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The Social and Emotional Dimensions of Schooling: A Case Study in Challenging the 'Barriers to Learning'

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Abstract: The educational landscape in England and Wales is shaped by demands made on head teachers, teachers and pupils to perform within a 'field of judgement' dominated by clearly defined outcomes of academic success (Ball 2003). This puts schools from challenging socio-economic contexts where there are potentially 'barriers to learning' at a considerable disadvantage. This paper draws on case study data from an English secondary school in an area of considerable deprivation. The empirical focus revolves around school participants' perceptions and understandings of the social and emotional dimensions of schooling. The emphasis on the relational and emotional work undertaken by teaching staff underpins the case study school's approach to challenging the barriers to learning. A number of themes and concerns are reported in this paper including relational work in school which extends into the community, the school as a sprawling network of communication and the heighted role of the emotions at a number of levels in school. In drawing on interview data from teachers, school managers, pupils and parents we are developing a model of schooling that approximates to Fielding's (2006) conception of a 'people oriented learning community'.

Introduction

Research has focused on the way that schools are adjusting to systemic changes that reconstruct education as a bounded outcomes oriented project where external judgements of schools are made on the basis of these outcomes (Ball, 2003). This

dominant educational project of 'performativity' is reinforced by a broader culture of blame, where problems tend to be located within clearly defined institutional spaces or attributed to 'culpable' individuals (Woods and Warin 2014; Lindqvist et al 2009). The school is now expected to provide a recognised product or outcome from which its worth is judged. Along with the targeting of 'irresponsible parents', the school is also often pinpointed as the source of a range of social issues and problems, ranging from bullying and delinquency through to obesity and incivility (Wyness 2014). These trends within education have significant implications for the school as a social and emotional space within which children are able to develop as learners, democratic citizens and, more generally as, emotionally and socially centred individuals. Moreover, a culture of performativity has implications for the capacity of schools to reach out to their parents and the surrounding community, particularly in socio-economically challenging areas. Where there may be the resources for and expectations of children performing at high levels in more affluent schools, children in social-economically deprived schools have barriers and obstacles to overcome (Lareau 2011).

In this paper we draw on a case study of a school in an area of considerable economic deprivation. We explore the ways that the school responds to the challenges and obstacles it faces in participating within a competitive outcomes oriented education arena. Our particular empirical focus is the social and emotional work carried out routinely through a network of support that incorporates children, teaching staff and parents as well as feeding into a range of local agencies and organisations. In the first part of the paper we discuss the policy context, the performativity agenda and the implications these have for schools in challenging socio-economic contexts. In the second part we discuss our methodology and case

study school. This is followed by the data analysis, which maps out the social and emotional dimensions of the school and the contributions and understandings of the various school participants.

Context

Reforms in the late 1980s in England and Wales altered the structure of the education system generating expectations that schools were offering parents an educational product that could be differentiated within a 'quasi-market' place. This was reinforced through the introduction of the parents' charter in the early 1990s as well as a much tougher inspection regime through the introduction of Ofsted. There was a stronger emphasis on school outcomes at various levels with the performances of pupils, teachers and school managers being measured and judged against officially define criteria and more informal local expectations. Schools provide examples of Ball's (2003 p. 216) conception of institutional performativity as

> … a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement (Ball 2003, 216)

Judgements are routinely made which both challenge and compromise the self-confidence of teachers and school managers generating "guilt, uncertainty instability and the emergence of a new subjectivity" (ibid, p.221). There is a subtle process of individualisation: schools and teachers are encouraged to represent themselves as both responsible agents and uniquely different from neighbouring schools in order to gain a 'market' advantage. The bounded nature of schooling is important - the actions of school participants are now more clearly defined and measured in terms of a range of outcomes from exam results through to behavioural criteria. A politically defined audit culture and a more informal culture of blame help to reinforce the links between actions within the school and outcomes as they affect children. Moreover, policy and media focus on the need to make public service professionals accountable. Issues of risk assessment loom large as a consequence. Lindqvist et al (2009) refer to a 'culture of documentation' as accountability is translated in terms of risk assessment with defensive actions documented. This in turn can generate greater distance between the professional and their client or consumer as they seek to both pre-empt and prevent blame. Schools thus become more concerned with calculating risk and accounting for their actions.

