

**CAPTURING THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS WITH  
SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES  
ON THEIR SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES**

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this thesis to my husband Tray Brown and to my greatest pride and joy, our son  
Julian Hajduk Brown.*

## **Abstract**

This study explores the experiences of students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), both in mainstream schools and residential school settings. The subjects are 29 students attending a New Zealand residential special school for boys with SEBD. Through voicing their views on their schooling experiences and suggesting ideas for improvement, the boys provided educators and policymakers with a better understanding of ways in which the schooling experience of boys with SEBD can be more positive and successful.

A qualitative research design was utilised to gain the students' insights into the salient features of their mainstream and residential schooling experiences. In order to highlight student voices in the research process and thesis writing, a phenomenological approach was utilised to shape the core methodology. Interviewing was chosen as the primary method of data collection for the analysis. In-depth, semi-structured interviews raised a number of salient features of the boys' schooling experiences.

The findings are summarised and merged into three main themes; the mainstream school experience, the residential school experience, and boys' suggestions and recommendations for school improvement.

The findings suggest a considerable degree of consistency between the boys concerning the difficulties experienced in mainstream schools. They highlight the importance of cultivating strong, positive student-teacher relationships and relationships among peers; the need for more effective disciplinary practices; the need to recognise the learning needs of students with SEBD as a priority; and the need to address bullying issues more effectively.

The findings also provide valuable insights into some of the ways in which placement in a residential school for boys with SEBD are perceived to be effective for these students. The benefits of a residential school programme identified by the boys included improved learning and behaviour, improved relationships with others, and a greater capacity to deal with difficult feelings. The factors enabling these improvements were identified and included positive relationships with teachers, effective behavioural management based on fair sanctions and rewards, small classes, teachers' instructions, the availability of academic support, better relationships with peers, and an effective anti-bullying policy.

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# **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

## **Overview**

This chapter starts with a short introduction describing the motivation behind the current research. Some background information on inclusive education in New Zealand and its reform is provided in order to contextualise the research. This is followed by a rationale for the study, highlighting the importance of student voice and of research with students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). The overall aim of the research and the specific research questions are presented. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

## **Motivation Behind the Current Research**

This study investigates the perceptions of students with SEBD of their schooling experiences, both in the mainstream and in residential schools. The purpose is to give a voice to 29 boys with SEBD and to learn from their perspectives and recommendations for school improvements in order to gain a better understanding of how educators and policymakers can make the students' educational experience more positive and successful. This research is born of my professional experience as a special education teacher and teaching assistant working with and supporting students with SEBD in primary, secondary, and special schools. These experiences taught me that when we look beyond challenging behaviour and listen carefully, we find articulate students with valuable insights and knowledge and, even more important, a potential for growth. I also believe that each student with SEBD has a unique story to tell, a story which has the potential to be powerful in altering the way these students are perceived.

Another reason for conducting this research and motivating me to undertake the study, is a concern to help ensure that those students with SEBD who currently struggle within our

current mainstream education are given the best possible opportunity to succeed and fulfil their potential.

### **Inclusive Education in New Zealand**

New Zealand has one of the most inclusive education systems in the world, in that less than 1% of children educated in residential schools, special schools, or special classes or units in mainstream schools. New Zealand's ratio of slightly less than 1% compares with England's approximately 1.35%, and the USA's approximately 8%. Recent government policy in New Zealand has focused on ensuring that all schools are "fully inclusive" (Ministry of Education, 2010). Thus the remaining residential special schools, especially those for children with SEBD, are under the threat of closure. The alternative provision suggested by the Ministry of Education is an expansion of the wrap-around service developed in the USA for children with severe behavioural difficulties (Hajdukova, Hornby, & Cushman, 2014).

Inclusive education in New Zealand is based on the premise that every student has the right to access the curriculum as a full-time member of an ordinary classroom alongside other students of similar chronological age (Ballard, 1996). This position is non-exclusionary, highlighting the point that no student should experience segregation on the basis of disability (Mitchell, 2001). It also builds on the concept of the "non-restrictive" environment (Taylor, 2004) and proposes that every child should have the resources and support they need for successful learning. Inclusive education is regarded by its proponents as preferable to special education because it avoids labelling children with special educational needs in a way seen to be stigmatising. However, Hornby (2011) contends that if students with special education needs are not formally identified, they are at great risk of not receiving the teaching they require, which prevents them from reaching their full potential.

## **New Zealand's Special Education Reform**

The Education Act of 1989 (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988) is of particular relevance to special education reform as it requires all schools to enrol students with disabilities. Specifically, section 8 of the act entitles students with special education needs the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as other students. In 1993, the Human Rights Act (1993) was passed. Section 57 of this act prohibits educational establishments from refusing or failing to admit a student with a disability, or admitting such a student on less favourable terms and conditions than would be otherwise available.

From the outset of these reforms, guidelines requiring schools to accept and provide appropriate education for students with disabilities have been developed by the Ministry of Education (Mitchell, 2001). The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2007) also requires schools to “recognize, respect, and respond to the educational needs, experiences, interests and values of all students” (p. 7), including those with special educational needs.

In 1996, the Ministry of Education introduced a new policy, called Special Education 2000, which aimed “to achieve, over the next decade, a world class inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities of equal quality to all students” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 5). Despite the aim of bringing about a significant shift in approach and philosophy, the focus has mostly been on the provision and management of resources (Millar & Morton, 2007). Specifically, the reform shifted the management of funding for the majority of students with special educational needs directly to schools. It also requires any board of trustees to develop and implement local school policies congruent with the objectives of this policy (Wills, 2006).

Moreover, Special Education 2000 introduced a new approach to resourcing students with special educational needs. As part of this, an ongoing resource scheme (ORS) was introduced in 1998 for the 1% of students identified as having a “high” or “very high” level of needs. Under the scheme, these students are guaranteed ongoing resourcing, irrespective of the type of school in which they are enrolled or their geographical location (Ministry of Education, 1996b). “Thus, categories based exclusively on disabilities became replaced by ones based on ‘support needs,’ with an emphasis on students’ capacity to cope with the National Curriculum” (Mitchell, 2001, p. 324).

In the same year, the Ministry of Education established “Behaviour Education Support Teams” with the aim of assisting schools to manage students with challenging behaviours. If behavioural problems persist, students are referred to Centres for Extra Support for short-term intensive programmes. In addition to these resources, the position of RTLB (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) was introduced in recognition of the need to help classroom teachers design and implement appropriate programmes for students with moderate behaviour and learning difficulties. RTLBs are special education teachers who provide advice and guidance to teachers in a cluster of mainstream schools and who are expected to be highly skilled in developing programmes for students experiencing short-term behavioural and/or learning difficulties (Mitchell, 2001).

## **Rationale for the Study**

### ***Student Voice***

In this research project, the desire to give students with SEBD a voice is premised on the conviction that these students have valuable knowledge and unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, that their insights warrant not only the attention of adults but also



responses from them, and that students should be afforded the opportunity to assist in actively shaping their education.

The study also adopts the position suggested by Wise (2000) that we can learn from the perspectives of students with SEBD and should seek to better understand their experience without considering them ‘impaired or invalid’ in some way (p. 144). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), ratified by the New Zealand government in 1993, has influenced the growing recognition of the importance of children’s rights both nationally and internationally (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007; Lundy, 2007; Shevlin & Rose, 2008). The convention provides a benchmark from which a generation of participatory research has developed. As a result, there has been increased international attention to drawing on student perspectives to develop educational processes (Lundy, 2007).

The UNCRC aims to challenge and improve the treatment of all children by affirming their need for “special consideration” and enshrining a number of rights. Of particular significance to this study are the following:

- Article 12: Children’s right to express their views
- Article 23: Children’s right to special care, education and training, regardless of disability
- Article 28: Children’s right to a primary education
- Article 29: Children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest

In educational research and reform, the issue of student voice is not a new phenomenon (Flynn, Shevlin, & Lodge, 2011). Research into student voice was vigorously pursued in the late 1960s and 1970s in order to gain a better understanding of life in classrooms and schools (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Even though many of the studies highlighted student potential

to make a valuable contribution to school improvements, “there was no general expectation, as there is now, that the data would be fed back to teachers and students as a basis for informed action” (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007, p. 21).

Since the 1990s, the steadily increasing interest in the active participation and voice of students (Flynn et al., 2011) has been reflected in many educational initiatives, such as school councils, citizenship and personal and social education curricula, and pedagogical approaches such as personalised learning and Circle Time as well as policy and research initiatives (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Leitch & Mitchell, 2007). The movement towards a culture of participation has been strongly supported by the claim that there is a link between giving students a voice and enhancing the effectiveness of schools. An array of evidence (Cooper, 1993a, 1993b; Daniel et al., 2006; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Flynn et al., 2011; Sellman, 2009) suggests that by actively consulting with students, schools are likely to improve the effectiveness of individual and group learning, student motivation, and disciplinary, pedagogical and organisational processes. Research also indicates that engaging the student voice has the potential to lead to improved student-teacher alliances, increasing the quality of school life and student empowerment (Tangen, 2009).

### ***The Importance of Research with Students with SEBD***

While there is a plethora of studies eliciting student voices, those recording the voices of students with SEBD are still relatively few (Cefai & Cooper, 2009). The number of students identified as having SEBD increases continually (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a; Goodman & Burton, 2010) and despite government rhetoric and growing concern about the low educational attainment and bleak life outcomes for this group of students, they are rarely afforded the opportunity to join debates about their schooling (Thomas, 2007). According to Robinson and Taylor (2007), teachers tend to listen to able, very articulate students and

“those who agree with what schools want to hear” (p.11). Tangen (2009, p. 861) also points out that “those students who literally speak or shout loudest in the classroom, are those whose voices are most seldom heard.”

Listening to the views of students with SEBD is particularly important if Cooper (2006) is right in his assertion that this group of young people is the “least empowered and liked group of all” (p. 39). The importance of including the voice of students with SEBD is also stressed by Davies (2005), who asserted that until the views of students with SEBD are listened to and acknowledged, it is likely that they will continue to have negative schooling experiences.

Previous studies, furthermore, that have utilised, as a main data collection method, the voices of students having or perceived to have SEBD demonstrate that these students have a lot to offer in providing meaningful knowledge and authentic insights into their schooling experiences (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Cooper, 1993b; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Flynn et al., 2011; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Jahnukainen, 2001; MacBeath, 2006; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton & Torstensson, 2011; Polat & Farrell, 2002b; Pomeroy, 1999; Riley & Docking, 2004; Sellman, 2009; Wise, 2000).

Some studies (Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Wise, 2000) have also suggested that insights provided by students with SEBD have the potential to facilitate better understanding of the nature and cause of learning and behavioural difficulties, which might be overlooked or not reported by teachers. Listening to the views of students with SEBD may enable them to reflect on their behaviour and its impact on their own and others' learning and relationships. This can help prevent feelings of helplessness and disaffection and empower these students to take responsibility for their own actions, consequently leading to improved behaviour in schools (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Cefai and Cooper (2010) also argue that giving students with SEBD a meaningful and influential voice at school can lead to

the development of more positive student-teacher relationships, an enhanced sense of belonging to and engagement in school, and improved educational outcomes.

The inclusion of students with SEBD perspectives is clearly beneficial for both school staff and students, yet the value of eliciting student views as a crucial component of school improvement needs to be acknowledged by practitioners, policymakers and researchers (McIntyre, Pedder, & Rudduck, 2005).

### **The Aims of the Study**

Through an appreciation of student voices, the overarching aim of this study is to explore the schooling experiences of students with SEBD, both in the mainstream and in residential school settings. Its purpose is to gain valuable insights and information that can be used for the enhancement of pedagogical practice and school improvement. The research also aims to present the participants' recommendations with the anticipation that these may lead to the creation of a more positive educational environment in which students with SEBD will be able to thrive and reach their potential. It is also hoped that the study will help educationists and practitioners to better understand the complexity of SEBD and thus assist them to better meet the psychosocial and emotional needs of these students.

In order to achieve these aims, phenomenological methods are utilised as they are effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives (Larkin, Smith, & Flowers, 2009). The study also recognises that the multiple realities experienced by students with SEBD in different educational settings cannot be fully comprehended, either by inference or assumption. Only by allowing participants the time and opportunity to make sense of their lived experience is it possible to understand the complexities which contribute to their experiences and behaviour (Innes, Moss, & Smigiel,

2001). The phenomenological framework of this study illuminates the experiences of the participants through their personal descriptions of their lived school experience. This approach fits with the rationale behind the study. The phenomenological methodology chosen for the study is discussed fully in Chapter Three.

The study also seeks to contribute to the larger base of literature on student autonomy and fill a gap in educational research. A comprehensive investigation of the international research uncovered that not only are the voices of students having or perceived to have SEBD underrepresented in the field of social research, but there is also limited research investigating the school experience of these students both in the mainstream and in residential school settings.

Furthermore, a minimal amount of research focusing on students with SEBD and providing recommendations for mainstream school improvement has been found. All of the studies relevant to this research that have been located are presented in the literature review in Chapter Two. In addition, the voices of students with SEBD, especially those attending residential and special schools in New Zealand, seem to have been largely ignored by the research community, as only two studies of this type have been conducted in New Zealand (Hornby & Witte, 2008a, 2008b; Townsend & Wilton, 2006). Consequently, the study aims to address this knowledge gap by investigating the school experiences of students with SEBD and considering both insiders' perspectives and the students' recommendations for mainstream school improvement.

## **Research Questions**

The research was specifically designed to answer the following research questions:

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their mainstream schooling experiences?*

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their residential schooling experiences?*

These questions underpin all aspects of the research design and the analysis of the data that emerges.

## **Overview of the Thesis**

The first chapter introduces the study, its background, rationale, purpose and significance, and outlines the research questions.

Chapter Two addresses and synthesises the relevant international research literature associated with this study and upon which the study is largely based.

Chapter Three describes the methodological context of the study and provides a brief outline of phenomenology, including its various approaches and chief characteristics. It focuses on phenomenology, the methodological approach utilised in this study, and pays particular attention to the phenomenological procedures set forth by Moustakas (1994).

Chapter Four describes the methods that guided the data collection process and includes descriptions of the residential school setting, the participants, the selection procedure, the phenomenological interview structure, and the interview schedule, as well as an overview of how the data was collected, analysed, and synthesised.

In Chapter Five, the results are presented, following the phenomenological tradition. This chapter is divided into three thematic units: the mainstream school experience, the residential school experience, and participants' recommendations for school improvement.

Chapter Six provides a discussion and interpretation of the findings of the current study in relation to previous research. It goes on to discuss practical implications for working with students with SEBD. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the major contributions, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

## **Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to clarify the motivation behind the current research and to provide some background information on inclusive education in New Zealand in order to contextualise the research. The inherent value of student voice and of research with students with SEBD has been highlighted. The overall aims of the research and the specific research questions have been presented. The chapter has concluded with an overview of the thesis structure.

In the next chapter the international literature pertaining to the challenges of SEBD is examined.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The aim of this chapter is to provide background information about the complexities of SEBD in relation to the phenomena of schooling. Even though the examination of the international literature presented in this chapter provides a solid foundation for the discussion of the findings, it should be noted that an additional extensive body of literature is examined and presented throughout the study.

The chapter begins with a definition of the term “SEBD” and the rationale behind its use in the current study. This is followed by the first section of the literature review which outlines the major challenges of SEBD, specifically its increasing prevalence, mental health issues, educational attainment, and issues of inclusion. In addition, research studies that have attempted to explore the schooling experiences of students with SEBD, in both mainstream schools and in alternative educational provisions (special and residential schools), are presented and discussed.

The second section of the chapter outlines international research that has focused on students with SEBD relationships with teachers and highlights the importance of fostering positive relationships. The literature review undertaken in the third section of this chapter reveals the different ways of thinking about the behavioural management of students with SEBD. It begins with a short description of theories of behaviour and is followed by a discussion of effective classroom management of students who are perceived or identified as having SEBD. The international literature pertaining to the most common disciplinary practices implemented in schools to manage the behaviour of students with SEBD is outlined.



In the fourth part of this chapter, a range of research literature relating to students with SEBD in their relationships with their peers has been examined. One segment of this literature specifically relates to the attitudes of peers towards students with SEBD. The fifth and final part of the chapter presents current research on the phenomenon of bullying. Teachers' attitudes towards bullying as well as bullying issues pertaining to students with SEBD are examined.

## **The Challenges of SEBD**

### ***Definition of SEBD***

In the context of this study, the term “social, emotional and behavioural difficulties” (SEBD) is used in reference to a group of children who exhibit disturbing and/or disruptive behaviour that interferes with their own and others' social functioning and academic engagement. Their behaviour may be termed “acting out” (disruptive) or “acting in” (showing withdrawal and/or avoidance) (National Council for Special Education, 2006). SEBD phenomena include difficulties in sustaining attention, serious or persistent impulsiveness, difficulties regulating physical movement, verbal or physical aggression towards other people, violent or destructive behaviour, oppositionality, extreme fearfulness, avoidant behaviour, withdrawn behaviour, low self-worth, and hopelessness. In the school setting, these phenomena might manifest themselves, for example, as defiance to staff, persistent rule breaking, bullying others, being a victim of bullying, truancy and disruptive behaviour (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a).

The decision to use the term SEBD in this study was made because it is the longest established and most comprehensive term currently in use in the field. More importantly, the term SEBD usually refers to students within their social context, stressing the point that the problem may reside in the environment rather than in the individual (Cooper & Jacobs,

2011a). In addition, the order of the letters in the acronym SEBD puts clear emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of students' difficulties. This is important as it may encourage teachers and practitioners to change their focus from managing behaviour to seeking to understand the social and emotional factors behind the behaviour (Cole & Knowles, 2011).

Internationally a wide range of terminology is used to describe students exhibiting these kinds of aforementioned behaviours. These include 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' (Scotland), 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (Northern Ireland), or 'emotional and social difficulties' (England). 'Emotional and behavioural disorder' is a term commonly used in medical/psychiatric circles and refers to specific psychiatric conditions for which the diagnostic criteria are published by organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association (2013) and the World Health Organisation (2004). The term is also widely used in US educational legislation as well as in research and professional literature.

In New Zealand, the term 'challenging behaviour' is employed in health and social care, and educational circles to refer to students whose behaviour is experienced by those around them as disturbing and/or threatening. Although it is important to acknowledge the wide range of terminology used both in policy documents and research pertaining to the categorisation of behavioural difficulties, it is not within the scope of this study to examine either the contested interpretations, the historical development of them, nor the broader philosophical debates on the issue of terminology in education.

### ***The Nature of SEBD***

SEBD among school students presents a unique educational challenge as it is manifested in both externalising and internalising problems and social adjustment issues. While externalising problems are manifested in outwardly disruptive terms, internalising problems are often a threat to an individual's own safety and well-being. In addition, a small but still

significant proportion of students with SEBD have mental health problems that often co-mingle with cognitive learning disorders such as attention hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002). Furthermore, many students with SEBD have experienced rejection, continual abuse and a lack of appropriate adult role models in their life, which can result in the development of ‘failing’ patterns of behaviour, difficulties in social adjustment and an inability to internalise care (Mihalas et al., 2009).

### ***The Prevalence of SEBD and Mental Health Issues***

The issue of the prevalence of SEBD among children and youth is often fraught with controversy, partly driven by serious concerns about labelling for the purpose of social control (Slee, 2013). However, Cooper and Cefai (2013) argue that minimizing the prevalence of SEBD by denying its actual extent can potentially lead to missed opportunities for “preventive and remedial interventions” (p. 85). Since SEBD is an umbrella term that encompasses a broad spectrum of difficulties, it comes as no surprise that SEBD is the second highest category of special education needs, with 23% of children and young people identified globally as having SEBD. This figure is likely to be even higher since it does not include those students who may have internalised rather than externalised difficulties (Cole & Knowles, 2011).

When considering both externalised and internalised problems, there is growing concern that international prevalence rates for mental health problems among school students appear to be increasing and have been for some time (Patel et al., 2007). Mental health issues in young people are also apparent in New Zealand, where approximately 20% of adolescents and 10% of children under the age of 14 are affected by mental health disorders or mental health problems (Oakley Browne et al., 2006). The most common mental health disorders among children and youth in New Zealand are anxiety disorders, depression, conduct disorders

(CD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and substance abuse. As there is a strong overlap between the population of children and youth with SEBD and those diagnosed with mental health problems and disorders, these mental health disorders and problems are likely to be seen and exhibited by students with SEBD (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a; Daniel et al., 2006).

A strong link between the mental health of students and achievement has been recognised, with good mental health being a strong contributor to a student's positive development and educational achievement (Cushman, Clelland & Hornby, 2011). Unfortunately, many educators are still not equipped with the necessary skills to meet the mental health needs of students, are unaware of a student's social and emotional problems (Mannella, Sawka, & McCurdy, 2002), and find it difficult to understand the boundaries between "normal" misbehaviour, behavioural difficulties, and mental health problems (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002). Consequently, school-based mental health initiatives are critical and need to incorporate approaches aimed at teaching students effective strategies and healthy lifestyles, as well as screening those who are at risk of developing mental health problems and disorders (Murray, Low, Hollis, Cross, & Davis, 2007).

### ***Educational Attainment***

Students with SEBD are more at risk of negative school and life outcomes compared with students in other disability categories and students without disabilities (Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011b; Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). International research suggests that there is a link between low achievement in basic academic skills and the development of SEBD (Chazan, Laing, & Davies, 1994; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a; Farrell, Critchley, & Mills, 1999). Externalising behaviours are linked to deficits in reading,

mathematics, and written language achievement (Clark, Prior, & Kinsella, 2002; Kaukiainen et al., 2002; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). Research on the educational attainment of students with SEBD indicates that these young people perform at a significantly lower level than other students across a wide range of academic subjects and settings (Farrell, 1999; Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004). Grimshaw and Berridge (1994) found that the majority of students who were attending SEBD residential schools had reading skills 2 years below the grade average. Students with SEBD also achieve lower grades, fail more courses, and are less likely to graduate from high school compared with students without SEBD (Cooper, Drummond, Hart, Lovey, & McLaughlin, 2000; Reid et al., 2004). They are less likely to undertake postsecondary education or secure a stable job or career and are more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives (Bullock & Gable, 2006; Carter & Lunsford, 2010; Hornby & Witte, 2008a).

These studies reflect the concerns expressed by Maras (1996) who argues that many students with SEBD have undetected learning difficulties. Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) point out the need for early identification of learning difficulties and the importance of intervention targeting reading skills in students with SEBD. They advocate the implementation of Success For All, a whole-school reform model, which has shown positive outcomes for the great majority of students involved. It is the most robustly evidence-based programme in the USA, specifically designed for at-risk students and targeting not only literacy skills but also promoting the social and academic engagement of students with SEBD through co-operative learning, intensive one-to one mentoring, and the encouragement of parental involvement in the school as a whole (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a; Wood & Caulier-Grice, 2006).

Furthermore, the research concerning students identified or perceived as having SEBD consistently demonstrates how an inappropriate curriculum can exacerbate behavioural

difficulties (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Porter, 2007). According to Porter (2007), “a relevant curriculum is both a preventative and interventive measure in relation to disruptive behaviour.” (p. 118). The importance of access to an engaging curriculum that inspires student interests is highlighted by Rosenberg (1997), who also argues that effective academic instruction of students with SEBD should be based on pedagogical principles that consider both their unique educational needs and educational orientation. Cefai and Cooper (2009) support this assertion since they found that young people with SEBD wished that what they had to do at school would make more sense to their present lives and future career prospects.

### ***Issues of Inclusion***

Many researchers have explored such important questions as whether high quality education for students with SEBD can be provided in mainstream schools without adversely affecting the education of other students and the consequences of placing these students in special schools. Their findings have had implications for effective policy and practice (Cooper, 1993a; Cooper et al., 2000; Cullen, Munn, & Lloyd, 2000; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Hornby & Witte, 2008a; Polat & Farrell, 2002a; Sellman, 2009; Smith, McKay, & Chakrabarti, 2004). This study, however, does not seek to answer these questions, nor does it propose to compare the effectiveness of mainstream and residential schools.

Although the issue of inclusion has become a key feature in global discussions around the development of education policy and practice, the status and the effectiveness of existing residential and special schools are systematically ignored and excluded from the wider debate (Willmann, 2007). Residential schools are not favoured by many inclusive educationists because they appear to stand for segregationist practices. By isolating students from

communities and building up negative stereotypes among the general population, students in residential schools become marginalized participants in society (Farrell & Polat, 2003).

Inclusion advocates also argue that the expense of running residential programmes is too costly, draining special education resources without providing long-term beneficial results (Artiles & Bal, 2008). Lorenz (1998, p. 5) contends, however, that inclusion is not necessarily less problematic. “Intensive in-class support can be equally stigmatising and many students, particularly those of secondary age, resent being minded, preferring to seek help when they need it.” In addition, “some children’s differences require distinctive (and, therefore, separate) places for instruction if their educational needs are to be met and, consequently ... separate placements can be superior to inclusive placements for these children” (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002, p. 151).

Many authors refer to the present state of mainstream schools and suggest that the unique needs of students experiencing SEBD cannot be sufficiently met in this setting. They argue that special education provides students with positive learning experiences through the quality of the instructional environments and the relationships with teachers and staff (Cooper, 1993a; Farrell & Polat, 2003; Habel, Bloom, Ray, & Bacon, 1999; Harriss, Barlow, & Moli, 2008; Hornby & Witte, 2008a, 2008b; Jahnukainen, 2001; Polat & Farrell, 2002a; Schuh & Caneda, 1997; Smith et al., 2004; Townsend & Wilton, 2006).

Concern about the ability of mainstream schools to provide effective education for students with SEBD is also underlined by Cefai and Cooper (2009) who conducted research seeking to hear the voice of students with SEBD in Malta. They identified seven research projects carried out in the last decade, drawing on retrospective adult accounts or secondary age students. From these studies they drew the following conclusion:

Students with SEBD described their mainstream school experience as an unpleasant and unhappy one. Not only did they feel cheated by not receiving the support they needed in their learning and in their socio-emotional development, but they felt victimised and abused by a system that labelled them as deviant and failures, putting them even more at risk for social exclusion as young adults (p. 49).

This conclusion links to findings that suggest that students with SEBD tend to dislike being in mainstream education (Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 1999; Riley & Docking, 2004; Wise, 2000).

A study conducted by Burton, Bartlett, and Cuevas (2009) highlighted the fact that differences in the interpretation of special education policy globally and in the formulation of support for inclusion varied among schools, cause significant variation in the experiences of the most vulnerable children. This situation poses the question about the extent to which students with SEBD are genuinely included in mainstream schools. The literature indicates that not only are schools becoming more reluctant to admit students with SEBD (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Farrell & Humphrey, 2009; Farrell & Polat, 2003) but also that these students often go “missing” from mainstream schools and/or are excluded (Brown, 2007; Cooper et al., 2000). Due to the lack of statistics provided by the UK government, it is difficult to confirm this claim (Farrell & Polat, 2003). However, it has been acknowledged that students with SEBD are among the most disadvantaged students with special education needs (Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Hornby & Witte, 2008a).

Even though there is some evidence of mainstream school teachers developing their practice to foster the inclusion of students who are at risk of developing behavioural problems (e.g. Hollanders 2002; Rooney 2002), an array of evidence (Croll & Moses, 2000; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Heiman, 2001) suggests that mainstream teachers



tend to have negative perceptions of, and limited tolerance for, problem behaviour and thus are unlikely to have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with SEBD.

### ***Studies on Students' with SEBD Voices: School Related Themes***

A search for studies on the voices of students with SEBD yields mostly small-scale studies carried out in the past two decades. These studies share the common aim to present students' with SEBD views on their schooling, a perspective that has received relatively little attention in the field of educational research (Cefai & Cooper, 2009). The studies have been all undertaken with students identified as having SEBD; namely students with behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools (Flynn et al., 2011) and SEBD provisions (Cooper, 1993a; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Sellman, 2009), students who were excluded from mainstream schools (O' Connor et al., 2011; Pomeroy, 1999), former students of special classes (Jahnukainen, 2001) and residential schools (Farrell & Polat, 2003; Hornby & Witte, 2008a, 2008b; Polat & Farrell, 2002a; Smith et al., 2004; Townsend & Wilton, 2006).

The questions raised by the researchers commonly touched on the various aspects of the students' school experience, the learning and the behaviour problems they encountered, their future career prospects, and where applicable, the reasons why they stopped attending school. Five common themes related to students' with SEBD perceptions of their mainstream schooling experience can be seen across the studies, namely poor relationships with teachers and peers, victimisation by teachers and peers, a sense of oppression, unconnected learning and exclusion. Students with SEBD, including those who attended mainstream schools, special schools/units, and those who were excluded from schools, described their mainstream schooling experience as unpleasant and unhappy. They found it difficult to engage in learning and often found the school curriculum boring and unrelated to their life and career. They felt victimised by their teachers and peers and believed that they had little say in what

was happening in school. They commonly reported a sense of injustice, failure, helplessness and oppression. On the other hand students expressed mainly positive views about their experiences at the residential schools. While the reasons given for these positive views varied, one factor which stood out across all studies was the appreciation which students expressed for the positive relationships that teachers and other staff at the special schools had established with them. Perceptions of negative aspects of SEBD provision generally included impact of labelling and difficulties related to post transition.

Even though many of these studies (e.g. Cooper, 1993a; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Polat & Farrell, 2002) reported on number of non-school related factors that contributed to the students' with SEBD schooling difficulties, most of them focused solely on students' with SEBD perceptions. This could be considered as presenting a narrow perspective of highly complex phenomenon. Furthermore, it needs to be mentioned that the focus chosen by these studies should not be taken to imply that students' perspective is more important or valid than that of school staff and other partners concerned.

All of the studies on students' with SEBD voices provide an adequate description of the methodology used in the data collection and analysis process, including the design of the instruments. The studies predominantly used qualitative interviews as a main source of data and implemented a grounded theory approach (e.g. Jahnukainen, 2001; O' Connor et.al, 2001; Sellman, 2009). The choice of grounded theory approach in student voice research is considered to be appropriate as the aim is to develop theory that is generated or "grounded" in data from participants who have experienced the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Observations were predominantly used in ethnographic research studies (e.g. Cooper. 1993a; Flynn at.al. 2011; Hamill & Boyd, 2002). Only two studies (e.g. Cooper. 1993a; Hamill &

Boyd, 2002) used quantitative methods such as questionnaires to seek empirical support for their research.

Only three studies (O' Connor, 2011; Flynn, 2011, Sellman, 2009; Wise, 2000) utilised participatory action research. These studies aimed to highlight the importance of moving away from a data gathering process that treats people with SEBD as 'objects' to methods that focus on empowerment and facilitation. The tools of inquiry included innovative explorative strategies such as activity sessions, workshops, and visual tools for mapping important events. The analysis often included participants themselves. However an objective of this research is often to work collaboratively with professionals to ensure they are aware of what is happening at every stage while critically analysing the provision. This can be limiting as the professionals involved could become wary of highlighting bad practice and this could be perceived as the school structure trying to silence the students' voice.

### ***Schooling Experiences of Students with SEBD in Alternative Programmes***

International research on the educational experience of students with SEBD in residential schools speaks in favour of this setting (Cooper, 1993a; Farrell & Polat, 2003; Harriss et al., 2008; Hornby & Witte, 2008a, 2008b; Polat & Farrell, 2002a; Smith et al., 2004; Townsend & Wilton, 2006). These studies suggest that students often experience positive, warm, and supportive relationships with residential staff, as well as experiencing a sense of safety and emotional security, allowing them to form more positive identities. Students commented positively on the benefits of broader life experience opportunities, increased skills in handling negative emotions, and more individualized instruction in residential schools. For many students, this not only resulted in an improvement in their ability to cope with negative feelings, trust others, and engage in learning at school, but also improved the quality of their

family relationships (Cooper, 1993a; Harriss et al., 2008; Hornby & Witte, 2008a; Polat & Farrell, 2002a).

