"So that's a strength on the sort of rules and community side because that means the looked after child has got virtual school and the social worker wanting the situation supported as well. So, we've got backup. I think that you know, through your rules there (referring to the Activity Theory diagram) they've got the backup, which is a real advantage and a strength as well." (Cora, Pos. 132)*

She perceived that it consisted of the *'statutory frameworks'* and that we '*require strong framework/rules to support the systems for effective support'*. With rules including, *"accountability/responsibility"* demonstrating a view of a whole system. Stella's interpretation was more literal, signifying the rules that apply to the child in school and in placement. Her focus was reinforcing expectations of the child, rather than rules for the professionals or the system. Tanya, on the other hand, seemed to focus on the legal element of rules, including the *'Children's Act'* and *'Safeguarding'*, placing emphasis on the rules governing the adults' behaviour.

4.12.6 Instruments

Tanya focused on the following; *'education – academic, personal and social, mental wellness – THRIVE'*. On reflection, although the content is minimal, her conceptual depiction of instruments was thought-provoking. Rather than including these topics as goals, she depicted education and mental wellness as instruments to support the child's development. Emma's response was practical, focusing on a particular tool, the *'PEP meeting'* and critiquing its contribution to the system. *"point gets lost, not child centered enough, form unwieldy'*. She expressed her dislike of the PEP form and feeling that the PEP meeting has a tendency to be an *'unwieldy'* form completing process;

> *"I feel like there's a whole load of professionals that you know, using acronyms, talking about things sometimes really kind of telling a child off for what? And actually, it's just really not what it's supposed to be." (Emma, line 15)*

She also felt that format for the pupil's contribution to the PEP was counterproductive;

> *"there is a space on pep forms for the young person's feelings, hopes. But the questions are quite specific. So, it's very hard to just have a conversation and make sure you touch everything." (Emma, line 21)*

Cora also referred to practical instruments, such as the *'PEP'*, *'interventions'*, and *'social care support'* and in her discussion she talked negatively about the process. She suggested focusing on supporting the child to reach their outcome rather than;

> *"sitting at a pep and saying what's your favourite subject, do you know who to go to"*
> *(Cora, line 163)*

Stella referred much to *"what is used to support the child"*, which can be open to interpretation, explaining that she considers the PEP process to be an opportunity to develop a relationship with the pupil.

4.12.7 Outcome

The outcomes were generally child focused, other than Tanya's, which could be considered an outcome for the system – *"successful, secure young person/adult"*. Stella identified a process orientated conclusion *"final outcome – back home"* as well as within child references to *"improvement in attitude?"* and *"behaviour"*.

Cora's focus in the diagram was on LAC pupils achieving a *"successful set of school results along with wellbeing ready for a post 16/work/settled placement"* but in the discussion Cora clearly had much broader aspirations for the pupils in her care;

> *"And then understanding themselves. If you want it to be long term like when they're 25 they can hold down a job and things like that. They have to understand that it wasn't them. This is how they've managed it; it is unfair." (Cora, line 193)*

She expanded on this comment by developing her view of the schools' role in the process of enabling children to reach that outcome;

> *" I guess that's what we're looking at doing and the outcome is an undoing the gaps in the knowledge, the emotional instability, the way that they deal with situations, their ability to communicate, their voice in a in a way that like you said is meaningful." (Cora, line 163)*

4.12.8 Contradictions in the DTs depiction of the system

An interesting contradiction materialised as Cora explained that she did not consider the school environment the best place to provide emotional support for LAC pupils, despite having previously suggested the school had a role in supporting pupils with their 'emotional instability'. I wondered whether this reflected an internal conflict for Cora, an unconscious belief that her school system could not adequately meet the needs of LAC pupils or a reflection of restrictions on her time. Alternatively, it could have been the projection of an unconscious wish for the system to take responsibility for the child's emotions enabling the

school to focus on academic progress. In my reflections, I wondered whether it was indicative of the school structures or her own personal view.

4.13 Theme 2 - Role of the designated teacher

Figure 16

Main themes - What is the role of the DT
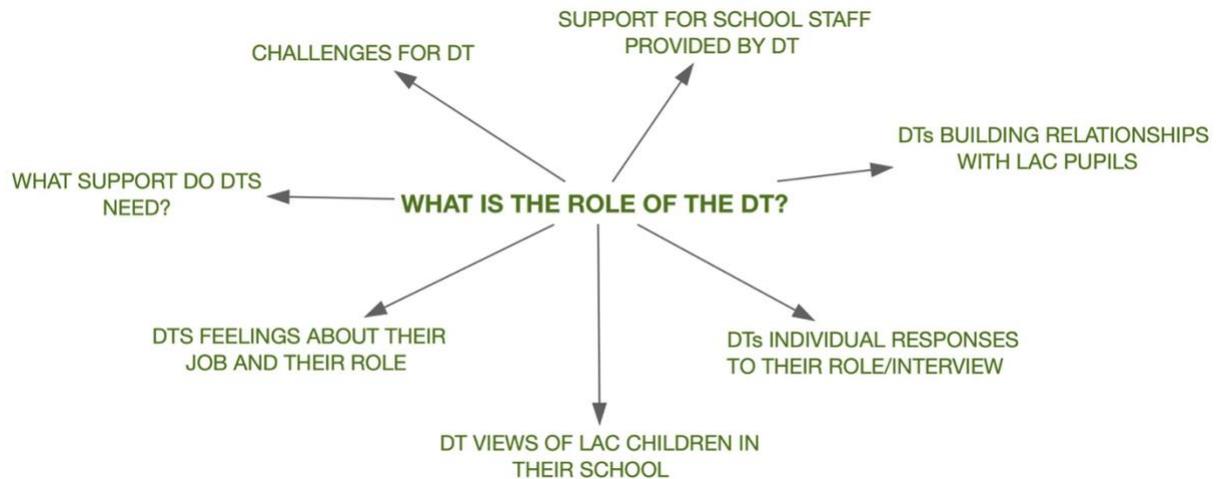
4.13.1 Challenges to the role

The DTs view of their role and what it included was mentioned throughout the interviews, in relation to other agencies, the pupils, the staff and foster carers. Three main themes emerged: their frustration with communication from children services, feeling that their views were not taken seriously and their own role in disseminating information to staff. Emma's experience was;

> "you spend your life chasing people for information." (Emma, line 35)

In this instance she was referring to changes to a child's placement which had not been communicated to the school. Tanya also discussed discovering from a child that he was being removed from his parents and was only able to make contact with the social worker five days later;

> *"But to find out that a kid's going into foster care through a kid bursting into tears is not okay." (Tanya, line 47)*

Although Tanya expressed her annoyance and frustration at the lack of communication, neither she nor Emma were negative about social services. Their concerns related to being aware of changes, so that they could effectively support the children. Emma expressed frustration at her belief that schools often 'hold' a larger share in the responsibility for the 'corporate parent' role, particularly for children who needed a high level of support. She referred to a PEP meeting, where it was agreed a child needed additional provision yet no additional funding was available provide it for him;

> *"but I feel like as a school, we go with the basis of well, we have to, because we can see that that child needs that. So, we have to, whereas I think that in some schools, there is a sense of well, the funding is not here and therefore we can't." (Emma, line 100)*

She explained that some schools would refuse but it was not a consideration for her school, because the needs of the child were of paramount importance to them.

4.13.2 Training staff

Trauma Informed Schools training and its positive impact on staff, was mentioned by most of the DTs. Most had attended the training and cascaded the training to staff, themselves or through another agency. It was apparent that the training was considered to have immense benefits, positively influencing staff involvement with, and understanding of LAC pupils, experiences and needs. However, Tanya considered that theoretical training was not sufficient for her staff to enable them to be able to properly support LAC pupils;

> *"It needs to be better training, in terms of not just the 'there, there, there' and empathy and trying to do that, but also how to defuse and when the shit hits the fan, actually deal with that. To keep you safe, without rejecting them and sending them home." (Tanya, line 63)*

The DTs reaction to training seemed to be dependent on their experiences of pupils within their school, and their view about how best to manage when the child's behaviour becomes physically and emotionally challenging.

4.13.3 Challenges

Figure 17
Sub Themes - Challenges for the DTs

```
OTHER AGENCIES          TIME


          CHALLENGES FOR DT


SOCIAL CARE PROCESSES        WORKING WITH PARENTS OF
                                  LAC PUPILS
```
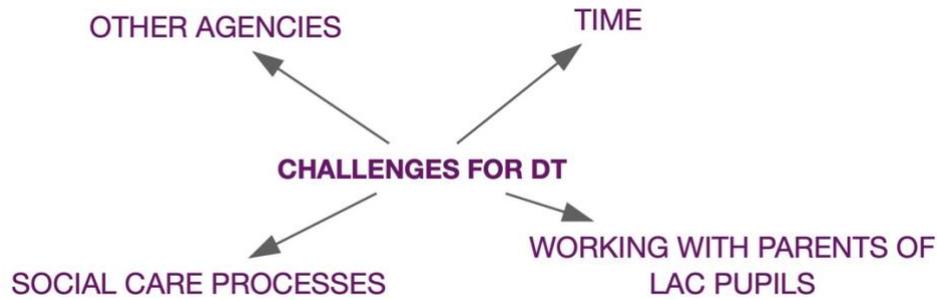
The main challenge for many of the DTs was how their role was perceived by others. Although referring to managing challenging behaviour of the pupils, Tanya focused on a SW not taking the school's experiences seriously, by not acknowledging the impact of emotionally containing a pupils anger and rage;

> *"and I was like, I've been trying to tell you. That's what we've been dealing with, the rage in the her, has been huge. We are covered in her bruises." (Tanya, line 59)*

Stella talked very specifically about not being included in PEP or LAC meetings because a new social worker was unaware that schools were invited to these meetings. She also questioned why DTs are not asked to contribute to court proceedings, particularly if they have had the most consistent relationship with a pupil;

> *'That's all done by the social worker, if I say to you that child had, maybe five different social workers. How does that person know them well enough. Who knows that child well enough? I do." (Stella, line 96)*

Emma referred again to her view that despite a range of other agencies being involved, other than the foster carer, it can often be the school that takes the majority of the load for a LAC pupil;

> *"all the day to day obviously is going to take place there and it can really feel like sometimes you're really left on your own a lot." (Emma, line 14).*

Cora's challenges related to practical difficulties with PPG funding, including ensuring that funding was not absorbed into the general school budget. She also talked about the impact of austerity and resulting financial restrictions, which made the retrospective funding process for tutoring problematic for the school.

4.13.4 Support for DTs

Figure 18

Subtheme - What support do DTs need?
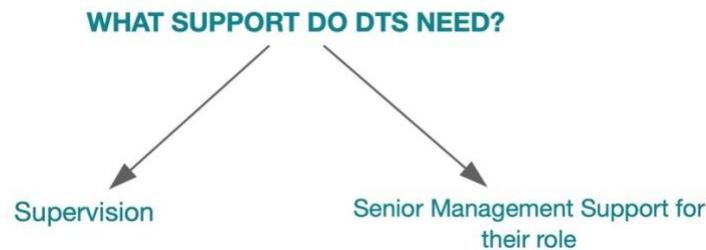
4.13.4.1 Supervision

This is an area that three of the DTs raised, both in terms of their access to supervision and how essential it is to their role. Stella explained that she is able to access supervision if she requires it, so she feels very well supported by senior staff and other designated leads in the school. She also believes that she has the capacity to switch off from her work emotionally, when she finishes work. However, she did reflect on the fact that she used the interview as an unofficial supervision session;

> *"I think I've vented all my frustrations at you." (Stella, line 201)*

Whereas Tanya and Emma, both acknowledged the importance of having supervision provided for them on a regular basis. Tanya spoke about trying to be aware of feelings that have been triggered and usually being able to notice but then when she finishes a supervision session being surprised about what she is 'carrying' emotionally;

> *"I think it's sort of not. It's semi-conscious, but you've suppressed it. You're so good at suppressing it and putting your work head on and taking your personal head off." (Tanya copy, line 96)*

Emma shared her experience, explaining that despite having a regular meeting with her line manager, at times it is insufficient to enable her to handle the emotional transference she can experience from pupils;

> *"and having a child who's been so awfully sexually abused and and just being in such an awful place and just thinking, Oh, my God and feeling like I'd tried to off load it and just obviously having not offloaded at all and feeling bloody awful," (Emma, line 75)*

4.13.5 Impact of school culture on the DT role

Some DTs felt that their school structures and senior management recognised the value of their work with LAC pupils;

> *"I'm very fortunate that the head teacher at this school sees my role as being important enough that I should be not based in class, so I can attend all meetings and provide the absolute maximum support for all the children on my caseload." (Stella, line 149)*

These schools tended to acknowledge that supporting LAC pupils could take up a significant amount of time and allocated protected time for the DTs;

> *"I think if it makes you feel as if people have got your back and there is an ish understanding if you might not actually have time, the amount of times you get to the end of the day and found you haven't done any work today" (Tanya, line 72)*

The discussion also raised questions about whether the time required to support LAC pupils was part of the DT role, or part of a usual school day;

> *"And I think sometimes, sometimes it's hard because actually you, your school has to buy into that. And you can't put it as part of your pupil premium funding because lots of places, well virtual school said its part of the school day and but actually, it isn't for every other child, and it is above and beyond what normally happens." (Emma, line 71)*

In comparison, Cora's school environment differed and she mentioned finding it challenging to balance the DT role and her other responsibilities. Funding seemed to be the major influence on the challenges she faced, making me wonder whether there were other difficulties she was not acknowledging. It was apparent that either she (or the school) considered the support she provides as a DT should be funded by the local authority not the school;

> *"But it does mean then also, that they're, they're not covering the equivalent of the designated teachers wages either …… you know, it would take this allocation of time that's coming out of, of being a teacher. So I'm a French teacher, I'm a SENCO, I've got my senior team duties and I'm a designated teacher. But somewhere out of there, you know, that's all coming out of one sort of pot" (Cora, line 53)*

These views bring into discussion the expectations of schools in relation to the designated teacher role, despite the guidance (DfE, 2009) unambiguously stating that it is the schools' responsibility.