Fielding's (2006, p.303) critique of contemporary state schooling in the UK offers a model of the 'high performing school' that puts pressure on both teachers and pupils.

> The personal is used for the sake of the functional: students are included or excluded, valued or not, primarily on the basis of whether they contribute to organizational performance of the school. The pressure they and their teachers are put under to raise standards and improve performance marginalizes the very educational aspirations that give schooling its

justification and its purpose. Student complaints that schools do not care about them as persons, but only about them as bearers of results and measurable outcomes are now ubiquitous. The same is true of teachers.

For some this has led to the attenuation of the social dimension of schooling, and has implications for children's 'sense of autonomy, relatedness, competence, and belonging', their wellbeing (Pyhalto et al 2010, p. 209).

In an early critique of 'new right' educational reforms in the US Wexler's analysis of middle class schooling emphasizes a commitment to individualism and performance with competition between pupils and indirectly between teachers, classes and schools having the net effect of "emptying the social centre [within schools] in the pursuit of academic excellence" (Wexler, 1992, p. 65). Similarly, a recent critique of education policy in English and Wales and Irish primary schools identifies 'teaching to the test' and the focus on definable outcomes as key curricular concerns, with space and opportunity for broadening children's knowledge of subject areas attenuated (O' Breachain and O' Tolle 2013).

In looking at these trends from a parental perspective these problems are more keenly felt in schools in challenging areas. In an early analysis of the education market place Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1995) refer to social class forms of school choice. Middle class parents have an 'open' choice shaped by cultural and symbolic criteria. Working class parents, on the other hand, are likely to have a more 'restricted' choice of schools where economic and practical issues are at the forefront. Moreover, children from poorer families tend to have limited access to dominant middle class forms of social and cultural capital and are less likely to conform to the demands of performativity (Sullivan et al 2013). Research suggests that the dynamics, language and atmosphere found in working class families can put

working children at a disadvantage in terms of connecting with the norms and expectations of the school (Lareau 2011). Middle class children, on the other hand, are more likely to be viewed by their parents as a project to be cultivated over time in order to mesh with variegated but increasingly individualised demands of the school. Working class children and their parents in some instances have to make changes to their practices in order to keep up with the competitive nature of schooling (Keddie 2013).

While an emphasis on choice, outcome and performance have been powerful forces individualising schooling, the Labour government in the UK from the late 1990s introduced a number of educational initiatives focusing on children's social and emotional capacities which potentially expand the school as a social frame of reference (Woods and Warin 2014). Among other things, the National Healthy Schools Programme focused on the 'Emotional health and wellbeing' of children within schools (Dept of Health 1999). Peer support initiatives have also become a common feature within English schools with a Peer Mentoring Pilot scheme set-up by the government in 2007 to explore the effectiveness of peer support networks as a way of tackling bullying and improving peer relations in school more generally (Mentoring and Befriending Foundation 2010). More explicit 'emotional' initiatives have been introduced: the Social and Emotional Aspects of learning (SEAL) programme promotes children's emotional wellbeing in an attempt to improve children's capacities to learn.

There was little continuity with the coalition government (2010-2015) with fewer interventions on children's social and emotional capacities. Moreover, until the recent OECD report on the significance of the emotions for learning, there has been little international recognition of the emotions within a school context (OECD

2015).Recent meta-analyses of social and emotional initiatives at an international level refer to interventions ranging from broader attempts at changing school cultures to targeted efforts at preventing problem behaviour and encouraging pro-social behaviour among groups of children (Sklad et al 2012; Durlak et al 2011). Some of this is inevitably subsumed within the performativity programme within schools. Research and evaluation within this field has concentrated on ways in which children's emotional literacy and intelligence can be harnessed to improve school-based outcomes relating to attainment and behaviour (Weare and Gray, 2003).