A small-scale qualitative research project carried out by Spiteri (2009) explored the way in which attending an SEBD school had influenced the self-perception of five young people as adults. The participants identified a number of factors that they believed they had come to view as “strengths” as adults. One of the participants described how attending the special school had made him feel like he was “one of a group” for the first time in his life. The participants commonly described feelings of belonging associated with the special school and stressed the importance of having a second chance to start at another school (in their case a special school). In their own words, the special school enabled them to develop a more positive view of school and learning, which in turn led to a more positive view of themselves and their abilities. Findings in this study also imply that attending a special school can instil a sense of responsibility in students with SEBD as the participants referred to this experience as a turning point in their lives.

In order to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of residential schooling, attempts have been made to document post-school outcomes of students. A follow-up study by Farrell and Polat (2003) revealed poor social and personal outcomes for students who attended SEBD residential schools in the UK. Their lack of educational qualifications often resulted in issues such as financial insecurity, a struggle to find full-time jobs, and negative expectations for the future.

In a similar study in New Zealand carried out by Hornby and Witte (2008a), the findings were even worse. Only 9 out of 29 interviewees had a full-time job and four others were in prison. These ex-residential school students also reported poor interpersonal relationships and a lack of engagement in community activities. The authors of these studies attributed the

outcomes to inadequate support throughout the transition process from residential school, followed by lack of long-term support mechanism and poor post-residential intervention. Cooper and Jacobs (2011a) supports this finding, declaring that “the positive achievements of these placements can be undermined when continuity in support and care for individuals after they leave residential provision is absent” (p. 119).

A study carried out by Jahnukainen (2001) however offers a different view to these follow-up studies and their findings. This study examined the post-educational outcomes of ex-students of special education in Finland, 10 years after they left school. Unlike those mentioned in the previous studies, most of these ex-students lived fairly typical lives with a decent quality of life. Those who fared badly had had disadvantaged childhoods, leading Jahnukainen to claim that it was the students’ backgrounds, not the special educational context and their post-school support system, that most influenced their lives. According to Cooper (1993a), disadvantages in childhood and SEBD are closely linked, thus school placement should provide a respite from the students’ disadvantaged situations in order to improve the future outcomes for these students.

## **Relationships with Teachers<sup>1</sup>**

### ***The Importance of Fostering Positive Pupil-Teacher Relationships***

There is no single solution to the multifaceted issue of effectively educating students with SEBD; however research suggests there are various ways in which teachers can positively influence the outcomes of these students. An important step that teachers can take is to develop positive student-teacher relationships as their cultivation can be a strong mechanism for guiding and supporting students’ social-emotional, behavioural and academic growth (Cooper, 2008; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2009). The term ‘positive student -

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<sup>1</sup> Some material in this section (Relationships with Teachers) has been published. See Hajdukova, Hornby & Cushman in the reference list.

teacher relationships' in this thesis means an interaction between teachers and students that is characterised by mutual respect, caring and closeness, whereby the teacher does what is in the best interest of the student, while taking into account the students' developmental level and associated needs (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

There is clear evidence that positive student–teacher relationships are central to the healthy development of all students in schools. International research shows that positive relationships between teachers and primary school students are aligned with students' successful adjustment to school, academic achievement and school liking (Baker, 2006). A New Zealand study of students and teachers' views on enhancing self-worth in the classroom found both groups to be unanimous in their view that positive relationships between students and teachers “enhance students' good feelings about themselves, which then contributes positively to their learning” (Cushman & Cowan, 2010, p. 85).

On the other hand, negative student-teacher relationships in primary schools are associated with students' low academic achievement, school disengagement and poor self-direction (Birch & Ladd, 1998). The need for quality relationships with teachers remains salient for positive student outcomes throughout middle and secondary schools as such relationships continue to be linked with pro-social behaviour (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002), school engagement (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006), psychological well-being (Herrero, Estévez, & Musitu, 2006) and a decrease in aggression (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003). In contrast, negative relationships between teachers and middle school and secondary school students consistently predict school disengagement and poor academic achievement (Lee, 2007).

### ***Students' Perspectives on Relationships with Teachers***

International research that has focused on the elucidation of students' with SEBD perspectives on their relationships with teachers shows that positive student–teacher

relationships are a source of remedial and protective factors in their experiences. In Cooper's (1993a) research, students with SEBD reported that trusting, mutually respectful and supportive relationships with adults in SEBD special schools enabled them to develop more positive self-images and come to terms with the difficulties of self-regulation and academic engagement. In a study of students attending four contrasting residential schools, Grimshaw and Berridge (1994) found support for Cooper's study. More recently, former students of a residential school in England for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties also reported that establishing positive relationships with adults helped them to improve their confidence and learning and enabled them to better manage their behaviour (Farrell & Polat, 2003; Polat & Farrell, 2002).

On the other hand, research focusing on the perspectives of students who are labelled with or are experiencing SEBD suggests that negative relationships with mainstream teachers are a common source of grievance. In her study of students who were excluded from UK schools, Pomeroy (1999) found that problematic relationships with teachers were referred to as the most common source of students' difficulties in mainstream schools. Among the concerns she cited that arose from these relationships were: teachers refusing to listen to young people's concerns; teachers not intervening to provide pastoral care; teachers treating students unequally; and teachers humiliating students by shouting at, insulting or being rude to them. Research carried out by Cooper, Drummond, Hart, Lovey and McLaughlin (2000) paints a similar picture as many of the students whom were perceived to exhibit SEBD noted that they felt that they were not respected and acknowledged as human beings by their teachers. Other studies that draw heavily on the views of students also show that teachers are likely to attach 'deviant' labels to students who present with SEBD. This may not only exacerbate behavioural problems and lead to problems of disaffection and disrespect (Hamill

& Boyd, 2002; Riley & Docking, 2004), but it can also serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy for this group (Jahnukainen, 2001).

Another issue associated with teachers' labelling and its negative consequences is highlighted in a study by Swinson and Knight (2007) wherein students who were perceived by their teachers as behaviourally challenging were more likely to receive a higher proportion of negative feedback directed towards their social behaviour and a lesser amount of individual praise for appropriate behaviour when compared to peers without behavioural problems. The perspectives of students with SEBD on their relationships with teachers appear to be supported in literature regarding teachers' perspectives. As has been previously alluded to (Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 1999), teachers, especially those working in mainstream schools, may hold a negative attitude towards students whom they perceive as having SEBD and this attitude may impede the development of positive student-teacher relationships. Cooper (2008) states that the difficulties in maintaining an attitude of care and empathy in the face of challenging and distressing behaviours displayed by students with SEBD should not be underestimated as no other educational problem is associated with such a high level of fear, anger, blame and frustration.

Despite the past failure that many students with SEBD have experienced with adult relationships, research (Cooper, 2008; Lowenthal, 2001; Mihalas et al., 2009) shows that both general and special education need teachers to be in a unique position to foster positive relationships with students with SEBD. Lowenthal (2001) found that students with SEBD who rejected their teachers still wanted to feel cared for and wanted that care to be communicated to them. Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) found that students differentiate teachers from other adults, thus enhancing teachers' potential to foster caring adult-student relationships. The sheer amount of time spent with students, and the nature of the school



environment, also places teachers in a powerful position to become natural support figures and role models in transmitting behavioural and social values (Mihalas et al., 2009).

Moreover, Wentzel and Watkins (2002) found that teachers have a more direct impact on students in this regard than parents.

## **Managing Behaviour**

Improving education provision for students with SEBD calls for a better understanding of the nature of behaviours displayed by students with SEBD. This requires not only careful consideration of their views but also an in-depth knowledge of theories and models of behaviour. It is also vital to acknowledge that one's theoretical preferences can influence the interpretation, description and perception of behaviours displayed by students with SEBD and that categorising behaviour is a very subjective task because behaviour is open to interpretation and often cannot be understood without consideration of the context (Wise, 2000). Cooper (1993a) also asserted that the problems experienced by students with SEBD are diverse; therefore a diversity of approaches is needed to address them.

## ***Theories of Behaviour***

Interactionism has been developed in various ways and currently presents itself in the form of systemic or ecological theories. Interactionism rejects psychodynamic and social learning theories which suggest that behaviour is the result of subconscious forces working to control the individual. Psychodynamic theory stresses that the forces which control the individual from the inside are the result of earlier experiences, particularly during childhood. Social learning theory focuses on the forces within a society which control the individual's behaviour, allowing little opportunity for the individual to make conscious decisions (Wise, 2000).

On the other hand, systemic or ecological theories of behaviour encourage the consideration of behaviour in context by allowing for the exploration of a variety of factors at multiple levels of the child's system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Such approaches stress the importance of the environment for the behaviour of students with SEBD and encourage the belief that problems may lie within the systems surrounding these students, or at least in the interaction between the students and the school system (Cooper & Upton, 1990). It seems apparent that the systemic approach to behaviour needs to be considered when working with students with SEBD as it can offer a greater opportunity for intervention that focuses not only on the students themselves but also on school environments and the attitudes of individuals who are involved with these students (Cole & Knowles, 2011).

A study conducted by Wise (2000) underlines the need to move away from behaviourist conceptualisations of SEBD towards a systemic understanding, in order to capture strengths and resources at different levels of the system. Wise interviewed students (aged between 12-16 years) who attended one of two special schools for students with SEBD and found that participants identified multiple factors that they believed contributed to the development of their difficulties, both within and outside the school. Factors in the school system included the transition to secondary school, relationships with teachers, lack of support, classroom discipline and low self-esteem in particular areas of the curriculum. Factors associated with the self-included being different, not being able to learn, and self-blame. Factors associated with the family included loss of parents through family breakdown or death, violence in the home, inappropriate role models and caring for a parent. Finally, factors associated with broader social experiences included being in care, poverty, class, self-image, and cultural expectations associated with being part of an unacceptable cultural group.

It has been acknowledged in the literature that social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties in children and young people are multifaceted phenomena influenced by various bio-psycho-social factors (Cefai & Cooper, 2006). As in system theory, the bio-psychosocial approach allows for the synthesis of other individualised approaches to SEBD, while emphasising the importance of the influence of social environment and a contextualised view of SEBD.

However the bio-psychosocial approach takes this synthesis further by fully integrating the internal biological and intra-psyche dimension with the intrapersonal and social dimension (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a, p. 58). Cooper and Cefai (2013) also argue that this approach is truly holistic as it allows for a better understanding of the complexities of SEBD and its associated interventions.

### ***Effective Classroom Management: More than just a Discipline***

Although definitions of classroom management vary, it generally includes actions taken by the teacher to establish and maintain order, engage students, or elicit their cooperation (Emmer & Stough, 2001). The issue of classroom management, disruptive behaviours, and teacher practices should be approached from a socio-ecological perspective since “all individuals are part of an interrelated system that locates the individual at the centre and moves out from the centre to include all systems that affect the individual” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). Adopting this perspective assumes that student-teacher relationships and relationships between students in the classroom are reciprocal and interconnected. This means that the actions of all classroom members affect the behaviour of everyone in the classroom environment, creating a dynamic context and culture.

SEBD are commonly associated with disruptive and challenging behaviours in classrooms (Cooper & Cefai, 2013). Even though the number of students with SEBD in New Zealand mainstream schools is steadily increasing, many teachers feel that they do not possess the

necessary behavioural management skills to deal with disruptive and challenging behaviours displayed by these students and report it as one of their major concerns and greatest sources of stress (Miller, Ferguson, & Byrne, 2000), as a main cause of burnout (McCoy, 2003) and as a major barrier to creating a truly inclusive environment (Goodman & Burton, 2010).

International research also indicates that beginning teachers often feel unprepared to manage their classrooms (Duck, 2007; Merrett & Wheldall, 1993; Sullivan, Cleary, & Sullivan, 2004) and lack the skills to manage students with SEBD effectively (Allen & Blackston, 2003; Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Kirkpatrick, Lincoln, & Morrow, 2006). This frequently contributes to their decision to leave the teaching profession (McCoy, 2003).

Furthermore, teachers who lack effective management skills and an understanding of SEBD are at increased risk of focusing excessively on undesirable behaviours and more inclined to use unsuitable behaviour management strategies such as restraint, inappropriate language, and threatening (Kayıkçı, 2009). A teacher's tendency to focus on minimising students' with SEBD classroom disruption can also greatly impair their ability to provide effective education (Goodman & Burton, 2010). Osher, Dwyer, and Jackson (2004) also argues that emotionally exhausted teachers who try to manage the deteriorating classroom climate may resort to reactive and excessively punitive responses, which do not teach self-regulation and may contribute to a self-sustaining cycle of classroom disruption.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009), moreover, purport that emotionally exhausted teachers are at increased risk of becoming cynical and callous and may eventually feel they have little to offer. This may potentially have a harmful effect on students, especially those who are at risk of mental health problems, which includes many students with SEBD (Cooper & Cefai, 2013). Some research also indicates that a teacher's lack of resources to effectively manage the social and emotional challenges in the particular context of their school and classroom

can result in lower levels of on-task behaviour and performance (Marzano & Pickering, 2003).

Creating a positive and productive classroom environment depends on the teacher's ability to effectively manage their classroom (Lewis, Romi, Katz, & Qui, 2008). A narrow view of classroom management describes it mainly as the management of student misbehaviour and discipline. Effective teaching, however, involves more than just being able to influence and control student behaviour (Allen, 2010). It also includes an array of skills, such as being able to create and maintain a supportive learning environment, employing strategies to establish rules and procedures, monitoring classroom events, and appropriately and promptly responding to student misbehaviour (Emmer, Sabornie, Evertson, & Weinstein, 2013).

Further to the research already presented regarding the importance of fostering positive student-teacher relations for students with SEBD, research also indicates that the quality of the student-teacher relationship is a crucial factor in the quality of classroom management (Kayıkçı, 2009). Students who perceive their relationship with their teacher as positive tend to be more accepting of the sanctions and consequences that are enforced by the teacher (Marzano & Pickering, 2003). In contrast a teacher's undesirable attitudes, bias and inability to foster positive relationships with their students can exacerbate undesirable student behaviour and emotional difficulties (Baker, 2006; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011b; Cummings, 2000; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 2000). This further highlights the need to foster quality relationships with students with SEBD (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003).

A study conducted by Sellman (2009) in an SEBD special school suggests that positive teacher-student relationships are paramount for effective classroom management. Students in Sellman's study pointed out that "it does not matter what 'tool' a teacher has at their disposal (reward, sanction, restraint), if the relationship is poor, this tool can be misused." They also

agreed that it was “less important to modify the reward system/behaviour policy and much more important to address the issue of relationships” (p. 42). Furthermore Lewis, Romi, Qui, and Katz (2005) argues that an effective way to develop more positive relationships with students requires minimizing the use of harsh disciplinary practices while at the same time recognising positive student behaviour by giving praise and approval in a systematic and careful fashion. Also, allowing students with SEBD the opportunity to express their opinions and listening to their side of stories could potentially lead to improved behaviour and the development of more positive relationships with teachers (Hajdukova et al., 2014).

According to Little and Hudson (1998), the effectiveness of classroom interventions requires students to be aware of what are considered to be appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in the classroom. The overall effectiveness of a teacher’s classroom management skills can be improved by educating students regarding what is expected of them behaviourally, identifying problematic behaviours, deciding appropriate consequences for misbehaviour, and establishing clear expectations (Infantino & Little, 2005). Effective classroom management also requires a shift from a direction and control approach to putting more emphasis on student self-regulation, engagement, community responsibility and teacher guidance (Hardin, 2012).

### ***Disciplinary Practices***

Students with SEBD are at an increased risk of exhibiting disruptive and antisocial behaviours, such as defiance, overactivity, aggression and bullying (Reid et al., 2004), which often results in truancy and disengagement (Cooper & Cefai, 2013). These behaviours not only represent a challenge to daily classroom management, learning and teaching, but can also destabilise a positive classroom climate and safe school environment (Jull, 2008).

Disruptive behaviours may also create student-teacher conflict which can result in a teacher’s

negative actions and reactions that might spiral out of control, leading to intimidation, chaos, and damage (Allen, 2010). In addition to this, students who exhibit disruptive behaviours are more likely to be subjected to the negative effects of their own disruptive behaviour and tend to be rejected and avoided by their peers. This may limit their opportunities to be actively involved and to participate in social and academic interactions (Infantino & Little, 2005; Little & Hudson, 1998). This issue is highlighted by Towl (2007):

Concern over the behaviour of disruptive students has been a New Zealand issue for at least 20 years. To this point, however, not much has happened to address the needs of teachers required to manage, both inside and outside the classroom, those students with challenging behaviours. While the intensity and severity of the behaviours appear to have increased, teachers and school managers are given little useful training and very limited resources to meet this demanding and essential part of their job (p. 17).

Such growing concerns about discipline have led to the development of many interventions and programmes to improve students' moral and character development, reduce antisocial and disruptive behaviours, promote the development of vital social skills and strengthen academic competencies (Leff, Power, Manz, Costigan, & Nabors, 2001).

In New Zealand schools, the Ministry of Education has responded to these concerns by putting in place a variety of initiatives designed to improve the capacity of schools and their effectiveness in addressing the complex needs and increasing numbers of students exhibiting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These initiatives include The Special Education Grant (SEG), Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), the Specialist Classroom Teacher (SCT), and the Interim Response Fund. Following concern over high suspension rates for Māori students, the Ministry also instigated the Suspension Reduction Initiative (SRI), which has been integrated into the Student Engagement Initiative

(SEI) (Ministry of Education, 2010). All of these initiatives share the common goal of improving educational and behavioural outcomes for students by facilitating professional development for teachers and providing students with appropriate support and instruction in their classrooms. However there is still a clear need for improvement and better provision since mainstream teachers not only perceive SEBD to be worsening but also complain about the lack of training necessary to deal with this phenomenon.

Globally, SEBD is the largest group represented in the school exclusion figures (Brown, 2007; Jull, 2008). Even though exclusion as a strategy for school safety appears to be effective in addressing immediate danger (Brown, 2007), research on the effectiveness of exclusionary disciplinary actions indicates that school suspension and expulsion is not likely to decrease students' disruptive and inappropriate behaviours (Casella, 2003; Cooper et al., 2000; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011a; Pomeroy, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

There is also an increased likelihood that an expelled or suspended student will drop out of school (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Cigman, 2007), placing the student at increased risk from drug use, sexual and illegal activity, and also predicting academic failure (Cooper et al., 2000; Lamont et al., 2013). Thus many researchers advocate limiting the use of exclusionary practices in favour of strategies that stress behavioural and academic support, prevention, and early response for students at risk of disciplinary action (Lutzker, 2006; Nikitopoulos, Waters, Collins, & Watts, 2009; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

In the international literature, there appears to be a consensus that students with SEBD are over-represented in the exclusion figures as a result of their display of disruptive behaviours leading to disciplinary action (Christle et al., 2007; Jull, 2008). However some researchers (Brown, 2007; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 2000; Reinke & Herman, 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 2000) have suggested that teacher bias might also be a contributing factor to the



over-representation of students with SEBD among those excluded from schools. A study conducted by Reinke and Herman (2002) indicated that both teachers and school administrators are more likely to disproportionately use harsher disciplinary measures with students whom they perceive as disruptive.

This inconsistency in the application of school exclusion and other disciplinary actions is also noted in the literature exploring the school experiences of students perceived or identified as having SEBD (Cooper, 1993a; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 1999, 2000; Sellman, 2009). This literature points out the potential for students with SEBD to receive and perceive differential treatment which can lead to disaffection and impact negatively on the student's relationship with school adults and their faith in disciplinary processes (Brown, 2007; Sekayi, 2001). However, it has also been acknowledged that students "who have significant emotional and behavioural problems respond less positively to others and this elicits fewer positive responses and more negative responses from others" (Pace, Mullins, Beesley, Hill, & Carson, 1999, p. 151).

### ***Physical Restraint***

Over a number of years, students have complained about the use of physical restraint (Moss, Sharpe, & Fay, 1990; Paterson, Whiteford, & Watson, 2003; Steckley & Kendrick, 2008). A study by Grimshaw and Berridge (1994) provided a number of examples where physical restraint was used "where the circumstances included children's attempts to move out of a supervised area or to refuse compliance with the routine" (p. 94). When students were asked about their experience of physical restraint, they stressed that it was used too often and too soon.

On the other hand students seemed to be accepting of restraint in instances where someone was likely to get hurt or property likely to be seriously damaged (Morgan & Britain, 2004).

They also underlined that restraint should be a last resort (Paterson et al., 2003) and that it should never involve pain, indicating the importance of staff training in how to restrain without hurting (Morgan & Britain, 2004). Unfortunately it seems that the issue of physical restraint still remains a taboo subject in many agencies. Leadbetter (1996) argued that there has been a tendency to “individualize” the issue of the management of challenging behaviour by transferring the responsibility to the individual staff member. However, it should be acknowledged that the legal situation relating to physically restraining students is very complex (Steckley & Kendrick, 2008).

### **Relationships with Peers**

Students’ friendships make a difference to their experiences at school. Having friends is linked positively to better academic achievement (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004) pro-social behaviour (Claes & Simard, 1992), and engagement in school-related activities (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). Research also suggests that students with reciprocated friendships are likely to be more independent, emotionally supportive, altruistic, pro-social, and less aggressive than those who do not have such friendships (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996).

Research has examined a variety of individual student characteristics that might provide insight into factors that can contribute to young people being preferred as social partners by their classmates. Generally, interpersonal characteristics such as social competence, pro-social behaviour, academic achievement, physical attractiveness and leadership are linked to popular or average sociometric status. In contrast, students who tend to exhibit high levels of aggressive and disruptive behaviour and have lower levels of social skills and social competence are identified sociometrically as being rejected (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011).

Researchers have distinguished between rejected students who are aggressive, those who are withdrawn, and those who are aggressive-withdrawn. In the short-term, aggressive, rejected students tend to display problems with conduct and antisocial behaviour in schools.

Withdrawn students report feeling lonely, are more depressed, and have a poor self-image.

Aggressive-withdrawn students are the most at risk for all of these problems. In the long-term, rejected students are more at risk for mental health problems, delinquency, low achievement, and dropping out of school (Cillessen & Rose, 2005).

Furthermore students who display challenging and disruptive behaviours tend to experience lower social participation (Eriksson & Granlund, 2004), which is linked to a lack of positive interaction with peers, fewer social and friendship relationships with peers, lower peer acceptance and the perception of not being liked and accepted by their peers (Koster, Timmerman, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009).

### ***Peer Attitudes Towards Students with SEBD***

The majority of research dealing with peer perceptions of and attitudes towards students with special needs focuses predominantly on students with physical and intellectual disabilities (Visser & Dubsky, 2009). Literature investigating SEBD suggests that the characteristics of students with SEBD are usually considered undesirable by their peers, which often results in low peer acceptance and peer rejection (Sparling, 2002; Visser & Dubsky, 2009).

Unfortunately, when considering desirable attributes, the “gaps” between students with SEBD and their peers are likely to increase with age (Visser & Dubsky, 2009). Research by Abrams, Hogg, and Marques (2004) also suggests that behaviours that may have been accepted in a primary school setting are less likely to be tolerated by older peers.

Interestingly, Allan (2003) points out that students who display disruptive and challenging behaviours are often viewed by their peers as undeserving of additional academic support.

However, when these students behave in a way that provides amusement, they are more likely to be tolerated and accepted by their peers. Conversely, research by Abrams et al. (2004) suggests that some forms of aggressive behaviour can lead to popularity, although this trend is likely to decrease with age (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003).

The attitudes of teachers are critical in influencing peer attitudes toward students with SEBD (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Short & Martin, 2005). Unfortunately, an array of evidence (Cooper & Cefai, 2013; Farrell et al., 2007; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Hornby, 2011) has suggested that many mainstream teachers still lack knowledge of SEBD and this can negatively influence their attitudes towards these students.

With regard to interventions focused on targeting a change of perception and attitude towards students with SEBD in the mainstream school setting, international literature suggests that promoting an awareness of SEBD in the whole school can positively improve the acceptance and inclusion of these students by their peers (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002; Westwood, 2011). However, this approach appears to be more effective upon the introduction of a new student with SEBD into a mainstream school setting, rather than for altering the perceptions of students with SEBD who are already in the school (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007).

## **Bullying**

Over the past decade, global research into the phenomenon of bullying has expanded considerably as it has become recognised as a pervasive issue present in most schools (Dresler-Hawke & Whitehead, 2009). Bullying typically involves aggressive behaviour by peers where the perpetrator persistently and repetitively engages in the harassment of a victim with the intent of gaining a position of power or strength (Monks & Smith, 2006). Bullying

can be physical or verbal, can involve social exclusion (Farmer, et al., 2012) and can be perpetrated face-to-face, through peers, or by using electronic means (Ackers, 2012).

Three distinct types of bullying involvement have been described. Students identified as bullies repeatedly perpetrate social, emotional, or physical harm against peers but are not themselves bullied by their peers. Those who are the target of peer aggression and are routinely bullied by peers but do not themselves bully peers are identified as victims.

Students who perpetrate bullying against peers and are also bullied are considered bully-victims (Gumpel, 2008).

These three bullying subtypes are associated with distinct types of problem behaviour and social relationships in school (Farmer, et al., 2012). When compared to victims and bully-victims, students identified as bullies tend to have a lower incidence of internalising problems and are more likely to have some socially valued characteristics, even though they are perceived by both teachers and peers as being aggressive and disruptive (Farmer, et al., 2012). Students identified as victims tend to be socially isolated or have smaller networks when compared to students identified as bullies. Bully-victims tend to have the lowest rate of social acceptance, the fewest positive interpersonal characteristics and use aggressive strategies that are emotionally charged but socially ineffective (Estell et al., 2009).

Farmer et al. (2011) suggests that some students who frequently engage in problem behaviour may be viewed as highly popular, dominant leaders. On the other hand, aggressive students who are perceived as unpopular may engage in problem behaviour in order to impress peers, protect themselves against the teasing and taunting of peers, or as engaging in a reactive response to victimisation by peers (Farmer et al., 2012).

There is some indication of gender differences relating to bullying behaviour. For example, DeSouza and Ribeiro (2005) argued that boys are more likely to participate in bullying, both as perpetrators and as victims when compared to their female counterparts. Also, a meta-analytic review of gender differences and maladjustment carried out by Card, Stucky, Sawalani, and Little (2008) suggests that although social aggression is invariant for both males and females, males engage in higher levels of direct aggression.

### ***Teachers' Attitudes Towards Bullying***

An important factor in examining bullying is the teacher's awareness, intervention, and attitudes towards bullies and victims. Research suggests that some teachers might actually tolerate bullying, resulting in an increase in bullying behaviours (Yoneyama & Naito, 2003). Teachers have also been found to be inaccurate in estimating the amount of bullying that occurs in their schools, as reflected in discrepancies between the perceptions of students and teachers concerning the prevalence of bullying incidences and its severity (Dedousis-Wallace, Shute, Varlow, Murrin, & Kidman, 2013).

Rose, Monda-Amaya, and Espelage (2011) argue that teachers may lack knowledge about how to effectively respond when they observe bullying, which has implications for student perceptions of intervention (Espelage and Swearer, 2003). Dupper and Meyer-Adams (2002) point out that when students observe a lack of awareness and responsiveness on the part of teachers, they may feel hopeless and believe that effective solutions are impossible. Other research has found that teachers tend to respond more effectively to physical bullying but view verbal or emotional abuse and social exclusion as less severe (Ellis & Shute, 2007). Conversely, students rate emotional, verbal, and physical bullying as equally severe (Newman & Murray, 2005).

### ***SEBD and Bullying***

Students with SEBD are at increased risk of disruptive and antisocial behaviours including bullying (Cooper & Cefai, 2013). This behaviour represents a challenge to a teacher's daily management, learning, and teaching, and can destabilise a positive classroom climate and safe school environment (Jull, 2008).

Current literature that does pertain to SEBD and bullying relates to those areas of SEBD associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Taylor, Saylor, Twyman, & Macias, 2010), emotional and behavioural disorder (Cho, Hendrickson, & Mock, 2009; Gumpel & Sutherland, 2010) and learning difficulties (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). These researchers indicate that students who fall into any of these categories are more likely to be rejected by their peers and are often regarded as unpopular with few friends, making them particularly vulnerable to bullying. Furthermore students with special needs often report social and verbal abuse as the most frequent forms of bullying (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007).

Some research suggests that students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) are as likely to be bullies as they are to be victims (Gumpel, 2008), and are at a greater risk of displaying bully-victim behaviours (Gumpel & Sutherland, 2010). In a study by Cho, Hendrickson and Mock (2009), around 60 percent of students with EBD were identified as bullies, victims, or bully-victims. Even though it has been empirically validated that students with EBD engage in high levels of reactive aggression (i.e., fighting), reactive emotions (i.e., anger) and proactive aggression (i.e., bullying) (Rose & Espelage, 2012), Rose et al. (2011) argues that "the proactive aggression, or bullying may be more accurately defined as reactive aggression or emotion" (p. 135) as it may be a manifestation of the student's disability.

## **Summary**

This chapter has aimed to establish a sound theoretical background by carefully examining the international literature. The major challenges of SEBD, specifically its increasing prevalence, mental health issues, educational attainment, and issues of inclusion, have been outlined. Research studies that have attempted to explore the schooling experiences of students with SEBD in both mainstream schools and special and residential schools have been presented and discussed. In addition, an examination of international research that focused on the investigation of students' with SEBD's relationships with their teachers and their peers, as well as current research on the phenomenon of bullying pertaining to students with SEBD has been provided.

In the next chapter the methodology adopted for this investigation is described and the methods of ensuring rigour are presented.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

The primary aim of this chapter is to present the methodological influences that have guided decisions about the research design. The chapter begins with a description of the theoretical influences underpinning the research process, with a particular focus on phenomenology.

A case is made for the use of phenomenology as a way of exploring participants' experiences and understanding the phenomenon in question. A description of the research methodology selected includes the identification of constructivist philosophical foundations for the research, the rationale for adopting a qualitative methodology, and the particular research approach chosen. This is followed by an outline of Moustakas's method of preparation, data collection, and analysis. Ethical considerations, as well as rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative research are explored in relation to the specific research approaches and methods employed throughout the research process.

### **Use of Qualitative Methodology**

“Methodology is the theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 27). Methodology describes purpose and not simply the way we do research (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). It is the justification for carrying out the proposed research in a particular way. A researcher should start by providing a valid reason for exploring a particular phenomenon and then defend the process of the research itself by demonstrating its validity and appropriateness. In order to present a strong methodology, the theoretical and philosophical reasoning behind the choice, as well as more practical considerations regarding the research design must be sustained. In other words, a methodology must be built on a strong foundation developed by a well-defined and

cohesive ontology and epistemology, in addition to the more practical considerations within the project. Finally, a good methodology must demonstrate that the selected approach fits the context and aims of the intended research (Creswell, 2007).

A researcher's own philosophical foundation, their ontology, is integral to the methodological structure. Any framework that is chosen when beginning a research project is influenced by the worldview the researcher has developed over time through her or his own experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The belief system that one holds shapes the overarching research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) as well as the interpretative focus that a researcher implements during data analysis (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, acknowledging one's own philosophical beliefs is a vital starting point for any research study.

With this in mind, it should be noted that this research is grounded in an interpretivist knowledge claim. "All research is interpretative, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 26). This view proposes that no single interpretation from any one person can be seen as "the truth." It argues that there are multiple, subjective ways of making sense of any experience, thus building on ontology, which is relativist in nature.

Interpretivism can be described as an attempt to interpret human behaviour in terms of the meanings assigned to it by the actors themselves, thus reflecting a subjectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Consequently, interpretivism fits into the constructivist paradigm in educational research and allows for the utilization of a variety of phenomenological methodologies. These perspectives underpin any claim to knowledge and accord with a qualitative approach to methodology. Thus strategies and tools of inquiry are aligned with this approach.