4.14 Theme 3 – Approaches to supporting LAC pupils in school

Figure 19

Main theme - School approach to supporting LAC pupils vary
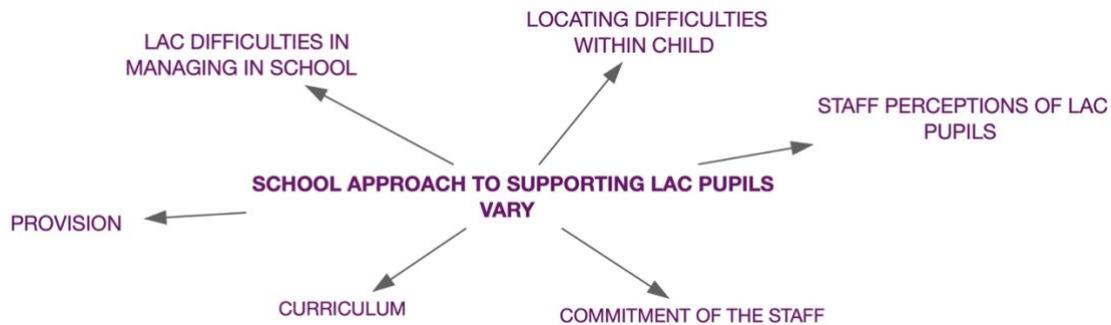
4.14.1 Staff perceptions of, and commitment to, LAC pupils

DTs views of the children were varied. Cora seemed to find the LAC pupils behaviour quite challenging, difficult to understand and focused on within child factors as a cause, rather than considering the impact of the environment or the school ethos;

> *"but that is so self-destructive. What do you think is now going to happen tomorrow ? and do other children do that. They don't do that. I haven't ever heard of that one before. (Cora, line 112)*

As the interview progressed and we explored the potential causes behind the child's behaviour and the impact of trauma, Cora's responses became more reflective. Despite this she remained adamant that the emotional needs of the children could not be managed within the school environment, due to issues such as safeguarding or the negative reaction of their peers;

> *"It's really outside of the school environment through the LAC review maybe or through social work, where they're really finding out what are the issues that are raising the anger or stuff?"(Cora, line 163)*

Cora explained that her experience was that LAC children in secondary did not want their peers to know their status, they wanted school to be a safe space where no one knew their care status. Other DTs approach was completely different but again their views seemed to be reflective of the school ethos;

> *"I think we're a good team. We're a very strong team. And as you're juggling the balls, if you drop the ball, somebody else will pick it up. So it's, you know, strong learning mentors. We've got thrive practitioners, we've got an academy chain that*

only works with schools that are, you know, in deprived areas that might traditionally not succeeded." (Tanya, line 67)

In my discussion with Tanya, the staff perception of, and commitment to LAC pupils was not an overt topic of discussion. The school approach seemed to be completely inclusive and LAC needs were not considered as separate, or an additional element;

> *"it's about quality first teaching, it's not about catch up. It's not about interventions. It's not about withdrawing and making feel different and stupid and special. It is about having incredibly good teaching going on every single day." (Tanya, line 146)*

Emma discussed whole school approaches to LAC pupils, how it is perceived by the pupils and how it demonstrates the school ethos;

> *"It's not okay for that to happen, so if they're sitting there and we're saying what you need this and then we say well you can't have it. What does that say about how worthwhile they are as well and how we view them and what we think, you know and what we're willing to put in. I just think it's all the extent of all of our messages." (Emma, line 111)*

The variation between Emma and Cora's approaches which was surprising as they are both DTs in secondary schools. Prior to interviewing Emma, I expected her views to be more closely aligned to Cora's yet they were completely distinct. I wondered whether this was a reflection of the size or location of the school, it's culture or their individual views. Some DTs seemed to have the capacity to reflect on the school ethos and consequently, its impact on the LAC pupils, however for others, it was more problematic and perhaps subconsciously avoided.

4.15 Theme 4 - Virtual school support

Figure 20

Main theme - Virtual school support
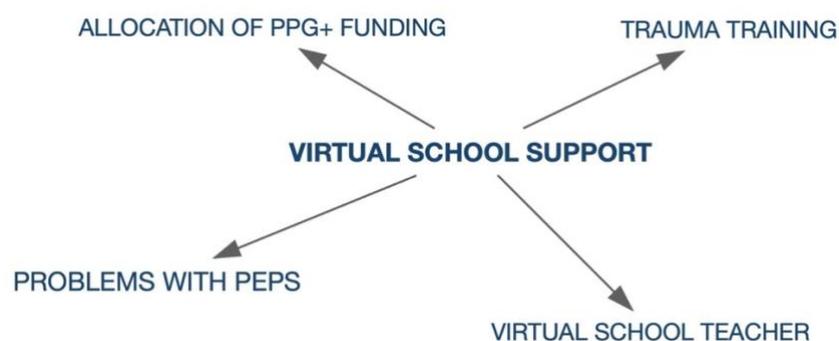
All four DTs referred to the improvement they have seen in the provision of support by the VS this year and have valued their input. Cora in particular felt that attendance by VSATs at PEP meetings meant that targets were set and funding agreed immediately. She had also received an individual coach through Achievement for All funding, which she had found beneficial;

> *"to discuss individual cases as well. It's nice to have, you know, someone to bounce ideas about. Just to get, well it's an additional level of support that was really beneficial." (Cora, line 55)*

Cora was very complimentary, focusing on the improvement in PEPs, better links between school, social care and the VS, ensuring that the child is receiving the support they require. However, she suggested that perhaps the VS could provide tutoring, mentors and counselling for pupils at a venue in the centre of town, rather than at school, because she felt that the pupils would be more likely to access this kind of provision. Tanya was also extremely positive about the individual staff at the VS, praising their support for herself and the individual children. Her main focus, however, was her intense dislike of the PEPs;

> *"I hate the PEPs, loathe and detest the whole, I don't mind meeting with people and talking it through. It's got to the point where you're so formulaic with that PEP that any conversation about the actual child starts to feel bit alien." (Tanya, line 134)*

She also talked about the allocation of PPG and that due to the high levels of pupils who are entitled to PPG, the schools combined the funding and devised a different whole school approach for pupils. Stella mentioned training funded by the VS and feedback on PEPs she has completed, both of which she considers has impacted on her own development as a professional. In particular, she concentrated on positive feedback she has received regarding her support of a pupil;

> *"What a great job we're doing for the lac child at our school and the support we're providing. And as a result, his academic attainment is improving" (Stella, line 238)*

However, she found it frustrating that the VS is only focused on education and does not have any input into the child's care. Emma works with a range of VS and explaining that their involvement and the funding varies depending on the local authority.

> *"So, depending on the virtual school that you're working with, there can be lots of advice. There can be lots of guidance. There isn't always a lot of actual action." (Emma, line 14)*

4.16 Theme 4 – LAC pupils and academic achievement

Figure 21

Main theme - LAC pupils and academic achievement
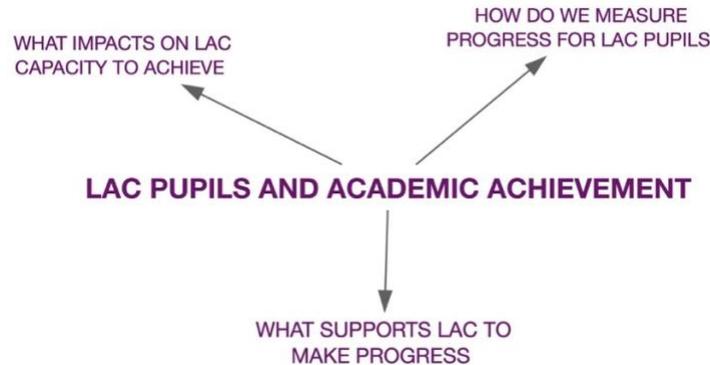
4.16.1 The factors which influence LAC capacity to achieve?

Figure 22

Subtheme -The factors which influence LAC capacity to achieve
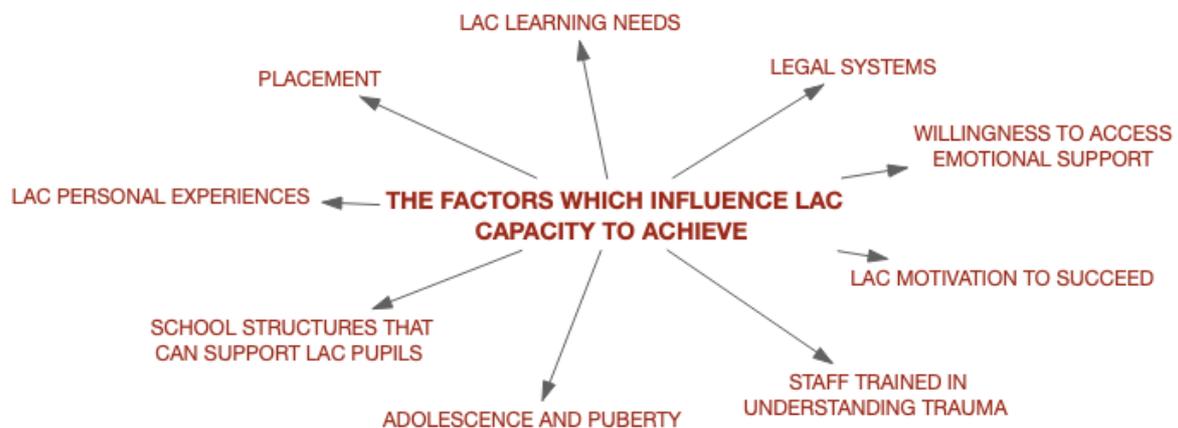
Emotional support for LAC pupils was the area raised the most in this theme, demonstrating that although we tend to focus on academic progress, actually the DTs considered their LAC pupils required emotional support. They included interventions such as; life story work, access to an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), support with self-regulation,

access to counsellors and therapists. Stella felt that this support was essential for all of her LAC pupils;

> "It's about giving them the understanding and sort of working backwards, so they can understand what's happened, what processes, what's they've gone through to the point they're at now." (Stella, line 128)

However, Cora also thought that as the pupils reached secondary age, psychoeducation about how trauma impacts brain development could be useful to the students;

> "to say look basically, it's likely as a result of the conditions you were living amongst. This is likely to be what, how your brains developed. It's about giving them that understanding." (Cora, line 180)

Stella, also thought this would beneficial for her students to help them understand their own behaviour;

> "other children, if they get angry, they can count 10, you can't, and this is why this is probably why." (Stella, line 186)

Tanya also talked about staff having an understanding of how everyday simple experiences could trigger LAC pupils emotions without adults or the child knowing why;

> "But you never know what smell, sound, sight, anything is gonna trigger." (Tanya, line 116)

Participants also mentioned the emotional availability of trusted adults in the child's network and ensuring;

> "that they can talk about that in a safe space as much as they want and as little as they want and that's really important." (Emma, line 40)

Emma also felt that the amount of time the children had been in care impacted on their ability to deal with the curriculum, because it reflected stability in their life;

> "she's been a child looked after since she was little, he went into care in year 10. So that's really different." (Emma, line 50)

4.16.2 What do LAC pupils need to make progress?

Figure 23

Subtheme - What do DTs consider LAC pupils need?

CONTAINMENT

SPACE TO TALK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES

WHAT DO DTs CONSIDER LAC PUPILS NEED

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR LAC

BETTER ACCESS TO EPs
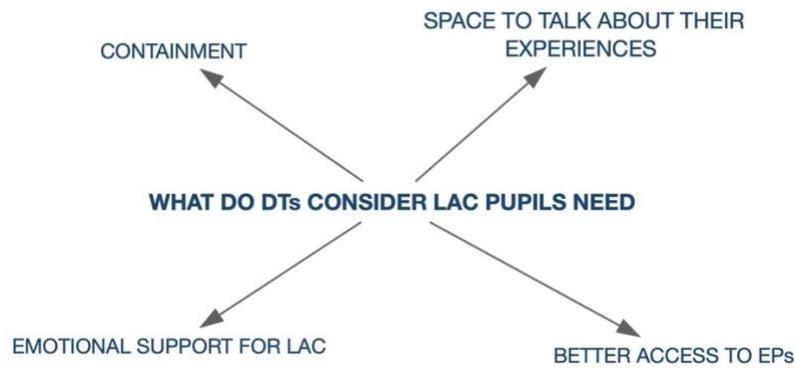
4.16.3 Emotional support

When Emma spoke about her role and her experiences, she explained that she considers providing an emotional space for LAC pupils to be a crucial element of her role;

> *"And I do believe that. I think that building a relationship with that young person so that they have got an emotionally available adults and a consistent emotionally available adult." (Emma, line 44)*

Tanya considered her role should be focused on supporting staff emotionally, through conversations or resources, to deal with difficult emotions being expressed by the children. Her belief was that staff, but particularly herself as the DT, needed to provide a safe and containing space and to be a trusted adult for the child to speak to. This particularly applied if the school had supported the child through the child protection process;

> *"And I think part of being a DT is not just that you have a connection with those kids, but you absolutely nailed it on the head. You know their story far more than any other member of staff." (Tanya, line 33)*

Tanya also referred to the importance of school containing children's emotions when they become challenging. Sometimes containment involved having an awareness of the potential impact of the child's behaviour on their placement, not just keeping them safe within the school environment;

> *"that was the other big fear we have typically for her, is if we sent her home too many times. It would jeopardise that placement." (Tanya, line 65)*

Another theme was the importance of adults creating *'consistency'* and *'developing relationships'* with the pupils;

> *"We've got one young man who has been looked after for four years, and he has had one consistent social worker. And I think that's made a big difference. I don't think she's great. But the fact that she's been consistent has been really important for him." (Tanya, line 41)*

Although Stella did not refer to containment directly, she emphasised the importance of developing relationships with the children and providing a space;

> *"At the same time I try to build that relationship with my LAC children. And I always say to them, they can come to my door and come have a chat, anytime." (Stella, line 134)*

Remarkably, considering the topic, throughout all four interviews there were very few references to exclusions or negative references to challenging behaviour. Only Tanya and Cora referred to exclusions, referring to a pupil who was at risk of permanent exclusion and a another who received a fixed term exclusion (FTE). This is quite a distinct comparison to the VSATs interviews and generally reflected the ethos of the DTs schools. Tanya's reference to exclusion, was in relation to a FTE being used as an absolute last resort. However, for Cora, the discussion focused on her determination to prevent LAC pupils being excluded, despite the Academy's zero tolerance behaviour policy. Cora's experience was more indicative of the VSATs general experiences of schools and the exclusion of LAC pupils. Tanya's views about containment also referred to the whole school ethos, not purely herself or other trusted adults;

> *"These children need a primary school nurturing environment." (Tanya, line 158)*

She continued in this vein, suggesting that secondary schools need to review and adapt their practice to include more nurturing processes. Emma also referenced developing specialised nurture provision in secondary schools, but as a specific alternative provision for those LAC children who are finding the mainstream routines challenging;

> *"we'll do some literacy, but it's based on a project. You know like primary school. We're in the same place. It's safe. It's nice. There's some comfy chairs over there. It looks nice. There are less children in here." (Emma, line 90)*

Although Stella, did not refer to containment, she acknowledged the impact of a child's emotions on their whole being;

> *"if a child's not happy about something at home it'll probably impact on their emotions and behaviour at school." (Stella, line 31)*

4.16.4 DTs views about LAC academic progress

Cora felt that the children in her school did not make progress but she attributed this to areas other than their cognitive capacity;

"So what what I mean by that is sometimes they don't make expected progress but it's not always because of their lack of ability to learn and accessing information, it's to do with all the other stuff around it, like their emotional well-being, their self-esteem, they're wanting to belong, and their ability to follow rules and, and regulations. And but definitely they could have gaps, gaps in their learning, which then affects it." *(Cora, line 71)*

Other DTs had the opposite view and considered that all or most of the LAC children in their schools were making expected or above expected progress;

"they're all bar one, who was in year one last year. Were at expected or above, of our CLA's." *(Tanya, line 76)*

"and he's doing brilliant academically. Actually, he's not a child that I expect to underachieve at GCSE unless as he gets older he has emotional issues." *(Stella, line 66)*

However, Emma reinforced the views of the VSATs that academic progress is often dependent on the circumstances of the individual children, rather than the child's capacity;

"I've got two children looked after, one of them is making really good progress, she made the best progress out. I think she was in the top five, for progress made in year 10, and the other one, we have just withdrawn from all the GCSE's, he cannot function at all at the moment." *(Emma, line 50)*

4.16.5 Educational psychologists

Within the interviews there were various discussions about the involvement of EPs. Some focused on the EP providing individual assessments for pupils, but for others EP involvement related to providing a range of services;

"it would seem really sensible for the virtual school to have a contract with the educational psychology team where there is some form of supervision that people can sign up to. and it could be virtual schoolteachers, it could be DTs," *(Emma, line 83)*

On the whole, the DTs felt that it would be helpful if LAC pupils could be prioritised by the EP service or if the virtual school could fund additional support for LAC pupils. However, Stella also suggested that EPs could provide emotional support to LAC pupils.