Others have argued that initiatives to support children's emotional wellbeing in working class areas are attempts at compensating for parental inadequacies within the local catchment area (Woods and Warin 2014). Moreover, the rise in psychological initiatives that focus on children's resilience by targeting their emotional vulnerability have been viewed as a new bio-social technology aimed at generating normative models of emotional self-sufficiency (Eccleston and Lewis 2014). The focus here is on intervention enabling children from poorer backgrounds to compete with their more affluent peers. Nevertheless, a focus on the conditions as well as the outcomes for attainment can lead to a broader conception of the school, which connects with initiatives to improve the lives of children and their families. Some of this work in school inevitably overlaps with work taking place with children in the community generating a broader and more complex social context of contemporary schooling.

While we have briefly referred to a number of national, and in some cases global trends within contemporary schooling, we want to explore the implications of these conceptions of schooling at a more localised level, particularly where schools are likely to have difficulties subscribing to a bounded performance oriented

conception of education. In focusing on one school in a challenging area, we examine the way that teachers, parents and children engage with an increasingly remote and disparate range of educational demands. The social and emotions dimensions of schooling are central. One of the focal points of our empirical analysis is the extent to which the social and emotional aspects of schooling become ends in themselves despite the political imperative to achieve. A second aspect of the analysis is the relational dimension to schooling both in terms of the kinds of social connections between children and teachers and importantly, the kinds of contact that schools have with parents. In referring to the school in more relational terms, Fielding's (2006) conception of the 'person centred learning community' is instructive. While targets and outcomes are an unavoidable feature of school life, there is a strong focus on what Fielding (2006) refers to as 'human flourishing' where relationships at all levels in school are vital, and where care, dialogue and commitment to the child as a person are central. We draw on data in exploring the possibility of a person-centred school. In the paper we analyse the relational dimension, the nature of communication across and beyond the school and the emotional nature of schooling.

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Methodology

The paper is drawn from a pilot study that was initially exploring the social and emotional dimensions of schooling. The empirical focus here is one school, a case study of Harold Lane, a secondary schooled based in an English midlands city in challenging socio-economic circumstances. The emphasis here is an in-depth analysis of one school from various vantage points involving a range of school

participants, including parents. Our analysis draws on the potentially disparate understandings, perspectives and interests of participants within the one school. In doing so we have taken on a more 'ecological' stance in that various standpoints are incorporated within the school as a single unit of analysis (Star and Griesemer 1989). The research thus takes the form of what Merriman (1988) refers to as an 'explanatory interpretive case study' with an emphasis on generating new concepts and ideas from the one case. In this sense the case suggests a degree of ontological openness in that our analysis aims to generate a model of schooling that is potentially different from the dominant model of the school as a 'performance oriented learning organisation' (Fielding 2006). In this paper there is more emphasis on what Downes (2013) refers to as 'concentric relational spaces', where there are dialogical connections across the school which incorporate those outside the school such as parents and other agencies. Our analysis directs us towards exploring a more nuanced social and relational model of schooling.

The analysis is descriptive in portraying the routines, roles and relationships within Harold Lane school. In doing so we draw on the interpretivist paradigm where "social life can be understood only through an examination of people's selection and interpretation of events and action" (May 2001, p.14). The limitations of our research reflect the more general limitations of case study work: we can say very little about the social, emotional and communicative structures in other schools. We cannot argue that Harold Lane is typical of other secondary schools in working class areas. We can probably only speculate that the social and emotional dimensions are different in schools in more affluent areas (Wood and Warin 2014). Nevertheless, the aim of our research was to generate new ideas and concepts through our empirical

analysis of one school: to generate a model that both corroborates and challenges our expectations and assumptions about schooling in a working class area.

Our main empirical focus for this pilot study was the school staff and pupils. We interviewed 18 members of staff, including subject teachers, support teachers, school managers. 20 pupils aged between 11 and 17 were interviewed both individually and in focus groups. We were also able to interview 4 parents. We briefly draw on data from parents in order to illustrate certain points. However, we are well aware that as we gained access to parents through the head teacher and as the sample size was so small, we cannot claim that they are typical of parents of children attending this school. All necessary ethical conventions were followed (BERA 2013). All of the participants completed an ethical approval form which enabled them to give us their informed consent. We also ensured confidentiality with names of participants and the name and location of the school anonymised.