## ***Constructivism***

The theoretical perspective of constructivism influences this study. Foundational to the constructivist position is the belief that human perceptions and understandings are shaped by cultural, social, and linguistic constructs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2002). The constructivist ontological view is relativist, proposing that there are multiple local and specific realities for every phenomenon. Knowledge is then constructed by people through their interactions with each other and with phenomena. Constructivism focuses on the criteria of authenticity, trustworthiness, and transferability rather than the positivist criteria of external and internal validity, thus lending itself to more qualitative methods of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Constructivism is often combined with interpretivism (Creswell, 2007). Researchers working from the constructivist theoretical perspective focus not only on how people construct meaning through particular interpretations of their world but also seek to understand how their own interpretations are influenced by historical, cultural, and personal experiences. Moreover, the researcher is seen as a passionate participant who occasionally constructs the realities alongside the participants. Through the interpretative process, the researcher re-constructs the findings in order to interpret the combined construction of the participants. Using this process to interpret the findings requires the researcher to ensure that the participants' interests are integral to any interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Constructivism fits with the aim of this study to explore the multiple realities constructed by students with SEBD. The perceptions and understandings of students with SEBD regarding their schooling experiences and the meanings they attach to them are cognitively constructed and cannot be separated from their culture and social context. My understanding as a researcher is also socially constructed through my own culture and experiences and thus the

interpretations of the findings will be generated from interactions between the participants and myself reported through my interpretative lens as a researcher.

### ***Phenomenology***

In order to explore the schooling experiences of 29 boys with SEBD attending a residential school in New Zealand, a methodology that builds on constructivism was required to acknowledge the relative nature of reality and knowledge. The central purpose of my study was to explore the phenomenon of schooling experiences for students with SEBD both in the mainstream and residential school settings. In particular, I endeavoured to capture through the participants' in-depth descriptions the essence of their schooling experiences in order to gain a better understanding and unique insight into their world of schooling. In addition to this it was important to explore what could be gained from this greater understanding. Specifically, what implications for future pedagogical practice could be gained from the perspectives of students with SEBD? Therefore I aimed to develop a means by which I could pass on my findings to educators, practising teachers, and people working with students with SEBD, in the hope that practices could be improved. In other words, I wanted to help people who are working with students with SEBD to have access to a greater understanding when supporting this student group. Phenomenology offered the greatest potential to do this as it is epistemologically anchored in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, while also highlighting the significance of personal perspective and interpretation and providing a means to extrapolate "objective" meaning from subjective experience (Patton, 2002; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

The word *phenomenon* comes from the Greek *phaenesthai*, "to show itself, to flare up, to appear" (Moustakas, 1994). This provides a clear connection to the use of the term *phenomenology*, with its focus on making sense of human experience or bringing it to light.

Phenomenology is a self-critical methodology for reflectively examining and describing the lived evidence (the phenomena) that provides a crucial link in our philosophical and scientific understanding of the world (Reeder, 1986). Phenomenologists have diverse interests but they generally share a particular interest in exploring the experience of being human in the everyday world (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009).

Central to phenomenological philosophy are four key themes: description, reduction, essences and intentionality (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003). *Description* is concerned with describing things as one experiences them. *Reduction* or *bracketing* refers to the need for individuals to temporarily suspend presuppositions about phenomena, assumptions that are taken for granted. The reason for bracketing is to prevent theoretical prejudices and preconceived assumptions from contaminating the description of the experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). *Essence* is simply the core meaning of an individual's experience of any given phenomenon that makes it what it is. *Intentionality* refers to consciousness and implies that individuals are always conscious of something. It is the total meaning of an object and an important concept to consider in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

#### *Different phenomenological methods*

With several approaches to phenomenology, the question developed as to what method would be best suited for this research inquiry. All phenomenological approaches seek to understand a human experience as it is lived and have similar and complementary end-points (Lavery, 2003). However, Lavery (2003) contends that many researchers tend to present phenomenology as a single approach and fail to point out the differences between transcendental and hermeneutic approaches. A researcher's assumptions drive methodological decisions, therefore the researcher needs to be aware of the claims and values

associated with each phenomenological approach before making a commitment to a choice of method (Creswell, 2007). Implementing phenomenology without a careful examination of its philosophical basis can result in research that is ambiguous in its purpose, structure, and findings (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

As phenomenology has evolved as a philosophical context for social research and as a research method, the traditional data collection strategy has been the qualitative, in-depth interview. The output of the interview is a narrative account that provides a description of the participants' subjective experiences. The researcher then analyses the narratives to generate the findings. Two primary differences between the descriptive and interpretative phenomenological approaches are in how the findings are generated and in how they are used to augment professional knowledge.

#### *Husserl's transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology*

Husserl's philosophical ideas about how science should be conducted gave rise to the descriptive phenomenological approach to inquiry. An assumption specific to Husserl's philosophy was that any experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific research. Husserl believed that subjective information should be important to any scientist seeking to understand human motivation because human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real. A vital component of transcendental phenomenology is the belief that it is essential for the researcher to shed prior personal knowledge in order to grasp the essential lived experiences of those being studied. The goal is to achieve transcendental subjectivity in which the impact of the researcher on the inquiry is continually evaluated and biases and preconceptions are neutralised, so they are not influencing the object of study (Creswell, 2007).

Another assumption underlining Husserl's approach to the study of human consciousness is that there are features to any lived experience that are common to all people who have the experience, referred to as eidetic structure. These essences are considered to represent the true nature of the phenomenon being studied. The assumption that essences generated through phenomenological research result in one correct interpretation of experience represent a foundationalist approach to inquiry. In this view the reality is considered objective and independent of history and context (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

### *Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology*

Heidegger, a student of Husserl, challenged some of his assumptions about how phenomenology should guide meaningful inquiry. Heidegger developed interpretive phenomenology by extending hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation (Creswell, 2007). In relation to the study of human experience, hermeneutics goes beyond the mere description of core concepts and essences to look for meanings embedded in common life practices. These meanings are not always apparent to the participants but can be collected from narratives, hence the focus of a hermeneutic inquiry is on what participants experience rather than what they consciously know (Lavery, 2003).

A central tenet of hermeneutical inquiry is that humans cannot abstract themselves from the world, therefore it is not the pure content of human subjectivity that is the focus, but rather what the individual's narratives imply about what she or he experiences each day (Dowling, 2007). Another philosophical assumption underlining the interpretative phenomenological approach is that expert knowledge is an essential part of inquiry allowing for production of useful and meaningful knowledge. The technique of bracketing as described by descriptive phenomenologists is therefore debateable within the hermeneutic approach, although making

preconceptions explicit and explaining how they are being used is a vital part of the hermeneutic tradition (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

### ***Transcendental Phenomenology***

Transcendental phenomenology was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this research as I was searching for an understanding of the meaning and essence of the participants' schooling experiences through their descriptions. I choose to be guided by Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological research approach, which he tends to label "transcendental phenomenology" (p. 79), where the directed awareness (intentionality) of the students' with SEBD perceptions of their schooling experiences guided the research process along with my bracketed engagement.

Transcendental means "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Husserl believed that pure phenomenological research starts from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions and where the focus is on rich description rather than on explanations of the phenomenon studied (Husserl, 1970). Husserl argued that all our understanding comes from sensory experience of phenomena but that experience must be described, interpreted, and elucidated. His basic philosophical assumption was that we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness.

Husserl argued that phenomenology is scientific because it is a self-critical examination and description of experience. It attempts to investigate and understand the structure of experience rather than the objects experienced. It does so by using the transcendental reduction process through which one can look deeply into consciousness and thus reveal the underlining structure of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, Husserl disputed that the study of consciousness must actually be very different from the



study of nature. For him, phenomenology aims to look at particular examples without theoretical presuppositions and then discern what is essential and necessary to these experiences. Husserl asserted that one needs to return to things themselves, which is a way of underlining knowledge that is anchored in meanings rather in an analysis of physical objects (Moustakas, 1994).

The concept of *intentionality* plays a vital role in understanding transcendental phenomenology. Husserl (1970) calls intentionality the “fundamental property of consciousnesses and the principle theme of phenomenology” (p. 9). Intentionality is described as a characteristic feature of our mental state and of experiences that are manifested in our awareness. Husserl believed that intentionality is a phenomenological property of mental states or experiences which have an internal nature as experiences and are externally related to the outside world.

Intentionality in phenomenological research is utilised to gain insight into how participants experience the world around them, by recording their subjective descriptions and perceptions of the relationships they develop with the intentional world (Smith et al., 2009).

Furthermore, intentionality directs consciousness toward something real or imaginary and every intentional experience consists of *noema* and *noesis* that refer to meanings.

Noema directs consciousness towards specific objects and assigns meaning to what one can see, touch, think, or feel. Noesis comes from explicating how beliefs about such objects may be acquired. Structural noesis leads us to understand how we experience phenomena. Once understood, this leads to a correlation of “intentionality into meanings and essences of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). Ihde (2008) outlined the following distinction between noema and noesis: “Noema is *that* which is experienced, the *what* of experience, the

object- correlate. Noesis is the way in which the *what* is experienced, the experiencing or act of experiencing, the subject correlate” (p. 43).

A key characteristic of the transcendental phenomenological approach is its rich and detailed description of phenomena that indicate how the participants experience the phenomena rather than the researchers’ preconceived perceptions. This is critical to a study such as this one since any conclusions will be based on the experiences of the participants and therefore for trustworthiness must be free of researcher bias. In order to achieve this, Husserl (1970) developed a *phenomenological reduction process*. This process proceeds through a series of reductions and assists the researcher. Each reduction offers different ways of thinking about the phenomenon, the intent being to lead researchers away from their distractions and misdirection and guide them back to the essence of their experience of the phenomenon. The examination of the phenomenon should include description, interpretation, and reflection in order to uncover the core of the subjective experience of the phenomenon and the *essence* or *eidos* or *idea* of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). The reduction process utilises the technique of bracketing or *epoche* where, in order to gain a clear view of the phenomenon, one must set one’s own biases, prejudices, and beliefs aside (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Following phenomenological reduction, the next step in the research process is that of *imaginative variation*. Imaginative variation enables the researcher to uncover the structural themes that emerge from the textural descriptions produced during the process of phenomenological reduction, by imagining new examples, viewing the phenomenon from different perspectives, and drawing on one’s past experience. The aim of imaginative variation is to help the researcher establish and understand the essence of participants’ experience. The last step in the transcendental phenomenological approach includes the

development of composite textural description that reveal the essence of the phenomenon investigated (Moustakas, 1994).

Using transcendental phenomenology as a research methodology includes the study of essences where “researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning” (Creswell, 2007, p. 52).

### *Strengths and weaknesses of transcendental phenomenology*

Transcendental phenomenology was utilised in this study as it removes the Cartesian dualism between subjectivity and objectivity by allowing me to develop an “objective” essence thorough aggregating subjective experiences of a number of students with SEBD. However, this research approach also presents some challenges to the qualitative researcher.

It needs to be acknowledged that the essence of any experience cannot be totally captured as it can only reflect a particular time, place and experiences of the interviewees. Even though the researcher selects participants all of whom have experienced the phenomenon of interest, their experiences vary due to their different cultural and historical backgrounds. Also, when the research is guided by Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenological research approach it is not clear how reflections on the historical, cultural and social contexts (embraced by hermeneutical phenomenologists) could be negotiated, included and used in the text to provide a richer and more authentic description of the phenomenon of interest.

Transcendental phenomenologists emphasise the reduction as a process to rendering oneself as neutral as possible. Here researchers aim to bracket their previous understanding, past knowledge, and assumptions about the phenomenon to focus on the phenomenon in its

appearing (Moustakas, 1994). Even though bracketing is difficult to achieve, this method enabled me to listen to and record participants' descriptions of their schooling experiences in an open-minded manner by enabling me to investigate at deeper levels of reflection across all stages of the research process, hence resulting in more profound and multifaceted analysis and results. The implementation of this method also mitigated the potential deleterious effect of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research.

As the chosen core methodology for my investigation, transcendental phenomenology allowed me to capture the essence of the school experiences of the research subjects without destroying the uniqueness of their voices. This is achieved by highlighting the subjectivity of the students' perspectives, as well as understanding the experiences and meanings they created and constructed over time, which enabled me to gain a deeper insight into their unique world of schooling.

### ***A Qualitative Research Approach***

The key influences of constructivist-interpretivism and phenomenology are consistent with each other and are the major influences that guided this study. Phenomenology was adopted as a theoretical foundation for the project as well as a qualitative approach to the research.

Merriam (1998) defined qualitative research as “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5).

Qualitative research is diverse but at the same time common characteristics can be found among the various approaches. These approaches tend to share the following characteristics. A major focus of qualitative research is to elucidate the ways in which people make sense of particular phenomena (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methods focus on an understanding of the

meanings and knowledge constructed in a social context, with an emphasis on understanding the subjective perspectives of the research participants (Merriam, 1998; Punch, 2009).

In qualitative research, the researcher is seen as the main instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher's subjectivity is perceived as a positive resource rather than a source of bias and invalidity. All data is mediated through the researcher and therefore qualitative methods depend on the researcher's ability to process and analyse information, respond sensitively to social cues and new questions that emerge, and to adjust the research design adequately (Merriam, 1998).

Furthermore, inductive reasoning is emphasised in qualitative research. Although such research often begins with some theoretical and preconceived ideas, neither theory nor hypotheses are established prior to the investigation. The goal is to develop a theory that makes sense of data generated in the context of a particular investigation (Merriam, 1998; Punch, 2009).

Fieldwork is used as a primary mode of data collection with the purpose of engaging with the study of the phenomena in context. In order to draw credible conclusions, the researcher needs to spend sufficient time in the field to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in its context (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, since qualitative studies generally include small samples, the researcher needs to provide rich descriptions of the phenomena in order to lead to a greater in-depth understanding of a particular experience (Patton, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomena of the school experiences of students with SEBD in the New Zealand educational system through the lived experiences of the participants. It became apparent that any decisions concerning the research design would follow from a purely qualitative research approach. The study was

influenced and guided by an interpretivist knowledge claim and the theoretical perspectives of constructivist-interpretivism and phenomenology. This led to a transcendental phenomenological, qualitative approach to inquiry.

Although there are multiple phenomenological approaches, phenomenological researchers follow some general guidelines in developing plans for their study. These guidelines are summarized by Creswell (2007) into the following areas: philosophical perspectives and epoche, research questions and lived experiences, criterion-based sampling, phenomenological data analysis and the essential invariant structure (or essence) of the lived experience. These five dimensions from the guidelines are the key concepts of the phenomenological approach used in the current study.

### **Moustakas's Phenomenological Method**

Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology is based on the writings of Husserl and focuses on the rich descriptions of participants' experiences. Moustakas's method was chosen for this study as it clearly guides the research activity and assists the researcher in keeping the study rigorous. The procedures in Moustakas's phenomenological method begin by identifying a phenomenon of interest, followed by the bracketing out of one's experiences and engaging in data collection from a number of people who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then analyses the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes. In the final stage, the statements are combined into themes, allowing the researcher to develop a textural description of the experiences. The textural description can be described as the cornerstone of what participants experienced while a structural description of their experiences elucidates how the participants experienced the phenomena in terms of the conditions, situations, or context. By combining the textural and

structural descriptions, an overall essence of the experience is conveyed (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

“In deriving scientific evidence in phenomenological investigations, the researcher establishes and carries out a series of methods and procedures that satisfy the requirements of an organized, disciplined and systematic study” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103). Following Moustakas’s methodological requirements, this study has been organised under the rubrics: method of preparation, method of collecting data, and methods of organising and analysing data.

### **Moustakas’s Method of Preparation**

Methods of preparation include reviewing the professional and research methods, formulating the research question, illustrating the topic and research question, and selecting the participants. In phenomenological research, the question should have both social meaning and personal significance. Ethical principles of human science research must be taken into account and participants should be fully informed and their privacy respected. Data should also be open to validation by the participants. All these steps and procedures were followed and are discussed in this study.

### ***Formulating the Research Questions***

The chosen research topic was based on my personal values and interests and its social significance. The research questions were formulated to provide the appropriate focus to the study. It was then determined that the research questions would be best examined and explored by the utilisation of the transcendental phenomenological approach.

The following questions were developed and implemented throughout the investigation process in order to better focus and direct attention to the phenomena of interest:

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their mainstream schooling experiences?*

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their residential schooling experiences?*

The major components of these questions are *perceptions*, *experience* and *schooling*. The word *perception* not only implies something about the relativity of schooling experiences, but it also underlines that schooling experiences are perceived differently by different students, and by the same student in different situations. The word *experience* implies that I will be seeking comprehensive stories from the research participants of how they perceive and describe the most salient features of their *schooling* in their everyday lived experience.

### ***Locating and Selecting Research Participants***

In accordance with the phenomenological tradition, participants were selected who had experienced the phenomenon and were willing to share their schooling experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The participants were identified in a New Zealand residential school for students with behavioural problems. In general, phenomenological samples are small, as the data collection process requires an in-depth study of human experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Nevertheless, I decided to give students attending the residential school the opportunity to have a voice. This decision was based on the aim of my study, which was not only to investigate the phenomena of the schooling experiences of students with SEBD attending a residential school in New Zealand but also to give a voice to students whose perspectives were and still are underrepresented in the field of social research (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Powell & Smith, 2009; Sellman, 2009).



All of the participants in this study were boys, with ages ranging from 9-12 years. The omission of girls is due to the fact that the residential school selected for this study only enrolled boys in its programme. All the participants had been excluded from mainstream schools as they had presented behaviours that were seen to be extreme, chronic, and beyond the resources of mainstream schools to manage. The majority of participants had been diagnosed with mental health problems and disorders. The most common forms of mental health disorders among participants were anxiety disorders, depression, conduct disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Their intellectual ability was in the average range or above (based on the residential school's admission criteria). All of the participants interviewed had attended the residential school for a minimum of 1 month, or a maximum of 1 year and 11 months, with an average of 6 months at the time of the interviews.

### ***Procedure***

Approval for the study was gained from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (Appendix A), and the board of trustees and principal of the residential special school. Approval for their children to be involved was also obtained from all parents and legal guardians (adult consent form, Appendix B). In addition to parental consent, all participants were provided with an opportunity to make their own decisions about participating in the research project (student consent form, Appendix C). The participation rate was 100 percent as all students attending the residential behavioural school at the time of the study expressed their interest in, and willingness to take part.

An introductory session was conducted in order to inform the students what their potential participation would entail. The right to withdraw at any stage of the interviews was emphasised, not only in the introductory session but also before each interview took place. It is also important to acknowledge that this study was carried out in close cooperation with the

principal and the teachers in the residential school, who helped me to approach the students and their parents and introduced me and my research project.

### **Moustakas's Method of Data Collection**

The data collection method for this study accorded with the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry espoused by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas's steps in data collection suggest that, as a starting point, the researcher develops questions to guide the interview process. As a second step, the researcher collects data from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon through in-depth informal interviews. The researcher's engagement throughout the interview process with the epoche or bracketing is critical, since it entails purposefully putting aside preconceived theories, biases, and attitudes.

The in-depth informal interview was chosen as an appropriate way of obtaining rich data in this phenomenological qualitative study since the aim was to enter the participants' life-world and recount their schooling experiences in various educational settings. This approach allowed me to explore the subjective experience of the phenomenon of interest, thus enabling me to expose the essence of the schooling experiences for students with SEBD.

Once all the interviews were transcribed, a second meeting with the same participants was arranged in order to validate the data. Each participant received a copy of their own transcript. I took into consideration the possibility of participants with reading difficulties and therefore offered to read the transcripts to them. The majority of students welcomed this option, with only two students reading independently. Throughout the transcript review process, participants were asked not only to clarify their statements but were also given the opportunity to eliminate or change statements they were not happy with or wanted excluded from the study. This step was added to the Moustakas method of data collection as a useful

tool for data validation, adding credibility to this study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommended checking interpretations against raw data with participants as a qualitative research activity that can help improve the credibility of research results.

### ***Phenomenological Interview***

The tools of inquiry for this study were chosen in accordance with the phenomenological approach to human science inquiry espoused by Moustakas (1994). The interview was chosen as one such tool because it is suitable for obtaining rich data in phenomenological, qualitative research (Jurs & Wiersma, 2009). Participants were interviewed about their residential school experience and also about their experiences in their former mainstream schools. The interview is often described as a conversation with a purpose implicitly informed by a research question. The aim of an interview in the phenomenological tradition is to facilitate interaction, allowing the participants to tell their stories in their own words (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, interviews have the potential to reveal narrative representations of social experiences and elucidate the meanings they have for the speaker (Mathison & Freeman, 2009). In the phenomenological tradition, the meaning must be the result of co-creation between the researcher and the participants. Since the participants are viewed as co-authors and not merely repositories of data (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006), interviewing should be seen as a relationship in which researcher and participants collaborate to construct a narrative experience of the world (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000).

The interview methodology is based on the work of Cooper (1993a), who suggests a range of approaches such as congruence, empathy, and repeat probing in order to facilitate the interview process. For the individualised interviews, a number of broad areas of inquiry were identified and a series of standard open-ended questions were formulated. This approach is similar to the “interview guide approach” described by Patton (2002). The implementation of

this approach in the study enabled the process of data collection to be more systematic and comprehensive while the interviews themselves still remained fairly conversational and situational. This allowed the interviewer to remain flexible with the questions while maintaining a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged the participants to better engage and express themselves openly.

### ***Challenges of the Phenomenological Interview***

The choice of the phenomenological interview process did bring some challenges.

Researchers utilising a phenomenological approach need to develop specific research skills such as reflection, clarification, requesting examples and description, and the communication of interest through listening techniques, in order to adequately explore the participants' lived experiences without contaminating the data (Jasper, 1994). The development of this repertoire of skills is an essential requirement of phenomenological reduction or bracketing which is undertaken to suspend one's own beliefs, biases, and preconceived theories so that the essence of the phenomenon of interest is revealed (Moustakas, 1994). Setting aside my own preconceived theories, biases, and beliefs was not an easy step. However, resorting to the epoche technique enabled me to listen and hear what the participants had to say about their schooling experiences with an open mind and thus enabled me to gather the information from the participants' perspectives.

A phenomenological interview is informal and interactive and while questions are prepared in advance, these are often altered during the interview (Moustakas, 1994). Interview questions in this study were designed to be open-ended, with the purpose of encouraging full, meaningful answers, using the participants' own perceptions, knowledge, and feelings. Open-ended questions also tend to be more objective and less leading than closed-ended questions. Probing questions were employed to help elicit fuller descriptions and clarify

interviewees' responses that may not have been predicted in preparation for the interview. Questions dealt with the students' perceptions of their everyday lived experiences in their various educational settings, allowing them the opportunity to voice their own thoughts and opinions.

Successful interviews with students require knowledge regarding child development and personal experience with students of the age being interviewed (Gibson., 2007). Since the ages of the students in this study ranged from 9 to 12 years, my interview had to be properly adjusted to the developmental stages of these students. After I prepared my first interview questions, I piloted them with my colleague's 9, 10 and 13 year old children. Questions that appeared to be unsuitable were changed or eliminated. This process helped me not only determine if the questions were developmentally appropriate but also enabled me to improve my own interview technique. In regards to interviewing students with SEBD, Cooper (1993b) pointed out that such students often feel insecure when it comes to their academic achievement, which might negatively influence their confidence during an interview. I took this into consideration and, in order to avoid potential confusion and frustration, made sure that the interview questions were easy to understand.

### ***The Researcher's Position in Interviews***

In preparation for the interviews one consideration was how to best position myself in the interview situation. "In qualitative research it is important to consider positionality, which is the role that personal and social characteristics play in positioning an individual relative to others" (Gibson, 2012, p. 151). There are different levels of power inherent in different positions. Consequently, it is crucial that the researcher establishes a rapport with the participants. The way the participants view the researcher influences interactions and therefore the data collection process. At the beginning of the interviews, I indicated my

position by describing myself as a young graduate from Slovakia, studying at the University of Canterbury, who had been involved in work with students with SEBD.

I may have been assisted in establishing a rapport with the boys especially quickly, because young people tend to view a young woman as nonthreatening (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007). My Slovakian nationality, accent, and colourful style of clothing may also have been helpful in developing a rapport with the boys. My personality and background do not reflect the “norm” or “societal standards” in New Zealand and as a result I am perceived as “different” by many people. I believe that these factors may have contributed to my winning a greater degree of acceptance from the boys because a consequence of their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties is that they are frequently perceived to deviate from what is perceived as “normal” (Cooper, 1993a). My role as a graduate student may also have helped to decrease the power imbalance between me and the participants because I took on the role of learner, whereas the students may have viewed another adult as someone with power and authority over them (Christensen, 2004; Punch, 2009).

An important requirement for the interviews was to encourage an atmosphere of trust because I felt that a positive researcher-participant relationship would add strength to the data collected. According to Gibson (2012), an important task for an interviewer working with children is to adapt the interview format to them in order to establish comfort and trust. As the interview gets underway, the researcher needs to use language that resonates with participants, be attentive, and adapt their vocabulary and format as needed (Christensen, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Furthermore, establishing a strong rapport and trust with young people upon first meeting them poses a great challenge and often cannot be achieved (Irwin & Johnson, 2005).

Therefore, the interviewer should get to know these young participants before the interview

begins (Punch, 2009). Gibson (2012) suggested that a casual conversation before the interview can elicit higher levels of trust in students and thus enable them to feel more comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings. Within a few minutes of meeting the participants and engaging in informal and relaxed conversation, most of the boys appeared relaxed and open to expressing their ideas, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. There were only two participants who were shy and seemed uncomfortable during the interview process. However, when meeting with them for the second time they seemed more relaxed, open, and happy to share their thoughts.

The process of positioning myself in the interviews accorded with the constructivist-interpretivist knowledge claim espoused for this thesis. I saw the interviews as a dialogue, where both the participants and I were active in the negotiation and construction of meaning, because active interviewing is not only a neutral exchange of questions and answers but a collaborative effort (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Furthermore, since the purpose of qualitative research is not simply to investigate the phenomenon of interest, conducting a qualitative interview required intense listening in order to understand the meaning of what the interviewees were telling me. It also involved learning about what was important to those being interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I adopted the technique of “responsive interviewing” (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 15), which allowed me to modify my interview questions based on the interest and knowledge of the interviewees, thus enabling the individuality of each participant to come through in our interaction.

### ***Interview Setting: The Residential School***

The interviews were carried out at the participants’ residential school located on 2 hectares of farmland, gifted to the Education Department in 1969. In 1971, due to The Disturbed Children’s Aid Movement and the initiative and persistence of its founder, the government

accepted responsibility for establishing and running a school for young people with emotional and learning problems who were at risk in their home, school, and wider community on the gifted farmland.

The purpose of the residential school was to provide special education in a residential setting for students in Grades 3-8. The students accepted into the residential school had severe behavioural difficulties, to the extent that their special educational needs could not be adequately met in their local community.

The aim of placement at the residential school was twofold: (1) to provide a programme which delivered the New Zealand Curriculum so that optimum learning occurred for students who had the potential to progress appropriately according to their age; and (2) to develop the student's personal and social skills, making possible their future inclusion in age-appropriate mainstream education in their local community.

The residential school was supported by the Ministry of Education, Group Special Education, social workers involved with the students, local schools and their staff, and a variety of individuals and groups in the community. The school offered a wide range of facilities, including the homestead, offices, staff room, conference room, kitchen and dining room, parent accommodation, four dormitories, offices, ablution facilities, storage, laundry, sick bay, time-out room, gym, games room, art studio, offices, resource room, study, library, and transition house for four students and two live-in caregivers. The grounds were well set out with many trees and provided the students with an adventure playground, tennis court, BMX track, artificial cricket wicket and football field, a covered swimming pool and shaded area for skateboarding, and gardening. Students were taught in four modern, well equipped classrooms with seven or eight students in each class. All teachers had additional training in the provision of programmes for students with special needs.



The aim of the residential school was for the students to experience a sense of stability, security, and self-worth, thus enabling them to develop greater self-discipline and responsibility, the academic skills necessary for independent learning, appropriate recreational interests, self-care skills, and the ability to relate acceptably to a variety of people and situations. The residential school also provided a set of expectations and a code of behaviour not only for the students but also for staff and parents. In order to mitigate any potential risks, I familiarised myself with the residential school's behaviour code, rules, and routines and followed them at all times.

### ***Facilitating the Understanding of Expectations and Obtaining Informed Consent***

As a part of my research into the students' schooling experiences I needed to educate them about the research and what it entailed to participate in the research project. This was done because trust can be facilitated by helping participants understand the purpose and processes of the interview or focus group (Gibson, 2012). From an ethical perspective, it was necessary to provide my research participants with substantial information about the project so they could understand why I wanted to interview them and the expectations that accompanied the interview process.

The first introductory session was conducted by the principal of the residential school during the school assembly. I was present at this session so I could provide additional information and answer students' questions if necessary. The purpose of this introductory session was to introduce the research project. I explained to the participants that I would tape-record our discussions, use the data in my study, and remove all identifying data, including personal and school names. I also emphasised that they would be free to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition to this oral introductory session, students were provided with

information letters that succinctly outlined the research project and what their potential participation would entail if they chose to participate.

The student information letters (Appendix D) were written in easy-to-understand language in order to be suitable to the student's developmental stage. Parents, the board of trustees and the principal of the residential school received the information letters (adult information letter, Appendix E) and the consent forms as well. All students were provided with an opportunity to make their own decisions about participation in this research project, regardless of parental consent. No student was approached before all necessary written consents were obtained.

From the methodological perspective, by implementing this process the power differential between interviewer and interviewee could be reduced, thus increasing the likelihood that the participants would feel committed to the interview and answer the questions with honesty (Conroy & Harcourt, 2009). Following the return of the completed consent forms I was able to proceed with the pre-interview session, followed by the individualised, semi-structured interviews.

### **The Interview Process**

Students need to be provided with a safe environment that will enable them to express their opinions freely when being interviewed (Mathison & Freeman, 2009). The library was chosen as such a safe and comfortable place to conduct the interviews. In order to allow the participants to describe their schooling experiences in detail, and in accordance with the phenomenological approach, the interviews were not constrained by a time limit.

Each individualised interview started with an informal discussion in order to get to know each participant and make them feel more relaxed. I also ensured that they felt safe and

comfortable with the interview process by giving them the opportunity to choose a comfortable seat and pointing out that nobody could overhear our conversation. The students' participation in the interviews depended greatly on their willingness to share their stories and time with me. All interviews in this study were conducted in May and June 2012. Interviews ranged in time from 25 to 40 minutes.

I was fully aware that the stories I listened to and recorded were given to me subject to the promise that I would not breach their confidentiality and that I would protect those who had shared them with me. My personal moral code was the strongest defence against unethical behaviour as ethical research depends on the integrity of the individual researcher and his or her values (Neuman, 2006). Field notes were written after the interview because I did not wish to distract the participants or make them feel mistrustful or uncomfortable. The field notes were used to describe the non-verbal communication and peripheral activity taking place in the setting. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### ***Encouraging Thoughtful and Detailed Responses During the Interview Process***

According to Gibson (2012), interviews with young people run more smoothly if they first answer a few easy questions that require only a brief response. I implemented this technique by asking the boys a few simple questions about their age, year level, and what part of New Zealand they were from. These questions required only a short response and allowed me to establish a rapport with them.

Although the interview approach was inspired by Cooper (1993a), as a novice researcher I chose to implement a semi-structured interview approach (Appendix F) since young people are more likely to require prompting than adults (Gibson, 2012). Unstructured interview formats can be an unproductive approach with young students (Irwin & Johnson, 2005).

The opening question was the same for each participant. I asked: “Can you tell me what you remember about your first day at this school?” The purpose of this question was to retrospectively engage with the phenomena of school experiences and refresh the participant’s memory, thus eliciting fuller descriptions of the phenomena of interest.

I also asked probing questions such as: “Can you tell me more about that?” “How did that make you feel?” “How would you describe them?” These reflexive probing questions seemed to help the participants elaborate on their responses without leading them too much in any particular direction. For each of the open-ended questions, I prepared at least three probing questions. The open-ended questions that followed were developed to encourage each participant to describe their perceptions of their individual experiences in the mainstream and in residential school settings by talking about those aspects of schooling that were significant to them. The order of the open-ended questions and the probing questions used depended on the participant’s responses.

After conducting the first three interviews, I listened to the recordings multiple times, which contributed not only to the development of a smoother and more engaging interview process but also enabled me to improve my interviewing skills, thus eliciting richer descriptions of the participants’ school experiences. Throughout the interviews, I made sure that the participants had sufficient time to convey their thoughts. At any point where I did not fully understand the student’s response, I carefully asked for clarification. Nonverbal communication strategies such as maintaining consistent eye contact and a relaxed posture were also used, since they allowed me to demonstrate attentiveness and interest in the participants’ stories.