4.17 Psycho-social interpretation of DT interviews

During the interviews with DTs remaining vigilant to my own transference and countertransference, as well as that of the participants, was essential. Having been previously

employed as a DT, I was aware of my potential subjectivity and positive bias toward DTs when entering the interviews. Tchelebi (2018, pp.199) suggests that as a researcher, developing an awareness of research subjects "internalised representations" provides information about their "psychic reality". Whether discussed overtly or not, we potentially had a shared understanding of their role and the demands. Therefore, I was much more conscious of my own behaviour, trying to ensure that I did not assume too much or project my own views or experiences onto the participants.

The DTs tended to acknowledge the emotional impact of working with LAC pupils and seemed to make appropriate use of supervision. However, Stella's comment that she had used the interview as an opportunity to vent her frustrations about other agencies, demonstrated that her suggestion that she could leave work behind emotionally could be a defence mechanism. Clearly, from the discussions there is evidence of transference and unconscious absorption of LAC pupils distressing emotions. There was also evidence of contradictions in the DTs depiction of their environment, as evidenced by Cora's conflicting discussion regarding providing emotional support to LAC pupils. Frosh & Baraitser (2008, pp.13) postulate that the research process can influence the subject and their 'knowledge', and this was clearly apparent from the changes in Cora's views of LAC pupils during the interview.

4.18 Researcher reflections on both sets of interviews

The application of psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theory provided an additional layer of analysis and reflection on the influence of unconscious emotions on the research data. It also influenced how I, as the researcher, responded to the participants in the interviews. I tried to have an awareness of the psycho-analytical concepts described earlier, to hold in mind these concepts and to have an awareness of the absence of content in the interviews, as well as the areas discussed. Developing an awareness of myself and my own responses during the research process was essential, particularly being aware of the potential to become a 'defended researcher', in response to my own anxiety about completing the research as deadlines increased (Thomas, 2018). At times, I was particularly aware of high levels of anxiety within the interviews and reflection support to me explore whether this was transference and countertransference or my own emotional state becoming present in the interviews. As highlighted earlier, during the data analysis process, I needed to be conscious

of my own bias and subjectivity, to reflect on whether my interpretations were reflective of my own experiences or those of the participant.

Prior to beginning the interviews, I was mindful, from my own experiences, that discussing work with LAC pupils can be emotive but I was unsure how much the participants would connect with the emotional element of the interview. During the first interview, I was quite surprised at how quickly the participant connected with her emotional responses to the pupils and realised how important it was to provide a 'containing' space for the participants, where they felt safe to express difficult or uncomfortable feelings. With the VSATs, it was easier for me to manage this process physically, however with DTs I was stepping into their environment and it was more difficult to ensure the containing space was present in terms of physical space. Consequently, the emphasis on creating a 'holding' space through my own presence in these circumstances was vital, reinforcing the need to focus my attention much more on their experiences and emotional responses. It was sometimes difficult but when I was able to be fully present and hear the participants, they seemed to respond by sharing their experiences in more depth (Ruch, 2013).

Although, many of the participants seemed uncomfortable initially with the psycho-social structure, the majority responded positively to an opportunity to openly discuss their experiences. Those participants who were used to a supervisory relationship seemed to find the interview process easier to access than those participants who had not, perhaps because they were used to reflecting on their practice. I was also aware that for some of the participants, openly discussing their experiences may have been challenging, potentially making them feel vulnerable. The post interview reflection process drew attention to my perception that participants tried to maintain a level of control in the interviews, where if they did connect with any uncomfortable feelings, they quickly moved onto another subject to try to retain this control. I construed that this was potentially a strategy for managing their own emotions about supporting LAC pupils, particularly for the VSATs who had a high caseload of pupils.

Although the focus was on the individuals contributing to the interviews, their connection to their role, created two distinct groups. There was evidence from the interviews of basic assumption behaviours, particularly in relation to social workers and foster carers. Although, participants acknowledged that social workers are individuals, with some fulfilling their role

more effectively than others, there was evidence of BAf (Basic Assumption fight) (Bion,1961) in the participants discussion, particularly in relation to frustration with the system. Offering my own internal responses as potential data about the underlying unconscious emotions emerging (Eloquin, 2016), I surmised that the uncomfortable emotions that surfaced in the interviews, particularly anxiety, were being displaced onto an 'other'. When 'splitting' occurs in a network, Rocco-Briggs (2008) suggests it is necessary to tackle the problem at the cause of it. However, reflecting on its occurrence, can provide information about the child's unconscious internal state, and the process of projection of their difficult emotions into the network (Sprince, 2000).

Chapter 5   Discussion

5.1   Chapter Overview

In this chapter I aim to review the findings in relation to my initial research question. It will consider how the DT and VSATs' experiences corroborate existing literature and relate to psychology theory. I will also include reflection on the process of adopting a psycho-social methodology and discuss the contribution of Activity Theory to conceptualising and understanding the participants' depiction of the system surrounding LAC pupils. Implications for professional practice will be considered, particularly in relation to the role of educational psychologists. The limitations of this study will be deliberated and suggestions for further research identified.

5.2   Discussion of findings

The aim of this research was to explore VSATs and DTs experiences of supporting LAC pupils in education. I consider that overall the findings demonstrate the challenges in role for both DTs and VSATs, both in terms of working with the individual children and the network supporting them. It also provides insight into their perspectives regarding the academic progress of pupils and the reasons for their perceived underachievement. Furthermore, it highlights the numerous obstacles that transpire, when supporting LAC pupils, which the professionals I interviewed worked extremely hard to counteract.

The application of Thematic Analysis identified core themes from both sets of participants, supported by a number of supplementary themes, some of which were pervasive throughout the interviews and others specific to the role of the participant. They have been summarised into overarching themes for the discussion, as the breadth and depth of information gained from this research is too substantive to be covered in detail in this discussion. Table 4 provides an overview of how I have summarised the findings from both sets of interviews to develop these substantive themes in answer to the research question.

Table 4

Overarching Themes from the research findings

Main Theme	Sub themes
Emotional labour of supporting LAC pupils	Supervision
	Containment
	Defence mechanisms
Systemic issues within the network	PEPs
	Corporate parent role
	Experiences specific to role
Participants perspective on LAC achievement	Early intervention is key
	Importance of school environment
	Emotional support is a necessity
	Perceiving LAC pupils as individuals
	Pupil voice

5.3 'Emotional labour' of supporting LAC pupils

A pertinent theme from the research was the impact of the content of the young people's cases on the participants. Evidently, participants found the children's experiences emotionally disturbing and onerous to process. This was particularly apparent for the DTs who had developed a relationship with LAC pupils, where the pupils had felt able to share their experiences openly. The VSATs, such as Mary, shared their experiences of feeling wholly unprepared for the content of the cases and being shocked by the children's experiences. Participants questioned whether, prior to becoming a VSAT they should have experience as a SENCO although, as Mary articulated, "nothing would prepare you" (line 62).

Research exploring the relationship between staff and pupils, acknowledges the need for staff to be given opportunities to reflect on their practice and integrate psycho-analytical theories into their practice (Jackson, 2002; Eloquin, 2016; Ellis, 2018; Kennedy et al, 2019). Kennedy et al (2019) propose that the emotional experiences of teachers need to be more widely acknowledged, whilst Edwards (2016) argues that there is a dearth of research exploring education professionals' emotional experiences of working with LAC

pupils. Simmonds (2015, pp. 103) maintained that it is essential to "meet the needs of the professionals" to develop their capacity to support LAC pupils successfully. Colley & Cooper's (2017) recent book for trainee teachers has made some progress towards improving newly qualified teachers' awareness. However, despite this, Naima considered school staff to be ill equipped or unprepared to provide emotional support to LAC pupils. Consequently, increased opportunities for supervision or reflection on action (Schön, 1983) would enhance the capacity of the staff to recognise some of the unconscious processes that may be taking place within the relationships between staff and pupils. Furthermore, Hulusi & Maggs (2015, pp.2002) argue that it is essential teaching staff are supported and feel contained to be able to engage in their work effectively.

5.3.1   Importance of supervision

Due to the implementation of the Mental Health in Schools Act (DfE, 2018) an increase in training regarding pupil's mental health, including areas such as trauma and attachment has occurred. To supplement this there also needs to be additional focus on the emotional needs of staff, however, the emotional impact for adults working with LAC pupils is rarely acknowledged. LAC pupils are unlikely to have experienced 'good enough' parenting, and it is therefore probable that they have developed unhelpful strategies to manage their "unbearable, intolerable and unnamable feelings" (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015, pp.34). Often, these feelings will be projected onto the adults, their caregivers or, 'corporate parents' and without an opportunity to process their experience of 'transference' or 'countertransference', a negative interplay can develop between the adult and the child. (Kennedy & Laverick, 2019). This process can result in LAC pupils experiencing 'triple deprivation' (Emmanuel, 2006) and a reduction in adults capacity to meet the child's needs. Almost all the DTs felt that supervision offered an essential support mechanism for them to explore their emotional responses to the children, to ensure they did not retain either the trauma the child had experienced, or their response to it. Thus, hopefully preventing the process of 'triple deprivation' occurring.

Participants experiences of supervision varied, with some engaging in individual case supervision, others debriefing with colleagues, one participant receiving psychological supervision and as indicated earlier, Stella did not consider that she required support. Therefore, although the participants labelled the support as supervision, the majority did

not receive clinical supervision. Within schools, there is an absence of clinical supervision or containment, reducing the opportunity for staff to process or reflect on their experiences with appropriately trained professionals (Ellis, 2018; Tucker, 2010). Working with children affected by complex trauma is challenging and emotive, even for professionals highly experienced in this area (Sprince, 2000; Robinson, Luyten & Midgley, 2017).

Hulusi & Maggs (2015) suggest that an understanding of psychodynamic theory can be beneficial for supporting education staff through the medium of work discussion or supervision groups. Developing an awareness of how children express their difficult emotions, including anxiety, can enable staff to provide a containing space for children to manage these emotions (Ellis, 2018). Furthermore, the literature acknowledged adults anxiety about LAC pupils could manifest in different forms. Simmonds (2015) research acknowledged professionals' anxiety about feeling conflicted between meeting the child's needs and their desire for a particular outcome. Whereas, Goodall (2014) referred to professionals' experiencing feelings of anxiety, in relation to their workload or the expectations of the DT role and Carroll et al (2018) drew attention to anxiety about the child being located within the network. Thus, the supervision process can enable professionals to develop their 'self-efficacy' (Turner & Gulliford, 2020) and learn from their experiences through reflection (Kennedy et al, 2018).

5.3.2 Containment

Containment was a concept referenced by the participants on many occasions, both directly or through the use of words such as: consistency, safe space and the child's relationship with adults (Stammers & Williams, 2019). Containment of the pupils' emotional difficulties was a key factor for DTs. However, they also linked containment to the management of their own emotions in relation to pupils and being unaware of its impact, until discussing the child with someone else. Containment provides an opportunity to acknowledge and handle the unconscious emotions driving behaviour, thus enabling reflection and effective practice (Ruch, 2007; Eloquin, 2016). Finch & Schaub (2014), also suggest containment can be effective in minimising the occurrence of projective identification.

5.3.3   Defended subject

Consistent with the literature (Carroll et al, 2018; Goodall, 2014; Simmonds, 2015) participants demonstrated a range of strategies as defences against their own emotional responses to the pupil's experiences. Although, professionals want to properly support LAC pupils, acknowledging and hearing their pain is difficult. Many of the participants talked about their horror at the treatment of these children by their parents, which made me reflect on our ability to acknowledge that within our society adults can subject children to the most horrific and inhumane treatment. Sprince (2000, pp.421) intimates that as a consequence, we can often participate in arguments as a distraction from "the terrible emotional pain of the children". Recognising and accepting this for ourselves is challenging, so ensuring we are able to acknowledge it for the children who have actually experienced the trauma can be even more problematic.

5.4   **Systemic issues within the network**

Findings regarding the analysis of the network around the child imply that a level of dysfunctionality and lack of coherence exists between the different organisations that constitute the system. Thus, raising questions about whether these systems reinforce this discord or encourage professionals to work together. Berridge (2006) advocates that an inadequate sociological perspective leads to imperfect explanations for LAC pupils' low level of achievement, but findings from my research suggest that developing a wider systemic perspective would be beneficial. LAC pupils are placed into a system which is dependent on the individuals and organisations working together effectively. The professionals conceptualised this system in a variety of formats, as demonstrated by their completion of the AT diagram. The majority positioned looked after children at the centre and accentuated the need for multi-agency approaches. Yet when discussing problems or difficulties with the system, the foci was the individuals or organisations within it: the school, the social workers or foster carers. Emma, in particular, located the problem in a specific area, the care system, whereas Sally considered that the system as a whole often fails LAC children. Overall, minimal attention was given to exploring how these processes could be improved or changed, suggesting that despite their frustration and negative feelings, the DTs and VSATs had a sense of helplessness which inhibited their capacity to reflect on or analyse the sytem. However, Goodall (2014, pp.84), refers to

"Rotter's (1966) theory of 'locus of control", suggesting that DTs may perceive themselves as lacking in power within the system.

The participants negative experiences of the systems surrounding LAC pupils were reminiscent of the literature, demonstrating that multi-agency working tends to lack coherence and collaboration. Generally, as a result of the adults within the system not communicating effectively with each other, a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, or a multitude of agencies working with the same child. Unfortunately, despite an acknowledgement that LAC pupils benefit from learning to develop positive attachments to adults (Farnfield & homes, 2014; Sebba et al, 2015), as indicated by Rivers (2018) diagram, demonstrating how many adults could be working with one child. Woollam (2010) maintained that LAC pupils benefitted from feeling professionals or staff knew their experiences, reducing the need for them to repeat their story. Simmonds (2015) supports this view, suggesting that trying to develop a relationship with a multitude of professionals can be overwhelming for LAC pupils, particularly if they already have difficulties trusting adults and need to feel contained. Consequently, the process can sometimes result in their voice not being heard, pupils disengaging from support or not making progress academically (Berridge et al, 2015).

Furthermore, Sprince (2000, pp.417) advises that the development of a 'cycle of blame' has a tendency to arise in the network around LAC pupils, a duplication of the biological parents behaviour. Finch & Schaub (2014, pp.302) suggest that this process, the interaction between the individual and the organisational context, may be reflective of "wider organisational and societal defences against anxiety" or perceived threats. Rocco-Briggs (2008) also discusses the impact of a child's trauma on the network of professionals surrounding LAC pupils. She advises that transference, splitting and projection that can be introjected into the network by the child, mirroring their experiences prior to being in care. Recognising and analysing these processes can be a useful tool for professionals. affording a better understanding of the child's internal experiences (Sprince, 2000) and enabling the network to prevent the immobilisation of their reflective capacity (Finch & Schaub, 2014).