## **Phenomenological Focus Group Interviews**

A modification of the Moustakas's method of data collection was made by conducting 6 focus group interviews with the same participants in September 2012. At this time there were 24 participants as five of the original interviewees had finished the residential school programme and returned to their communities.

The aim of conducting focus group interviews with the same students was twofold: (1) to further explore and develop the themes that emerged after analysing individualised interviews; and (2) to provide another opportunity to capture the students' perspectives and their recommendations for effective pedagogical practice and school improvements.

Researchers following a transcendental phenomenological approach often utilise individualised in-depth interviews as the sole tool of inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). In this study however, focus group interviews were chosen as an additional and suitable way to obtain richer, more in-depth descriptions of the phenomena of interest. Furthermore, implementing focus group interviews as a tool of inquiry made it possible to uncover the essence of the phenomena of students' with SEBD schooling experiences, allowing me another opportunity to capture students' perspectives and their recommendations for effective pedagogical practice.

In addition focus group interviews were chosen as they are found to be congruent with phenomenology in three ways. First, focus group interviews support the aim of collaboration and dialogue instead of privileging the lone researcher and participant (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2009). Second, in traditional Husserlian phenomenology, it is solely the researcher who brackets his or her own prejudices throughout the research process.

However, in group discussion both researcher and participant prejudices are challenged by

the other group members, thus enabling the researchers to bracket their assumptions (Halling, Kunz, & Rowe, 1994). Finally, the group approach to phenomenology offers the same benefits as focus groups because it encourages discussion, opens new perspectives, and encourages exchange. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the group approach can be applied to descriptive Husserlian phenomenology (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009).

In focus groups, “the phenomenon being researched comes alive within the group” (Spiegelberg, 1975, p. 122). The purpose of focus groups is to capture the participants’ attitudes, beliefs, and ideas about the phenomena of interest through group interaction and exchange. This enables the researcher to tease out the strength of the participants’ beliefs and opinions about the topic that may be missed in the individual interviews, by illuminating the differences in perspective between the group members (Stage & Manning, 2003).

Focus groups moreover, frequently involve disagreement among the participants and they are often challenged through open discussion to clarify and modify their views by the other group members. It is vital that participants feel free to disagree so that the full spectrum of experiences and opinions in the group are expressed. This dynamic process creates a great opportunity for the researcher to see participant commitment to their views, something that is not always achieved in the one-on-one interviews (Berg, 2007). These publically expressed disagreements allow the researcher to interpret the meanings held by the participants, thus adding to the richness of the data and strengthening the study’s findings (Stage & Manning, 2003).

### ***Focus Groups with Young People***

Focus groups with young people have been widely used by social science researchers, especially when the goal is to elicit young people’s insights, perceptions and beliefs about specific issues and topics (Gibson., 2007; Large & Beheshti, 2001). The purpose of

implementing focus group interviews in this study was to engage the participants in an interactive and discursive way in order to offer suggestions for improvement. The aim was not to develop a consensus but to produce rich qualitative data that provided insights into the attitudes, perceptions, concerns and opinions of participants. Having selected focus groups as the second method in this study, detailed planning centred on the goals and on ensuring that a productive session was achieved.

Consideration was given to practical issues, such as timeframe for conducting the interviews, as well as substantive issues such as research questions, ethical issues, and group size and composition. Focus group interviews with young people create a greater challenge with regard to power imbalance because the facilitator is often perceived as an authority figure. Consequently, the relationship between facilitator and participants needs to be redefined. The facilitator's key task is to maintain an appropriate balance of power when directing group discussion and creating a positive atmosphere in which participants feel free to discuss (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002).

Twenty-four boys aged between 9 and 12 participated in the focus group interviews in this study. They were divided into six groups: four groups consisted of four participants, one group consisted of three participants and one group consisted of five participants. A decision was made to use smaller groups because groups of three to six members are more suitable for young people since this promotes lively, manageable discussion (Gibson., 2007). The decisions concerning group composition were based on the school teachers' suggestions. They knew the boys well and were able to predict potential clashes that could negatively influence the group dynamics and hinder the data collection process. The information about participants' personal characteristics and competencies gained by conducting the

individualised interviews and meeting with the participants to validate the data enabled me to adapt the style and format of focus group discussions.

The care taken with the choice of the size and composition of the groups was shown to be beneficial as no behavioural challenges or negative interactions arose during the focus group interviews. The participants got along well, seemed relaxed, and were open to sharing ideas and beliefs with the other group members. According to Gibson (2007), focus groups with young people should as a rule have no participants more than two years apart in age or level of development, in order to avoid influencing or overpowering the younger participants. This was considered when organising groups and in five of the six groups there was a two-year difference or less in ages. Despite the 3-year age difference between the participants in one of the focus groups, the youngest participant in that group seemed comfortable and was actively engaged in the discussion.

### ***The Focus Group Interview Process***

The library was again chosen as a safe, comfortable place to conduct the focus group interviews. The boys were encouraged to call me by my first name in order to regard me in a more informal way than they would their teachers. As seating arrangements can also help to promote an atmosphere of equality (Morgan et al., 2002). I decided to sit with the groups on the floor which allowed me to be on the same level and maintain good eye contact.

Each participant was allowed to make their own decision about participating in the focus group. The right to withdraw at any stage of the interview was again emphasised and the purpose of the focus group interviews was explained by using language that was appropriate for the boys. At the beginning of the session I established some ground rules in order to set clear boundaries and expectations. These were written on a flipchart that was left on display



and read: “Be respectful,” “there is no right and wrong answer,” “everybody is different, so are our opinions,” “speak one at a time,” and “you do not have to put up your hand to talk.”

The boys were also asked if they could suggest any other rules to suggest but they did not provide any suggestions. Each of the focus group interviews was tape-recorded and lasted between 40 and 55 minutes. The questions were based on the themes that emerged from the previous 29 individualised interviews and were divided into two sections: questions that focused on verifying or extending the core themes, and questions that aimed to elicit recommendations for future practices (Appendix G). Questions verifying the data required only a brief response. However, questions focused on extending the core themes and providing recommendations required engaged and open discussion. As discussions with students lasting over 45 minutes lead to a deterioration in the quality of responses (Morgan et al., 2002), each session was broken into two segments of about 20 minutes each, separated by a short break for refreshments.

### **Moustakas’s Method of Organising and Analysing Qualitative Data**

Qualitative content analysis has been defined as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). It involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. The process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison.

However, qualitative content analysis does not exclude deductive reasoning (Patton, 2002).

Data analysis in most qualitative research begins with data collection and remains constant in the research process rather than being confined to the end of the data collection (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2011). The data analysis adopted in this study was directed by the research questions and the selected research approaches. The processes of analysis fall under a qualitative umbrella and are closely connected.

### ***Phenomenological Data Analysis***

The process of phenomenological data analysis involves reflection, clarification, and discovering the essence of the lived experience with the purpose of gaining in-depth understanding of the essential meaning of what is being studied (Van Manen, 1990). Even though phenomenologists seem to be reluctant to focus on specific steps in data generation and analysis, common methods utilised include the division of the text into units, transformation of units into meanings expressed as phenomenological concepts and finally tying together the transformed meanings into a general description of experience (Polkinghorne, 1989).

An additional feature common to many phenomenological approaches is horizontalization, whereby all elements of a text are initially deemed to be of equal value (Moustakas, 1994). This study, including the method of organising and analysing the data, is based on Moustakas's modification of Van Kaam's steps in phenomenological data analysis. This approach provided me with systematic steps in the data analysis procedure and guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions, assisting me in keeping the study rigorous.

Moustakas (1994) sets out specific steps that are required for analysis, beginning with the requirement that the researcher describe personal experiences with the phenomenon. This accords with the phenomenological idea of bracketing or epoche. The researcher then lists significant statements from the data and works towards a horizontalization of the data which is a process of reduction, of developing a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements. These statements are grouped into meaning units or themes. The researcher then attempts to

write a *textural description* of what the participants believe the phenomenon to be about, including exact quotes. Next the researcher writes a *structural description*, also called *imaginative variation* which describes how the participants experience the phenomenon or what it is like for them in particular settings or contexts. Finally, a composite description is developed which is the *essence* of the experience for the participants.

### ***Process of Data Analysis***

Moustakas (1994) argued that the process of preliminary reflection on personal experiences and literature is vital to phenomenological analysis. Such reflection sensitises the researcher to the phenomenon and to his/her own preliminary ideas and can heighten the researcher's awareness of presuppositions and biases, thus adding validity to the study. To satisfy this requirement, I began the analysis by reflecting over my personal experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. Foci for this reflection were my personal experience working with students with SEBD both in the mainstream and in residential schools, knowledge of the relevant literature, and data generated in previous studies reflecting SEBD student voices. It has been noted that such reflection can provide a logical and systematic resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at an essential description of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

I began the process of the *reduction* of the individualised interview data by making initial coding notes on the hard copies of the interview transcripts for each of the participants, looking for patterns, themes, and significant statements. This enabled me to familiarise myself with the data and produce mind maps on paper with my first thoughts about tentative units and some early clustering of the meaning units.

I also engaged with the data by listening to the audiotaped interviews and reading the written accounts in my diary. I then turned to the computer software programme NVivo, a useful

organisational tool for coding, sorting, and grouping large amounts of qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004).

I imported all the transcripts into the NVivo programme and started the process of reviewing and coding the data. This process appeared immensely difficult, due to my inability to achieve an effective grasp of the interview data from the computer screen. I also found myself under time pressure as the Ministry of Education threatened to close the residential school by the end of the school year and I still had to conduct my six focus group interviews.

Moreover, the interview questions were based on the themes that emerged after the process of phenomenological reduction. I therefore made the decision to use the “old-fashioned” but effective method of colour coding and highlighting the significant statements on the hard copies of the transcripts. Each transcript was read multiple times in order to search for statements relating to the phenomenon studied. These statements, also referred to as *horizons*, were listed separately and then sorted into emerging themes according to the steps recommended by the Moustakas method (1994).

Even though Moustakas’s modification of the van Kaam steps in phenomenological data analysis was a valid method for carrying out this research, some further modifications had to be made. The six focus group interviews were an important tool for data enrichment and validation in my search for the essence of the phenomenon of the schooling experiences of students with SEBD.

The aim of conducting focus group interviews with the same students was twofold: (1) to further explore and develop the themes that emerged as a result of analysing interview data; and (2) to provide another opportunity to capture the students’ perspectives and their recommendations for effective pedagogical practice. Despite the expectation expressed in the

first aim of adding more in-depth data to existing themes, only a small portion of new data was obtained, with students often repeating and confirming statements that had already been obtained in the individualised interviews. Nevertheless, this can be viewed as a positive outcome in that it adds to the credibility of the initial findings. The second aim of the focus groups was achieved as students provided their own recommendations for school improvement.

The focus group interviews were analysed as follows. The six verbatim transcripts were searched multiple times for significant statements and quotes that highlighted and added to a more in-depth understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

Statements pertaining to students' recommendations were listed separately in order to constitute similar meaning units or themes. Other statements that had the potential to add a richer dimension to the themes that emerged as a result of analysing the interview data were placed under related themes.

Significant statements that emerged from both individual and focus group interviews were then examined and all overlapping and repetitive statements, as well as those not related to the research question, were reduced and eliminated. From these themes the textural description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations or context, were developed. The combination of the two conveyed the overall essence of their schooling experiences both in mainstream and in residential schools.

Once I was certain that the participants' perceptions had been clearly presented in the textural descriptions, I decided to apply educational terms and language to the meaning units in order to better describe and reflect the students' schooling experiences in different educational

settings. This allowed me to expose the universal essence of the schooling experiences for students with SEBD.

### **Methods of Ensuring Rigour**

When considering the need for rigour in any qualitative research, including phenomenological approaches, it is necessary to determine whether the findings are credible (Creswell, 2007). However, due to the interpretive and narrative nature of qualitative research, measures of validity, reliability, and generalizability used to evaluate the rigour of quantitative research may not be appropriately applied to qualitative studies (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). Thus qualitative research is often evaluated by its *trustworthiness*, defined as: “How well can readers trust the methods to have adequately exposed the investigator’s ideas to empirical observations and how well can they trust the interpretations to improve people’s understanding of the phenomena that was investigated?” (Stiles, 1999, p. 100).

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is what has been traditionally referred to as internal validity. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative data is credible when others can recognize experiences after having only read about them. Methods ensuring rigour in the current study included prolonged engagement with data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), verification with the source and from the participants’ feedback, and use of excerpts from the participants’ verbatim accounts (Johnson, 1997). Peer briefing ensures an ongoing analysis of findings is conducted by regularly presenting the findings to others for peer evaluation which in this case was both of my supervisors (Robson, 2002).

Triangulation is considered to be an important element in establishing research credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) as it affords “different perspectives on an issue under study”

(Flick, 2009, p. 445). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe triangulation as “the combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (p. 5). In quantitative research, triangulation assists in clarifying meanings through the various ways in which different groups of participants perceive phenomena (Seidman, 2006).

Patton (2002) identifies four different types of triangulation: data triangulation through different sources of data, methodological triangulation through the use of different methods of data collection, investigator triangulation when more than one researcher is involved in the study, and theory triangulation through the use of multiple theories or perspectives to analyse data. In the current study, only data triangulation was used because both individualised and focus group interviews were conducted. The data was obtained only from students, highlighting the importance of student voice. Also, phenomenology was used as the sole methodological approach.

Another strategy used in qualitative research to ensure credibility is that of reflexivity (Merriam, 2009). Reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect on the process as they move through it (Koch & Harrington, 1998). During this process, the researcher needs to make presuppositions explicit and acknowledge subjective judgements in order to increase the trustworthiness of the interpretations of the data (Ashworth, 1997).

It is necessary to understand how a researcher’s position can affect the trustworthiness of the study and how the research, in turn, can affect the researcher’s position (Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007). Thus researchers must ensure that they indicate explicitly their position in relation to their research (Creswell, 2007). Following this suggestion, I have declared my position as a young researcher and educational professional, both to my participants and to

the reader. I am also aware of the potential for my own bias to distort the interpretation of the results. Consequently, I have engaged in the process of bracketing, which has enabled me to maintain a clear focus on the participants' views and has increased my awareness of presuppositions and bias, thus adding credibility to this study.

### ***Transferability***

*Generalizability* refers to the extent to which findings are transferable to, or fitting for, other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, transferability is the concept used instead of the notions of generalizability and predictability that are common in quantitative research. Whilst it is often argued that generalizability is not the purpose of qualitative research, Morse (1999) states that if qualitative research is not considered to be generalizable, then it is arguably of little use.

Qualitative research is often deemed to be weak in its generalizability across populations, settings, and times, particularly because participants are selected purposefully (Johnson, 1997). Even though participants are rarely randomly sampled in qualitative research, the logic of generalizability is rather different, since the aim of qualitative studies is to produce rich descriptions of the phenomena of interest or to address particularities (Johnson, 1997; Patton, 2002).

In relation to sampling furthermore, Popay, Rogers, and Williams (1998) affirm that in qualitative work, “randomness and representativeness are of less concern than relevance” (p. 346) as the aim of qualitative research is to “make logical generalizations to a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population” (p. 343). Moreover, qualitative studies are often difficult to replicate as future researchers may not have access to the same subjects and if other subjects are used, results may differ. Also respondents may openly communicate with one researcher and remain



distant with others. Thus the focus in qualitative studies needs to be on producing research that can inform and enhance the reader's understanding (Shenton, 2004).

In order to address the issues of transferability in this study, a detailed written account of the information regarding participants, selection methods, context, and data generation and analysis methods are provided for the reader. Even though the findings in the current study are related to a particular context and particular participants, it is hoped that the broad themes and understandings that are reported in this thesis may be seen by the reader as relevant to other similar educational contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) support this by stipulating that it is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites is provided to enable the reader to make such a transfer.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability underpins the idea of consistency in research findings by proposing that if the study were repeated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). However as Fidel (1993) notes, the changing nature of the phenomena examined by qualitative researchers renders such provisions problematic in their work.

Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) argue that dependability is employed to “attest to the quality and appropriateness of the inquiry process” (p. 107). In order to ensure this, the text should include sections devoted to the research design and its implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, addressing the details of what was done in the field and reflective appraisal of the project, and evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken (Shenton, 2004). Following this requirement, the methodological processes within the current study were reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, with the possibility of gaining similar results. In-depth coverage of the methods employed in the

study can also allow the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed (Shenton, 2004)).

### ***Confirmability***

Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that the key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions to the reader. This means that the beliefs underlying decisions made and methods adopted should be acknowledged as well as the study's weaknesses in its use of the techniques employed (Shenton, 2004). In the current research my predispositions were addressed through the acknowledgement of my position as a researcher at the start of the research process as well as through the process of bracketing, as previously described in this chapter.

### **Summary**

In this chapter the methodological influences that have guided decisions about the research design have been presented. The influences underpinning the research process have been described with a particular focus on phenomenology. A case for the use of phenomenology as a way of exploring participants' experiences and understanding the phenomenon of schooling experiences for students with SEBD has been made. Moustakas's methods of preparation, data collection, and analysis have been outlined. Ethical considerations, as well as rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative research, have been explored in relation to the specific research approaches and methods employed throughout the research process.

The next chapter reports the findings from the phenomenological data analysis described in this methodology chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the research study, beginning with a rich description of the participants' school experiences both in the mainstream and in residential schools, followed by the participants' recommendations for school improvement. The chapter presents a textural description of what participants experienced, together with a structural description of how they experienced it, describing conditions, situations and context. In this way the boys use their voices to convey the overall essence of their schooling experiences both in mainstream and in residential schools. The following research questions have underpinned all aspects of the data analysis that is presented in this chapter.

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their mainstream schooling experiences?*

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their residential schooling experiences?*

To ensure the anonymity of the participants and also to portray the uniqueness and subjectivity of their voices, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. In order to give the reader a more comprehensive picture of the results, the participants' ages are provided, along with the interview in which the data was proving and the amount of time each participant had spent at the residential school at the time of the interview. For example, "Oskar (11 years, IDI – 3 months)" means that Oskar was 11 years old and had attended residential school for 3 months at the time of the individualised interview (IDI); "Nick (10 years, FGI – 5 months)" means that Nick was 10 years old and had attended residential school for 5 months at the time of the focus group interviews (FGI).

## The Mainstream School Experience

This thematic unit summarises the responses given to the study's first research question:

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their mainstream schooling experiences?*

The aim of this question is to capture the essence of the participants' mainstream school experiences, based on their memory and meaning. The descriptive presentation of the results endeavours to keep in mind the tenets of phenomenological analysis, as proposed by Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) who asserted that "participants are experts on their own experiences" (p. 20). Thus the intention of this unit is to present the data and be true to the voices of each of the participants. Substantial excerpts from the data are included in order to highlight what is unique to individuals as well as commonalities across the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

This thematic unit consists of five subthemes. The subtheme *Relationships with Teachers* reveals participants' perceptions of their mainstream teachers and both their positive and negative attitudes towards them. The subtheme *Academic Support* uncovers the participants' experience of limited academic support provided by their mainstream teachers and its impact on their behaviour and academic success. The subtheme *Managing Behaviour* describes the participants' experience of the disciplinary practices applied by their teachers in mainstream schools and teachers' reactions to the non-compliance and challenging behaviours exhibited by the participants. The sub-theme *Relationships with Peers* describes the participants' perceptions of their relationships with their peers in mainstream schools. The sub-theme *Bullying* is the largest sub-theme and has been divided into two parts. The first part, *Being Bullied*, provides participants' in-depth descriptions of bullying behaviours, the negative

consequences of these behaviours, and the various schools' responses. The second part, *Being a Bully*, uncovers participants' stories of being a bully, being identified as a bully by their mainstream teachers, the reasons why they were bullies, who their victims were, and what the consequences were for their actions.

### **Relationships with Teachers**

The belief that teachers in mainstream schools were uncaring, unfair, and biased was held by the majority of the participants (25 out of 29). Eight of the participants shared their stories of teacher injustice and bias. Brad (11 years, IDI – 1 month) complained that his classmates were “getting off lighter” than he would for the same misbehaviour and expressed his dissatisfaction at being treated unfairly.

Caleb (12 years, IDI – 7 months) felt uncared for and that his teachers were not interested in his personal welfare, only paying attention to the “bad stuff.” He further emphasised that his good behaviour was never rewarded. Caleb also thought that the teachers did not trust him and felt that they would rather believe something that was “not true” than what he had to say.

Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months) also perceived his teachers to be biased against him, though he did not dispute that he was guilty of misbehaving in class.

James (9 years, IDI – 2 months) similarly perceived his teachers to be unfair and described a situation when he was “kicked and hurt” but his teachers “would not do anything about it,” because “they would rather believe them [his classmates].” As a reaction to the perceived injustice of the teachers' behaviour towards him, he used extreme behaviour which took the form of open defiance and physical resistance to the teachers, resulting in physical restraint.

Another experience of a teacher's injustice was shared by Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months) who believed that he was unfairly accused by his PE teacher of not following the rules.

Darrell reacted to the teacher's behaviour by becoming irritated and resisting verbally. In response, the teacher grabbed Darrell's arm, which made Darrell even more defensive, angry and verbally aggressive. He refused to apologise to the teacher because he perceived his treatment to be unjust and consequently he was excluded from the PE class.

Kai (12 years, IDI – 2 months) also thought his teachers were unfair and expressed his perception in this way: "The teacher was taking the other kids' side when I didn't do anything." In explaining this perceived injustice, Kai told how he was falsely accused of hurting his classmate, because the student had a bloody nose and had said it was Kai who punched him. Though Kai was not responsible, neither the teacher nor the principal believed him. The next day the boy confessed that Kai did not hurt him and apologised to Kai. However, he received no apology from the principal or the teacher.

Two of the participants Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months) described an example of their teachers' injustice in how they were treated differently from their peers.

Harry: "They [the teachers] were like real hard on me. They were just like really hard, yeah really strict when they don't need to be. At times when they're not needed to be really, really strict, they are."

Chris: "Yeah, that's true. At my old school, teachers used to get really angry and like kids could say the wrong thing to you, but the teachers wouldn't do much."

Harry: "It's kind of not the same for everyone else and if you try to say something that you're proud of, they kind of put you down."

Chris: "Yeah put you down. They tell you to do one specific thing and then when you do it, you try to show it to them and they'll just be like, 'Oh no-one cares; keep on doing your work.'"

On the other hand, a small minority of participants (4 out of 29) voiced positive attitudes towards their mainstream teachers. Oskar (11 years, IDI – 3 months) believed that most of his mainstream school teachers were nice and described his class teacher in the following story.

The jokes that I made, she would laugh too, and yeah, she stopped me from getting suspended again, a couple of times. I forgot what I did, but someone went and narked on me and my teacher, she was in the class, and then the principal came and um he like took me into the office and sat me down and asked me what I did and I just kept denying that I didn't do anything, and then my teacher came in and told him that I didn't do anything, and yeah.

Oskar acknowledged that the teacher lied. However, he perceived it to be appropriate and justified this view with the following remark: “She saved me and my dad from not having to like look after me at home and it stops him from working if I get expelled or suspended, and he gets really angry, and yeah, she stopped it happening.” Oskar also thought “the cooking teachers” were nice and caring because, if he was hungry, he would be allowed “to have some breakfast.”

Otto (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also found his class teacher to be “just really friendly, helpful and really nice.”

Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months) believed that the two teachers who were “sent up by the Ministry of Education... [were] probably the best ones, best teachers ever,” because they taught him “hands-on stuff” and they “took him out.”

Ali (9 years, IDI – 10 months) also believed that he had experienced his “best teacher ever” in the mainstream school because the teacher let him do a lot of art and writing on the wall and this made him “feel happy and like [he was] having fun.”

## **Academic Support**

Nine of the participants associated feelings of anger and frustration with limited academic support from their mainstream teachers.

Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months) believed that the level of difficulty of his schoolwork did not match his ability level and thus contributed to his negative behaviour. He expressed this by explaining that the teachers would push him to do schoolwork that was too difficult for him and when he complained, “they would say it wasn’t difficult.” He believed that this was the main cause of his frustration and anger.

Brad (11 years, IDI – 1 month) shared a similar experience and believed that “they [the teachers] don’t give you help, only just tell you what to do.” Previous reports of perceived teacher injustice are reiterated here with Brad also believing that the teachers would not help him but were keen to help “other people” and that made him feel even more frustrated and angry.

Zorro (10 years, IDI – 2 months) also thought that “the teachers were too busy helping another group” which made him feel “very frustrated.”

The need for better academic support was also underlined by Zane (9 years, FGI – 7 months), Nick (10 years, FGI – 5 months), David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) and Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months).

Zane believed that he “did not get any help with his schoolwork” and that made him angry.

Nick said that he often ripped up his work to show his anger and frustration when he felt that he was not getting the help he needed. This attention-seeking behaviour was to no avail as the teachers would not help him and he would “just sit there angry and not work.” David wished that his teachers would provide him with better help and support since “the only help



I needed was to be reminded of the instructions. That's the only thing I needed help for.”

Sam perceived mainstream teachers as unsupportive because he asked for assistance on many occasions and was told “to be quiet and get on with it.”

Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also believed that his teachers did not provide him with adequate learning support, expressing himself this way. “When you get stuck they said, like, ‘I already explained it at the start, so I’m not going to explain again.’ It makes me feel frustrated. I slammed the table or something. It gets annoying.”

Sean (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) shared a similar view, although he described himself as not “the best at learning and behaving” stating how he used to “just sit outside and not go into the classroom and learn.” He described the teacher’s response. “Um, well they just let me really. Told me to come inside and if I didn’t, I would either get sent home or I’d just sit there and go inside whenever I liked.”

Travis (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) also thought his schoolwork was too hard and said that if he asked to get something easier and did not get it, he would usually run away from school. “I didn’t wanna run away, so it would make me feel upset and angry, probably.”

### **Managing Behaviour**

Eight of the participants described their experiences of disciplinary practices used by the teachers in mainstream schools. The practice of using a time-out room as a disciplinary tool in the mainstream school was experienced by Nick (10 years, IDI – 2 months) who perceived it to be a normal part of his day. He emphasised that he did not mind it, as he was used to “being locked away.” However, he believed that the teachers did not always have a valid reason to place him in the time-out room.

If you do one thing wrong, like pick up a piece of bark and throw it at someone, you get in time-out straight away. And even if we have play fights and not hurting anyone, we have to go to time-out.

James (9 years, IDI – 2 months), described himself as “naughty” and admitted that he did not follow the school rules or listen to the staff at school and that he did as he pleased. On many occasions, James said that he tried to avoid the time-out room by walking onto the school field and described how the older students would chase him around in order to get him into the time-out room. James thought that the principal was “too slow” and since he was a “good runner,” the principal “did not want to waste his time.” Instead, the students would chase James around until he ran out of breath and they could catch him and place him in the time-out room.

Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months) also described himself as “too naughty” and believed that he was excluded from the classroom because he misbehaved. He described his experience of the observatory (the time-out room) and how he felt when he was placed there.

I got moved into the observatory where it’s a really small space, and it’s only for looking at the sky and anyway, it was pretty small and I got angry because it was so small and I had no friends to play with in there. I was in there for about two weeks and I had no friends to play with, so all that I had was one staff to play with and it made me very angry and I ran out.

Nigel said that he refused to do his work and ran out and hid in a tree. He said that the staff walked around, stopped where he was, sat down and called his caregivers to take him home. As a result of his misbehaviour, Nigel got expelled from the school and stayed home for “one whole year” and then was sent to the residential school. He described the one year at home. “I did education stuff on the computer, which was good, they said. I was just playing on my computer and eating stuff.”

Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months), Nick (10 years, IDI – 2 months), James (9 years, IDI – 2 months), Kai (12 years, IDI – 2 months) and Brad (11 years, IDI – 1 month) felt that suspension as a form of disciplinary practice was not an effective way of addressing their behavioral issues. They regularly described suspension as “having time off school.” James also remarked that suspension “kind of makes you to want to swear at the teachers, because it’s like getting a reward for swearing.” The boys also pointed out that suspension just made them fall further behind in school and that made it more difficult to learn. When Brad got suspended for swearing, none of the teachers checked up if he has completed work and therefore he “was not bothered to do it [the work].”

Consequences for misbehaviour were perceived to be negative by most of the participants. In contrast, Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) and Caleb (12 years, IDI – 7 months) did not appear to take the consequences seriously. Dan thought “it was funny to sneak away” from detention, because it took the teachers a while to find out that he was gone. Caleb ran away from school a couple of times because he thought that it was “kind of funny,” since when he was caught by the staff, they told him, “If you don’t listen to us, we don’t want you at school,” so he said “ok” and walked home.

### ***Mainstream Teachers’ Responses to Misbehaviour***

The students described various strategies used by their teachers to manage their misbehaviour. Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months), told the story of talking to his friend and not paying attention during a science class. As a consequence, he was sent out of the classroom and the teacher locked the door. However, “he didn’t lock it very well.” Darrell opened the door and, as a result, was taken to the principal’s office where he received a ‘pink sheet’. He believed that he did not deserve to get a pink sheet and emphasised just how serious this consequence was.

If it's like nothing major, it's like a yellow sheet. If it's like more than major it will be a blue sheet and if it's just constant getting blue sheets and green sheets, you get a pink sheet. You get sent home or a phone call to your parents about it, and then they come down and have a chat. I was shocked because I've never had a pink sheet before.

Caleb (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also described a similar behavioural management system at his school, where the students could earn orange cards for good behaviour and received red cards if they misbehaved. Caleb perceived this system to be ineffective, however, since he believed that students were stealing orange cards and putting other students' names on them.

Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months) described how he “was pushed, like a shove, a hard one into the wall,” because he refused to do his school work. Then the teacher “grabbed” him, threw him into her office and “yelled” at him that he had to do his work. Nash believed that he had not responded in any way to the teacher's mistreatment because he was scared and shocked by her behaviour.

Physical restraint and its consequences were described by Adam (10 years, IDI – 4 months) who related how teachers had held his hands behind his back until “they were actually hurting” him and he “thought it was very bad” and therefore ran away from school often.

David (9 years, IDI – 7 months) similarly described his negative experience of teachers overreacting to his misbehaviour. He said that every time he was “naughty,” the teachers would “stick him in the basement” and that made him feel “angry” and “alone.”

Nick (10 years, IDI – 2 months) had a different view on his experience of being physically restrained. He said that he was restrained by “a whole lot of teachers just about every day,” but he believed that the teachers had a valid reason to physically restrain him because “it was for other kids' safety.” Nick also emphasised the need for space when he was angry and

frustrated and said that he would often run away from the school to “find a little hiding place where they won’t come after you” so he could calm down.

On the other hand, James (9 years, IDI – 2 months) believed that he did not deserve to be restrained.

If someone hurt me, like kicked me or something, I would overreact and start going off to them and trying to kick them. So they (the mainstream teachers) forced me to the ground, not kids that kicked me. It made me angry. They’d twist my arm up until I calmed, but I calmed pretty quick, because it really hurt. I said that they had no right to do that, cos basically they don’t. And then they’d put me in this corridor and they’d lock the doors until I calm down.

### **Relationships with Peers**

Eleven participants described issues with friendships and relationships with other children in the mainstream schools. Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months), Nick (10 years, IDI – 2 months), Peter (11 years, IDI – 7 months) and Thomas (10 years, IDI – 1 year and 11 months) believed that friendships were important yet they had few friends at their mainstream schools. Each expressed a desire for better, richer relationships with their peers.

Thomas described a time when he felt sad and needed help and his only friend stood up for him and how this had made him happy. Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months) also believed that he did not have many friends, a situation that made him feel “sad.” He thought that having friends would make everything easier for him at school as they would be able to help and support him when he needed it most, making him “want to go to school and see them and not be annoying and stuff.”

Zorro (10 years, IDI – 2 months) was unhappy that he had just one friend whom he could call a best friend. Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months) believed that he lost his friends because the

other kids told them that he was “mean.” This experience negatively influenced his perception of friendship because he believed that “friends are really nice things to have but they can turn on you.” Only one participant, David (9 years, IDI – 7 months) saw himself as a popular kid in the school with a lot of friends.

On the other hand, Brad (11 years, IDI – 1 month) believed that the students at the school would “wind him up” and push him until he reacted negatively, and because of this he would sometimes run away from school. Oskar (11 years, IDI – 3 months), Nick (10 years, IDI – 2 months) and Peter (11 years, IDI – 7 months) shared a similar opinion and thought the other children were irritable and annoying. Oskar told a story about his reaction to “annoying” behaviour, relating that when one “kiddie got really annoying,” he chased him with his softball bat and hit him around the back and was suspended for this behaviour. Despite his belief that his peers would “wind him up” Brad (11 years, IDI – 1 month) also noted that on many occasions he felt left out, since the children would not want to play with him and he did not understand why.

### ***The Importance of Friendship***

Because they believed having friends to be a great asset, the majority of participants (20 out of 29) considered their future mainstream school success to be dependent on their ability to develop and sustain friendships over time. Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months), thought that friends would make his mainstream school experience more positive and described how he would like to start his first day in a new school.

Like they (boys) could like come up to me and be like, “Oh hello, want a game of rugby?” and I’d be like, “Oh yeah bro!” and then yeah they could be like, “Oh yeah, come tomorrow?” And I’d be like, “Yeah that’s cool bro.”

Kelso (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 7 months) also wanted to find friends in his new school. He said that he wanted to play and “not just sit in the class alone” like he used to. The need to develop new friendships was also voiced by Caleb (12 years, FGI – 10 months), Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months) and Zorro (10 years, FGI – 5 months) as they believed that with the help and support of their new friends, they would be able to adjust to a new school environment more easily. In the following quote, David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) describes the reason why he plans to put effort into making friends in his new school.

I want to make more friends so I can have someone to rely on, play with and occupy myself and then, in like school times, to be able to run around, play around, kick a ball, throw a ball, play a game, and also be able to make friends with their friends that they've already got and make more friends, and also they can explain things to you that you don't know yet.

## **Bullying**

Bullying was reported by the majority of participants (21 out of 29) but appeared to affect eight students most strongly. These children provided in-depth descriptions of bullying behaviours, the responses of the various schools and mainstream school teachers to bullying, as well as their own responses.

### ***Being Bullied***

The painful experience of being bullied was described by Nelson (11 years, IDI – 7 months). “They called me fat pig and glasses boy cos I used to wear glasses, and um they called me a monkey and then they call me Chinese boy. Cos I had a dad that looks like he's from China.”

Nelson also described his response to the children's bullying. When the children made him upset, he would smash buildings, kick through the walls and fences, smash bottles and threaten and throw stones at people. At the same time Nelson emphasised that he felt

“lonely” and “not liked by others” in his previous mainstream school and ended up hiding in a tree house in the corner of the school playground.

Nash’s (10 years, IDI – 2 months) experience of being bullied resulted in a reluctance to return to his previous school. He believed that the children would make fun of him and call him “psycho” again, because they would not have forgotten how he used to throw chairs and desks around. Nash also believed that he was bullied because of his lack of friends and accessories such as “cool” hats. He described his response to bullying in terms of payback for those who had called him names and teased him about his past. Furthermore, Nash had a low level of trust in his teachers because he believed that they would not listen to his concerns about being bullied and he therefore decided not to report his difficulties.

Nelson (11 years, IDI – 7 months) described the need for revenge, believing that if he went back to his previous school, all the bullies would try to pick on him but he “would get them back for it” by telling his uncle and his mates and they would come and “bash them (the bullies).” He admitted that he did not report to the teachers or principal at the school that he was being bullied, because he felt that it would be to no avail. “They never listen. None of the teachers, even the principal doesn’t even, cos every time I go near them they’re gonna say, ‘Go away, go away!’”

Another story about bullying and its negative consequences was told by Thomas (10 years, IDI – 1 year and 11 months) who believed that his experiences with bullying started when one of the students overheard a conversation between the principal and his mother about the death of his father and spread this around the school. Thomas described how the students annoyed him by saying “really mean things about my father” and said that they made fun about him having died. When his peers bullied him and made him angry Thomas’s response was to sit outside the school and try to calm himself down.



Thomas also thought that his teacher tried “doing things but the kids wouldn’t listen” and described how she would hand out yellow cards and red cards to the bullies but to no avail. Thomas perceived that the bullies would “just run off and not do the consequences.” He also believed that the principal was not sufficiently informed about the bullying and when the subject was brought to his attention, “he did the same thing as she [Thomas’s teacher] did, gave red and yellow cards out.”

In addition to receiving warning cards, the students who bullied Thomas were supposed to pick up rubbish around the school but Thomas believed that the staff did not adequately enforce these consequences.

They’d hide from the principal at morning teas and lunch so they didn’t have to do it and he’d keep forgetting that they needed to do it. He thought they’d done it because the staff member had been supervising when they hadn’t.

Ben (12 years, FGI – 7 months) shared a similar experience and believed that telling the teachers about bullying issues would be pointless.

If you tell the teacher, at most schools they don’t have the time so they don’t listen to you. They have to do their work, like they’ve got more important things to do, so they’ll just say, ‘Oh yeah, we’ll catch on this later,’ and they didn’t actually really care what you said and in the end they’d forget.

Bullying was also experienced by Zane (9 years, IDI – 4 months) who believed that he was bullied in each mainstream school he went to. He emphasised how much he hated being bullied and said that it made him “very, very angry.”

Zorro (10 years, IDI – 2 months) agreed. He also felt that he was “bullied most of the time” in the mainstream schools but said that the bullies “got payback” when he became a bully as well. As Zorro commented, “Well they were bullying me, so I bullied them. They were

calling me names and yeah, I got very, very angry. I was about to punch somebody.” Like Zane, Zorro described how they had reported to the teachers at the school that they were bullied and called names at break, but nothing was done about it.

Kai (12 years, IDI – 2 months) thought teachers’ biases were aligned with the bullies. He believed that when he experienced bullying, the teachers would take the bully’s side and that made him angry.

I get angry when people are annoying me. Like just, say, calling me names, hurting me. Because they know they can get to me. I know that the school knows that I’m bad, so they’ll just go for their side.

On the other hand, Kai said that there were children who tried “to stop the other kids sometimes.” However, he believed that the same children would sometimes join in and bully him as well.

Travis (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) said that he was bullied by the children “for the things he did,” because he “liked to take things that were not his,” and he believed that because of this his classmates would not let him sit next to them and would call him names and tease him, thus making him angry. He described his response. “That’s when I would get a bit angry and then start, yeah, talking back to them. And then I think we would just push each other and everything.” Travis was provided with a teacher’s aide whom, he thought, was supposed to stop him from “doing anything bad.” He expressed the positive attitude he had towards the teacher’s aide: “I was actually pretty good with it (having a teaching aide), cos I didn’t really want to hurt anyone anymore.”

### ***Being a Bully***

Oskar (11 years, FGI – 6 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI –1 year and 1 month) believed that they were identified as bullies by their teachers. However, they described their behaviour as

self-defence. Oskar admitted that he “attacked a few people” but he believed that it was a fair payback for their bullying behaviour towards him. Ali shared a similar opinion and said that he was just defending himself by fighting back. He also believed that he was never a bully who would pick on little kids.

James (9 years, FGI – 5 months), Zorro (10 years, IDI – 2 months), Brad (11 years, FGI – 4 months), Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and Ben (12 years, FGI – 7 months) thought that they became bullies because they had been bullied and teased by other children in the mainstream schools they attended.

Three participants shared their stories of being bullies and described the reasons why they were bullies, who their victims were, and what the consequences were for their actions.

Bullying was described as the main reason why David (9 years, IDI – 7 months) was expelled from his mainstream school and placed in the residential school. David described himself as a friendly person and believed that he had more than 20 friends in his previous school. He added, however, that he hated about 10 people and they were girls. He stressed that the girls deserved to be bullied, because they were getting smart, annoying him, and “winding him up” by touching him on the back. He described his bullying.

When I was chasing them, I was funny. Ah, I got kicked out because I was chasing them. I was hurting them. Girls are so mean. Every time I get to play soccer, they [the girls] show off. So I kicked them because they are too bossy.

As in David’s case, Sam (12 years, IDI –1 year) also was expelled from school for bullying and believed that all of the mainstream schools refused to take him because they “found out how much of a bully he was.” He said that he “chased children around with a knife” and “whacked them with a hockey stick on their back.” He described his own behaviour. “I was a

bully; it gave me something to do, punching them. I went for their looks, ugly and idiots. The idiots always get the question wrong and that made me angry.”

Sam also perceived that the teacher liked the “idiots” better than him, “even though they were not smarter” and he thought that the teachers would not let him answer their questions, even though he had the right answer. He believed that he had few friends, “17 friends out of 250,” and described them as bullies and himself as their leader. “They were bullies with me. I was a leader and when I finished, they gave them the last punch and smirk at them.”

Otto (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also believed that he was expelled from school because he was a bully and said that he “got taught bullying” at the mainstream school he attended, because he made friends with two boys who were known as the biggest bullies at that school. He described how his bullying behaviour led to rejection by his peers and feelings of loneliness and unhappiness. Otto thought his “weird ADHD medication” was the cause of his bullying and challenging behaviours but he believed that his new medication worked better and he became “happier and nicer to other people.”

### ***Bullying and Learning Difficulties***

A small number of participants (6 out of 29) believed that having learning difficulties increased the likelihood of their being bullied by their mainstream peers. This negative experience was described by Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months).

It was all because I was the spoilt one there. Cos the teachers gave me all of their attention and they start bullying me. The teachers would just let me play on the computer and they’ll (students) see that I was dumb and couldn’t do any work.

Sean (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) described himself as “a stand out kid, naughty... (and) not learning that well.” He believed that he was picked on and bullied by his classmates because of his learning difficulties and voiced this perception in the following

way. “They just used to laugh at me and stuff, cos I didn’t know how to do my work and stuff. I felt um, upset, alone.”

Sean also experienced anger and frustration and displayed challenging behaviours when he was bullied and teased by his classmates. The teachers did not listen to his concerns and when his issues were not resolved, he was transferred to a new school which he described as a better place to be. Despite this, Sean felt that he was “still not good at learning” and worried he would be bullied and teased again. A couple of the new boys did tease him but “he just got over it.” In the new school, Sean was provided with a special education programme which involved his teacher taking him out of the classroom. This worried him, because he believed that it made him look like he was “the nerd at the school.”

## **The Residential School Experience**

This thematic unit summarises the responses given to the study’s second research question:

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their residential schooling experiences?*

Its aim is to capture the essence of the participants’ residential school experiences, based on their memory and meaning. The first subtheme, *Settling Down in the Residential School*, describes the participants’ experiences of their first weeks in the residential school, their adjustment difficulties and the factors they believed positively contributed to the process of settling down in a new environment. The second subtheme, *Relationships with Teachers*, reveals the participants’ perceptions of their residential school teachers and their attitudes towards them. The third subtheme, *Academic Support*, describes the participants’ experiences of the level of support provided during classroom instruction by teachers in the

residential school, individual experiences of academic improvement in the various subject areas, and the factors that the participants perceived to be influential in their academic improvement.

The fourth subtheme, *Managing Behaviour*, is based on the participants' reflections on the negative behaviours they exhibited in the past and what they believed were the reasons for improved behaviour in the residential school. The fifth subtheme, *Relationships with Peers*, describes the participants' perceptions of their relationships with the other boys in the residential school. The sixth subtheme, *Bullying*, describes the participants' experiences of bullying behaviour and its consequences, as well as the impact of the anti-bullying system used by the residential school.

### **Settling Down in the Residential School**

The majority of participants (23 out of 29) believed that their first weeks in the residential school were challenging. They associated their adjustment difficulties with the new routines and strict rules that were enforced by the teachers and staff members working at the school.

Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) described his experience of the first weeks.

It was difficult; I ended up in the time-out room. I didn't know what they were like here. I didn't know their policy; I didn't know what to do and what not to do. I've been in the standard group like every day for three weeks. It's not very good. You have to sit on the floor with your arms folded, legs folded, back straight, sore as. I don't like it.

On the other hand, Sam (12 years, IDI –1 year) remarked that after a few days had passed by, “it was actually good” because he came to realise that the residential school was a “safe place, I got food and shelter.” A similar experience was described by Nelson (11 years, IDI – 7 months), who thought that it was strange going to a new school and said that he was

nervous doing so. Even so, he was happy to meet new children because he did not have many friends in his previous school and believed that no-one there liked him because he hit people.

In spite of his excitement at meeting new people and possibly making new friends, Nelson experienced a range of adjustment difficulties, displaying challenging behaviours in response to the demands of the new school environment, rules, and routines. He thought the teachers were too demanding and said that he was a “little upset cos he didn’t like doing what they wanted him to do.” Nelson struggled to find new friends, which he attributed to his negative and often challenging behaviour.

I punched a teacher and my friends, stabbed one of the staff members, cos I was upset. Well, Darrell takes things off me sometimes even though it’s not his and... Um, I got put in the time-out room. I smashed a glass thing and I got out and they had to put me down in the one down there in the residential side. I had to fold my arms and wait for a staff member to come and get me and I had to say why I was there.

Similarly the first few weeks at the residential school were not easy for Thomas (10 years, IDI – 1 year and 11 months). Like Nelson he described the difficulties he experienced and his resistance towards adjusting to the new school rules and routines. “I was not doing as I was told. I would walk out and just walk around the school if I pleased like I did at my other school.” The first night at the residential school Thomas “cried quite a lot and swore a lot at the staff,” which he attributed to the sadness of leaving his parents behind. He said that he also threatened people and did not do as he was told and he believed this was why he was taken to the time-out room a few times that night.

Sam (12 years, IDI – 1 year) shared a similar experience and described how upset he was when his nana left him. He said that he did not get to say good bye to her, because he was

crying too much. He tried to run after her but was held back by the principal and staff, something he thought was a “fair enough” action. He also said that the teachers were trying to comfort him but it did not help because he was too upset and wanted to leave.

Oskar (11 years, IDI – 3 months), Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months), Sean (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) and Zorro (10 years, IDI – 2 months) also found it hard to leave their parents and experienced sadness, crying a lot and displaying a range of challenging behaviours in response to the demands of their new school.

Despite their adjustment difficulties at the beginning, most of the participants believed that after a few weeks they were able to settle down and follow the routines. The majority of participants believed that the development of new friendships enabled them to overcome their initial adjustment difficulties.

For example, Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) thought that the first weeks were challenging and said that it was difficult to “get along with everyone straightaway.” Despite this, he was able to find new friends and, as a result, everything became “easier” and he felt “much happier.”

Ben (12 years, FGI – 7 months) and Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months) also believed that making friends made their start easier and “more fun.” Peter (11 years, FGI – 10 months), Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months), Caleb (12 years, FGI – 10 months) and Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months) described meeting new people on their first day as scary. However, they remembered that they quickly made new friends and that made them feel happy, because they perceived having friends to be a luxury not experienced in their previous schools. Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months) described how nervous he was when he came to the residential school



because he did not know people or what to expect. Once there however, he also found the people to be nice. “I just thought, oh yeah, I’ll give these people a go, they seem nice.”

Carl (11 years, IDI – 4 months), Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months), Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months), Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months) and David (9 years, IDI – 7 months) also shared similar experiences and said that they felt welcome, not only because the boys were nice and friendly but also because they would help them with their transition to the new environment by explaining the school rules and routines.

Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months), David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) and Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) believed that the clear expectations from the teachers and staff and knowing the rules and consequences enabled them to settle down successfully. David described his first day as follows.

The staff was welcoming here. Usually they’ll introduce um themselves and tell you their names and everything, like what you need to call them, and then just sort of explain the rules to you and take you step by step and tell you what things are and what you could do around them and what you can’t do.

Nick (10 years, FGI – 5 months), Erick (10 years, FGI – 2 years and 3 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month) emphasized the teachers’ abilities to show care and understanding and give comfort as influential factors that helped in the process of settling down in a new environment. Ali said that he was able to overcome the initial adjustment difficulties because the teachers and staff members treated him “nicely” and comforted him when he cried and was homesick. Ali also believed that the teachers would “actually see if you’re alright and help you out.”

Erick reported a similar experience and shared the story how one of the teachers comforted him when he was “bawling his eyes out” because his dad had not called as promised. The

teacher called his dad on his behalf and since then his dad had called on a regular basis and that made Erick “feel very happy.” Zane (9 years, FGI – 7 months) and David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) shared similar views and believed that having nice, friendly teachers enabled them to overcome the initial adjustment difficulties.

### **Relationships with Teachers**

The majority of participants (21 out of 29) assigned positive qualities to the teachers working in the residential school. Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months) felt that the teachers took good care of him. He believed that his learning needs were being adequately addressed and that the teachers paid equal attention to the needs of all students. “They all take good care of you. Like you never miss out on something that someone else has if it is essential.” The teachers were also described as nice and helpful by Sean (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 4 months), Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months) and Dan (12 years, FGI – 10 months). David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) believed that the residential school teachers were “nicer” than his mainstream school teachers.

They’ve [the residential school teachers] had a lot of experience with other kids like you and they know what other kids are like and sort of what you are going through, sort of, so it makes them nicer because they know a lot.

Perceptions of the teachers as understanding, “cool,” and funny were shared by Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months) and Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months). Ben believed that the teachers’ positive qualities made his day “better and funnier” which allowed him to enjoy the school more. Harry felt that the teachers knew him and his mum pretty well and therefore were able to understand him better.

Seven participants described strictness as a positive quality for teachers. Teacher consistency in enforcing discipline and the school behavioural policy was also described as a positive

contributor to better behavioural and educational outcomes. Travis (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) expressed this view when he commented that the residential school staff and the teachers were nice because they not only enforced the rules but also explained what the rules were, making it easier for him to tell the difference between the “wrong and the right stuff.” He believed this helped him to “stay out of the trouble.”

Sean (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) claimed that being “told off” and not being allowed to “get away with whatever” was positive feature of student-teachers relationships. He also believed that it was easier for the teachers to enforce classroom discipline because of the small student to teacher ratio at the school. Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) also believed that having to accept strict school rules and their enforcement stopped him from “being naughty all the time.”

Similarly, Oscar (11 years, IDI – 3 months) expressed his view that it was important for teachers to be strict.

Um, oh yeah I said the teachers and how they’re strict on you but they help you at the same time. And like you came here because you might have a problem, but at the time that you leave you would have conquered that problem and it’d be like gone and you wouldn’t have that problem maybe.

Zane (9 years, IDI – 4 months), David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) and Sam (12 years, IDI – 1 year) shared a similar opinion and said that the strictness of the teachers enabled them to improve their behaviour. They perceived the teachers to be not only “tough” but also “fair” and believed that their positive behaviour was always recognised and rewarded.

The majority of the boys assigned positive qualities to the teachers, seeing them as nice and caring and believing that they treated the students fairly and with respect. This made them feel welcome and eased the process of adjustment to the new school environment.

Kai (12 years, IDI – 2 months) also regarded the teachers as fair and believed that if there was a problem, they would listen to both sides involved. Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months) said that the teachers just made him “feel happy” and believed they understood him well because of their experience of working with people like him. Ben felt that the way teachers “acted and reacted to stuff” between him and the other boys was very similar. Thomas (10 years, IDI – 1 year and 11 months) also considered the teachers to be nice and caring and recalled a time when he was rewarded for his good behaviour.

Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) described being treated nicely by the residential school teachers as a positive quality that contributed to the feeling of “being welcome” at the school. Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) felt the same and emphasised that the staff treated him with respect and that he thought that it was “cool as,” because not many people had showed him respect in the past. The teachers at the residential school were also perceived to be caring by both Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months) and Carl (10 years, IDI – 5 months), with Carl describing the teachers’ behaviour and his perception of the residential school.

We don’t get treated like different kids and they don’t treat you any different to the other kids. It just feels like a normal school, except we live here. Like some people would think, like there’d be a difference, it would be really, really different to like a normal ordinary school over here, but it’s not, it’s just that we are living here. It was probably about two days until I knew everyone and felt comfortable here, because everyone here already knows you and makes you feel comfortable and like just treats you like you’ve been there forever pretty much.

On the other hand, a small minority of the participants (5 out of 29) held different views. Caleb (12 years, IDI – 7 months) believed that most of the teachers did not understand his needs and how he could get overexcited. Despite this he admitted that one teacher really understood him and supported him and described her as nice, caring, and trustworthy.

Ali (9 years, IDI – 10 months) believed one of the teachers to be biased against him and said that he was put into the time-out room unfairly. Although he described one of the teachers as grumpy, Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months) perceived the teacher to be very kind although a bit “growly” when the boys were naughty. Adam (10 years, IDI – 4 months) and Nelson (11 years, IDI – 7 months) also described some of the teachers as grumpy, although they acknowledged that the teachers’ bad moods were often justified responses to their misbehaviour and use of foul language.

### **Academic Support**

The majority of participants (20 out of 29) believed that they were able to improve academically at the residential school and felt motivated to learn. They also thought that the teachers helped them to improve their academic skills in subject areas such as reading, spelling, writing and maths. Travis (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month), Sam (12 years, IDI – 1 year), Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months), and Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) believed that they had improved in maths. Chris said that he had previously “absolutely hated it” (maths). However, with more help and support from the residential school teachers, he was able to improve and maths became his “favourite subject.”

Erick (10 years, IDI – 2 years) believed that he had improved his spelling and maths, which he thought was great and said that it made him very happy. Peter (11 years, IDI – 7 months) also believed that both his academic ability and independent learning skills had improved. Zorro (10 years, FGI – 5 months) thought that he improved in spelling and said that he felt more motivated to do his work and not “slack and be lazy.”

David (9 years, IDI – 7 months) said that he used to be “sort of like loner” and would always “do work independently” and thus struggled to develop peer relationships. He believed that

with the teachers' help, however, he not only improved academically but also learned how to cooperate with other students and that made him feel very happy.

Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months) also experienced academic improvement and found the residential school “a lot easier,” because he had learned more things and had been taught properly “how to learn.” He believed that the teachers devoted more time to him and were able to explain things more effectively. Harry said that he did not do any work at his previous school but felt motivated to learn in the residential school because it was a fresh start and he had decided to become an engineer.

If you have a bad experience at school, you're not going to be able to get much of a job. You need to learn to get a good job. I kind of thought about getting a job. I want to get a good job. I want to be an engineer.

Like Harry, Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months) also believed that his attitude towards learning had changed for the better and thus he was able to engage more readily in learning and engage with his school work.

Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) believed that more complex academic work made his day more exciting, because he liked a challenge. He commented that “they usually always give you hard work and I like a challenge when it comes to working. Something that actually makes you have to think, that you really have to think about.” Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) had similar experience feeling that his teacher pushed him and challenged him to do more work. He said that it was good to be pushed because it would make it easier for him in his next school. He also viewed the teachers as helpful and believed that they gave him a chance.

Well, there's some really nice teachers here you know it's good that they can actually give you a chance and help you to get better. Like, that's all we need, is just one

chance to change our life and yeah. So it's good that they're taking their time up to help us in all the ways they can.

Participants also relayed their experience of their teachers showing patience and persistence as part of their teaching and believed that these qualities helped them to be more successful in their learning. Sam (12 years, IDI – 1 year) believed that he was encouraged by his maths teacher not to give up. He perceived his teachers to be persistent, because they would keep working with him until he got it right.

Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also believed that the teachers offered him clear, more in-depth explanations when he needed help with English and other subjects. He stressed that his residential school teachers were better than the teachers he had in the past because “they don't just get on your nerves and when you do something, like a mistake, they don't just yell at you for it that you got it wrong and that, which most teachers do.”

Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months), Adam (10 years, FGI – 7 months), David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) and Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months) shared similar perspectives and believed that the teachers were able to provide them with clear explanations that were easy to understand and thus enabled them to learn better.

Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months) believed that he was “just getting on better” with his work and that made him happy. He said that having two teachers in the classroom made learning much easier. The positive effects of individualised instruction were highlighted by Ben (12 years, FGI – 7 months), Darrell (12 years, FGI – 10 months) and Nick (10 years, FGI – 5 months). They declared that it allowed them to understand more quickly, resulting in less frustration and anger. On the other hand, Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months), Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months) and Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months) attributed their lower level of

frustration with the school to the teachers' ability to match the work with each student's ability level.

The following is part of a discussion between Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months), Ben (12 years, FGI – 7 months), Darrell (12 years, FGI – 10 months) and Nigel (9 years, FGI – 7 months), describing factors, in particular the size of classes, that they believed allowed them to improve academically.

Ben: Cos I've been here for four terms and I've learnt lots from my teachers.

Researcher: "How do you think your teachers helped you?"

Otto: "Well, the work, how they explain the work."

Ben: "And the teachers teach us at our levels, teaching us at what the levels we should be at. Um, at normal schools they [the teachers] don't... there's heaps of other kids and then like in our class there's only about 11 and we get more of a chance to do things and in the other class you don't."

Nigel: "Yeah. At some schools there's heaps of people in every class. In like my class that I was in, when I was leaving there was 32 kids in our class. Here you get more of a chance."

Darrell: "More cos you don't get frustrated as much with your work cos then if there's like let's say 28 um then and if they're all talking you can't do your work. It's like hard to concentrate."

Ben: "And you get more one on one with the teacher. Like if there's 30 odd kids, there's bound to be like 12 other kids that want to help and that."

Brad (11 years, IDI – 1 month) also preferred the small classroom sizes in the residential school as he had often struggled in the loud mainstream classroom environment, finding it difficult to concentrate and understand the teacher's instructions. Kelso (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 7 months) agreed, saying that mainstream school classes were large and had too



many students in them. Like Brad, he preferred the smaller classroom sizes in the residential school. Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also said that he really liked the fact that the residential school was “nice and small” and that the classes were “not too packed.”

### **Managing Behaviour**

Reflecting on the negative behaviour they had exhibited in the past, the majority of participants (19 out of 29) perceived themselves to be better behaved in the residential school. Some of them also provided explanations and reasons for the change in behaviour.

Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months) described himself as “naughty” in the previous schools he had attended, having displayed many challenging and aggressive behaviours towards others. He believed that his behaviour had improved in the 4 months he had attended the residential school, saying “I know more stuff now and my behaviour and stuff’s changed. Just like my language and my learning and stuff and not being angry all the time and getting into heaps of trouble.”

Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) had attended the residential school for 7 months and expressed a similar view. He felt that being less “angry and not overreacting as much” was nice but he could not explain why this positive change had happened.

Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months) also felt that they had better control over their behaviour. Describing his change in behaviour, Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months) explained that “I used to automatically get angry and then start punching people and now I just slow down automatically.” Chris also believed that he was able to respond more appropriately to situations where he would not have been able to keep calm in the past and provided the following example. “My Nana came to visit me the other week and

somebody said something nasty about my Nana. I didn't say anything, I just walked straight away."

Ali (9 years, IDI – 10 months) believed that the reason why he attended the residential school was the defiant and non-compliant behaviour he exhibited at home. He found it difficult to get along with his brother and described himself as "naughty." He regarded the residential school as helpful, aiding in improving his relationships with his family, and said that it made him happy. Ali was also confident and positive about his future because:

I actually think I'm going to do well when I go back home. The school's actually working, cos in the holidays, I'm doing much better than I used to do. I'm more focussed on jobs that my dad's asked me to do. I'm more focussed on behaving. I'm being more pleasant to my brother. I'm doing lots more things well than I have lately.

A positive behavioural change was reported by Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months), who believed that the residential school provided him with "a second chance to change my life." He was expelled from the mainstream schools because he was "too naughty" and thus stayed at home with "no education" which he found "boring as." Chris attributed his change in behaviour to the strict discipline, rules, and consequences enforced by the staff and teachers.

Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month) also believed that his behaviour had improved. When asked why he had changed he said:

I've changed because the teachers had done lots to help us. They've taught us to get on well. They've taught us to help. They helped me lots cos if I get annoyed I know how to calm down fast, and they've shown me how to do all these things.

Otto (12 years, IDI – 7 months) believed that the reason he had been suspended from the mainstream school was his challenging behaviour. He not only shared Ali's perception about

the reason for his improved behaviour but expressed his excitement. “I just can’t believe that I’ve made it this far.”

Travis (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) described his change in behaviour.

I think there’s been change in me. I haven’t been taking things that often, I haven’t been running away. Um, I feel actually pretty good about it cos the police would probably visit me or something and everything, but now I haven’t seen them in – I’m not sure – ages.

He also believed that his mom needed a break from him, because he was not very well behaved at home. The idea of attending a new mainstream school did not worry Travis, because he believed that he had “got better” and that it would be a new start for him.

Sam (12 years, IDI – 1 year) also believed that his behaviour had improved because of the strict consequences for misbehaviour and other challenging behaviours.

At this school you’re not supposed to say naughty stuff or hurt someone or anything, because if you hurt someone, like kick them, hit them or something, you go through all the stuff again: the plain meal, hand held, away from others, time out and it’s just not worth it.

Sam expressed his wish to visit his primary school for just one day in order to show the teachers and staff there how much he had improved. This was important to him because he believed that the staff at the primary school believed he had great potential but at the time, Sam did not want to develop his potential and instead was “naughty.” Showing his mainstream school teachers how much he had improved was also important to Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months), who felt that if he could regain the trust of his peers, they could say, “Oh do you remember this kid, how he used to be such a little brat? Well, you can be friends with him because he’s now improved.”

Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months) believed that he had improved “lots,” because he did not swear as much and did not “do as many bad things.” He also attributed this improved behaviour to the strict consequences for misbehaviour such as the time-out room and loss of privileges. Nigel felt that earning back the lost privileges was difficult, because he had to “get 100%” the whole week.

Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) also found it hard to be “good 100% all the time” and thought the rules were too strict. In reflecting on his behaviour in the past he described himself as having been really naughty, which he believed got him into a great deal of trouble and was the cause of him being excluded from his previous mainstream school. Of the residential school he said, “No other school would accept me, except for this one. I felt kind of annoyed, because when I got here, I didn’t know anything because I’d been off school for seven months.”

Zorro (10 years, IDI – 2 months), on the other hand, was also expelled from school but said that he felt happy about it, because he could play games on his computer the whole day. He explained his motivation to be good, saying that “I’m trying to be good so I can get out of here.” Because he did not want to end up in the time-out room, he said, he did not respond to situations in an aggressive and violent way. He described a situation where one of the boys flipped the light off when he was in the shower but since he did not want to end up in the time-out room, he decided not to react.

Oskar (11 years, IDI – 3 months) believed that he too was already better behaved and said that it was not worth being naughty because of the negative consequences he would suffer. He perceived the residential school to be a helpful place since:

They help you with your life now and could help you with your life later on. Like cos I've come here, because I wasn't really concentrating at school and I was a really naughty boy, and I'm like not as bad as I was when I first came here.

Oskar believed that coming back to the residential school was not an option for him, because if he continued "to be that naughty," he might end up in prison later in his life and he did not want that to happen. At the time of the focus group interview, Oskar had attended the residential school for 6 months and described his change in behaviour: "I am doing much better, because I am improving. I'm being a gentleman now. I'm doing kindness. I'm sharing with more people and I'm helping people on the computer. I've also not been overacting and getting annoyed as much." However, Oskar thought that "it's not going to be easy" attending a new mainstream school but he was ready to try hard, not give up, and do as well as he could having gained the knowledge to take the right steps.

It was Thomas' (10 years, IDI – 1 year and 11 months) second time at the residential school. He believed that he had to come back a second time because he had done something very wrong when he went back to his previous mainstream school. Furthermore, he said that he continued this misbehaviour on his first day in the residential school, describing it as "threatening and hurting others and swearing." He perceived the staff in the residential school to have high expectations, because "they expected really good things" and therefore he "had to show his best example." Thomas had reflected on his behaviour while in the residential school and said that he knew that he did something wrong and told himself: "I'll get this term over and done with and do as best as I can at my new school."

Having a chance for a fresh start was important for James (9 years, IDI – 2 months) as he believed that it would allow him to "change things around so it would be finally average, normal." James perceived strict rules and consequences for misbehaviour to be "marvellous

things,” because through them he would learn his lesson. James also expressed his desire to change his behaviour: “I will change my behaviour, my foul language and my actions like punching and kicking and all that.”