5.4.1 Corporate parent role

Discussions regarding the corporate parent role highlighted the confusion surrounding this title and the need for greater clarification, in terms of roles and responsibilities for local authority staff. A debate emerged regarding who has the 'trump' card (Sebba & Berridge, 2019), resulting in 'power struggles' rather than professionals working together, with confusion arising regarding who has the overall responsibility (SWs, DTs, VSATs, virtual school). Parker (2017) argues that the power held by the VS derives from legislation, the implementation of the PEP and its resultant allocation of roles to the social worker and designated teacher. However, the VSATs experiences tended to contradict this assertion, demonstrating their limited awareness of the role, with the majority considering the social worker to be the corporate parent.

The participants also expressed frustration with the processes outside of educational influence, such as short notice placement moves (Peake, 2011) or social workers moving children without discussing appropriate school in the new area, being significant (Sebba & Berridge, 2019; Ofsted, 2012). I noticed in the interviews that there is a potential for participants to become hijacked by processes, systems and locating problems in other professionals, possibly due to the inordinate level of demand on the system.

5.4.2 Experiences of individual roles

The participants within this study represented two specific organisations and despite mainly positive reflections about each one, there was a sense that they remained separate entities within education, with different perspectives and experiences of the pupils. Even within the research, authors have different perceptions and expectations of key people in the system, views that were not always reflected in the VSATs experiences. Parker (2017, pp.165) presented her understanding that "the virtual school has been enacted as a powerful driver for standards, action and change for LAC". Yet within my study, the VSATs considered themselves to have very little power in the process.

Other themes arose in relation to 'role'; including a perceived lack of understanding of the DT and VS role by social workers, with some lacking clarity about the boundaries between themselves and the social worker. Whilst other VSATs considered some DTs

demonstrated a lack of understanding of the expectations of their own role. Legislation and government guidance are much more prescriptive, but clearly further training is required for professionals.

5.4.2.1 Designated Teachers

Turner & Gulliford (2020) argue that the school ethos or culture impacts considerably on the teachers' approach, with DTs becoming isolated or a lone voice in a school. The role of the DT varied, dependent on their seniority or position within the school and their level of power and influence. Overall, the DTs seemed to be respected and those that participated had been in their schools for some time. The schools they represented tended to have good or outstanding Ofsted judgements and worked closely with the local authority and the educational psychology team.

The DTs had daily experience of working with LAC pupils and developed close relationships with the foster carers. However, some DTs indicated they were managing the child on a day to day basis with no information about what was happening at home. DTs allocated time to spend with LAC children on a weekly basis, not as therapeutic support specifically, but to develop a relationship as the child's trusted adult. Emma's opinion that consistent access to an emotionally available adult is sometimes more important than counselling or short-term emotional interventions, was echoed by the research (Robinson, Luyten & Midgley, 2017).

5.4.2.2 Virtual school

The VSATs frustration focused on the amount of time available to support pupils, reinforced by their feeling that they are only able to work with a child weekly, to develop a relationship and support the child, when there is a crisis. VSATs felt that due to the PEP process, they can become too focused on the administration of the PEP, quality assurance and monitoring the funding for LAC.

DTs reflections on the virtual school indicated there had been vast improvements in the service provided, the presence of the organisation and the attendance of VSATs at PEPs.

They considered the PEP process was more effective and the VS itself was perceived to be developing their presence and expanding provision to schools.

5.4.3 PEPs

An emphasis on PEPs tended to dominate some of the interviews, with two key themes arising; the process of initiation and lack of a child-centered focus. The process of initiating PEPs created a high level of frustration for VSATs, as currently, a social worker initiates a pep, a DT completes it and the VSAT monitors and quality assures the document, in order to be able to release the funds. The process can be effective but due to issues such as shortages of social workers and time constraints on DTs, there are multiple opportunities for it to fail. Anger and frustration can then arise aimed at individuals, rather than recognising that the process is ineffective or needs to be adapted. The PEP process highlighted conflicts regarding the role of the corporate parent, how it is viewed and implemented by different agencies, along with who has ultimate responsibility.

Research suggests that the primary focus of the meeting can often be viewed as the allocation or monitoring of funding and resources (Parker, 2017) and supports the DTs view, that systems or the PEP process do not adequate reflect the pupils view (Woollam, 2010; Parker, 2017). Literature suggests that this omission is being addressed by some virtual schools (Rivers, 2018) and the PEP has the capacity to become an effective joint working tool (Simmonds, 2015). Although, VSATs shared a sense that their role has a tendency to be dominated by the PEP process, Drew and Bannerjee's (2018) research suggest that this view is not entirely accurate. Rivers (2018, pp.158) advocated that virtual schools have an important role in training whole school staff on "issues affecting looked after children".

5.5 Participants perspective on LAC achievement

Berridge (2006) questions the accuracy and validity of assuming that national data is an accurate reflection of reality, arguing that it is inherently flawed, with significant errors and gaps (Jay & McGrath-Lone, 2019). The participants experiences reflected this picture, with examples where LAC pupils were achieving or exceeding expectations. The general view seemed to be that suggesting LAC pupils are significantly underachieving without exploring individual circumstances was not an accurate reflection of reality.

Some pupils need a significant amount of additional provision, others make progress and some pupils require very little support. Participants suggested that it is impossible to provide an overall picture and a child's ability to achieve was dependent on a range of factors: their experiences prior to be in care, their age when they came into care, the support they received from their foster carer, the school environment and their capacity to manage their emotional needs enough to engage with learning (Bibby 2011; Youell 2018; Rocco-Briggs, 2008). These factors need to be reflected in the analysis of their academic progress, with assessment of their achievement based on the progress they have made in relation to their individual baseline. Cora maintained, that children who have come into care before year six and have managed to achieve GCSE grades, will have made progress.

Berridge (2017) stated that some young people felt that school staff or social workers did not listen or show enough interest in the young person's education. Fancourt & Sebba (2018, pp.4) argue that "the educational potential of many looked after children is unfulfilled. One factor contributing to this seems to be that schools do not fully address their wider personal anxieties and insecurities". Yet, the literature demonstrates that young people identified school as their primary area of support for their educational progress. One school in my study demonstrated that the provision of smaller classes and child centered learning has resulted in all LAC pupils having either 'met' age related achievement or working at 'greater depth' in year six.

5.5.1   Early intervention

Participants working with pupils in secondary schools highlighted the need for emotional support to be put into place as early as possible (Peake, 2011). Their experience suggested problems tended to arise for pupils when they get to the end of year eight or beginning of year nine, when they feel a need to explore their experiences or are less able to manage their emotional responses to the trauma (Anderson-Warren & Kirk, 2011). As a specialist EP working with virtual schools, Peake's (2011) research demonstrated that eighty percent of their referrals requesting support were for pupils aged fourteen to fifteen. Berridge (2006) indicates that there is a correlation between the earlier a child has experienced trauma and the likelihood they will experience difficulties in adolescence. Even those children who 'manage' can become more vulnerable and

possibly challenging, with the potential to destabilise their education and their care, thus requiring a higher level of intervention and support at certain times in their life (Peake, 2011). However, it is essential to acknowledge that adolescence is a critical period of change and development for all children; psychologically, socially and biologically. In particular, changes in the brain such as synaptic pruning, can affect their executive functioning and social interaction, resulting in increased risk taking behaviours and impulsivity. (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Blakemore, 2018). Additionally, adolescence, particularly the age of fourteen, is considered a vulnerable period for the development of mental health difficulties, such as anxiety and depression (Satchwell-Hirst, 2017)

5.5.2   Emotional support is a priority

Although there are many children who are making progress academically there was an agreed consensus from the interviews that emotional needs must be prioritised. Participants maintained that for children to be able to learn, they need assistance with processing their trauma. However, the government focus on GCSE results for LAC pupils as an indication of progress remains in position. Even though the interviews included focus on both academic and emotional support, nearly every single participant talked about the emotional experiences of supporting LAC. They related to individual cases and the challenge of supporting these children when they are clearly traumatised. Participants identified a range of existing interventions and approaches provided within school to support pupils emotionally, including counselling or therapy, ELSA and life story work. However, they also considered psychoeducation and other support that enabled them to develop an understanding of their own behaviour, such Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) would be beneficial. Currently, the majority of provision for emotional support is identified and organised through the PEP.

Cora argued that for a secondary school, providing additional support as an add on to the existing systems is not effective for LAC pupils. Whereas, Emma suggested that if the senior leadership have developed a school ethos which values support for LAC and allocates DT time to imbed the approach within the school day, in-school support can be very effective. However, she acknowledged that some pupils require specialist provision, particularly in secondary school. These conflicting views suggest that the school ethos or

senior managements' view of LAC pupils is extremely important, potentially, influencing a pupils' capacity to succeed in school.

5.5.3   The importance of the school environment or ethos

Research supports the assertion that the school structure or ethos, including the views of the senior management, influences both the emotional and academic progress of LAC pupils (Carroll et al, 2019). Fancourt & Sebba (2018) indicated in their research findings that the effectiveness of the application of their programmes was dependent on the level of senior management's commitment to the programme. Greig et al, (2008, pp.16) also highlight the importance of the learning environment being perceived by pupils as a "secure base". Within this study, the majority of the DTs seemed to be highly supported in their role by school management, apart from Cora, whose school ethos differed from the other participants. However, Cora's experience is supported by the literature, which does suggest that DTs are likely to have difficulties if the senior management team in the school are not recognising, understanding or acknowledging their role (Woollam, 2010). In my opinion, other than Cora, the participants experiences in this study, may have been reflective of the recruitment process. Either as a consequence of the VSATs only recommending DTs whose schools had a positive attitude towards LAC pupils, or the fact that these schools are more likely to be willing to engage with the research project.

DTs and VSATs emphasised the variability in school ethos mentioning a range of approaches from schools, those who support LAC whatever the cost. Whilst others tend to view pupils as a source of funding and consider them to be the responsibility of the local authority. Thus, demonstrating that some schools invest far more, whilst others rely purely on PPG and believe the DT role should be centrally funded. VSATs statement that some DTs do not even fulfill their statutory duty was supported by Ofsted (2012). Other professionals are highly committed, suggesting it is their duty not only as a teacher but also a citizen, whilst others consider LAC pupils emotional needs should be addressed by others.

5.5.4 Perceiving LAC pupils as individuals

The participants highlighted most LAC pupils wish to be regarded as individuals, despite regularly being viewed as a cohesive group. Their experiences are not homogenous and every single child's response to their early experiences are individual. Berridge (2017, pp.91) explained that children often "did not want reminders of their 'in need' or 'in care' status". Hare and Bullock (2006) acknowledge that LAC are in fact an 'administrative group, defined by law and have little in common other than the fact they are 'looked after'. They are individual children who have been taken into the care of the local authority due to neglect or abuse. Each child's circumstances are unique (Stammers & Williams, 2019) and conflicts arise if we fail to recognise LAC pupils as individuals. Consequently, if they are not provided with the support required, behaviour problems can occur. (Rocco-Briggs, 2008).

This study has been titled, "it depends on the individual" as this was the overarching theme or response from the participants, sometimes explicitly stated or implied through discussion. The child's legal status does not reflect their individual circumstances, their capacity for resilience or provide an indication of their innate cognitive capacity. All of these variables impact on their capacity to manage the transition to foster care, to engage with education or therapeutic support.

5.5.5 Pupil Voice

An important element of acknowledging the individuality of LAC pupils is the recognition of the need for an increase in pupil voice and person-centered approaches. These were common themes and participants regularly received feedback from pupils that professionals are continually asking for their views, without any resultant changes. In particular, this section in the PEPs can often be perceived as a bureaucratic necessity, however, some DTs demonstrated that they valued the opportunity to discuss the pupil's views with them. Ultimately, LAC pupils' contribution to the processes of the network is important and can have a positive influence on the pupils (Pert et al, 2014). Consequently, an increase in the inclusion and development of person-centred approaches was considered beneficial by the participants.

5.6   Reflections on theoretical approaches to the interviews

5.6.1   The contribution of a psycho-social methodology and epistemology

The aim of this study was to provide an opportunity for designated teachers and virtual school advisory teachers to share their experiences of supporting looked after children emotionally and academically. Adopting a psycho-social approach limited the possibility of participants' responses being guided by my own questions or pre-conceptions. Their willingness to contribute to this research, along with the development of a relationship between myself and the participant, was fundamental to the process. It enabled the creation of a space between us, where participants were able to openly and honestly articulate their positive and negative experiences.

Developing an understanding and awareness of my research participants incorporated a delicate balance between subjectivity and reflexivity, particularly because I had closer associations with the DTs. Croviani-Windland (2018, pp.42) deduces that reflexivity is essential in psycho-social research to ensure that we pay close attention "to how we affect and are affected by them" Psycho-social methodology encourages us to explore all factors relating to the interview process and emphasises the importance of acknowledging power dynamics between the researcher and participants. I was aware that there may have been power dynamics at play between myself and the participants, in terms of our roles; Assistant Head versus trainee EP, trainee EP versus newly appointed VSAT. Evidently an unconscious interplay took place, as the dynamics seemed to shift when knowledge of my previous role emerged through the interview process. This was particularly apparent with the DTs, who tended to become more open and engaged in the process as they developed an insight into the reasons for my interest in the topic. Initially, in some of the interviews, my perception was that the power dynamics between myself and the participant, acted as a barrier to the research process. With the participant's, and my own, defence mechanisms restricting the development of an open and transparent conversation at the start of the interview. However, as the interviews progressed, the process gradually evolved into a co-constructed discussion as the relationship between us strengthened (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

5.6.2 Activity Theory

Rivers' (2018) diagram, (Figure 24) pinpointed the considerable number of professionals potentially involved in a looked after pupil's life once they are taken into care. The AT diagram also provided a perspective on the participants views or experiences of other agencies, which also enabled them to access their unconscious views or feelings about other professionals. It was important I paid attention to my depiction of the network around the pupils to ensure I did not project my own views of the network onto the participants. Instead, I used their depiction of the AT diagram to visualise how they perceived the systems, where they placed the looked after child, and to explore agencies they included or excluded. The AT diagram also provided an opportunity to develop a sense of connectedness between myself and the participants, a shared experience and understanding of the research topic.