Peter (11 years, IDI – 7 months) believed that fighting with people was the main reason he got expelled from the mainstream schools. He described the change in him: “I just feel like a new person, cos of my anger, you know I’m just trying to get the good person back. The good person got lost when I started fighting one year ago.”

Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months), Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months) attributed their improved behaviour to the strict rules, and the teachers and staff enforcing them. The following is part of a discussion between Chris, Harry, and Nelson during a focus group interview:

Researcher: “What do you think helped you to change your behavior?”

Chris: “Just knowing that if we’re going to be naughty then we should expect to lose our privileges, we should expect to lose our privileges if we’re gonna be naughty.

Harry: “And they’ve [the teachers] taught us to treat people the way we want to be treated like if we’re going to do something bad, we can’t expect to have good things happen to us.”

Nelson: “Like give a negative, expect negative.”

Harry: “Yeah, you realise that once you are here for like 2 weeks, you realise that if you do something wrong you’re going to get consequences. So people here normally try to be as good as possible, but they [the teachers] treat you really well, but say you do something wrong, you’re going to get kept away from the other children or you’ll just get consequences that you don’t want.”

Sam (12 years, IDI – 1 year) perceived the consequences in the residential school to be stricter than in the mainstream school.

Oh well, if I ran away from the previous school there's not much consequences, because you can just go home and call them. But at this school, I jumped the fence and picked an apple off the neighbour's tree and ate an apple, but I got in trouble.

Sam said that as a consequence for his misbehaviour he had to wear slippers and the staff held his hands so he would not go out of bounds again. However, he believed that the way he was treated was for his own good and said that he knew that he “did something wrong” and that made him feel disappointed with himself.

Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) said that he was put into the time-out room at the residential school when “he was naughty.” Furthermore, he believed that the staff working in the mainstream school were too easy on him and other students, because they did not discipline them enough.

They'll [the teachers in the mainstream school] tell us to do something and if we don't do it, they'll just yell at us and that's the end of it, but I reckon there should be more than that. They should have a time-out room there too at school, mm. Um, just so like they can discipline people then.

James (9 years, IDI – 2 months) shared the same view and believed that strict consequences and discipline in the residential school enabled him to improve his behaviour and learn. Sean (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) said that he ran away from the residential school because “I was bored and didn't like doing what I had to all the time, cos they instructed us to work and we had to.” As a consequence for running away from the school, Sean said that he was not only put into the time-out room but he also had to “wear pyjamas, could not go out and play, was stuck in one room alone and had to do schoolwork” for a week. He described

his reaction to this situation. “I felt annoyed, upset, and sad.” Sean said that he had learned his lesson about running away and he “would never do it again.”

Nelson (11 years, IDI – 7 months) described the consequences for challenging and aggressive behaviour. “Once I got put on restrictions and damage restitution. I wasn’t allowed to do anything. I was only meant to stay in the class and work behind the screen and I wasn’t allowed outside to play.” Nelson also said that this made him feel sad, because he felt alone. On the other hand, Nelson recounted the rewards for good behaviour and said that the “best behaved kids received plenty of privileges.”

### **Relationships with Peers**

Almost half the participants (13 out of 29) believed that they had friends in the residential school. Ben (12 years, IDI – 4 months) and Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) regarded everyone as their friends. Nash (10 years, IDI – 2 months) believed that he had a lot of friends as boys treated him nicely and he wanted to be their friend. James (9 years, IDI – 2 months) felt that it was much easier to find friends in the residential school perceiving the other boys to be friendly and interested in him. He felt happy as he was able to play with friends rather than spend his time alone.

However, negative relationships between the boys were also reported by some of the boys. While Thomas (10 years, IDI – 1 year and 11 months) and Caleb (12 years, IDI – 7 months) viewed some of the boys as friendly, they also felt that some were mean and annoying, trying to “wind them up” and make them angry. Similar perceptions of boys being mean to them were voiced by Ali (9 years, IDI – 10 months), Erick (10 years, IDI – 2 years) and Nigel (9 years, IDI – 4 months).



Nigel regarded four of the older boys as mean and believed that they were intentionally getting him into trouble. This resulted in him being singled out as the one who had to face the negative consequences making him angry and upset. Erick also thought the older boys were making fun of him and believed that the boys considered him to be “disgusting.” Although Nigel thought some of the older boys were mean to him when they got angry, he also recognised that some were very kind to him. He recalled that when he started at the residential school, they did not leave him “alone in the middle of nowhere, took me around, showed me all the places around and taught me how to do all the stuff that was at the school.”

Tim (9 years, IDI – 4 months) concurred and stated that even though there were some mean boys in the residential school, he had two friends who took good care of him and therefore he expressed a wish to reciprocate their friendship. Oskar (11 years, IDI – 3 months) also believed that there were some “cool boys” at the residential school and said that when he first arrived, he was very shy but a few of the boys helped him to fit into the school and showed him respect, which made him happy and feel as if he was not alone. David (9 years, IDI – 7 months) also perceived some of the older boys to be “cool” though his perception of “coolness” was attributed to their ability to excel at sports, such as skateboarding and BMX.

For James (9 years, IDI – 2 months), it appeared that most of the boys were mean to him. However, he believed he was treated this way because “they did not forget the time when he made them upset” so were trying to get “revenge.” Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months), Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) and Travis (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) viewed the new boys at the residential school as “annoying” and “naughty,” attributing the new boys’ negative behaviour to their limited knowledge of the school rules. Dan expressed his view of them:

I just hate the new kids that have come in. They sort of think they own a place and they sort of rark you up a little bit and they just get you really, really angry. Yeah,

when some new kids come in and they actually don't know what the rules are and all that, and then they sort of get you a little bit angry just by teasing you.

Despite having only been at the residential school four months himself, Chris agreed and asserted that the new boys were not “there long enough to know what was right and what was wrong.” On the other hand, Travis who had spent a year in the setting admitted that he liked to watch the new boys getting into the residential school routine and said, “I still remember when they were naughty, but now they're good, they've gotten better.”

## **Bullying**

The majority of the participants did not experience bullying in the residential school. Peter (11 years, IDI – 7 months) regarded the residential school as a safe place and believed that he had been provided with a respite from bullies. “I'm glad to be away from some of the enemies at the other school. They didn't like the person I become a friend with, so they started ganging up, and they started hurting me and then I got a bleeding nose and yeah.” Harry (12 years, IDI – 2 months) agreed, also viewing the residential school to be a bully-free environment.

The following is part of a discussion between Oskar and Ali, describing the residential school anti-bullying system and its effectiveness:

Ali: “It's like if someone's bullying you then you write what they're doing to you. You write when it is, you write who's done it and your name where it says name. You just put it under Mr. Green's door and when he arrives he'll look at it and that means they look out for stuff like that and they'll keep a close eye on the bully.”

Oskar: “Yeah, I've written lots of them. They've helped.”

Ali: “Yes, cos I wrote one, one night and I put it under Mr. Green's door and he came in the morning and then he read it and on the way back to the dorms he caught that person who I wrote a concern card.”

Researcher: “What happened next?”

Ali: “Well, he just told him off and then put him in the standard group and he had to write me an apology letter.”

Oskar: “And if it’s serious they’d go to time-out and they have to write an apology letter for you, for the staff, and why they shouldn’t do it.”

Caleb (12 years, IDI – 7 months) also believed that the staff working at the residential school addressed the bullying issue effectively and described the anti-bullying system positively because “If it happens too often, you write out a concern card and they get immediately dealt with. I did have to write one for Adam, because he was bullying me, calling me names, and even making fun of my family. He hardly ever even bullies me now.”

Sean (12 years, IDI – 1 year and 1 month) also wrote a concern card because he was being teased and made to feel upset. He agreed with Caleb that the anti-bullying system worked, because he did get help and the problem was resolved.

We write out concern cards. Um, well, concern cards, you’ve got to write your name and you’ve got to write the problem and where it’s happening, and then you give it to the staff member and they read it and then both of us boys get taken to the office and we sort it out. Um, well, the staff member says what’s wrong to both of us and I say my point of view and then they say theirs and then we um talk about it and then they just solve it and we don’t bully anymore.

Despite the school anti-bullying system, a minority of participants (5 out 29) had experienced bullying at the residential school. Dan (12 years, IDI – 7 months) believed that he was picked on and pushed around by the boys every day. Chris (11 years, IDI – 4 months) also experienced bullying and said that he did not like or get along with some of the boys, because they “were racist people” who called him black and said “bad stuff” about his family. Similarly, Darrell (12 years, IDI – 7 months) suffered from bullying related to racial

discrimination. He had shared with a few of the boys who he felt were friends that his mom had dark skin. Some kept this to themselves but others passed on the comment so that some of the boys started to verbally bully him by calling his mom “nigger.”

Zane (9 years, IDI – 4 months) believed that “every kid” in the residential school was “partially a bully.” He said that he got bullied by Adam (10 years, IDI – 4 months) and described how angry he got and that he wanted to “bust him through a concrete wall.” He did not respond to the bullying, however, because not only did he see himself as physically weaker but he did not want to end up in the time-out room.

Oskar (11 years, FGI – 6 months) also thought that some of the boys were bullies. However, he said that he was not afraid of them. One of the residential boys was identified as a bully by Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month), who believed that he was picking on the “small kids” that were younger than him “cos if he picks on kids that are the same size and age as him, he knows he’ll probably get smashed.”

## **Boys’ Suggestions and Recommendations for School Improvements**

This thematic unit presents the participants’ recommendations for school improvements and is divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme, *What do I Need to be More Successful in My Next School?* presents the boys’ recommendations. Based on their own experiences and beliefs, they highlight the need to have a fresh start at their next school, to be treated like a “normal kid,” to be listened to and heard by their teachers, and to have teachers’ aides provided for students who need them.

The second subtheme, *Ending Bullying in Schools*, provides the participants’ insights into and recommendations for, creating a safer mainstream school environment for all students. This

includes recommendations such as providing better supervision within the school, school security guards and security cameras, separating students, changing teachers' attitudes towards bullying, finding new alternatives to expelling students for their bullying, and implementing a "buddy" programme in schools.

## **What do I Need to be More Successful in My Next School?**

### ***Having a fresh start***

The majority of the boys (19 out of 24) believed that having a "fresh start" would enable them to experience greater success in their new mainstream schools. Based on the boys' past experiences, a completely fresh start would not be easy as their previous teachers would most likely have read their personal files and thus assume them to be "bad boys." The boys believed that this negative label often led to them being falsely accused of misdemeanours by their teachers. Despite this, the boys trusted in their ability to prove the teachers wrong as they felt more confident about the new social and academic skills they had acquired in the residential school. Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months) stated: "You got one chance to show them right. So that's your one chance to show them that you've changed."

The following is part of a discussion between Peter (11 years, FGI – 10 months), Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and James (9 years, FGI – 5 months), portraying their beliefs about their future in mainstream schools. The discussion illustrates their fears and concerns about the impact of the reports of their previous behaviours on future teachers.

Peter: "I want to go to a new school, because then they don't know what you've done in the past."

Kai: "Yes, because your old school keeps like a record of what you've done and they pass it on to all your schools until you've done time."

James: “What you’ve done wrong is carried with you to the end of your school years and to the end of your life.”

Kai: “They have like notes, a big list of all the bad things you’ve done and when you go to a different school, they pass it on to the different school.”

James: “Yeah, by email if they like.”

Kai: “To tell them what you’re like.”

James: “No, it’s like say one thing happened, just one day, one thing happened and they’ll [the teachers] go back to those other things, have a look at those, and then they’ll be like, you’ve done something wrong and then all the kids will find out. And then it will just start like that. Just by one thing happening, then they’re going back to those papers and having a look and then they know what you’re like. “

### ***Being Treated like a “Normal Kid”***

Regardless of the fact that their enrolment would be accompanied by previous school records, it was important for Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) to be treated “exactly like any of the other kids” in his new school, because he wished to fit into “the crowd pretty much” and not be labeled as a residential school student who needed to be followed and monitored by the teachers. Adam (10 years, FGI – 7 months), Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months), Zane (9 years, FGI – 7 months) and Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months) also wished to be treated like “a normal kid going to a normal school” because they wanted to fit in and have a “normal life.”

### ***The Need to be Listened to***

Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months) believed that if the teachers gave their students greater opportunities to be heard, then everything would be “great and so much easier.” Zane (9 years, FGI – 7 months), Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months) and Caleb (12 years, FGI – 10 months) agreed that the teachers needed to listen to them in order to better understand their problems and thus help to resolve their issues more effectively. Ali (9 years, FGI – 1

year and 1 month) also hoped that his new teachers would be more interested in his personal history because he thought that they need to know “what you’ve been through and what disability you have and what disadvantage you have.”

The following is a part of a discussion between Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months), Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months) that underlines the importance of being listened to.

Harry: “Everyone has the right to be heard, they [teachers] say, everyone has the right to and then if you say something.”

Chris: “The teacher doesn’t.”

Harry: “The teacher doesn’t listen to you. You wanna talk and they won’t listen to you. They’ll completely ignore you. It’s annoying.”

Nelson: “They should listen to us cos they’ll be able to, they’ll know what comforts us and they’ll know that we need and what we want.”

### ***Teacher Aides***

More than half the boys (16 out of 29) hoped that they would be provided with teacher’s aide at their next school as they felt that having extra help would be useful. Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months), Caleb (12 years, FGI – 10 months), Adam (10 years, IDI – 4 months) and Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months) pointed out that they were not provided with a teacher’s aide in their previous mainstream schools and expressed their dissatisfaction as they believed that each school should provide a teacher’s aide for students who needed one.

### **Ending Bullying in Mainstream Schools**

#### ***Better Supervision within the School***

There were many school areas identified as places with higher incidences of bullying behaviours that could benefit from better supervision by teachers. The front field, school

corridors and playgrounds in the mainstream schools were recognised as unsafe areas by Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months), Zorro (10 years, FGI – 5 months), David (9 years, FGI – 10 months), Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months), Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months), Oskar (11 years, FGI – 6 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month). The toilets were identified as unsafe areas by Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months) and Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months).

Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months) asserted that the limited number of staff supervising students during lunchtime and on the playground contributed to the bullying.

At my previous school, there was a few rules, but it wasn't quite that good, because there was only a certain amount of staff on at lunchtimes and that, and out the front, when you get bullied, there's not much staff around to see and get proof from.

Adam (10 years, IDI – 4 months) agreed that each school needed to provide better supervision, because “when the staff is not looking they [the bullies] just come over and hit you.” Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months) was convinced that he would be less bullied if “the teachers were there looking,” especially near the bushes so they could see what was happening.

David (9 years, FGI – 10 months) argued that one of the most effective ways to stop bullying in schools would be through better supervision. “Every school that I've gone to, they've never had a teacher outside making sure that there's nothing bad going on. So yeah, you probably have to have a couple more teachers out, or put some teachers out on duty.”

Nick (10 years, FGI – 5 months), David (9 years, FGI – 10 months), and Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months) concurred that there was a great need for better supervision in the mainstream schools and said that teachers should punish the bullies for their unkind behaviour. One suggested punishment was to deny bullies access to the playground for at



least a few days. Being compelled to sit and do their schoolwork rather than playing and having fun was seen as an effective way to address bullying.

### ***Security Measures***

Nelson thought that schools would be a much safer place with far less bullying issues if there was a security guard who would “keep everyone aware of what is going on.” Oskar (11 years, FGI – 6 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month) held a similar opinion and said that having a security guard would benefit all students as they would be responsible for finding the bullies and thus make the school a safer place. The security guard could also be responsible for giving the bullies a “child community service” such as picking up rubbish or cleaning tagging from the sides of buildings to encourage students to make better choices in the future.

Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months), Oskar (11 years, FGI – 6 months), Nigel (9 years, FGI – 7 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month) maintained that schools would be safer places if there were security cameras with a voice recorder placed inside the schools and in the playgrounds. This would enable the staff to see and hear unacceptable behaviours and identify the offenders. Nash (10 years, FGI – 5 months) argued that the cameras would make a school a safer place for both “the big and the little children.” Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months) thought that cameras would be especially useful if they were placed outside bathroom doors and in the playground as those were the “places where teachers aren’t gonna see.” Caleb (12 year, FGI – 10 months), on the other hand, affirmed that everybody needs space and privacy and therefore he would place the cameras only in places with high incidences of bullying, specifically suggesting the playground.

### ***Separating Students***

Nigel (9 years, FGI – 7 months) and David (9 years, FGI – 10 months), thought that school would be a safer place if older and younger students were separated. This would involve dividing the classroom and playground areas in two, one for the younger children and one for the older ones, so that older children could not pick on the younger ones, a view shared by Zane (9 years, FGI – 7 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month).

Zane believed that the older children should be separated from the younger ones because the bullies usually pick on the younger ones who they perceive as weaker. Ali agreed with Zane and said that it is important to allow the younger and smaller children to play in a safe environment “so the small kids can grow up and have a good life and remember... When I was at school I had a good time then.” On the other hand, Harry (12 years, FGI – 5 months), Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months), Caleb (12 years, FGI – 10 months) and Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months) doubted that separating children based on size and age would be beneficial because they maintained that all children should learn to get along and be kind to one another, regardless of size and age.

### ***A Change in Teachers' Attitudes***

Otto (12 years, FGI – 10 months) declared that one should not condone bullying and that teachers needed to “stand up to them [bullies].” Sean (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 4 month) concurred stating that teachers should talk to the bullies and tell them to “stop bullying others.” The belief that teachers need to become better listeners if schools want to stop bullying was voiced by Sam (12 years, FGI – 1 year and 2 months), Nigel (9 years, FGI – 7 months), Darrell (12 years, FGI – 10 months), Nelson (11 years, FGI – 10 months), Caleb (12 years, FGI – 10 months), and David (9 years, FGI – 10 months). They all agreed that

more students would speak up and more bullying issues would be resolved if teachers changed their attitude and addressed bullying issues promptly and more effectively.

### ***Alternatives to Expelling and Suspending Students for Bullying Behaviour***

Chris (11 years, FGI – 7 months) asserted that mainstream schools need to stop expelling students for bullying because “then they’re [the bullies] not going to learn and they’re just going to go to another school and harass another kid.”

James (9 years, FGI – 5 months), Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months) and Brad (11 years, FGI – 4 months) were also not convinced that expelling students for bullying would resolve the issue of bullying. Brad suggested punishing bullying behaviour by isolating the bullies in an empty room, where they could reflect on their behaviour and come up with a plan to help rather than hurt their victims. Oskar (11 years, FGI – 6 months) and Ali (9 years, FGI – 1 year and 1 month) expressed the view that when bullying issues arose, the principal or class teachers should call an immediate meeting with the students involved in the incident. These students should be given a fair chance to explain what they did and why. The whole group would then decide what the consequences should be and who should receive them. Oskar and Ali added that if the bullies did not respond positively and kept bullying others, they could be sent to the residential school as it would help the bullies to change their unkind behaviour and become better people.

The following is a part of a discussion between Kai (12 years, FGI – 5 months), Peter (11 years, FGI – 10 months) and James (9 years, FGI – 5 months), illustrating their recommendations for how to stop bullying in schools.

Kai: “Like I’d get them [the school] to build like a timeout thing where they can go and relax, that’s all made of cushion and they [the bullies] can go and sit in there.”

Peter: “Because the bullies, they need time to calm down.”

Kai: “Yeah because if they get wound up...If they get wound up, they can have like box board-games that they could read or play to calm themselves down. “

James: “Yeah like at my old school there was this big as room, it was like a wrestling room, it had heaps of patterning around the walls, and a big boxing bag to like let out all your anger, and you could come up to the wall with the boxing gloves and punch it hard and you could punch the boxing bag heaps. It was cool as.”

### ***Buddy Programme in Schools***

The following is part of a discussion between Brad (11 years, FGI – 4 months), James (9 years, FGI – 5 months), and Peter (11 years, FGI – 10 months) reflecting their ideas on the use of the buddy system.

Brad: “We need somebody who we can rely on to actually help the ones who need help.”

James: “Oh yeah true, like you’d have a year 1 person – if it’s a year 1 to 6, then you’d have a year 1 person with a year 6 person and a year 2 person with a year 5 person. And then like if a little kid’s being bullied, then they can go tell that big person, and then that big person goes to someone else and like helps them. Like they have buddies.”

Peter: “Yeah. We could have buddies at school.”

### **Summary**

This chapter has captured the essence of participants’ school experiences by providing a rich description of the phenomena of interest. Participants’ responses to the study’s research questions have been described and reported by utilising the transcendental phenomenological approach. The findings have been summarised and presented in three major thematic units:

*The Mainstream School Experience, The Residential School Experience, and Boys’*

*Suggestions and Recommendations for School Improvements.* Substantial excerpts from the

data have been included in order to highlight what was unique to individuals as well as commonalities across participants.

*The Mainstream School Experience* thematic unit has exposed participants' perceptions of the most salient features of their mainstream school experiences, presented in five subthemes:

*Relationships with Teachers, Academic Support, Managing Behaviour, Relationships with Peers and Bullying.* The second thematic unit, *The Residential School Experience* has

uncovered participants' perceptions of the most salient features of their residential school experiences, presented in six subthemes: *Settling Down in the Residential School,*

*Relationships with Teachers, Academic Support, Managing Behaviour, Relationships with Peers and Bullying.* It has been noted that the majority of the findings that have been

presented in these two thematic units have emerged from the semi-structured individualised

interviews. Only a small part of the findings have been obtained from the focus group

interviews, as the aim of conducting focus group interviews with the same students was

twofold: (1) to further explore and develop the themes that emerged after analysing

individualised interviews; and (2) to provide another opportunity to capture the students'

perspectives and their recommendations for effective therapeutic and pedagogical practice

The last thematic unit, *Boys' Suggestions and Recommendations for School Improvements*

has presented the participants' recommendations for school improvements in two subthemes:

*What do I Need to be More Successful in My Next School?* and *Ending Bullying in Schools.*

All of the findings presented in this thematic unit have emerged from the focus group interviews.

The findings from the three thematic units presented above will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Overview

The following chapter consists of a discussion of the findings from the current research in relation to the review of the literature. The discussion is divided into six parts: *Relationships with Teachers, Managing Behaviour, Academic Support, and Relationships with Peers, Bullying, and Boys' Suggestions and Recommendations for School Improvements*. It should be noted that the majority of the findings discussed in the first five parts emerged from the individualised interviews. On the other hand all findings discussed in the *Boys' Suggestions and Recommendations for School Improvements* section emerged from the six focus group interviews. At the end of the chapter, the major contributions and limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research are suggested.

The following research questions have underpinned all aspects of the results' discussion in this chapter.

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their mainstream schooling experiences?*

*What are the perceptions of students with SEBD on the most salient features of their residential schooling experiences?*

## **Part One: Relationships with Teachers<sup>2</sup>**

### **Students' Perceptions of Relationships with Mainstream Teachers**

The boys commented on a number of aspects of mainstream teachers' behaviour that they perceived negatively influenced their relationships with their teachers. The insights provided by these comments suggest the need to foster more positive student-teacher relationships. More positive student-teacher relationships might have the potential to reduce the number of students who find the challenge of surviving in mainstream schools too difficult. The interviewees' comments raise a critical question in regard to the level and quality of pastoral care that is currently provided for this group of students in mainstream schools in New Zealand. Only four interviewees reported positive, emotionally supportive and caring relationships with their mainstream teachers.

Even though each interviewee attended a different mainstream school, their views about their teachers were not only remarkably similar, regardless of their age and length of time spent in the residential school, but also showed a considerable degree of consistency with the existing literature (Cooper et al., 2000; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Miller, Ferguson, & Moore, 2002; Pomeroy, 1999; Riley & Docking, 2004). The consistency of the interviewees' comments also suggests that the views expressed here are not necessarily a retaliatory response to their exclusion from mainstream schools.

#### ***Unfair treatment***

In this study, the topic of differential treatment was raised by the interviewees as a salient feature of their mainstream school experience. The majority of the boys reported that they were not treated fairly and believed that they were often picked upon and made scapegoats by

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<sup>2</sup> Some material in this section (Part One: Relationships with Teachers) has been published. See Hajdukova, Hornby & Cushman in the reference list.

their mainstream teachers. This perception was commonly linked to having a bad reputation in the eyes of the teachers which the boys believed negatively influenced the teachers' ongoing attitudes towards them. According to the boys, once this reputation had been established, it was immensely difficult to shed. These findings are consistent with previous studies that reported that being treated unfairly and unequally is a common grievance of students who are perceived as disruptive and challenging (Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Jahnukainen, 2001; Pomeroy, 1999).

The boys also believed that, because of their reputation, mainstream teachers seemed to be less willing to listen to their side of story. This not only made them feel like their point of view was not valued but it also negatively impacted on their trust in, and relationships with, their teachers. Some of the boys also suggested that being perceived and thus labelled as a 'bad boy' negatively influenced the mainstream teachers' expectations towards them. They reported that the mainstream teachers showed a tendency to mainly focus on their negative behaviour, making them feel like their efforts were rarely recognised and rewarded.

In addition, the statements of some of the boys revealed how mainstream teachers' differential treatment, whether actual or perceived, negatively impacted on their ability to behave as well as emotional regulation. Elevated levels of frustration, anger and sadness and the use of extreme behaviour which often took the form of open defiance and physical resistance to the teachers were reported.

The findings imply that when students feel that they are treated unfairly by their teachers, disruptive and challenging behaviour is more likely to occur and be exacerbated. These results confirm those of extant research that suggest that students with SEBD often feel that features of some teachers' behaviour, such as unfairness or labelling, are a major cause of their disruption (Cooper et al., 2000; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Miller et al., 2002). The findings



in this study also suggest that mainstream teachers often demonstrate negative attitudes towards students who they perceive as challenging and disruptive, which can lead to an insufficient provision of positive reinforcement and emotional support. These findings are echoed within literature which documented that teachers tend to give students who they perceive as behaviourally challenging a high proportion of negative feedback directed towards their social behaviour, and little individual praise (Swinson & Knight, 2007).

Unfortunately, by doing so, mainstream teachers can contribute to the exacerbation of SEBD that in many cases leads students to become disenfranchised from the educational system. Based on these results, it seems apparent that mainstream teachers need to reconsider their role and focus more on providing a higher level of pastoral care for their students. Students with SEBD often lack the necessary skills to meet the complex demands of mainstream school settings. Therefore, a more therapeutic approach to their needs, based on providing them the opportunity to speak out and to be listened to, may allow them to feel better supported and understood, potentially resulting in the development of stronger and more positive student-teacher relationships.

## **Students' Perceptions of Relationships with Residential School Teachers**

### ***Fair Treatment***

The interviewees in this study made a clear distinction between residential and mainstream teachers. A widespread view expressed by the boys was that the residential school teachers were 'nicer' and 'better' than the mainstream teachers they had had in the past. This view was primarily linked to the boys' perception of being treated fairly and respectfully by the residential school teachers. The fairness of the residential school teachers aligned with their ability to pay equal attention to the needs of all students.

The boys also emphasised that the residential school teachers were nevertheless strict. This strictness was described as a positive characteristic with the boys perceiving the residential school teachers to be 'fair' in addition to being 'tough'. Within this study, the students' perceptions of fairness in the use of discipline were often provided to highlight the contrast between the boys' experiences of the residential and mainstream teachers. There was a considerable amount of evidence in the boys' statements to suggest that the residential school teachers' disciplinary practices were positively viewed and accepted by the majority of the boys.

### ***Highly Skilled Teachers***

There was a common agreement among the boys that the residential school teachers were highly experienced and skilled, which was linked to their ability to show patience and provide a high level of appropriate care and support. The findings suggest that the residential school teachers were better able to develop positive relationships with their students. This supports extant research that documented positive relationships between students with SEBD and their residential school teachers, a quality that is associated with students' improved confidence, self-esteem, academic ability, behaviour and ability to relate to others (Cooper, 1993a; Grimshaw & Berridge, 1994; Polat & Farrell, 2002b).

The findings also imply that the residential school teachers were able to better manage students' behaviour as their disciplinary practices were commonly interpreted and described by the boys as appropriate and fair. It should be noted that all of the teachers who worked at the residential school when this study took place had undertaken extensive training in the field of special education with emphases on pastoral care and behavioural management. It appears that this acquired academic knowledge coupled with years of practical experience could have enabled the residential school teachers to better understand the complexity of

SEBD and their students' needs, and this allowed for the better management of their relationships with these students. Unfortunately, the majority of the mainstream school teachers in New Zealand are still not provided with the necessary training in the field of special education and this may negatively impact on their ability to meet the diverse needs of all students when managing their classrooms.

### ***The Need to Foster Positive Student-Teacher Relationships***

The study demonstrates that there is a need to improve relationships between students with SEBD and their mainstream teachers as these can have important, positive and long-lasting implications for students' academic, social and emotional development. The study also suggests that the nature of relationships between students with SEBD and their mainstream teachers is often perceived as negative. This has an enduring effect on students with SEBD social and learning endeavours, and can exacerbate their behavioural problems, leading to school disengagement and disaffection. Therefore, extending teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEBD, as well as their understanding of how to develop more positive relationships with these students is essential. It could be suggested that this may be a vital component of effective educational service for teachers.

## **Part Two: Managing Behaviour**

Through the research process, a number of common themes and interesting views emerged about how to address the issue of misconduct in schools more effectively. Even though each participant attended a different mainstream school, their views about disciplinary actions and their perceived or actual effectiveness and fairness were not only consistent, regardless of age and stay at the residential schools, but also broadly endorse and substantiate previous work in the field (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Cooper, 1993a; Farrell & Polat, 2003; Hamill & Boyd,

2002; Hornby & Witte, 2008a; Jahnukainen, 2001; Pomeroy, 1999; Townsend & Wilton, 2006). More importantly, the findings in this study indicate that students with SEBD have a valuable contribution to make when given an opportunity to express their views. This, in itself, provides a clear rationale for involving students more in decision-making about policy and school behaviour (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Cole, Visser, & Upton, 1998; MacBeath, 2006; Reid et al., 2010; Sellman, 2009).

### **Boys' Perceptions of Disciplinary Practices used in Mainstream Schools**

There seemed to be a general respect for discipline among the boys as long as it was perceived to be “fair.” Unfortunately, nearly all boys reported inconsistencies in discipline. They disliked teachers who punished them without ascertaining the full story and acted merely on the basis of the boys’ reputation. They believed that they were often singled out for misbehaviour and felt sad and angry when blamed unfairly. This not only negatively influenced their perception of the school but was also cited as a major reason for their misbehaviour.

These thoughts and feelings resonate with those of peers in similar situations across cultural settings (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Jahnukainen, 2001; Pomeroy, 1999). Interestingly, several of the boys believed that there was a need for increased disciplinary action in mainstream schools. One might argue that this can be seen as the boys’ unwillingness to take responsibility for their own behaviour. However, there was a considerable amount of evidence in the boys’ statements to suggest that they viewed discipline as an important part of the teacher’s role. Also, the call for fairer and more vigilant discipline is not unique to this study. The ability to maintain discipline and control the classroom was perceived as a positive quality in a teacher, appreciated by students of special classes for the emotionally and behaviourally challenged in mainstream schools in a study

conducted by Jahnukainen (2001). Visser and Dubsky (2009) also asserted that the ability of teachers to create a feeling of safety is a key to successful practice with students with SEBD.

### ***Suspension***

Some boys reported suspension was ineffective in addressing their problem behaviour. Even though the boys admitted that they enjoyed having time off school, they also acknowledged that not being able to participate in school-related activities was a major barrier to their learning as it just made them fall further behind.

The present findings seem to be consistent with other research which found that these punitive disciplinary practices can exacerbate students' school-related problems as they may choose being sent out of the classroom as a way to avoid work or to gain the attention of teachers or peers (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Lipsey's meta-analytic review (1992) has shown that teachers' over-reliance on suspensions is not likely to decrease rates of aggression or disruptive behaviour. In addition, referencing five major studies published in 2000, Gladden (2002) concluded that "the widespread use of suspensions is deeply troubling because suspensions have not been shown to modify behaviour, and can undermine students' academic achievement" (p. 264), as the findings in this study have indicated.