Figure 24

Key partners involved in the education of looked after young people (Rivers, 2018)
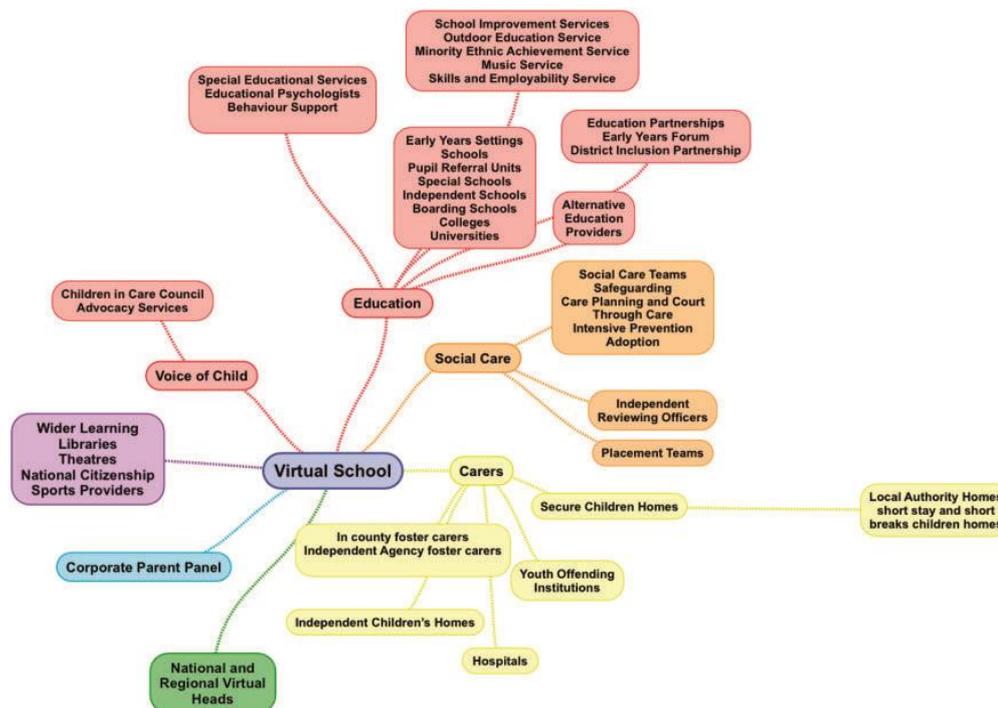
Its interpretation can be applied as a mechanism to identify current working practices and engage the participants with reflecting on more effective ways of working together (Leadbetter, 2008). The process also presented a picture of how LAC pupils can be perceived by adults, consciously and unconsciously. The participants perspective varied

considerably, with LAC pupils positioned at the centre of the network, as an outcome, subject and object.

The inclusion of the task may also have influenced the behaviour and participation of the interviewees, as Eva and Stella demonstrated hesitancy about completing the task at the beginning of the interview. Psycho-social supervision enabled me to reflect on their experiences of the task, to understand how the participants' perception that the task was a trick, or lack of understanding of the language, could have also influenced their participation. Conversely, the task may have provided a sense of containment in an unstructured interview for some participants (Ellis, 2018). Each participant was both separate from, but also part of the system, simultaneously participating and rejecting its influence (Judd, 2003). The format of the interview and its perceived lack of structure was alien to some of the participants, consequently, some, such as Cora, configured their own format by using the AT diagram to shape their responses.

Activity Theory's strength is in its capacity to provide a framework that can accentuate the contradictions and the unconscious motivations of the individuals within the system. Thus, by highlighting human behaviour within the system, it recognises the inner conflict for the individuals and postulates that all activity has an underlying, although not always conscious, motive (Engestrom, 1987). Inclusion of the AT diagram complemented the psycho-social interview process, providing an opportunity to understand how individual unconscious emotions interplay with the context and the network. Whilst also exploring the tension between the individual and the system, within the third space where the two interact (Hollway, 2008; Judd, 2003).

The notion of AT theory as structure for understanding human motivations (Wilson, 2006) also complements the psycho-analytical analysis of group dynamics and mentality (French & Simpson, 2010). Demonstrating that Bions' (1961) theories of basic assumption and work group mentality, are likely to be functioning within the systems surrounding LAC pupils (French & Simpson, 2010). Although often viewed as one system, when investigated in depth, it is a network of microsystems consisting of groups of people identified by their role. Drew and Banerjee (2018) allude to this when they discuss Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory in relation to virtual schools and LAC pupils, emphasising its value as a theoretical framework for understanding the complexity

of the system. The separation of different microsystems within the network heighten the propensity for unconscious groups behaviours, both positive and negative.

5.7 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

This was a small-scale study in one Local Authority, which does not claim to be representative of all designated teachers or virtual school advisory teachers. The findings from this research need to be interpreted cautiously and are not considered to be generalisable to all settings.

The study consisted of eight participants and those who took part were not proportionately representative, with all of the participants being female and six were white. The DTs were more likely have a better understanding of their role (DTs), as they have been in position for some time. The VSATs, however, were all newer to the role and less experienced and had a limited awareness of how their role has emerged. I cannot assume from discussing these themes with the eight participants that their views are representative of all designated teachers or virtual school advisory teachers. However, the commonalities shared by the participants indicate that it is plausible that the participants thoughts and feelings are not purely reflective of their own experiences and I have demonstrated that the literature supports many of their views.

A further limitation of the study is the inclusion of data from the perspective of education professionals only. Future research would benefit from the exploration of the AT diagram from a social workers perspective and an inclusion of their experiences. Furthermore, the inclusion of eight participants, although helpful in providing an overview of both secondary and primary phases, resulted in only one interview being completed. On reflection, limiting the study to four participants, would have provided an opportunity for a second interview, enabling a potentially deeper discussion regarding the content of the interviews and my perception of their emotional responses. Although this study, supported the literature (Rivers, 2018; Simpson, 2012) which emphasised the emotional impact on professionals supporting LAC pupils, further research investigating the benefit of emotional support for these professionals and its resultant impact on LAC pupils outcomes would be advantageous.

Berridge's (2017) study recognised the continuing influence of their birth families on young people. Sadly, the capacity of this study to explore or address the impact of continued contact with the young people's birth parents and their influence on pupils, both positive and negative, was not possible. Furthermore, the number of UASC pupils are increasing in the local authority and were an area of concern for the VSAT and DTs. However, they have a specific set of experiences that are disparate from pupils who have been taken into care from British families and their process of entry into the care system is likely to have been significantly different. Although there is an increasing demand to understand, and support, their needs which could be a potential topic for future research.

5.8   Implications for practice for educational professionals

The allocation of the 'corporate parent' responsibility to local authority employees increases the emphasis on the impact and value of the involvement of EPs in supporting LAC pupils and the education professionals working with them. EPs tend to support VS via a range of methods, including individual casework, supervision for staff, work discussion groups and training in areas such as Attachment and Nurture Groups. The range of emphasis indicates that it is essential EPs have an understanding of the psychological demands of working with LAC pupils, but that an understanding of psychodynamic concepts may also be beneficial. As Mary suggested, EPs could potentially become 'a bridge' between the school staff and the Virtual School. Thus, the consultation process can be advantageous in identifying gaps in knowledge, enabling the EP to facilitate a joint problem solving approach, to address these gaps and promote change in educational practice. With targeted additional support at certain age ranges or at specific times in a child's life, to prevent unexpected challenges occurring. Furthermore, EPs could be pivotal in supporting the development of different approaches to the PEP meeting format, demonstrating Person Centered Planning (PCP) structures such as the PATH or PCP meetings, increasing the focus on the needs of the pupil.

Participants feedback regarding EPs involvement was extremely positive and many requested an increased level of support, suggesting more direct work with pupils would be helpful. However, they also considered that EPs could provide psychological support for pupils or staff, as indicated earlier for pupils this could consist of a range of provision, such as CBT, play based therapeutic support or group/individual psychoeducation. EPs

have the potential to acquire a pivotal role in facilitating supervision for staff (Turner & Gulliford, 2020; Eloquin, 2016), through formats such as group supervision or case related supervision for key professionals (Peake, 2011), including cross agency supervision. Thus, enabling professionals to reflect on their own emotional responses to the pupils, their role and the systems within which they exist. Lessening the potential for the 'cycle of blame' (Sprince, 2000, pp.417) to be perpetuated and professionals' emotional responses, such as anxiety, transference, and splitting to be projected into the network (Goodall, 2014; Simmonds, 2015; Rocco-Briggs, 2008).

Carroll et al (2019) identified educational psychologists, amongst their top five methods of providing additional support for LAC pupils in schools. EPs also have the potential to facilitate problem solving frameworks or solution focused thinking to resolve some of the systemic issues which arise within the network. Thus enabling professionals to reflect on their own emotional responses to their role and the systems within which they exist. An effective multi-agency network can benefit from each professionals individual expertise and can result in an excellent package of support for a young person (Simmonds, 2015). EPs can make a valuable contribution to the network, developing its capacity to focus on the strength and needs of the young person.

5.9 Dissemination

This research will be disseminated to the participants, through a summary of the research findings and a feedback meeting to the virtual school team. A further presentation will be made to the educational psychology team in the local authority where the research took place. DTs and VSATs will also be contacted individually, to explore with them how they would like to receive feedback from the research.

5.10 Concluding Thoughts

I would argue that as education professionals, we need to be continually evaluating LAC pupils progress in more detail, beyond the academic limitations of the PEP. However, we also need to hold in mind 'both and', in the sense that LAC pupils are individuals, but there will be commonalities of need or themes that arise for them throughout their life. If professionals have an understanding of the potential impact of their experiences before

being taken into care, including their emotional development, provision can be developed, which can enable them to address potential emotional difficulties (Sprince, 2000). As Berridge (2017, p. 91) advocates "it appears that young people, individually, will need the right forms of help at the right time. Support offered needs to acknowledge and complement their own expressions of agency".

Furthermore, it is essential to develop an understanding or awareness of the range of influences on LAC pupils' needs and outcomes. To consider the effect of their experiences prior to being taken into care, both in terms of trauma but additionally, the impact of neglect and deprivation. Language development, as indicated earlier, is influenced by early experiences and pupils are 2.3 more likely to be identified with SLCN needs if they reside in areas of deprivation (Dockrell, Ricketts & Lindsay, 2012). DfE statistics indicate that just under 24% of LAC pupils with SEN had speech, language and communication needs.

Adverse childhood experiences can result in harmful neurobiological consequences, affecting a child's brain development in a multitude of formats, such as the dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA), increased levels of cortisol, reduced cerebellar volume and prefrontal cortex volumes (Glaser, 2012). Although, it is important to acknowledge that not all LAC children's brain development or functioning is affected equally. We also need to have an understanding of the importance of factors, such as resilience, which can ameliorate some children's experiences or enable LAC pupils to progress academically, despite their negative early experiences. Simpson (2012), argues that resilience and stability in placement are key factors in improving outcomes for pupils. Therefore, we need to have knowledge of brain development, including its adaptability and plasticity, particularly in critical periods such as adolescence. As well as comprehending that both positive and negative experiences can influence neural development.

Preparing LAC pupils for potential transitions is of fundamental importance, at an individual, systemic and academic level, allocating additional support where required, thus preventing the development of additional emotional difficulties (Everson-Hock et al, 2011). As professionals outside of the network, who have access to a range of therapeutic, psychological and psychoanalytical theories, valuable tools for understanding

the child's behaviour, EPs could assist the network . Encouraging others to engage with frameworks, such as the systems psychodynamics (Eloquin, 2016) and the power threat meaning framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018), or other relevant psychological theory, could facilitate a reflective process. Thus, creating an emphasis on the child's individual needs and ensuring that LAC pupils' ensuing SEMH, as a result of their trauma experiences, do not become pathologised. Whilst also enabling professionals within the system to recognise LAC pupils behaviour as "meaningful, functional and understandable response to life circumstances" (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018, pp. 6), potentially preventing their disengagement from education and resultant school exclusions.

An in-depth knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment is required, to be able to analyse and predict, where possible, potential flashpoints that could occur (Sinclair, Luke & Berridge, 2019). Additionally, ensuring educational professionals are well informed about the impact of trauma on brain development and its restructuring process during adolescence (Blakemore, 2018), will enable them to more effectively meet LAC pupils needs. A better conception of LAC pupils experiences is also needed, to be able to plan appropriate assistance in education (Peake, 2011). If we do not have this knowledge and experience, we must develop processes that enable access to professionals who do, to guide us to develop provision that meets the needs of LAC pupils. In my opinion, this is the true meaning of being a 'corporate parent'. The participants in this research demonstrated commitment and engagement to LAC pupils, but if the adults are not adequately supported by the systems within which they work, they will not be able to fulfil their role effectively. As agents within the system, EPs capability to influence policy is limited but we do have the skills and capacity to influence the system. We have the potential to take up a pivotal role within it, supporting the reflective capacity of the individuals, to develop their ability to problem solve and think strategically. As Mary suggested, EPs could potentially become 'a bridge' between the school staff and the Virtual School, using consultation to identify gaps in knowledge. Developing training and providing advice to address these gaps and promote change in educational practice.

The system needs to instigate processes whereby children's complex trauma is acknowledged and support provided for them. It should be dependent on their need, but without stigmatising or singling them out because they have experienced significant or

complex trauma. Currently the guidance for virtual schools is to select schools for LAC children based on their Ofsted grading. However, the impact of the school ethos or approach to vulnerable children, on their progress needs to be acknowledged. The literature and my research findings indicate that LAC children make progress where their individual needs are identified and met, emotionally and academically. Cora's argument that LAC pupils emotional needs might be better met elsewhere, has some validity if the school does not have an inclusive approach to vulnerable or SEND pupils. These schools will not provide a containing or safe environment for LAC pupils to engage with counselling to address their emotional needs, thus influencing their capacity to engage and make progress academically, as the two areas cannot be separated. Even when a child's strategy for managing their emotional difficulties is focusing on their academic achievements, as the participants have highlighted, they are likely to find that unprocessed trauma could impact them when they reach adolescence thus potentially derailing their academic achievement (Sinclair, Luke & Berridge, 2019). As education professional, and adults, we need to be considering these factors when supporting LAC pupils and putting into place emergency strategies. The system, or the adults within the system, need to be the containers, emotionally and academically, thinking strategically and anticipating potential difficulties for the child.

A crucial element in the system is communication between the professionals and a cohesive approach to the 'corporate parent' responsibility. Although, all local authority employees have a responsibility to adhere to the corporate parent principles, it could be advisable to provide more clarity around role definition and expectations about how the different professionals are expected to meet the corporate parent principles. Harris & Ayo (2011) acknowledge that multi-agency collaboration is complex and consider systemic theory to be beneficial as it acknowledges the different perspectives of the many professionals within the system. Additionally, the professionals perhaps need to think creatively about how best to understand the emotional and academic needs of the child and to support the educational placement to meet these needs. This is particularly relevant if a LAC pupil is struggling emotionally and the school are finding it difficult to meet their needs. In these circumstances, it would be pertinent to allocate a specific professional with the responsibility of supporting the foster carers and education staff with managing the child's emotional wellbeing.

Berridge et al (2015) advocate providing a more detailed and informed understanding of the pupil's progress, beyond whether they are reaching age expected levels of attainment. Perhaps ensuring we acknowledge the impact of trauma, deprivation and neglect on academic progress and measure their progress from when they enter care, rather than on entry to school. Tools such as the PEP and Looked After Children's reviews, are a potential for the development of a joint approach to supporting LAC pupils but can become cumbersome. Reflections from the participants suggested that PEPs, in particular, are missed opportunities to communicate effectively about the child's needs. Instead, it was suggested that they should foster person-centered approaches, such as PATHs or PCP meetings, thus incorporating more opportunities for the child's viewpoint to be considered. Initially, EPs could facilitate this process and train other professionals within the network to structure PEP meetings using the format.