### ***Exclusion and Seclusion Time-Out: The Mainstream School Experience***

In this study, the topic of the use of exclusion and seclusion time-out was raised some boys as a salient feature of their mainstream school experience. In seclusion, the student is removed from the classroom environment for a period of time, placed alone in a room designated for this purpose, usually in a situation in which he or she is prevented from leaving (Busch & Shore, 2000).

According to Ryan, Peterson, Tetreault, and Hagen (2007), teachers often think of time-out as a procedure for allowing a student to calm down. However, the boys' accounts imply that both exclusion and seclusion time-out might actually contribute to the exacerbation of their behavioural and emotional difficulties as elevated levels of frustration, anger, and sadness were reported.

In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that seclusion of students with behavioural problems and disorders can increase disruptive behaviour (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Dishion & Dodge, 2005), particularly when it is perceived as unfair. On the other hand, time-out procedures can be effective in reducing maladaptive behaviours.

However, the student needs to be removed from an environment that she/he finds reinforcing. In situations where the student feels no desire to be included or to participate in the classroom or activity, time-out is unlikely to have the desired effect (Ryan, Sanders, et al., 2007). In order to ensure the effectiveness of time-out procedures, teachers need to make their classrooms and instruction more positive and supportive for their students, by increasing the ratio of positive to negative comments, and using effective teaching strategies (Ryan, Sanders, et al., 2007).

Despite the boys' support for it, the use of exclusion and seclusion time-out is not uncontroversial. Some research supports this procedure (Ryan, Peterson, & Rozalski, 2007). It can also be argued that the ability to remove a disruptive student from the classroom may be viewed as easier or preferable option and therein discourage teachers from using less harsh procedures. However, it needs to be acknowledged that disciplining students, particularly those with severe behavioural difficulties, can be challenging for many teachers because they need to balance not only the needs of the classroom community but also those of the individual student.

Frequently, at the core of this challenge is the question of the use of punitive versus supportive disciplinary practices. Even though little evidence supports punitive and exclusionary approaches (Osher et al., 2010), these usually ineffective disciplinary practices seem to be widely implemented in schools (Reynolds et al., 2008).

On the positive side, the current research has proposed many alternative strategies which can ensure the safety and dignity of all students and staff, address the underlying causes of student misbehaviour, and improve positive behavioural skills and long-term outcomes.

There are a number of research-based approaches providing proactive systems of behavioural support in schools. Some examples of these include positive behaviour support (PBS) (Sugai et al., 2000), second step (Leff et al., 2001), stop and think (McMurrin, Fyffe, McCarthy, Duggan, & Latham, 2001), restorative justice (Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007), an in-school suspension programme (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001), social skills instruction (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003; Lane, Wehby, et al., 2003), school-based mental health services (Satcher, 2004), and anti-bullying programmes (Olweus, 1997; Reynolds et al., 2008).

However these programmes need to be implemented comprehensively to serve as effective alternatives (Reynolds et al., 2008). Peterson (2005) and Skiba, Rausch and Karega (2006) contend that school-wide efforts should be made to create a caring school community and climate, increasing parental involvement, providing character education that is consistent with school values, early identification of potential problems and intervention, mediation programmes, and conflict de-escalation training. These are just some of the alternatives whose implementation is supported by a body of research that indicates positive, promising effects on student behaviour in schools.

In addition, it needs to be recognised that punishment cannot be effective without adequate rewards. This indicates a need to implement reward programmes that are concomitant with a decreased incidence of misconduct in schools (Atkins et al., 2002). Atkins et al. (2002) contends that effective reward programmes should not only focus on rewarding on-task behaviour during academic instruction but also should encourage cooperation between peers and allow equal access to friends and opportunities for leadership roles. Moreover, positive office referrals and recognition programmes that focus on celebrating and rewarding individual students for appropriate behaviour (e.g., attendance, being on time, improving grades, meeting behavioural goals) have been found to be successful in decreasing student misbehaviour (Peterson, 2005).

### ***Seclusion Time-Out: The Residential School Experience***

Despite their overwhelmingly positive accounts of residential school, the majority of the boys expressed largely negative feelings about the seclusion time-out procedure. Not only did they not like being placed in the time-out room but many said that they often felt sad and alone. Some boys also remarked that they disliked watching their peers struggle on their way to the time-out room.

However, the vast majority of the boys agreed that the use of this intervention was often necessary. Some boys also stressed the effectiveness of this procedure in addressing misconduct in schools. The majority of the boys reported being placed in the time-out room for noncompliant, mostly physically and verbally aggressive behaviour. According to Readdick and Chapman (2000), the boys' ability to tell why they were placed in the time-out room can make it more likely that the specific time-out event will be effective in inhibiting future occurrences of the same aggressive or noncompliant behaviour, as the findings in this study indicate.



The boys' accounts also suggest that they were most likely to be placed in the time-out room during their "settling down period" as they tried to test and push the boundaries. During this time, boys commonly reported difficulties in adjusting to the new residential school environment and its strict rules, an experience which they believed was a major cause of their challenging behaviour. However, the vast majority stated that after a few weeks they were able to settle down and follow the routines.

It should be noted that even though most of the participants experienced seclusion time-out, no concerns related to the fairness and appropriateness of its use were reported. This result may be explained by the fact that the teachers who worked at the residential school when this study took place had undertaken extensive training in supporting positive student behaviour, preventive and de-escalation techniques, and restraint. It appears that this acquired academic knowledge coupled with years of practical experience, may have enabled the residential school teachers to use physical intervention appropriately. The residential school also had well-established policy guidelines pertaining to the use of restraint and seclusion time-out.

### ***Restrained Time-Out: The Mainstream School Experience***

The use of a restrained time-out procedure in mainstream schools was reported by a small number of participants in this study, with the boys being candid in their analysis of restraint. There is some level of consistency here between the boys' views and those of individuals interviewed for a report by Morgan & Britain (2004), and a study by Sellman (2009). While these researchers found that students with SEBD can be accepting of the "need" for physical restraint, they are particularly concerned that it is done safely, fairly, and by trained adults.

The findings in this study indicate that teachers both in the pre-service and in-service levels could benefit greatly from behavioural management training with a focus on de-escalation strategies and techniques for defusing challenging behaviour. Based on the boys' accounts, it

seems clear that both physical restraint and seclusion time-out can have a negative effect on already weakened student-teacher relationships.

In order to minimize damage, both sides involved in the physical incident should engage in post-event reflection and focus on restoring the trust in their relationship. Sellman (2009) also advised the use of scripts which can help teachers and other staff members to record, report, and reflect on an incident, thus safeguarding all practices. However, it must be acknowledged that in educational settings, physical interventions should be used only as a last resort. Thus it is vital that teachers and other staff always attempt first to use less intrusive intervention (Paterson et al., 2003). Moreover, restrained time-out, also referred to as movement suspension, is not recommended for use without special training and established policy guidelines due to the inherent risk of injury and potential abuse commonly associated with its use (Ryan, Sanders, et al., 2007).

### **The Impact of the Residential School on Improving Boys' Behaviour**

There was a consensus among the boys that the residential school played a crucial role in enabling them to better cope with their behavioural and emotional difficulties. These views echoed findings from previous studies which have explored the school experiences of students and graduates of residential schools for students with SEBD (Cooper, 1993a; Farrell & Polat, 2003; Hornby & Witte, 2008b; Polat & Farrell, 2002b; Townsend & Wilton, 2006).

During their time at the residential school, the boys felt that they were able to make positive changes in their behaviour, especially in regards to emotional regulation, which contrasted strongly with their former negative self-image of being naughty and bad. The boys also commonly reported feeling happy and more relaxed. These findings suggest that the residential school experience enabled the boys to form a more positive opinion both of

themselves and their abilities, reflecting a process of positive re-signification, one of the aspects of successful residential treatment (Cooper, 1993a).

The re-signification of students, according to Cooper (1993a), is possible through positive recognition in a supportive but challenging environment. Such environment offers a wide range of opportunities for students to achieve success and recognition, as the findings in this study indicate. This process entails not only gaining insight into their own behavior and that of others but also developing the capacity to manage their emotions effectively in order to exercise self-control and form effective interpersonal relationships (Mowat, 2008). However, Mowat (2008) contended that positive behavioral change cannot be effected solely through the efforts of the residential school staff. Students with SEBD have to reach a point where they make a deliberate decision to take responsibility for their own behavior and develop a sense of agency.

Even though the findings in the current study suggest that the boys were able to develop a new repertoire of valuable skills and abilities that will be of considerable help to them, it is not possible to know whether these positive outcomes will enable the boys to cope more successfully in their next school.

### ***Acquisition of New Skills and Strategies***

The boys believed the acquisition of new social skills and strategies helped them to gain better control over their emotions and behaviour, especially when dealing with adverse and challenging situations. The findings implied that the residential school teachers focused not only on managing the boys' behaviour but also endeavoured to teach valuable social skills and behaviour management strategies.

This is important since the primary reason for students to be classified as having SEBD is their deficiency in social competence (Cooper & Cefai, 2013; Forness & Knitzer, 1992), which is observed in students' difficulties in developing and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships, and their lack of pro-social behaviour and social acceptance by their peers (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). Even though it has been acknowledged that social competence is vital to success at school, most social skills and behavioural expectations are rarely taught in schools (Meier, DiPerna, & Oster, 2006). This highlights further the importance of incorporating social skills into the curriculum, especially as the number of students lacking these skills is steadily increasing (Walker et al., 2004).

### ***Fairness and Consistency of Enforcement of Rules***

The vast majority of boys also attributed their improved behaviour to the strict discipline and consistent enforcement of the rules by both staff and teachers working in the residential school. The boys were well aware of the residential school behavioural policy and how it was implemented. Even though the vast majority of boys felt that the system was fairly implemented and effective, they saw it as too strict and rigid. Interestingly, most of the boys admitted that they tested the boundaries, especially upon their arrival at the residential school. However, there was a consensus among the boys that they learned very quickly that breaking the strict rules was "not worth it" as their misbehaviour was followed by a consequence each time it occurred. These results are supported by research that has found that reliability and consistency in the enforcement of rules is a crucial factor in achieving the effectiveness of a behavioural management system (Freiberg & Brophy, 1999; Lewis et al., 2005).

### ***Rewards: Token Economy System***

It was widely understood among the boys that pro-social, good behaviour was recognised and rewarded either by verbal praise or the acquisition of points in a token economy system, of

which the details were accurately reported. All students had to earn a certain number of points in the system in order to enjoy rewards and additional privileges that included extra play time, attending extracurricular activities, and hot chocolate and cookies in the evening.

On the other hand, misbehaviour resulted in the loss of points and privileges. The boys felt that the token economy system was effective. However, some boys also thought it too rigid and strict, a finding also reported by Sellman (2009). Sellman contended that the token economy system might yield only short-term results as it was unlikely to teach transferable behaviours that would be reapplied in different educational settings.

On the other hand, not all students respond positively to less concrete classroom-based incentives for good behaviour and academic achievement, such as grades or teacher attention (Gable & Strain, 1999). For students who do not respond favourably in typical classroom environments to more common strategies such as above, token economies can be effective for improving social behaviour and academic achievement (Miltenberger, 2011; Reitman, Murphy, Hupp, & O'Callaghan, 2004), a finding supported in this study.

### ***Clear Expectations***

The majority of the boys reported that the residential school teachers and staff explicitly taught behavioural expectations upon initial entry. According to Lane et al. (2003), this can enable students to exhibit better control over their behaviour, emotions, and temper in conflict situations. Interestingly, the boys' accounts of their first day in the residential school indicated that the boys already attending the residential school helped the newcomers with their transition by explaining the school routines and rules, in this way making them feel welcome. This was identified as an influential factor which contributed to the boys' smoother transition and adjustment to the new school environment.

The importance of explicitly teaching behavioural expectations is also highlighted in the professional literature. According to Colvin, Walker, and Ramsey (1995), a student's inability to meet the teacher's expectations can increase the likelihood of unwanted outcomes, including negative relationships with teachers, academic underachievement, and a high rate of disciplinary and exclusionary practice. Having a clear knowledge and understanding of what is behaviourally appropriate in the school context can result not only in improved behavioural outcomes but also contribute towards improved inclusive experiences for students with exceptionalities (Lane et al., 2003).

### **Part Three: Academic Support**

#### **The Need to Recognise the Learning Needs of Students with SEBD as a Priority**

The findings of this study raise serious concerns as to whether mainstream schools are able to respond flexibly and effectively to the learning needs of students with SEBD. There was a consensus among the boys that mainstream teachers varied in the efforts they made to support their students' learning needs. More importantly the boys reported that they were more likely to misbehave with teachers who were perceived as reluctant to help with their learning. The link between learning difficulties and misbehaviour in class has been well documented in the literature (Cooper, 1993a; Farrell, Critchley, & Mills, 1999; Head, 2005; Hewett, 2012; Mowat, 2009; Pomeroy, 2000).

Unfortunately, the findings of this study indicate that teachers might not yet have grasped the importance of the link between learning and behavioural difficulties. According to Mowat (2009), this issue is further aggravated by the fact that students with SEBD are less likely than other students with special educational needs to receive additional support in the first

instance, or receive it too late, a finding corroborated in studies by Kendall, Cullen, White, and Kinder (2001), and Pirrie, Head and Brna (2006).

When the boys struggled to engage in activities and tasks during classroom instruction, it made them feel frustrated, angry, and discouraged. These findings echoed results from previous research documenting that an inappropriate classroom programme is likely to exacerbate behavioural problems. This underlines further the importance of programmes and pedagogy that appropriately addresses the learning needs of all students and provides practical, meaningful activities that are easy to follow and participate in (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Cole et al., 1998; Hamill & Boyd, 2002).

### ***The Need for Differentiated Instruction***

The boys frequently reported that the level of difficulty of the schoolwork did not match their level of ability. This was perceived as a major obstacle to learning and a source of frustration. Haager and Klinger (2005) support this assertion, arguing that many teachers still “teach to the middle” (p. 19) and as a result, the learning needs of a growing number of students with special educational needs educated in the mainstream schools remain unmet. Based on these findings, it seems clear that there is a need for teachers to recognise that all students are different and require varied teaching methods to learn successfully.

Differentiation is a framework for effective teaching. To differentiate instruction means to recognise students’ varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, and interests. It is a process for approaching teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class with the intent to maximize each student’s growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is, and assisting in the learning process (Tomlinson, 2001). Although putting differentiated instruction into practice can be challenging for many teachers, the time and effort are well spent (Rock, Gregg, Ellis, &

Gable, 2008). Effective use of this approach has been linked to improved academic outcomes (Fisher & Frey, 2001; Odgers, Symons, & Mitchell, 2000; Pagliaro, 2011) and positive affective outcomes such as increased level of engagement, motivation, and excitement about learning (Tieso, 2005).

### ***The Negative Impact of Learning Difficulties***

The boys were critical in their evaluation of their own intelligence. Not only did they describe themselves as “dumb” but they also believed that their classmates regarded them as lacking in intelligence. More importantly, they believed that their learning difficulties and the extra help and attention they received from teachers made them easy targets for teasing, ridicule, and bullying.

Considering the nature of SEBD, it comes as no surprise that these students are in need of extra support and help. However teachers need to be aware that students who are seen to be too demanding of their time, whether in the management of behaviour or getting their “fair share of help,” are more likely to endure painful peer rejection (Becker & Luthar, 2007) as the findings in this study indicate. The boys’ accounts also suggest the potential for stigma to be attached to a student who is provided with additional learning support and specialised in-class instruction in the inclusive mainstream classroom.

Similar findings were reported by Norwich and Kelly (2004) who found that students identified as having moderate learning difficulties preferred to be provided with additional help in a separate setting. They thought the likelihood of being victimised and bullied was less, and that they would receive better quality teaching and encounter less distraction. These findings led Norwich and Kelly to conclude that “taking account of the students’ voice on learning support does not necessarily support a system of teaching which has abandoned withdrawal teaching” (2004, p. 61).



It appears that the coincidence of learning difficulties and SEBD may have separate yet compounding effects, substantially increasing the likelihood of students experiencing even greater psychosocial, behavioural and academic problems, thereby putting students with SEBD at greater risk. However successful implementation of school-based peer mentoring programmes might help to resolve some of these issues. Research has shown that when effectively implemented, these can promote academic success, pro-social behaviour among peers and reduce the incidence of bullying, consequently leading to more positive relationships, better attitudes towards school, and improved self-esteem (Randolph & Johnson, 2008).

### ***The Impact of Learning Difficulties on Boys' Self-Esteem***

There was considerable evidence in the boys' statements to suggest that learning difficulties can compromise learning and negatively affect self-esteem and behaviour. Self-esteem is defined by Woolfolk and Spero (2005) as an affective act that encapsulates the value or worth we attach to our self-assessments. It also encompasses the ways individuals feel about their strengths and weaknesses (Chohan, 2013). Self-esteem is considered an important variable affecting student progress and behaviour. However, it seems unclear whether it is educational failure that is detrimental to students' self-esteem or whether the situation is that students with low self-esteem fail to learn (Swinson, 2008).

Some researchers have argued that individuals with low self-esteem might be more prone to externalising problems (Fergusson & Horwood, 2002; Spratt & Doob, 2000) which are commonly associated with SEBD. Others, however, have questioned this claim and suggest that any link between self-esteem and externalising problems probably occurs at the high end of the self-esteem continuum; that is, unrealistically high self-esteem rather than low self-esteem actually contributes to externalising problems (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996).

Similar results were reported by Swinson's (2008) study which measured the self-esteem of 60 students attending two specialist schools for students with SEBD. The results of this study suggest that whether low or high, unrealistic self-esteem should perhaps be considered a significant problem for a proportion of these students. This conclusion further highlights the need to carry out a comprehensive assessment in order to plan an effective programme that will meet the individual needs of students with SEBD.

### **The Quality of Education Provided at the Residential School**

Strongest among the impressions conveyed by the boys was the sense of personal achievement. The boys seemed to be motivated to learn and confident to succeed. This is in strong contrast to their former feelings of being learning disabled and "dumb." Moreover the boys had a clear sense of the factors that enabled them to be more successful in their learning.

In general, the most effective aspects of the education at the residential school included being placed in small classes (less distraction), more one-on-one time with the teacher, individualised instruction and more appropriate teaching methods. These positive aspects of special schools were also noted in previous studies (Cooper, 1993a; Farrell & Polat, 2003; Harriss et al., 2008; Polat & Farrell, 2002b). There was a consensus among the boys that the residential school teachers were better equipped to meet their learning needs, a factor they linked with the teachers' ability to show patience and persistence.

This supports research that has documented how teacher persistence is essential, especially with students from whom others have lower expectations and who may have low expectations of themselves (Goldberg & Price, 2000). Teacher persistence also influences many factors related to effective teaching such as teachers' expectations for students, development of teaching skills, efficacy beliefs, response to setbacks, reflection, use of

reform-oriented teaching practices, and responsiveness to student diversity (Haberman, 1995). These findings indicate that teacher education programmes should systematically emphasize and foster the knowledge and skills that make persistence a natural response to the daily challenges of teaching.

The boys also agreed that the residential school teachers provided adequate support during classroom teaching and were able to both challenge the students and match their work with their ability level, resulting in a lower level of frustration and an increased motivation to learn.

These findings indicate that the residential school teachers' high expectations might help to give rise to the *Pygmalion effect*, a transformation in belief and behaviour that can change a low-expectation student into a more successful learner (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. This consideration points towards the need for educators to better understand how to use the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy as a useful pedagogical tool to convey positive expectations.

Moreover with their perceptions, understandings, and expectations of students with SEBD in mind, pre-service teachers need to be guided carefully through their teacher-education course and practicum experiences. It should be acknowledged by practitioners and policy makers that students leaving residential school are in great need of additional support during their transition to a new school. It is also vital for both the residential and mainstream schools to focus on effective information exchange, with an emphasis on retention of students' knowledge and skills gained during the special school placement (Farrell & Polat, 2003).

## **Part Four: Relationships with Peers**

### **Relationships with Peers in the Mainstream Schools**

In this study, the topic of unpopularity and dislike among peers was raised by the boys as a salient feature of their mainstream school experience. The boys commonly reported being unable to forge meaningful connections with their mainstream peers. These findings are consistent with previous studies that reported that students who are perceived as aggressive and/or hyperactive are more likely to be rejected by their peers (Allan, 2003; Farmer et al., 2011; Sparling, 2002; Visser & Dubsky, 2009).

Some boys were candid in their analysis of their “unkind” and often aggressive behaviour towards their mainstream peers and acknowledged that it played a crucial role in their difficulties in making and keeping friends. However the majority of the boys did not provide self-reflective accounts and portrayed themselves as victims of peers’ dislike and wrongdoing. The boys stressed that they felt socially isolated and rejected, which, in their own words, made them feel “sad”, “lonely” and in some cases “angry.” Unfortunately, research has found that the perception of being rejected (regardless of whether peer rejection is actually present) can perpetuate both externalising and internalising problems (Deater-Deckard, 2001), as the findings in this study also indicate.

Some boys described their peers as irritable, believing that they were purposely trying to “wind them up” and push them until they reacted negatively, a sentiment echoed in the accounts of secondary school students with SEBD in Malta (Cefai & Cooper, 2010).

Interestingly, Ben perceived that rejection by some friends allowed him to distinguish between real friends and others. Unfortunately, his friendship loss seemed to negatively

influence his perception of friendship, as he stated that “friends are really nice things to have but they can turn on you.”

Furthermore, as mentioned previously (Cooper, 2008; Hajdukova et al., 2014; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 1999), teachers themselves, especially those working in mainstream schools, may have a negative attitude towards students whom they perceive as having SEBD. A change in teachers’ attitudes is crucial as teachers have a strong influence on students’ attitudes toward their peers with SEBD (Avramidis et al., 2000; Short & Martin, 2005). In their positions as role models, teachers should model appropriate behaviours of caring, sensitivity, and cooperation. Their actions need to reflect support, acceptance, and positive regard while teaching and redirecting behaviours and attitudes that may hinder students’ pro-social interactions (Roland & Lawhon, 1994).

### **Relationships with Peers in the Residential School**

There was a consensus among the boys that it was easier to find friends in the residential school. The majority of the boys believed that they were able to find at least one good friend whom they thought trustworthy and supportive. A large number of boys who had endured painful bullying experiences in their mainstream schools also described constructive relationships with their peers in the residential school and emphasised how exciting it was to finally have somebody to play with, rather than remaining alone as had been their situation previously.

However, it should be noted that the nature of relationships between the boys was not always cordial, as some accounts of negative interactions were reported. A common source of irritation among the boys was “winding each other up,” which was described as a form of a verbal banter or personal insults. In spite of this, only a small number of boys reported

bullying in the residential school. (Note that this issue is further discussed under the heading *Bullying in the Residential School, Part Five*).

One of the proposed hallmarks of inclusive education is that students with special educational needs get the opportunity to be educated alongside their mainstream peers. However Hornby (2011) suggests that many students with special needs might feel more comfortable with peers with similar difficulties and interests, rather than peers of the same chronological age, a point the findings in this study also imply. This argument resonates with the theory of selective homophilic affiliation which is the tendency of individuals to choose friends and associates who share characteristics similar to their own (Kandel, 1978). Identifying and affiliating with similarly situated peers can be seen as an effective strategy for coping with negative feelings associated with peer rejection and social stigma (Moses, 2010) and can provide options for preserving self-esteem through positive social validation and emotional support (Major, 2006). However, affiliation only with a “stigmatised group” can also limit one’s social circle and mastery of skills for interacting with others (Major, 2006).

### **The Value of Friendship**

There was a consensus however among the boys that having good, supportive friends was essential, especially when dealing with adverse situations. These views are supported in international research documenting that at least one high-quality friendship might lessen the harmful effects of peer rejection (Buhrmester, 1990), inhibit victimization (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999) and serve a protective mental health function (La Greca, Prinstein, & Fetter, 2001). The findings in this study also suggest that feeling accepted and supported by peers can play a crucial role in positive adjustment to the school, a point highlighted in professional literature (Deater-Deckard, 2001; Harris, 1995).

The boys also perceived their future mainstream school success to be dependent on their ability to develop and sustain friendships over time. These views are similar to those of interviewees in a study conducted by Cooper (1993a) where 92% of the interviewees agreed that in order to be successful in the residential school they needed to put effort into building positive relationships with their peers.

This study demonstrates that there is a need to improve relationships between students with SEBD and their mainstream peers as these can have important, positive, and long-lasting implications for students' academic, social and emotional development (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). On the other hand, the results also indicate that the nature of relationships between students with SEBD and their mainstream peers is often negative. This can have an enduring effect on students' with SEBD self-esteem and psychosocial adjustment (Buhrmester, 1990) and might exacerbate their behavioural problems, leading to school disengagement and disaffection.

Consequently, extending teachers' knowledge and understanding of the value of friendships and how to foster more positive relationships between students with SEBD and their mainstream peers is essential. Literature on the value of relationships in the educational setting provides some guidance on practices that teachers can implement to foster more positive relationships among peers, both with and without special needs. For example, peer and cross-aged tutoring are strategies that have been found to foster positive peer interactions while aiding academic achievement (Gordon, 2007) as well as yielding improvements in student attitudes, self-esteem, and social skills (Gumpel & Frank, 1999). Also, through cooperative learning, students can learn how to support and encourage one another (Jolliffe, 2007; Slavin, 2011) which might lead to extra opportunities for the development of friendships among students with and without SEBD. However, care should be taken to

ensure that these relationships are based on collaboration, not helping, and that peers share equal status in the groupings (Shapiro, 2000). The essential learning area 'Health Education and Physical Education' in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) has mental health including relationships in education as a key area of learning that all New Zealand teachers should be teaching in classroom from years 1-10.

## **Part Five: Bullying**

### **Boys' Perceptions of Bullying in Mainstream Schools**

#### ***Being Bullied***

The pain endured by the victims of any type of bullying should not be underestimated. International research has reported a number of negative psychological effects associated with victimisation, such as low self-esteem, sadness and anger (Roland, 2002), social adjustment issues manifested in loneliness, isolation and school absenteeism (Rigby, 2003), and increased psychological distress, including high levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal thinking (Ayenibiowo & Akinbode, 2011).

The majority of the boys felt disliked by their mainstream peers and reported being victimised and bullied. The boys' perceptions of why they were bullied included a wide range of external attributes, such as looking different, being physically weak, and overweight or not wearing certain fashionable clothes. These comments support research findings that have concluded that victims are persecuted for external attributes (Hazler, 1991; Ma, 2001; Swearer & Cary, 2003).

The most common form of bullying experienced by the boys was verbal bullying, involving behaviour such as teasing and calling names. The next most common form was social



bullying which involved behaviours that excluded and isolated the victim. Physical bullying, involving behaviours such as kicking, pushing and hitting, was reported by only a few boys.

The present findings seem to be consistent with other research which found that social and verbal bullying are the most frequent forms of bullying experienced by students with special needs (Newman & Murray, 2005). Unfortunately, these forms of bullying seem to be less noticeable and less likely to be recognised and addressed by teachers (Ellis & Shute, 2007). Moreover, as Yoon and Kerber (2003) point out, teachers are more likely to discipline the perpetrators in instances of verbal or physical bullying than they are in the case of social bullying.

### ***Being a Bully***

The boys stressed that being a victim of bullying not only negatively impacted their social life and emotional wellbeing but also resulted in negative and often aggressive reactions towards their peers. Interestingly, a great number of boys who were bullied also identified themselves as bullies. However, they felt that their engagement in bullying was a legitimate response to being bullied, often referring to it as self-defence or fair payback.

These findings accord with previous studies that suggest that students with elevated rates of both internalised and externalised problems are not only at greater risk of being bullied but are also more likely to engage in bullying (Cho et al., 2009). Some however, have argued that the externalised aggression displayed by students with SEBD may be a manifestation of their disability (Rose et al., 2011), an attempt to protect themselves against the teasing and taunting of their peers and, as the findings in this study indicate, a reactive response to victimisation by peers (Farmer, et al., 2012).

The boys' accounts imply that the coincidence of victimisation, engagement in perpetration, and SEBD may have separate yet compounding effects, substantially heightening students' chances of experiencing even greater psychosocial, behavioural and academic problems, thereby putting them at even greater risk. On the other hand, creating opportunities to increase students' social competence and positive interactions may serve to decrease the risk of both bullying and victimisation. Learning how to utilise their strengths, decode social cues, and recognise feelings in themselves and others might well enable students with SEBD to make better choices and interpret situations appropriately (Orpinas & Horne, 2006; Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008).

### ***Lack of Effective Intervention in Mainstream Schools***

The majority of boys who identified themselves as victims of bullying in mainstream schools perceived their teachers to be indifferent towards the issue of bullying and ineffective in their handling of bullying incidences. As a result the boys were discouraged from reporting bullying. Similar results were noted in a study by Wise (1999) in which SEBD student interviewees reported inadequate support from their mainstream teachers in preventing incidences and in dealing with bullying. In this study, the boys linked their mainstream teachers' inadequate responsiveness to bullying to their biases against them. In line with the present results, previous studies by Hajdukova et al. (2014) and Cefai and Cooper (2010) have also demonstrated that being treated unfairly and unequally is a common grievance of students who are perceived as disruptive or challenging.

The views of students with SEBD regarding teachers' perspectives of students with SEBD, also appears to be supported in literature. As previously mentioned (Cooper, 1993b; Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Pomeroy, 1999), teachers, especially those working in mainstream schools, may hold a negative attitude towards students whom they perceive as having SEBD and this

attitude may lead to the insufficient provision of positive reinforcement and emotional support. These researchers also argue that teachers' biases can exacerbate SEBD, and potentially lead to increased incidences of bullying and victimisation. It seems apparent that teachers' attitudes towards students with SEBD need to be addressed if bullying prevention programmes producing positive outcomes are to be successfully implemented.

There are however, other possible explanations for teachers' limited responsiveness to bullying issues, such as teachers' belief that helping victims of bullying may actually make things worse (Duy, 2013). Similarly, teachers' failure to intervene could result from a lack of common understanding between the boys' and the teachers' definitions of what bullying is. For example, what one group might define as bullying the other group could interpret as just "rough play." This consideration emphasises the need to increase teacher education regarding the complexity of bullying. Orpinas and Horne (2006) support this claim and stipulate that teachers could benefit from education that extends not only their knowledge of different forms of bullying and its consequences but also deals with effective intervention strategies and the promotion of a positive school climate. The development and maintenance of a positive school culture has been associated with decreased incidences of bullying and improved social and emotional outcomes for all students (Cushman & Clelland, 2011).

### **Boys' Perceptions of Bullying in the Residential School**

There was a consensus among the boys that teachers and staff working at the residential school addressed bullying issues promptly and effectively. Consequently, the residential school was commonly described as a safe place that provided the boys with a respite from bullies.

However, a small number of boys did report being verbally bullied by other boys. Two boys complained that bullies were making insulting and degrading racist comments about them and their families, which resulted in them feeling “sad” and “angry.” Even though the victimised boys expressed the desire to retaliate physically, they said they managed to remain calm and not respond as they were fully aware of the strict consequences that would be enforced by teachers and staff for both sides (the bully and the attacker) involved in the incident. Interestingly, no accounts of physical or social bullying were reported.

A link between the increased likelihood of bullying and a lack of positive peer relationships was proposed by Taylor et al. (2010). They argued that even though inclusive settings appear to minimize bullying, such settings may actually maintain or exacerbate bullying issues if students with special needs are not fully integrated into their peer group and lack friends or a supportive social network. As friendship has been found to be an important protective factor against bullying (Bollmer et al., 2005), it seems apparent that fostering positive relationships between students with and without disabilities in mainstream schools should be a focus of inclusion. This argument is supported by the boys who expressed their appreciation for the presence of good and supportive friends when dealing with negative interactions with peers.

### ***Anti-Bullying System***

The anti-bullying system used by the residential school was also perceived as an effective tool in the fight against bullying. It would appear that the residential school implemented an effective reporting and recording system, which enabled the identification of both vulnerable students and potential bullies, thus resolving issues more effectively.