Therefore, I would argue that the academic and emotional progress of LAC pupils are inextricably linked. As Brewin & Statham (2011) suggest, if individual plans are devised, with a discrete balance established, LAC pupils can have their individual needs met without feeling stigmatised. Thus, making it is essential that educational professionals can not only acknowledge and understand LAC pupils needs, but in fact appropriately support them to manage their emotions to cultivate their aptitude for learning. To enable this process, supervision for adults is required to develop their capacity to understand, acknowledge and reflect on their own emotional responses and its resultant impact on our behaviour as adults and educational professionals. This study demonstrates that education professionals consider that LAC pupils have the capacity to make progress and to develop their potential, however they are often depicted as 'failing'. However, if their 'corporate parents' are unable to provide the infrastructure, support and guidance these pupils require, then the pupils are not failing, the network or system is failing them.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Search Terms

Database	Search Terms 1	Search Terms 2	Search Terms 3
Education Source	'virtual school' Limited to 'English', 'education', 'virtual schools' **10 items**	'looked after children' OR 'children looked after' OR 'children in care' AND 'educational achievement' **24 items**	'looked after children' OR 'children looked after' OR 'children in care' AND 'education' AND 'school' AND 'teacher' **54 items**
ERIC	'looked after children' or 'children in care' or 'children looked after' and 'corporate parent' and 'education' **49 items**		
PsychINFO	'looked after children', and 'education' and 'school' **62 items**	'virtual school', 'looked after children' and 'education' **2 items**	'looked after children', 'virtual school' and 'designated teacher' **2 items**
ERIC, PsychINFO, PEP archive, Education Source, SocINDEX	'looked after children' OR 'children looked after' OR 'children in care' AND 'designated teacher' OR 'teacher' AND 'virtual school' **17 items**		
Google Scholar	'looked after children' or 'children in care' or children looked after' and 'virtual		

	school' or 'designated teacher 9 items		
Hand search of relevant publications, grey literature and organisations such as PALAC	**2 items**		

Appendix B - Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
1) Published in the English Language	Studies not published in the English language	Time constraints do not allow for articles to be translated.
2) Published in England .	Published outside of England	Differences in policies, legislation and educational provision in countries outside of England.
3) Participants were Children in Care, Looked After Children or Children Looked After	Adopted or kinship care participants.	The focus of the research is specifically children in the sole or joint care of the Local Authority.
4) Participants aged between 4 and 18	Participants below 4 or above 18.	Different legal requirements and educational provision apply to pupils in the age ranges outside of the inclusion criteria.
5) Published between 2009 and 2020.	Research published before 2009.	Legislative changes have changed the legal responsibilities of schools and local authorities.

Appendix C – Evaluation of research included

Author	Purpose	Context	Participants and Method	Evaluative Summary
DTs				
Goodall (2014)	Thesis completed by a trainee EP. Exploration of Designated Teachers experiences of supporting Looked after Children.	DTs working in primary and secondary schools in one local authority.	Six Designated Teachers Semi-structured interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.	DTs can feel isolated with little contact with peers – impacted capacity to do DT role Level of commitment required for their role. Challenge to balance competing demands of different roles Highlighted DTs emotional involvement with LAC pupils and their resultant anxiety. Emphasised need for a 'holistic approach' to supporting LAC pupils. No exploration of whether LAC pupils are making academic progress
Woollam (2010)	Thesis completed by a trainee EP. Focus was the identification of factors	Single secondary school in one local authority.	Single case study in one local authority secondary school applying Appreciative Inquiry approach.	Relationship between LAC pupils and key staff important. Highlighted importance of developing LAC pupils emotional well-being

			Semi-structured interviews and a follow up workshop session.	Highlighted importance of PEP mtgs – but not essential for LAC to be involved
	that have a positive impact on LAC pupils secondary school experience. Implementation of Appreciative Inquiry approach to one setting to identify strengths and successes to inspire change.			Only one DT included and their voice was not clearly identified
PALAC – Carroll, Black & Bettencourt (2019)	Project aimed to develop an awareness of teaching and learning practice in schools for LAC pupils, at individual and whole school support levels.	Commissioned by VSH's from twelve local authorities in North East England.	Survey of four hundred designated the LA's. Additional focus groups with DTs. Face to face interviews with pupils and lesson observations.	DTs asked about the effectiveness of interventions – considered specific praise and not training LAC pupils differently Other than SEMH and attachment – other barriers to learning are not being addressed by training. No reference to the potential emotional impact of working with LAC

Virtual Schools				
Rivers (2018)	Reflective personal account of a Virtual School Head (VSH)	Single VSH head representing one local authority.	One VSH's experiences of the role.	VS role to bring key partners together References the extensive range of agencies involved with LAC pupils – first reference Questions a) the quality of education provision and b) capacity of schools to support LAC with emotional issues. Reference to extensive range of agencies involved with pupils and the need for PEPs to be more child centered.
Sebba & Berridge (2019)	Exploration of the status, role, functions, strategies and contribution of Virtual Schools to the educational outcomes of children in care.	Interviews took place in 2015 when the VSH became a statutory role. Combined a national study and a London based study.	Summary of two research projects; involving semi-structured interviews with sixteen VSH.	Considerable variation in structure of virtual schools. Main focus is work with the DT Argues that little information is available regarding how PPG funding is spent Identifies a gap in reviewing the effectiveness of interventions Little reference to emotional support provided by VS for pupils

				No reference to emotional impact of working with LAC on professionals
Drew & Banerjee (2018)	Research focus was to highlight the role of virtual schools in supporting LAC pupils through educational interventions and 'broader psychological factors'.	Survey of all VSH in England.	Online survey sent to all local authority VSH. 29 completed an online survey.	Focus on multi-systemic role of VS Identified 'educational attainment' as the most highlighted focus for service provision Highlights importance of schools and teachers for LAC pupils academic progress. Need for VS to address educational and psychological issues for LAC Relationships with other professionals referenced – in terms of EPs, other educational departments, DTs - all considered critical to LAC progress. Limitation – no interviews with any of the participants.
Caroll, Brackenbury, Herbert, Lee, Roberts &	PALAC (promoting the achievement of looked after children) project focusing on virtual schools. To share practice	Virtual schools across England and one in Wales.	Individual case studies focused on virtual schools. Includes literacy interventions, PEPs, key stage four checklist, work with carers,	Highlighted importance of VS staff role in strategic development – important to improve outcomes for LAC Reference to THINKSPACE, a reflecting team model (systemic family

Cameron (2018)	that contributes to positive school experiences and outcomes for LAC pupils.		collaborations with EPs and social care	therapy) – only reference to anxiety about the child being located in the system Includes evaluation of specific interventions. No direct reference to emotional impact of working with LAC or support provided to professionals (other than THINKSPACE).
Multi agency research				
Berridge, Bell, Sebba & Luke (2015) Technical report	Technical report focusing on the perspectives of young people and key professionals.	Collaboration with six local authorities, three ranked highest for their GCSE results and three nearer the lower end. VSH were asked to identify three young people who made better than expected progress and three who had made worse than expected progress.	Analysis of the qualitative data from interviews with twenty six young people using peer interviewers (who had care experiences). They also sought the yp's permission to interview their foster carers (17), designated teachers (20), social workers (17) and one residential worker.	Suggested focus of research should be on a more detailed and informed understanding of LAC pupils progress Highlights importance of relationships with adults – team around the child knowing about the child and communication. YP identified adults in education are important to their progress Highlighted the yp's sense of agency – their control over their education.` Research focused on experiences of the young people – little reference to the

			experiences of the professionals working with them.
Simpson (2012)	Thesis completed by a trainee EP.

Exploration of the future and current role of the virtual school. | Located within one local authority where EP was in training. | Mixed methods research design in two stages. Analysed using Thematic Analysis. Phase One – focus on current role included questionnaires to all DTs in local authority and semi-structured interviews with members of virtual school team. Phase Two included an appreciative enquiry session with three vs members and one DT. | More focused on VS than DTs views. Main focus role of the VS Exploring the collaborative view of DTs and VS Important that VS staff support education staff when situations become emotionally challenging and recognising impact on emotional wellbeing of staff. Importance of addressing emotional issues for LAC – so that they don't present as barriers to academic progress or achievement. Further interviews with DTs would have provided a more balanced reflection on the VS role. |
| Simmonds (2015) | Thesis completed by a trainee EP. Research focus was an understanding of the contextual factors and | Located within the virtual school for the local authority but young people were | Grounded theory methodology. Semi-structured interviews with two LAC pupils and six professionals, including virtual | Adults emotionally availability affects their capacity to support the yp. |

	individual mechanisms that both support and hinder LAC pupils educational progress at key stage four.	selected from within greater London area from schools or other educational settings.	school officers, a social worker one DT.	Too many professionals involved in network/meetings can have a negative impact for yp Professionals anxiety affects outcomes for young people More reference to adults emotional needs/stability/availability would have been useful.
Driscoll (2013).	Research focusing on the education of looked after children post sixteen and how pupils can be encouraged to continue with education.	Three year longitudinal study in England following twenty looked after children from years eleven to thirteen. .	Interviews with four VSH from urban local authorities and twelve DTs in eight local authorities, from a range of educational provisions, elected to be interviewed.	Transition from school to college was a challenge for the pupils. Multiple transitions often take place for these pupils which impact on their academic progress. Acknowledged that a holistic approach is required to support LAC pupils. Emphasis of the study was virtual schools support for education. Experiences of participants were directly related to transition support for LAC.

Appendix D – Excluded papers

Excluded Papers	Reason for exclusion
Parker, E. (2017). An actor-network theory reading of change for children in public care. British Educational Research Journal, 43(1), 151–167. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3257	Research focused on observation of PEP meetings, no consultation or discussion with DTs about their experiences.
Berridge, D. (2012). Reflections on child welfare research and the policy process: Virtual school heads and the education of looked after children. British Journal of Social Work, 42(1), 26–41. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr038	Social policy paper – no consultation with DTs or VSATs.
Francis, Y. J., Bennion, K., & Humrich, S. (2017). Evaluating the outcomes of a school based Theraplay® project for looked after children. Educational Psychology in Practice, 33(3), 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2017.1324405	Outcomes of a specific project – no discussion with DTs or VSATs.
Liabo, K., McKenna, C., Ingold, A., & Roberts, H. (2017). Leaving foster or residential care: A participatory study of care leavers' experiences of health and social care transitions. Child: Care, Health and Development, 43(2), 182–191. https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12426	Focused on care leavers experiences.
Evans, R., Brown, R., Rees, G., & Smith, P. (2017). Systematic review of educational interventions for looked-after children and young people: Recommendations for intervention development and evaluation. British Educational Research Journal, 43(1), 68–94. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3252	Systematic Review of existing studies.
Ridley, J., Larkins, C., Farrelly, N., Hussein, S., Austerberry, H., Manthorpe, J., & Stanley, N. (2016). Investing in the relationship: Practitioners' relationships with looked-after children and care leavers in Social Work Practices. Child & Family Social Work, 21(1), 55–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12109	Focuses on looked after children and care leavers.
Liabo, K., Gray, K., & Mulcahy, D. (2013). A systematic review of interventions to support looked-after children in	Systematic review of interventions.

school. Child & Family Social Work, 18(3), 341–353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00850.x	
Rees, P. (2013). The mental health, emotional literacy, cognitive ability, literacy attainment and 'resilience' of "looked after children": A multidimensional, multiple-rater population based study. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 52(2), 183–198. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12008	Provided statistical data regarding LAC pupils but no consultation or inclusion of their views
Everson, H. E. S., Jones, R., Guillaume, L., Clapton, J., Goyder, E., Chilcott, J., Payne, N, Duenas, A., Sheppard & Swann, C. (2012). The effectiveness of training and support for carers and other professionals on the physical and emotional health and well-being of looked-after children and young people: A systematic review. Child: Care, Health and Development, 38(2), 162–174.	Systematic review of papers. No reference to DTs or VSATs.
Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are looked after. Educational Psychology in Practice, 27(4), 365–381. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.624301	Does not fit the inclusion criteria - research took place in Wales
Denecheau, B. (2011). Children in residential care and school engagement or school "dropout": What makes the difference in terms of policies and practices in England and France? Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 16(3), 277–287.	Does not fit inclusion criteria - focuses on France as well as England.
McMurray, I., Connolly, H., Preston, S. M., & Wigley, V. (2011). Shards of the old looking glass: Restoring the significance of identity in promoting positive outcomes for looked-after children. Child & Family Social Work, 16(2), 210–218. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00733.x	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focuses on young people and social workers.
Dymoke, S., & Griffiths, R. (2010). The Letterbox Club: The impact on looked-after children and their carers of a national project aimed at raising achievements in literacy for children aged 7 to 11 in foster care. Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 10(1), 52–60. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2009.01143.x	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focuses on LAC children and their carers.

McAuley, C., & Davis, T. (2009). Emotional well-being and mental health of looked after children in England. Child & Family Social Work, 14(2), 147–155. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00619.x	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focus on mental health of LAC children.
Weekly Consultations - Whitehall. (2017). Education Parliamentary Monitor, (804), 1–7. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=126103196&authtype=shib&site=ehost-live	Providing information – no discussion with DTs
Honey, K. L., Rees, P., & Griffey, S. (2011). Investigating self-perceptions and resilience in Looked After Children. Educational Psychology in Practice, 27(1), 37–52.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – completed in Wales.
Payne, L. (2009). The role of designated teachers. Children & Young People Now (Haymarket Business Publications Ltd), 25. Retrieved from	Does not fit inclusion criteria – article on new government guidance.
Designated Teachers for Looked-after Children: Draft Regulations and Statutory Guidance. (2009). Children & Young People Now (Haymarket Business Publications Ltd), 23.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – information on new government guidance.
Edwards, L. N. (2016). Looking after the teachers: Exploring the emotional labour experienced by teachers of looked after children. Educational Psychology in Practice, 32(1), 54–72.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – reference to teachers only
Sinclair, I., Luke, N., & Berridge, D. (2019). Children in care or in need: educational progress at home and in care. Oxford Review of Education, 45(4), 443–460.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – comparison of academic achievement of LAC pupils.
Beckett, C., Dickens, J., Schofield, G., Philip, G., & Young, J. (2016). Independence and effectiveness: Messages from the role of Independent Reviewing Officers in England. Children and Youth Services Review, 71, 148–156.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focuses on the role of the IRO.
Mathers, S., & Tracz, R. (2017). Early education as an intervention for children looked after. International Journal of Birth & Parent Education, 5(2), 7–10.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – article on new government guidance.
Cann, N. (2012). The positive educational experiences of "looked-after" children and young people. https://0-doi-org.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/10.15123/PUB.1886	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focuses on pupils only.

Harland, L. (2014). Educational attainment of children and young people in the looked--after care system. Community Practitioner: The Journal Of The Community Practitioners' & Health Visitors' Association, 87(11), 25–27.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – article on new government guidance.
Berridge, D. (2017). The education of children in care: Agency and resilience. Children and Youth Services Review, 77, 86–93. https://0-doi-org.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.04.004	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is social policy.
Robinson, F., Luyten, P., & Midgley, N. (2019). The child psychotherapists' role in consultation work with the professional network around looked after children. Journal of Social Work Practice.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focuses on child psychotherapists.
Murphy, M. (2017). The impact of a literacy/mentoring intervention on the outcomes of looked after children.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is LAC pupils and learning mentors.
Coles, T. (2012). Why are "Looked After Children" fixed term excluded from school? : using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to understand the process.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focuses on view of teachers.
Whitehouse, C. (2014). An exploration of designated teachers' perceptions of the role of educational psychologists in supporting looked after children.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – includes DTs but their views of EPs only.
Sutcliffe, A. G., Gardiner, J., & Melhuish, E. (2017). Educational progress of looked after children in England: A study using group trajectory analysis.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – primary focus is statistics regarding educational outcomes.
Mannay, D., Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., & Andrews, D. (2017). The consequences of being labelled 'looked-after': Exploring the educational experiences of looked-after children and young people in Wales.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is LAC pupils only.
Sugden, E. J. (2013). Looked-after children: What supports them to learn?	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is LAC pupils only.
Jones, R., Everson-Hock, E. S., Papaioannou, D., Guillaume, L., Goyder, E., Chilcott, J., Cooke, J., Payne, N., Duenas, A., Sheppard, L. M., & Swann, C. (2011). Factors associated with outcomes for looked-after children and young people: A correlates review of the literature.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – systematic review of literature.

MacKay, T., & Greig, A. (2011). Fostering, adoption and looked after children - a growth area for educational psychology.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is educational psychology.
Scott, J. (2011). The impact of disrupted attachment on the emotional and interpersonal development of looked after children.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – review of literature.
Peake, A. (2011). The needs of looked after children: A rapid response when school placement may be in jeopardy.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – article on new government guidance.
Leeson, C. (2010). The emotional labour of caring about looked-after children.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is social workers experiences.
Dymoke, S., & Griffiths, R. (2010). The Letterbox Club: The impact on looked-after children and their carers of a national project aimed at raising achievements in literacy for children aged 7 to 11 in foster care.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – evaluation of a literacy project.
Jackson, E., Whitehead, J., & Wigford, A. (2010). In an EBD population do looked after children have specific needs relating to resilience, self-perception and attainment?	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is LAC pupils only.
Greig, A., Minnis, H., Millward, R., Sinclair, C., Kennedy, E., Towlson, K., Reid, W., & Hill, J. (2008). Relationships and learning: A review and investigation of narrative coherence in looked-after children in primary school.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is narrative coherence in LAC pupils.
Raspin, S., Smallwood, R., Hatfield, S., & Boesley, L. (2019). Exploring the use of the ARROW literacy intervention for looked after children in a UK local authority.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focus is a specific intervention.
Mathers, S., Hardy, G., Clancy, C., Dixon, J., & Harding, C. (2016). Starting out right: Early education and looked after children.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – subject is early years education. No reference to DTs or VSATs.
Murphy, M. (2017). The impact of a literacy/mentoring intervention on the outcomes of looked after children (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).	Does not fit inclusion criteria – evaluation of a literacy project.
Higgins, A. (no date). Taf, R. C., & Authorities, M. T. L. CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER FRIENDLY SCHOOLS.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – developed in Wales, views of professionals not included.

Dingwall, N., & Sebba, J. (2018). Evaluation of the attachment aware schools programme final report. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford (pdf)*.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – evaluation of a specific programme.
Fancourt, N. (2019). Looked after children: embedding attachment awareness in schools. *Education and Self-Development*, *14*(1).	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focused on attachment.
Jay, M & McGrath-Lowe (2019). Systematic review of educational outcomes	Does not fit inclusion criteria – systematic review.
Berridge, D., (2012). Educating young people in care: What have we learned?	Does not fit inclusion criteria — refers mainly to other research and policy - useful for discussion
Jones, R., Everson-Hock, E. S., Papaioannou, D., Guillaume, L., Goyder, E., Chilcott, J., Cooke, J., Payne, N., Duenas, A., Sheppard, L. M., & Swann, C. (2011). Factors associated with outcomes for looked-after children and young people: a correlates review of the literature.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – review of literature.
Turner, J., & Gulliford, A. (2020). Examining the Circles of Adults process for Children Looked After: the role of self-efficacy and empathy in staff behaviour change. Educational Psychology in Practice, 36(1), 32–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1667752	Does not fit inclusion criteria – views of staff are included but not specifically DTs.
Pert, H., Diaz., & Thomas, N. (2014). Children's participation in LAC reviews: a study in one English local authority.	Does not fit inclusion criteria – focus is views of LAC children.
Carroll, C., Herbert, E., & Lee, F., (2018) Promoting the achievement of Looked After Children and young people across Cardiff UCL/IOE	Does not fit inclusion criteria – research took place in Wales.

Appendix E – Example of coded interview transcript

erm, that must be quite challenging.

96 23:09 Participant: Yeah, it can be and and so I think there was a day I went to a PEP and the child was doing well all round, and it was so refreshing because a lot of the PEPs I've been to, grades are below expected, attendance is bad, you know, its just trying to to figure out how to help them. But then you go to the PEP where the child's actually working well. You know, there's nothing, that the school wouldn't, they couldn't ask for more. But that's few and far between. Almost always attendance, needing to do better in their studies, obviously because of stuff they've been through.

97 24:00 Interviewer: And what do you I mean, obviously some of them have been looked after for quite a long time. So what are the kinds of things that you think impact on their academic progress?

98 Participant: I think, I think erm in what I'm learning, it's a lot to do with school, to school there in, its a lot to do with the actual DT, And it's a lot to do with the carer. I think that if this is schools don't necessarily label them, it'll be a good thing. And I think if DTs erm, if DTS we're more empathetic which some of them are very empathetic. It really definitely has a positive effect on the child and carers. Some carers are really hands on. So they'll go to open evenings with the young people, you know, they really, really in touch wherever some carers are a bit more hands off. And I think that if those three elements worked well, together, it'd be really good. Because for example, I've got a school that says they've got no provision for LAC. And they're finding it really hard to provide support for the children. This is a xxxx school, you can't get away from LAC, so you're gonna have to start making provision. But whereas I've been to schools were they're really positive, they're so willing to help, the young person.

99 25:48 Interviewer: Mmm that's interesting. So the schools that you work with, do most of them have a few, quite a few LAC?

100 25:59 Participant: Erm, I don't know. Because I'm only year 11, I don't know. I think maybe some of them have maybe three to four as a minimum and some might have more.

101 26:12 Interviewer: So, that's not just one child. And what do you, when you said about labelling children, what did you mean?

102 Participant: Because we say LAC a lot don't we, and I feel like the children don't need to be reminded all the time that they're lac, they don't need to be told that. Erm yeah, one of my colleagues is dealing with a girl, she's ran away back to home, even though it's not a good place for her because she's been able to, she wants her friends to know that her family love her, that she's not looked after.

103 26:59 Interviewer: So it's about their identity, how they see themselves. Do you think that's quite important as well then?

104 27:14 P: Uhuh, I think its really important. I think they struggle a lot. Sometimes I try to think how I would have felt when I was 14 or 15, not with my mum, with a stranger practically, and trying to find your place where you fit.

Margin codes:

..WHAT IS VSAT VIEW OF LAC C
..WHAT IS VSAT VIEW OF LAC
..Attendance issues
WHAT DO VSAT PERCEIVE TO
..WHAT IS VSAT VIEW OF LAC
..SCHOOLS WANT CHILDREN
..Attendance issues
..IMPACT OF CIRCUMSTANCES NOT

..WHAT IS VSAT VIEW OF LAC
..Adult relationships with LAC
..FOSTER CARERS
..PROBLEMS WITH THE SYSTEM
..DESIGNATED TEACHERS
..FOSTER CARERS
..FOSTER CARERS
..DIVISION OF LABOUR
..PROBLEMS WITH THE SYSTEM
..PROBLEMS WITH THE SYSTEM
..PROBLEMS WITH THE SYSTEM
..SCHOOLS WANT CHILDREN TO

..VSATs PERCEPTION OF WHAT
..VSATs PERCEPTION OF WH
..Parents still being very invol
..IMPACT OF CIRCUMSTANC

..VSATs PERCEPTION OF WHAT
WHAT DO VSAT PERCEIVE TO E

Appendix F – TREC approval email

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Vari Waterman

By Email

30 May 2019

Dear Vari,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: An exploration of Virtual School Teachers and Designated LAC Teachers experiences of supporting looked after children (LAC) to make progress within schools.

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me. I am copying this communication to your supervisor.
May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.
Yours sincerely,

Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix G – TREC Ethics Application

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

PROJECT DETAILS

Current project title	An exploration of Virtual School Teachers and Designated LAC Teachers experiences of supporting looked after children (LAC pupils) to make progress within schools.		
Proposed project start date	June 2019	Anticipated project end date	May 2020

APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of Researcher	Vari Rebecca Waterman
Email address	Vwaterman@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Contact telephone number	07966 985824

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?

YES ☐   **NO** ☒

If **YES**, please detail below:

| |
| |

Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES ☐   **NO** ☒

If **YES**, please detail below:

| ` |
| |

FOR ALL APPLICANTS

Is your research being conducted externally* to the Trust? (for example; within a Local Authority, Schools, Care Homes, other NHS Trusts or other organisations). *Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust)	**YES** ☒ **NO** ☐
If **YES**, please supply details below: The Local Authority will be Croydon Borough Council Virtual School.	
Has external* ethics approval been sought for this research? **(i.e. submission via Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) to the Health Research Authority (HRA) or other external research ethics committee)** *Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation/body which is external to the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) If **YES**, please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below **AND** include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies:	**YES** ☐ **NO** ☒

If your research is being undertaken externally to the Trust, please provide details of the sponsor of your research? Sponsor is Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust	
Do you have local approval (this includes R&D approval)? Please see confirmation from the Virtual School Head. Permission from schools will be sought once ethical approval is received and the Virtual School have selected the relevant schools.	**YES** ☒ **NO** ☐

COURSE ORGANISING TUTOR	
• Does the proposed research as detailed herein have your support to proceed? **YES** ☒ **NO** ☐	
Signed	*A Styles*
Date	22.05.2019

APPLICANT DECLARATION	

I confirm that:
   • The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date.
   • I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research.
   • I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding our University's Code of Practice for ethical research and observing the rights of the participants.
   • I am aware that cases of proven misconduct, in line with our University's policies, may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research.	

Applicant (print name)	Vari Waterman
Signed	*Vari Waterman*
Date	21.05.2019

FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

Name and School of Supervisor/Director of Studies	Dr Adam Styles

Qualification for which research is being undertaken	Doctorate of Educational, Child & Community Psychology .

Supervisor/Director of Studies –
• Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research? **YES** ☒   **NO** ☐
▪ Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate? **YES** ☒   **NO** ☐
▪ Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient? **YES** ☒   **NO** ☐
▪ Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance? **YES** ☒   **NO** ☐

Signed	A Styles
Date	22.05.2019

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)
Government statistics and research literature generally concurs that the academic and emotional progress of Looked After Children (LAC) is a concern. However, there is limited literature that aims to understand whether staff working with LAC pupils are of the same opinion, if working with LAC pupils impacts positively or negatively on these staff, therefore impacting on LAC pupils progress academically and emotionally. The aim of the research is to explore the individual experience of both Virtual School teachers (VS) and Designated LAC teachers (DLAC), their perception of the systems around the child they are working with and the commonalities or differences between their roles. This research aims to interview four VS teachers and four DLAC teachers, using a psycho-social interview approach, that is designed to

elicit a narrative that is structured according to unconscious logic (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000).

It aims to gain a deeper insight into the VS and DLAC teachers practical and emotional experiences of supporting LAC pupils. The challenges and successes, as well as their perceptions of working together within a wider context. Their understanding of their corporate parent role, the processes and dynamics that underpin this role. While also exploring the facilitators and barriers to effectively supporting a LAC pupil in education. Participants will be required to take part in two interviews, using the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) approach, with the Third Generation Activity Theory diagram (Engestrom,1987) as a prompt for exploring their conception of the systems surrounding a LAC pupil.

The interviews will be completed in either the school that DLAC teacher works within or at the Local Authority building. Each interview will be audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. A psychosocial lens will be applied to the data and psychoanalytical theory will be used to identify and analyse themes.

2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)

The academic and emotional progress of LAC pupils continues to be an area of concern, despite a high level of funds being utilised to support them in school through funding streams such as Pupil Premium. Current research regarding LAC pupils has focused on a single area, such as the role of the class teacher (Sugden, 2013), the role of the Virtual School (Drew & Banerjee, 2018) or developing a whole school approach to supporting LAC pupils (Webber, 2017). From reviewing the literature, the key proponent to support the academic and emotional progress of LAC pupils was identified as the relationship with key adults, in particular the teacher. Despite the repeated focus on LAC pupils interactions with key adults, there is a paucity of literature that explored Designated or Virtual School teachers' relationships with pupils. Neither is there literature that explores their perceptions of LAC pupils academic and emotional progress.

Educationally, the Virtual School and the Designated teacher are not only key roles, but alongside the Social Worker have a statutory duty as corporate parents. Furthermore, although Drew & Banerjee (2018) highlight the interaction between the two organisations and pupils as key, there is no evidence of research that explores the triangular relationship between the VS, DT and LAC pupils. The needs of LAC pupils are complex and require a multi-agency approach, an absence of clarity regarding the underlying difficulties for each agency creates further challenge to the key adult's capacity to work together to support LAC pupils academic and emotional progress.

As a result, this research will have an explorative focus, taking an inductive approach (with no specific hypothesis). It aims to explore the personal experiences of Designated LAC teachers and Virtual School teachers in supporting LAC pupils in education, along with their underlying unconscious responses to LAC pupils.

It is anticipated that the potential benefits of the study will include an increase in professionals, such as Educational Psychologists, awareness of how VS and DLAC teachers support LAC pupils within a wider context. This study may also lead to a more in depth understanding of the facilitators and barriers to LAC pupils progress, both academically and emotionally in education.

The findings from this research will be disseminated to the participants who wish to be contacted following completion, as well as the Virtual School (VS), Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and Local Authority (LA). The written thesis will be available through the Tavistock and Portman and University of Essex library. I may also apply for wider publication in a peer reviewed journal after completing the doctoral thesis as this will allow other professionals who are interested in the topic to read the findings.

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3. **Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, TASKS assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

The method deemed most appropriate to this research is a psycho-social, free association approach. This form of qualitative research uses psychoanalytical theories and approaches to diminish 'researcher interference and apprehend the material from the subjective stance of participants' (Joffe & Elsey, 2014, p. 178).

Providing an opportunity to explore underlying emotions, moving beyond a defensive response from the participants, to explore the unconscious instead of the 'purely discursive' (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p.2). The interview does not involve questions that are prescripted, encouraging a spontaneous response from the participants.

A Third Generation Activity Theory (AT) diagram (Engestrom,1987) will be used to explore the participants different perspectives of the support systems surrounding, and the progress of, the same child. Using multi-level analysis, it will enable an investigation of the dialogues between the two activity systems for each individual (VST, DT), including what it is influenced by and how it influences. The diagram originates from Vygotsky's theories of mediation, focused on the individual's interaction with learning. Engestrom expanded these ideas to create the third generation AT and devised five principles relating to AT, including the importance of the perspective of multi-voices (2), the centrality of contradictions (4) and its transformative nature (5) (Leadbetter, 2016).