The boys’ accounts also suggest that the residential school had clear rules in place about bullying behaviour, a feature that has been associated with lower rates of bullying incidences in Welsh schools (Lambert, Scourfield, Smalley, & Jones, 2008). Furthermore, the boys

highlighted the importance of having their voices heard regarding bullying incidents and having open discussions, with a focus on problem resolution based on the agreement of the parties involved.

Based on the boys' descriptions, the characteristics of the anti-bullying approach used by the teachers seems to be similar to the restorative approach. Here, the underlying principle is to resolve conflict and repair harm by focusing on the perpetrator who is made aware of the victim's feelings, encouraged to acknowledge the impact of what they have done, and given the opportunity to make reparation. Those who have suffered have the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made (Morrison, 2002). Restorative approaches to bullying are highly recommended, since repeated successful outcomes have been reported by the international research community (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2001; Morrison, Blood, & Thorsborne, 2005; Varnham, 2005).

### ***Implications for Practice***

This study suggests a link between SEBD, victimization, and engaging in bullying. It appears that students with SEBD are at high risk of being bullied and are likely to experience the exacerbation of social, emotional and behavioral problems when they are involved in bullying as victims, perpetrators, or both. It is vital that teachers and school administrators be aware of this link as the psychosocial and educational ramifications are significant.

Extending teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEBD and how SEBD and bullying interact is crucial. Consequently, for both pre-service and in-service mainstream teachers, there is a need for more education aimed at teaching students with SEBD.

Addressing bullying issues among students with SEBD more effectively may require teachers to modify their approach to bullying and develop a new repertoire of intervention strategies that are specifically tailored to the unique needs of these students. A change in teachers'

attitudes towards verbal and social bullying would also be beneficial. This would entail teachers having a better understanding of the extent and pervasiveness of the specific forms of bullying among students with SEBD and how negative consequences can impact and further exacerbate their social, emotional and behavioral problems.

Furthermore, due to social difficulties and poor emotional regulation, students with SEBD are not likely to benefit from the protective factor of supportive peers in mainstream schools.

This could be addressed however, by the provision of social skills programmes that enable students with SEBD to develop a repertoire of social skills that strengthen their interpersonal relationships, encourage pro-social behavior and potentially reduce bullying in schools.

While there are numerous benefits to mainstreaming, this research suggests that educators and parents need to be aware that students with SEBD placed in these settings may be at greater risk of both bullying and being bullied by peers. In this study, nearly all the boys reported that they were victims of bullying in the mainstream schools they attended. This is consistent with findings from studies that revealed high incidences of bullying in New Zealand mainstream schools (Carroll-Lind, 2009; Cushman & Clelland, 2011). These findings should not be ignored, particularly in light of the increasing number of students with SEBD who are being educated in mainstream schools, due to recent New Zealand government policy focusing on ensuring that all schools are “fully inclusive.”

## **Part Six: Boys’ Suggestions and Recommendations for School**

### **Improvements**

#### **Enablers for Successful Schooling**

In this study, the participants were quite clear on strategies to help make their school experience more positive, rewarding, and safe. They proposed a number of suggestions and

recommendations based on their subjective experiences. These recommendations are discussed in the context of the review of literature, while also considering their wider implications for school improvements.

### ***Having a Fresh Start and Being Treated like a “Normal Kid”***

The major finding was that the vast majority of the boys believed that the residential school enabled them to improve their academic ability, behaviour, and ability to relate to others, which in turn led to a more positive view of themselves and their abilities, a process Cooper (1993a) calls *positive resignification*.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a legitimate concern that these perceived or actual positive improvements might not be maintained in the mainstream school the boys subsequently enrol in. The boys identified a number of obstacles that they believed would be immensely difficult to overcome. There was a clear consensus among the boys that starting afresh was essential to their future success. The importance of a new school where they were unknown was highlighted.

Unfortunately a belief that teachers in the new school would be eager to read their files and thus learn about their previous negative experiences, left them with little hope for a genuinely positive start. The boys worried that alerting the new teachers to their history of misconduct would once again create a negative stereotype, potentially leading to renewed teacher bias and differential treatment. The boys wished to “be treated like any other kids” in their new schools as they believed that this would enable them to better fit into their new classroom community.

Some boys also expressed concern about being labelled a “special school” student, a term of reference which is often cited as one of the main reasons for closing the special and

residential schools (Polat & Farrell, 2002b). The boys' perception of being treated differently, in a negative way, as a result of difficulties commonly associated with having SEBD and/or in consequence of being placed in special schools, can be considered reflective of stigmatization.

The negative impact of stereotypes and stigma has been well documented in international literature. Negative expectations on the part of a teacher can adversely affect student performance (Weinstein, 2002), self-confidence, and sense of self-worth (Shapiro, 2000) and can also impair a student's ability to adjust and feel included in the school community (Baker, 2006). It should be noted that the findings in this study do not call into question the importance of knowing students' background, since this provides useful information that can help to communicate students' strengths and weaknesses, suggest accommodations and interventions, possibly facilitate more tolerant attitudes, and provide a source of understanding for a problem that might not have been understood. Rather, the boys' voices call for a better understanding and the elimination of the stereotypes and stigma associated with having SEBD, since these are likely to hinder their future success by obscuring important individual differences and limiting the ways in which they are perceived and treated (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007).

### ***The Need to be Listened to***

The boys hoped that their new teachers would give them opportunities to voice their views and be heard as they believed that this would make their schooling "easier" and more successful. They believed that listening to them and hearing their perspectives on the challenges they faced could help the teachers better understand their difficulties, which in turn could lead to more appropriate teaching approaches and thus more effective problem



resolution, an argument further supported in the professional literature (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Clarke, Boorman, & Nind, 2011; Ravet, 2007; Wise, 2000).

### ***Teaching Aides***

More than half the boys hoped that they would have a teacher's aide at their next school because they felt that having extra help would be important. This recommendation can be linked to the boys' grievance at not being provided with sufficient academic support from their mainstream teachers, as discussed earlier in this chapter. It should also be noted that some of the boys who thought that having a teacher's aide would be beneficial, also reported difficulty in accessing this additional support in their previous mainstream schools, indicating limited personal experience with such support.

In the professional literature, it has been argued that the role of a teacher's aide is crucial for the promotion of inclusive education (Groom & Rose, 2005). However, a large-scale study of the impact of teaching aides on attainment levels of students with special educational needs, conducted by Blatchford et al. (2009), has indicated that for some students with special educational needs, the more one-to-one teacher's aide time they received, the lower their level of educational attainment. These researchers also expressed concern about the lack of appropriate skills and preparedness among teaching aides and pointed out that students who are provided with a teacher's aide are likely to be separated from the teacher and the curriculum, which can result in lower educational attainment. Differentiated instruction, on the other hand, can be designed for the effective education of all students since it makes it possible to cater for student individuality and not their potential to conform. This approach is based on a democratic philosophy, wherein each student's voice is heard and valued (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004).

## **Ending Bullying in Mainstream Schools**

### ***Better Supervision in the School***

There was a consensus among the boys that one of the most effective ways to stop bullying in school would be through better supervision in school areas such as the front field, school corridors, and the playground, since these areas are commonly identified as unsafe places.

The call for more vigilant supervision is also echoed in Blatchford's (2012) study. This researcher investigated student (ages from 7 to 16) experiences of break time and recess and found that bullying in schools takes place predominantly outside the classroom in the least patrolled areas, such as corridors and school grounds as well as outside the school gates.

In the professional literature, it has been acknowledged that anti-bullying school policies should include a playground policy (Thompson & Smith, 2012). To be effective, this policy needs to include liaison between teaching staff, a clear set of rules for appropriate behaviour in managing lunchtime breaks, and staff actively encouraging pro-social playground games and activities (Thompson & Smith, 2012). Sharp and Smith (2002) also found that well-designed play areas can help to reduce the incidence of bullying. Structuring and redesigning the physical environment of school playgrounds or play areas can decrease students' boredom by providing more creative opportunities for students during recess, consequently leading to a reduction of bullying behaviour.

### ***Separating Students***

Some boys (all of whom were 9 years old) thought that school would be a safer place if the classrooms and playgrounds were divided into two areas, one for the "little kids" and one for the "big kids". This seemed to be desirable as it would enable younger students to play in a safe environment. This recommendation is supported by the findings of a study carried out by Smith, Madsen, and Moody (1999). These researchers found that separate infant/junior or

lower/upper secondary playgrounds (a practice commonly implemented in UK schools) can decrease the incidence of bullying in schools. It should also be noted that some boys in this study (ages between 11 and 12) did not perceive allocating playgrounds based on student age to be a viable option, as they were concerned that this would limit their chance to make more friends.

### ***Security Measures***

Some of the boys thought that having a security guard and security cameras could help to decrease the incidence of bullying, thus make schools a safer place. One might hypothesise that if students know that they are watched by security cameras or a security guard, they would be less likely to engage in physical victimisation. However, a study conducted by Blosnich and Bossarte (2011) found that school safety measures such as surveillance systems and security guards were found to have no linkage with student reports of lower peer victimisation. Despite this, the role of supportive adults in the fight against bullying should not be underestimated, since students who were both bullies and victims showed fewer signs of depression when they reported having the support of their teachers (Connors-Burrow, Johnson, Whiteside-Mansell, McKelvey, & Gargus, 2009). Blosnich and Bossarte (2011) also argued that having a supportive adult in the hallways could facilitate more pro-social behaviour, which might lead to less chance of bullying behaviour.

### ***Changing Teachers' Attitudes Towards Bullying***

The boys' accounts highlight the need for teachers to become better listeners if schools want to stop bullying. The boys agreed that more students would speak up if they felt that teachers were listening to their concerns and were addressing bullying issues more promptly and effectively. These findings highlight the need to put in place mechanisms to support teachers in recognising and addressing bullying behaviour when it occurs.

According to O'Shea et al. (2001), the use of active listening skills plays an important role in effective communication. Active listening is more than just paying attention and includes making empathetic comments, asking appropriate questions, and paraphrasing and summarizing for the purposes of verification (Gordon & Burch, 2003). The goal in active listening is to develop a clear understanding of the speaker's concern and to clearly communicate the listener's interest in the speaker's message (McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner, 2008). It seems apparent that active listening should be implemented as a crucial component of teacher education. Unfortunately, there still seems to be little emphasis on teaching these valuable skills to educational professionals (McNaughton et al., 2008), an inadequacy reflected also in the lack of empirically validated interventions to address teachers' communication skills (Lasky, 2000).

One might argue furthermore, that teachers and other support staff would be the first to notice if a student is being bullied and that they would act accordingly. The findings in the current study however, indicate that the bullying issues of students with SEBD may be overlooked. International research that has directly compared peer and teacher perceptions of bullying further supports these findings, since it is well documented that teachers are often unaware of the frequency with which students with special educational needs are being bullied and are bullying other students (Holzbauer, 2008; Monchy, Pijil, & Zandberg, 2004; Nabuzoka, 2003; Torrance, 2000).

### ***Alternatives to Expelling Bullies***

In this study, the participants proposed a number of alternatives to expelling bullies, since they felt that this disciplinary sanction would not resolve the issue of bullying in schools. Even though the punishment of bullying through suspensions and exclusions is a disciplinary practice commonly implemented in schools (Smith, Salmivalli, & Cowie, 2012), its

application has not proven to be an effective means of improving student behaviour (Skiba et al., 2006, p. 113). Morrison (2007) also points out that this form of disciplinary practice tends to discriminate against students with emotional and behavioural difficulties and fails to meet children's rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989).

### ***Seclusion Time-Out***

A number of boys suggested implementation of seclusion time-out. However their understanding of the use of this punitive practice involved the implementation of components that are therapeutic (a place to calm down), self-reflective (the perpetrator is made aware of the victims' feelings) and restorative (an opportunity to make reparation). It was suggested that isolating bullies in an empty room would enable them to reflect on their behaviour and come up with a plan to help rather than hurt their victims.

It should be noted that the use of seclusionary time-out procedures has frequently been the focus of controversy as "it is considered to be one of the most restrictive forms of time out because it completely removes the student from access to the educational environment and from his or her peers and usually entails isolation of the student from other students and staff" (Ryan, Peterson, & Rozalski, 2007, p. 218). Moreover there is little research in support of the benefit of its use in decreasing maladaptive and aggressive behaviours (Ryan et al., 2007).

### ***Restorative Approach***

Calling an immediate meeting with the students involved in the bullying incident in order to provide both parties with a fair chance to explain what they did and why was suggested by two boys. This would be followed by a group discussion regarding consequences. This prescription resembles some elements of the restorative approach, such as an informal

conversation through a formal facilitated meeting in which incidences and harm are examined. Other crucial elements of this practice, not mentioned by the boys, include repairing harm, encouraging those who have caused harm to acknowledge the impact of what they have done, making reparation and giving those who have suffered the opportunity to have their harm or loss acknowledged and amends made (Thompson and Smith, 2012). Considering the boys' negative experience of being falsely accused by teachers and their peers (as previously discussed in this chapter), it comes as no surprise that having their side of the story heard and being able to participate in decision making were perceived as crucial. Interestingly the boys added that if the bullies did not respond positively and continued to bully others, they could be sent to the residential school. This recommendation can be linked to the participants' common perception of the residential school as a safe place with an effective anti-bullying system.

### ***Buddies: Peer Support Schemes***

Several boys recommended pairing younger students with older "buddies" as a means to provide bullying victims with necessary emotional support and assistance. Peer support programmes are becoming increasingly popular in schools as anti-bullying interventions that promote student safety, emotional health, and well-being (Cowie, Hutson, Oztug, & Myers, 2008). There is consistent evidence that this practice can help to address injustices such as bullying and deliberate social exclusion in a school community (Cowie, Naylor, Talamelli, Chauhan, & Smith, 2002). Interestingly the results of the survey by Cowie et al. (2008) indicate that it is the awareness that the peer supporters are there to help, rather than the existence of a peer support system, that enables students to see their school as a safe place. Also, when students are aware of the availability of peer supporters, they may feel empowered to talk about the negative things that happen to them, or that they do to others,

with someone else, which can be a valuable method of coping with issues of concern (Cowie, Hutson, Oztug, & Myers, 2008).

### **Limitations of this Study**

It is important to note that the results were acquired from one particular school for a particular subgroup of students, specifically those for whom the residential school environment was deemed appropriate for their education, care and protection. Generalisation of these findings to other groups of students with SEBD would be premature. There are other residential schools in New Zealand for students with SEBD; hence a survey sample of students attending these schools would be required to further explore the generalizability of the present findings.

Giving voice seems to imply that there is an authentic voice for the researcher to uncover and bring forth, however all data is subject to the researcher's interpretation (Ashby & Causton-Theoharis, 2012). Despite striving to represent the participants' views as authentically as possible, it needs to be acknowledged that any representation of their thoughts was always filtered through my interpretation as a researcher. The possibility of my preconceived ideas, beliefs and biases interfering with the data collection and analysis was mitigated in the study by engaging in the phenomenological reduction process to uncover and set aside my biases. However the difficulty of fully setting aside one's biases can limit the trustworthiness of data and involving a colleague in this study to cross-check the emerging themes could have helped increase the trustworthiness in the data analysis and interpretation.

The privileging of students' with SEBD experiences in this study is inherently underpinned by the belief that the participants have access to single coherent reality and that they are able to both express and interpret this reality. The reality might be plural however, might have

conflicting meanings and meaning could vary across context. Furthermore, taking into account the participants' attendance in the residential school programme it might be possible that some of their memories and recollections of mainstream schools and their perceptions of how they were treated by staff and teachers in the mainstream schools may have been coloured by what had transpired in their lives in the intervening time. Even though the aim of this study was to give voice to students 'with SEBD and gain insight into their schooling experiences this could be considered as presenting a narrow perspective of a highly complex phenomenon. There is little doubt that this study would have been strengthened by adding an additional layer of insight from multiple stakeholders, which would have allowed a more accurate portrayal of what is going on in schools and how current practice needs to be improved to serve the unique needs of these students more effectively.

This study utilised qualitative interviews as a main source of data collection which suggests heavy reliance on information provided by the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Even though the participants seemed to provide a candid analysis of their behaviour, suggesting they were representing their "true self", it needs to be acknowledged that they might have resisted certain avenues of questioning, left their meaning unclear, contradicted themselves, hidden things, presented ideal selves or just tried to please me. The study would have been strengthened by the use of observation, preferably conducted both in the mainstream and residential schools, in order to better comprehend the contextual factors operating in school settings and providing a greater insight into what was happening in the schools without having to rely solely on the students' statements.



## **Contributions to the Field and Further Research**

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this thesis makes a number of noteworthy contributions. Through an appreciation of student voices, the research has contributed an important perspective to understanding the educational experience of students with SEBD both in residential schools and in mainstream schools in New Zealand.

In line with the international literature, this study has demonstrated that giving students with SEBD the opportunity to have a meaningful voice can help educationists and practitioners to better understand the complexity of SEBD and thus assist them to better meet the psychosocial, behavioural and learning needs of these students.

A comprehensive investigation of international research on the question indicated that there are few studies that seek the perspectives of students with SEBD, especially those attending residential and special schools. The voices of students with SEBD, especially those attending such schools in New Zealand, seem to have been largely ignored by the research community (see Chapter Two).

There is also a paucity of research on students with SEBD recommendations for school improvement. More importantly the existing research tends to use either student perspectives alongside a range of other perspectives and data as part of a general inquiry into schooling issues, or concentrates solely on the students' views on one or more specific issues.

Consequently the current study can be seen to fill this knowledge gap because it concentrates on the perspectives of students with SEBD on those aspects of their mainstream and residential schooling experiences that were most significant to them. Furthermore, it positions these students' perspectives and recommendations for school improvement at the forefront of the findings of the study.

In addition this study makes a contribution by showing how taking into account the perspectives of students with SEBD can inform both policy and practice. The students in this study have provided numerous concrete examples of both good and bad pedagogical practice and in so doing have made valuable suggestions for change and school improvement. These suggestions, born of their unique understanding of school and school process, can make a significant contribution to the debate about educational change if the aim is to create a positive learning environment in which students with SEBD will be able to thrive and reach their potential.

The study can be said to add further to the growing knowledge base about educating students with SEBD in the context of special and inclusive education in New Zealand. It contributes to the larger base of literature on student autonomy, by including research which is underpinned by phenomenology as both a theoretical and methodological approach.

Furthermore this study provides valuable insight into some of the ways in which placement in a residential school for students with SEBD is perceived to be effective for these children.

Hence, a number of areas can be identified for further research. The key finding of this study is that the majority of the participants felt that the residential school enabled them to improve both their behaviour and their ability to deal with learning difficulties. The main implication of this finding is that careful consideration should be given to identifying which features of the residential school programme were successful in managing these students' behavioural difficulties and learning so that these elements can be implemented in mainstream schools.

Further research is needed to determine the veracity and extent of the students' claims of educational gains in residential schools by using objective outcome measures along with follow-up studies to determine whether any progress is sustainable and transferable to other environments.

The findings concerning the positive aspects of relationships between students and residential school teachers, particularly in regard to the personality, role, and behaviour of the residential school teacher, indicate a new objective for future educational research. Little is currently known about how these teachers behave in the classroom situation and how they build positive relationships with students with SEBD. Further related research could provide valuable information for both pre-service and in-service mainstream teachers and might enable them to develop a repertoire of skills to strengthen their interpersonal relationships with students with SEBD. This would assist them to better manage relationships, potentially contributing to more effective pedagogical practices for students with SEBD.

This study indicates that there is considerable consistency concerning the difficulties participants have experienced in mainstream schools. These findings can be seen as a challenge to the current practice of working with this group of students in inclusive settings. They also highlight the need to bridge the gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and its reality in New Zealand, thus indicating a new objective for future educational research. Little is currently known about the long-term impact of inclusive education on students with SEBD. Further related research could also provide information for educational policy and practice by collecting evidence of where students with SEBD thrive best in order to determine what educational provisions would be most suitable to meet their complex needs.

The findings reflecting students' perceptions of behavioural management and bullying issues in New Zealand schools indicate a new objective for future educational research. The findings concerning the use of seclusion and restrained time-out procedures can be seen as potentially disturbing. Accordingly, there is a need for systematic observation of teachers' application of time-out procedures over a period of time and documentation of students' response to and feelings about time out.

Using qualitative studies and interviews with students, future research could further address the issue of the bullying of students with SEBD in mainstream and residential schools.

Additionally, since there is rather limited research exploring teacher attitudes towards the bullying of students with SEBD and effective methods of intervention, future investigation is needed to strengthen the evidential base for practice in this area.

## **Conclusion**

The key point to take from this study is that students who might not normally be given an opportunity to participate in a student voice research project have clearly demonstrated their competence to be fully engaged in such a process. When asked, they have not only provided unique insights into school processes but have also made valuable suggestions for change to improve their schooling experiences. This has provided a better understanding of how educators and policymakers can make the educational experience of students with SEBD more positive and successful.

The boys' perspectives that have been presented in this study remind professionals of the value of eliciting students' views. Providing students with SEBD with an opportunity to express their views is useful as their experiences and insights have implications for practice and should inform both decisions and actions plans. This will require professionals involved with students with SEBD to acknowledge that, as much as they may consider themselves to be the 'experts' in this regard, it is in fact the students who are experiencing the schooling who are the real experts regarding their experiences.

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## Appendix A: Ethical Approval



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE  
Secretary, Lynda Griffioen  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: 2012/19/ERHEC

11 May 2012

Eva Brown Hajdukova  
School of Sciences & Physical Education  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Eva

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Capturing the perspectives of students on their schooling experiences" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.  
We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Surtees'.

Nicola Surtees

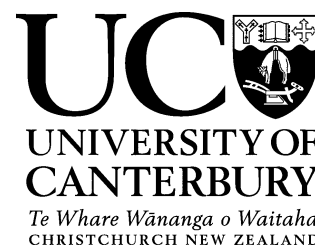
**Chair**

***Educational Research Human Ethics Committee***

*"Please note that Ethical Approval and/or Clearance relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Ethical Clearance Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."*

## Appendix B: Example of Adult Consent Form

Eva Brown Hajdukova  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
College of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
[eva.brownhajdukova@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:eva.brownhajdukova@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)



### Capturing the Perspectives of Students on their Schooling Experiences

#### Principal Consent Form

(Please tick each box)

- I have read the information sheet and understand what will be required of our school/students if we participate in this project.
  
- I understand that students' participation is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw at any time.
  
- I understand that the students, staff or the school, will NOT be identified in any presentations or publications that draw on this research.
  
- I understand a summary of results will be available to the school and participants.
  
- I agree that my school may participate in this research.

Name of school

---

Name of principal

---

Signature -

---

Date

---

**I would like to receive a summary of results.**

Yes

No

**Please return this consent form to the researcher in the stamped, addressed envelope.**

**Thank you for your participation.**

---

1. The University of Canterbury, College Of Education, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.
2. Complaints may be addressed to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: **human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz**

## Appendix C: Example of Student Consent Form

**Eva Brown Hajdukova**  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
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### Capturing the Perspectives of Students on their Schooling Experiences

#### Consent Form for Students

(Please tick each box)

- I have read the information sheet and understand what will be required of me if I participate in this project.
  
- I understand that my name and schools will not be given in anything that is written or said about the study.
  
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time.
  
- I understand that I can get more information about this project from Eva, and that I can contact the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee if I have any complaints about the research.
  
- I understand that Eva will tell us what she found out from the interviews.
  
- I agree to participate in this research.

Full name (student)

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Class Teacher

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Signature -

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Date

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**I would like to receive a summary of results.**

Yes

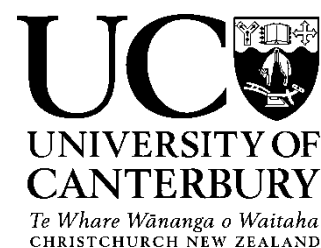
No

**Please return this consent form in the sealed envelope to your class teacher.**

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3. The University of Canterbury, College Of Education, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.
4. Complaints may be addressed to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: **human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz**

## Appendix D: Example of Student Information Letter



**Title of Study:** *Capturing the Perspectives of Students on their Schooling Experiences*

### **Information letter to students**

May 2012

Dear.....

My name is Eva Brown Hajdukova and I am an international student from Slovakia studying at the University of Canterbury. I am hoping you can help me with my research. I will be working under the supervision of Professor Garry Hornby and Penni Cushman, lecturers in the College of Education at the University of Canterbury. Professor Hornby can be reached at 033642987 or [garry.hornby@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:garry.hornby@canterbury.ac.nz) and Ms Cushman can be reached at 033458131 or [penni.cushman@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:penni.cushman@canterbury.ac.nz).

I would like to ask you about the school you are at now, and also about your previous school. I will carefully listen to your stories because I believe that your opinion is important and I can learn a lot of new and interesting things from you. There are no right or wrong answers: I just want to hear what you think and what is important to you. I will be talking to you during your free time.

It is important that I record what you say correctly, so I would like to record our interview on audio cassette (tape). The interviews will take around 30 - 60 minutes and will be in a private place where no one can see or hear you.

You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, I will use my best endeavours to remove any of the information relating to you from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable. No one but my teacher and I will be allowed to listen to the tapes as they will be kept in a locked cabinet for up to 5 years and then destroyed. The things I will write down when I listen to the tapes will not have your name, school name or other people's name in them and will also be kept in a locked cabinet. No one from this school or your other schools will be able to find out what you say. Any time I talk or write about the study I will be using pseudonyms (or pretend names) for you and the school. You might like to choose your own!



I am happy to talk to you more about the study and if you have any questions I am happy to answer them. My telephone number and email are at the bottom of the page. You can also receive a summary of interview results and perhaps even share and discuss them. Also, I can give you a copy of either the full report or a summary of the findings of my study. If you have any complaints about the research, they may be addressed to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz). You will be provided with the name of a person in the school who you may approach if you have any concerns regarding this project.

If you would like to be interviewed and share your stories with me just complete the consent form and return it to your teacher in the sealed envelope.

I hope that you will agree to be a part of this exciting project.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely

Eva Brown Hajdukova  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
College of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140

Ph. 0223151413

Email [eva.brownhajdukova@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:eva.brownhajdukova@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

## Appendix E: Example of Adult Information Letter



Title of Study: *Capturing the Perspectives of Students on their Schooling Experiences*

Information letter to Parents/Caregivers

Dear (name of the parent/caregiver)

My name is Eva Brown Hajdukova and to conclude my study for the PhD degree in Education at the University of Canterbury, I am conducting a research project (dissertation) related to the students' schooling experiences. My working title is: *Capturing the Perspectives of Students on their Schooling Experiences*. I will be working under the supervision of Professor Garry Hornby and Penni Cushman, lecturers in the College of Education at the University of Canterbury. Professor Hornby can be reached at 033642987 or [garry.hornby@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:garry.hornby@canterbury.ac.nz) and Ms Cushman can be reached at 033458131 or [penni.cushman@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:penni.cushman@canterbury.ac.nz).

Over the past five years I have been teaching children in mainstream, special and residential schools. The aim of this research project is to explore what students perceive the differences between mainstream and residential schools to be. I realize that students' opinions and concerns have not been listened to sufficiently. By conducting this research I would like to give a voice to your child and other students, because I believe that they have many valuable and important things to say that can help teachers to understand their students better and thus improve their teaching practice.

Your child's participation would involve being interviewed. All issues concerning the safety of your child will be discussed with the principal of the school prior to the interviews. This research project will involve an introductory session, where I will introduce myself and my research project. Students will be interviewed individually in one interview session expected to last 30 - 60 minutes. Students will be asked questions about how they like their school, how they liked their previous school and what they like and dislike about school in general. The interview will take the form of a very relaxed, informal discussion. Interviews will be tape-recorded and conducted during the student's free time. Participation is voluntary and your child has the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. If they choose to withdraw, I will use my best endeavours to remove any of the information relating to them from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable. This has been also outlined in the letters to your child and the principal of the school. Your child will also be provided with a name of a person in the school whom they may approach if they have any concerns regarding this project.

In order to protect your child's privacy, the information gathered will be presented in such a way that the school along with the staff and students will not be identifiable. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for up to 5 years and then destroyed. The interviews will be transcribed by the researcher, and the raw data will be confidential to myself and my supervisors. I will not be at liberty to disclose such material to anyone.

It is also anticipated that the results will be used to support the school and in conferences, presentations, as well as in articles to be submitted for publication. A copy of the full report or a summary of the results will be available upon your request.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me through the contact details provided below. If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

I look forward to hearing from you and hope that you will consent to your child participating in this interesting and valuable research. If so, please complete the attached parent consent form and return it to me in the stamp addressed envelope.

Yours faithfully,

PhD Candidate Eva Brown Hajdukova  
College of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Dovedale Avenue  
Ph. 0223151413  
Email [eva.brownhajdukova@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:eva.brownhajdukova@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

## Appendix F: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Primary Questions	Probing Questions
<p>Can you tell me what you remember about your first day at this school?</p>	<p>What else do you remember?</p> <p>What do you remember about the people you met that day?</p> <p>How did that/they make you feel?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>What do you mean by that?</p>
<p>What do you like about this school?</p>	<p>What do you dislike about this school?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about the people at this school?</p> <p>How would you describe them?</p> <p>How do you feel about other students at this school?</p> <p>Who is your friend at this school?</p>
<p>What did you like about your previous school?</p>	<p>What did you dislike about your previous school?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about the people at your previous school?</p> <p>How would you describe them?</p> <p>How did you feel about other students at your</p>

	<p>previous school?</p> <p>Who was your friend at your previous school?</p>
<p>What would you change about this school?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>What do you mean by that?</p> <p>How did that make you feel?</p> <p>What would you do if you were a teacher?</p>
<p>What would you change about your previous school?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>What do you mean by that?</p> <p>How did that make you feel?</p> <p>What would you do if you were a teacher?</p>
<p>What would make this school a better place to be?</p>	<p>Why do you think that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p>
<p>What would make your previous school a better place to be?</p>	<p>Why do you think that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p>
<p>What it will be like going to your next school?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Why do you think so?</p> <p>How does that make you feel?</p> <p>What do you mean by that?</p>
<p>Has there been any change since you got to this</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about it?</p>

school?	Do you think that being at this school has made a difference in anyway?
Anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences here or at your previous school?	Can you tell me more about it?

## Appendix G: Focus Groups Interview Schedule

<b>1</b>	<b>Questions to verify or extend the residential school experience themes</b>	
	<b>Stated Themes</b>	<b>Questions</b>
	Some of you said that your start at this school was difficult, but you were able to settle down after few weeks passed by.	<p>Did I understand you correctly?</p> <p>Why do you think that happened?</p> <p>What do you think helped you to settle down?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about it?</p>
	Some of you believed that they have changed at this school.	<p>Did I understand you correctly?</p> <p>What do you think helped you to change?</p>
	Some of you believed that they were bullied in this school.	<p>Did I understand you correctly?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about it?</p>
	What do you think will happen when you leave this school and go to your next school?	<p>Why do you think that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about it?</p>

<b>2</b>	<b>Questions to verify or extend the mainstream school experience themes</b>	
	<b>Stated Themes</b>	<b>Questions</b>
	Some of you believed that they were bullied in your previous school.	<p>Did I understand you correctly?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about it?</p>
	Some of you said that they felt angry and frustrated in your previous school because you	<p>Did I understand you correctly?</p>

believed that you were treated unfairly by some of your teachers.	Can you tell me more about it?
Some of you said that they felt angry and frustrated in your previous school because you did not get much help.	Did I understand you correctly?  Can you tell me more about it?
Some of you said that they did not have many friends in your previous school.	Did I understand you correctly?  Can you tell me more about it?

<b>3</b>	<b>Recommendations for School Improvements</b>	
	<b>Primary Questions</b>	<b>Probing Questions</b>
	Were there some things that helped you at this school that you would like to see at your next school?	Can you tell me more about it?
	What can your next school could do to make you feel happy there?	Can you tell me more about it?  Why do you think that?
	What do you need in order to have a better experience in your next school?	Can you tell me more about it?  Why do you think that would be helpful?
	What else could teachers do to make it easier for you in the school?	Why do you think that would be helpful?
	What would you do to stop bullying in schools?	What else could help?
	What could the schools do to stop bullying?	What else could help?