Each participant will be asked to take part in two interviews, the first lasting up to two hours, using the AT diagram. The interview will be audio-recorded but the interviewer will also take hand written notes to collect non-verbal data, such as; sighs, facial expressions, participants emotions and for the researcher to reflect on their own emotional responses to the participants. Once the interviews have been transcribed, approximately six weeks later a follow up interview will take place to consider the themes arising from the first interview. The second interview will also be audio-recorded.

The data from both interviews will be explored, using thematic analysis incorporating a psycho-social lens and psychoanalytical theory to identify and analyse themes. A reflexive research diary is key in this process particularly as I will need to be mindful of how the data is interpreted. Themes will be discussed in supervision.

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

4. **Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why this criteria is in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

The participants will be Designated School staff from schools and colleges in X Local Authority and Virtual School teachers from the same Local Authority. Ideally the staff will be working with the same pupil, as this will provide an opportunity for participants to have the same pupil in mind. As with Psychosocial research methods, a total of 4 –6 participants will be included in the study, to provide sufficient data to analyse and a range of perspectives. This will consist of three or four Virtual School teachers and their counterpart Designated LAC teacher. Links will be made with the Virtual School Head via the Educational Psychology service and the four Virtual School teachers will be provided with the opportunity to opt in to the research project.

Criteria for selection

For Virtual School Teachers:

All virtual school teachers in X Local Authority have been included in the sample. The Virtual School Head teacher will agree for the teachers to be approached but the teachers themselves will need to opt in to the research.

For Designated LAC Teacher:

Once the Virtual School teacher in the local authority has opted in, they will provide a list of schools within the Local Authority with whom they work.

Inclusion in this list is dependent on the following:

- Schools where a Designated LAC teacher has been in post **for at least a year**
- has **at least two LAC pupils in their school,**
- **who have been in care for more than a year**.

The head teacher will be approached, and their Designated LAC teacher invited to participate. The first Designated LAC teacher who responds will be selected and matched to the Virtual School teacher, regardless of the type of the school the pupil is placed in. This will provide an opportunity to work across the age ranges and types of educational provision. If a Virtual School teacher declines to take part in the research their schools will not be approached.

5. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?*(Tick as appropriate)*

☐ Students or staff of the Trust or the University.

☒ Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).

☐ Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)[1]

☐ Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.

☐ Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.

☐ Adults in emergency situations.

☐ Adults[2] with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).

☐ Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

☐ Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the **National Offender Management Service (NOMS).**

☐ Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

☐ Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).

☐ Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent[3] relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).

☐ Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).

☐ Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.

☐ Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

[1]*If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability[3], any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.*

[2] *'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)*

[3] *Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.*

6. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES ☐ NO ☒

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment) or from their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness). Where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable.

Adults lacking mental capacity to consent to participate in research and children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable. Studies involving adults (over the age of 16) who lack mental capacity to consent in research must be submitted to a REC approved for that purpose.

6.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?

If **YES**, the research activity proposed will require a DBS check. *(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance)*

7. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research? YES ☐ NO ☒

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

8. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)

Participants in this study will be qualified teachers working in education within the United Kingdom and using English to communicate with the CYP and other professionals. In order to successfully undertake the role, participants will have the required level of understanding of written and spoken English in order to access the information sheets, consent forms and verbal information provided.

RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

9. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? *(Tick as appropriate)*

☐ use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)

☐ use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection

☐ use of written or computerised tests

☒ interviews (attach interview questions)

☐ diaries (attach diary record form)

☐ participant observation

☐ participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research

☒ audio-recording interviewees or events

☐ video-recording interviewees or events

☐ access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes

☐ administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process

☐ performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction

☐ investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)

☐ procedures that involve the deception of participants

☐ administration of any substance or agent

☐ use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions

☐ participation in a clinical trial

☐ research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)

☐ research overseas (copy of VCG overseas travel approval attached)

10. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES ☐   NO ☒ If **YES**, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.
11. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.

The researcher has prior experience as an Assistant Head managing school staff, has been a designated safeguarding officer and Designated LAC teacher. Therefore, I have both an understanding and experience of the emotional demands of working with LAC pupils. I have also completed a year's placement in LAC CAMHS which has provided me with an enhanced awareness of the emotional impact on staff working with LAC pupils and how to support professionals.

The researcher has also worked with children, families and adults for 19 years, within the community, schools (schools with a special educational need focus and alternative provisions) and with a range of multi-agency professionals. Through these roles, the author has helped individuals in distress, signposted to alternative agencies and followed appropriate safeguarding procedures. The author also has a qualification in Counselling Skills using the Arts, which focused on developing empathy and therapeutic listening skills.

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12. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)

NOTE: Where the proposed research involves students of our University, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

The participants of this study may benefit from:

- An opportunity to speak about their experiences working with LAC pupils, allowing opportunity for reflection on their daily practice
- The experience of being listened to without judgement
- An awareness that they are contributing to the development of knowledge that aims to explore the educational and emotional progress of LAC pupils.
- When the results of the study are shared, Virtual School and Designated LAC teachers may benefit from the experiences discussed and the findings could affect future practice.

The decision of participants as to whether or not they wish to participate will have no bearing on the services provided by XXXXXX Educational Psychology Service.

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13. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)

Although, it is not expected that the interviews will result in adverse or unexpected outcomes, it is possible that participants may become distressed talking about their experiences supporting LAC pupils. As a result, the researcher will ensure that all participants, understand their right to withdraw from the study and know that they can discuss any issues that may arise following the interview

process. Additionally, participants will be signposted to any help or support they may require if the interviews raise personal or professional issues.

The use of psycho-social free association narrative approach may bring up issues with which I as the researcher may feel some resonance with. Therefore, the additional supervision I receive for the psycho-social elements of the research will provide an opportunity to explore these feelings and to be aware of elements of transference and counter-transference taking place between myself and the participant. I will also adhere to the psychosocial principles of creating a 'safe space' for my participants (Holloway, 2013, p.82).

14. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)

In the event that any of the participants wishes to discuss any issues that may have arisen through the interview process, the researcher will set aside time for a meeting to take place. The researcher will seek to explore any issues brought up by the participant in their own supervision to reflect on the issues raised. If further discussions are required, a further date will be allocated and/or alternative support can be sourced. Additionally, once the research process is completed (with all data analysed and written-up), a meeting will be held to inform participants of the findings of the study. This will be a voluntary meeting and will give participants the opportunity to reflect on their participation and the research outcomes.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL

15. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials. YES ☒   ☐

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

16. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.
YES ☒   ☐

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

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17. The following is a <u>participant information sheet</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

☒ Clear identification of the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher or Principal Investigator and other researchers along with relevant contact details.

☒ Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.

☒ A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC.

☒ If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.

☒ A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.

☒ Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

☒ Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

☒ A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.

☒ Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

☒ Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

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18. The following is a <u>consent form</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

☒ University or Trust letterhead or logo.

☒ Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.

☒ Confirmation that the project is research.

☒ Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

☒ Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.

☒ If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.

☒ The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.

☒ Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.

☐ Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.

☒ Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

19. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.

☐ Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?

☐ The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with <u>no</u> record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).

☒ The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers <u>are</u> able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).

☐ Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.

☒ Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (I.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)

☐ The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.

☐ Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

20. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.

YES ☒   **NO** ☐

If **NO**, please indicate why this is the case below:

NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.

DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

21. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES ☒   NO ☐
If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

22. In line with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.

☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-5 years ☒ 6-10 years ☐ 10> years

NOTE: Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance currently states that data should normally be preserved and accessible for 10 years, but for projects of clinical or major social, environmental or heritage importance, for 20 years or longer.
(http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/reviews/grc/grcpoldraft.pdf)

23. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.

☒ Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.

☒ Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.

☐ Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See **23.1**).

☐ Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the European Economic Area (EEA).

☐ Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the European Economic Area (EEA). (See **23.2**).

NOTE: Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).

☐ Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.

☒ Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.

☐ Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops). **NOTE:** This should be transferred to secure UEL servers at the first opportunity.

☐ All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be <u>overwritten</u> to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

☐ All hardcopy data will undergo <u>secure disposal</u>.

NOTE: For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

23.1.   Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.

Not applicable

23.2.   Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the European Economic Area (EEA).

Not applicable

OVERSEAS TRAVEL FOR RESEARCH

24. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK? YES ☐   NO ☒

    24.1.   Have you consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/   **YES ☐ NO ☐**

    24.2.   If you are a non-UK national, have you sought travel advice/guidance from the Foreign Office (or equivalent body) of your country? **YES ☐   NO ☐   NOT APPLICABLE ☐**

    24.3.   Have you completed the overseas travel approval process and enclosed a copy of the document with this application? (For UEL students and staff only)   **YES ☐ NO ☐**

Details on this process are available here http://www.uel.ac.uk/qa/research/fieldwork.htm

24.4. Is the research covered by your University's insurance and indemnity provision?
YES ☐ **NO** ☐

NOTE: Where research is undertaken **by UEL students and staff** at an off-campus location within the UK or overseas, the Risk Assessment policy must be consulted:

http://dl-cfs-01.uel.ac.uk/hrservices/documents/hshandbook/risk_assess_policy.pdf.

For UEL students and staff conducting research where UEL is the sponsor, the Dean of School or Director of Service has overall responsibility for risk assessment regarding their health and safety.

24.5.	Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place.
Not applicable	
24.6.	Will this research be financially supported by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or any of its divisions, agencies or programs? **YES** ☐ **NO** ☒

PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

25. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? *(Select all that apply)*

☒ Peer reviewed journal

☒ Conference presentation

☐ Internal report

☒ Dissertation/Thesis

☐ Other publication

☒ Written feedback to research participants

☒ Presentation to participants or relevant community groups

☐ Other (Please specify below)

OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES

26. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?

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CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

27. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.
☐ Letters of approval from ethical approval bodies (where relevant)   ☐ Recruitment advertisement   ☒ Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant)   ☒ Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)   ☐ Assent form for children (where relevant)   ☐ Evidence of any external approvals needed   ☐ Questionnaire   ☐ Interview Schedule or topic guide   ☐ Risk Assessment (where applicable)   ☐ Overseas travel approval (where applicable)
27.1.   **Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.**

Participants Information sheet

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in my research project entitled:

An exploration of Virtual School Teachers and Designated LAC Teachers experiences of supporting looked after children (LAC) to make progress within schools.

My name is Vari Waterman, I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) working for XXXXXX Educational, Child & Community Psychology Service (XECCP). This research project forms part of my doctoral course undertaken at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust (accredited by the University of Essex).

This research has received formal approval from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of Virtual School teachers and Designated LAC teachers supporting the same looked after child, to understand their perception of LAC pupils progress and their lived experiences of supporting LAC pupils within schools.

Why am I asking you to take part in the research?

Within the literature there is an agreement that the academic and emotional progress of LAC pupils is a concern. However, much of the research has focused on a singular area, such as the role of the teacher (Sugden, 2013) or developing a whole school approach (Webber, 2017). This research aims to explore both the individual experience of both VS and DLAC teachers, their perception of the systems around the child they are working with and the commonalities or differences between their roles.

This research aims to gain a deeper insight into the teachers practical and emotional experiences of supporting LAC pupils. The challenges and successes, as well as their perceptions of working together within a wider context. Their understanding of their corporate parent role, the processes and dynamics that underpin this role as well as exploring the

facilitators and barriers to effectively supporting a LAC pupil in education. Your thoughts and feelings reflecting on various aspects of this experience are valuable to informing the practice of professionals supporting schools in XXXXXX.

For Virtual School Teachers:

All virtual school teachers in X Local Authority have been included in the sample. The Virtual School Head teacher has agreed for you to be approached but it is your decision as to whether you would like to take part.

For Designated LAC Teacher:

Your school was randomly selected from the schools which work with X Virtual School teacher in the local authority. The head teacher has agreed for you to be approached but it is your decision as to whether you would like to take part. The criteria that has been used to select participants is: A school within X Local Authority with a Designated LAC teacher who has been in post **for at least a year** and has **at least two LAC pupils in their school, who have been in care for more than a year**.

The researcher does not work directly with the Virtual School/your school (delete as appropriate) and your decision whether to be involved in this research will not affect the services provided by XXXXXX Educational Psychology Service.

What will you be asked to do?

I am looking to conduct individual interviews with four VS teachers and their counterpart DLAC teachers, holding a particular LAC child in mind.

Your participation in this study will involve taking part in two interviews, the first lasting approximately 60 -120 minutes and the second, approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will take place between June and October 2019.

I would like to conduct the interviews in a private space either within your place of work or a local authority office, for your convenience and to ensure a comfortable setting for us both. The interview will be audio-recorded and I might take some notes during our conversation. The recordings will be transcribed to identify themes. These themes will prompt questions to

be explored further in the second interview and an opportunity will be given for further clarification of your experiences.

What will happen after?

The research findings will be shared via an anonymised project report sent to all of participants in the interviews and the head teachers of the schools in the study. If you would like to discuss the findings with the researcher, a meeting will be organised. The researcher may also apply for wider publication in a peer reviewed journal after completing the doctoral thesis as this will allow other professionals who are interested in the topic to read the findings.

Potential benefits of the study include increasing professionals' awareness of how VS and DLAC teachers support LAC pupils within a wider context. This study may also help increase understanding within your school and the Local Authority, about the facilitators and barriers to LAC pupils progress academically and emotionally.

Clarifying some common questions:

Right to withdraw- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time during, and up to one month after, the date of the interview.

Confidentiality - All information collected during the research will not be personally identifiable in any part of the study. General themes arising from the research will be fed back to participants. Anonymised quotes will be used in the final research report which may be read by other people interested in the topic. With the small number of participants involved and the design of the study, it is possible that participants may be able to identify one another from quotes and comments included in the final thesis. Every attempt will be made to ensure that participants and other stakeholders will not be identifiable to anyone not directly involved in the research. However, although it is unlikely in these circumstances, confidentiality of the information provided is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions).

Security: In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, 2018) all information will be stored securely; electronic data will be password protected and no information will be kept for longer than is necessary.

This study has been approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust ethics committee.

Although no physical or emotional risks to participants are anticipated as part of the research process, the researcher recognises that exploring personal experiences could potentially be upsetting for participants. The researcher will be available to discuss any concerns after the interview and will be able to direct you to independent supportive agencies should you wish to do so.

Contact Information:

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the researcher or any other aspect of this research project, please contact Paru Jeram, Quality Assurance Officer on academicquality@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk.

If you have any questions please to not hesitate to contact me at vwaterman@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you wish to participate in this research please sign the consent form and return it to me.

Appendix I – Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Researcher's Name: Vari Waterman

Topic of Study: Virtual School teachers and Designated LAC Teachers responses to supporting LAC pupils in school.

Please read and complete this form carefully.

1. I have read the 'Participant Research Information Sheet' giving details of the study. I have been able to ask questions regarding the research and my involvement in it and am satisfied with the answers.	YES (please circle)
2. I understand that all interviews will be audio-recorded and that I may be quoted in the final report.	YES (please circle)
3. I understand my involvement in this study and my information will remain confidential (this means private). I understand that my name, the school or local authority name will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect my confidentiality.	YES (please circle)
4. I confirm that my involvement in the study is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw (leave) at any time during the research without giving a reason and any information related to my involvement will be destroyed.	YES (please circle)
5. I hereby freely and fully consent to take part in the study on VS teachers and Designated LAC teachers.	YES (please circle)

Your name (in capitals): _____

Signature _____

Date _____