Harold Lane

In one sense the school as with all schools within the system are in the business of pushing children along individualised learning trajectories. The school positions children in such a way that they can compete against each other in academic terms and as we have argued, this competitive dimension forms the basis of public assessments of the schools' performances at various levels. Throughout the research process teachers, parents and children were telling us that Harold Lane is primarily 'challenging the barriers to learning' by providing the social and emotional preconditions for learning and engaging with the curriculum. This inevitably means conforming to the powerful educational world of performativity. Issues of performance and standings in the league tables are never far away from school

management thinking and the school has made progress in terms of outcomes (Ofsted 2014). Nevertheless, issues of competition are fairly remote from the day-to-day business of supporting children and their parents and connecting with a range of agencies with interests in children's wellbeing and child protection.

Much of the work in Harold Lane is responding to a backdrop of socio-economic deprivation with just over 40% of pupils categorised as multiply deprived and almost half entitled to free school meals (48%), markedly above the national average of 27%. Moreover, these challenges are complicated by what the most recent Ofsted Inspection report called a 'relatively unstable school population' (Ofsted 2014). First, there is a continuous influx of migrant children. There are 32 first languages spoken by the pupils and 30% of pupils have English as an additional language. The head teacher comments, "during the course of the year we will admit 70 kids from overseas". Teachers also referred to the numbers of travelling Romany children, with sporadic school attendance. Second, Harold Lane takes on children hitherto excluded from other schools. One of the interviewed parents referred to her son who had been excluded from another school

> At X school he didn't fit in there. He always used to get shouted at…he was getting into fights and getting excluded…I heard about Harold Lane that they are really good and understanding with your child. And I bought him here and he hasn't been excluded and rarely gets detention…They are not expected to have a pen. It is no big thing if they don't have a pen (1).

Challenges to the current population of pupils and staff are compounded by the hitherto negative reputation of the school. Earlier Ofsted reports refer to a number of

problems including low levels of school attendance and poor results. This was mentioned by almost all teaching and parental respondents with respect to how difficult it was to shake off these earlier perceptions of the school.

> Some people have a negative perception of the school. When you say to people that you work at Harold Lane 'uh, oh, I wouldn't want to work there', you know from the outside (English Teacher)

> I've talked to kids about this and they are saying when we go to other schools they say things about coming from this school, and it all goes back 10 or 20 years. It is that reputation that is stuck in their heads even though they don't see it when they come to the school now (History Teacher)

Children in the school experience a range of material, social and emotional difficulties, which compromise their wellbeing. These are problems that children bring into the school and problems that sometimes arise out of the dynamic between home and school. The head sets out some of the problems.

> With members of the community the default position is often to argue, to attack, to challenge, often without the ability to sort of reason things through. It is a fight or flight scenario most of the time, but I think they are living on the edge of emotions all the time. So when a parent comes into school and shouts at me, they are only replicating the way they shout at their kids or shout at somebody who pulls out in front of them in a car. I don't think I am seeing a different dimension to parents' behaviour but obviously the damage has been done in the model they give to their kids.

Given the school's catchment area, the staff we interviewed spent much of their time trying to improve children's wellbeing. Issues of care and caring are important within this school, something that the current discourse on performance based outcomes is lacking. In setting out the ethos of the school the Head comes close to Fielding's (2006) notion of 'human flourishing':

> (W)e are trying to create a community that is supportive inclusive and kind. I use the word kindness quite a lot because you need to create the emotional context for kids to learn in the way that I have described… they have got to feel safe, comfortable. You know it has got to be a non-threatening environment, so they're not worried looking over their shoulder all the time.

In more recent years the school has benefited from a range of government initiatives to improve the outcomes for children from challenging areas. For example, the school was involved in piloting the Achievement for all scheme (D.ofE. 2012). This is a more holistic school approach to improving outcomes in schools from challenging areas. 'Failing' pupils are tracked more rigorously and there is much more emphasis on mentoring and supporting pupils in difficulties. The school also has a fairly comprehensive network of additional support for children experiencing difficulties. This includes extensive language support for migrant children and the introduction of a Supported and Individual Learning Centre (SILC), located in a separate building where specialist staff help children with learning and behavioural difficulties re-engage with the learning process.

Interestingly, the head teacher focuses more on the social aspects of children's backgrounds rather than any psychological predispositions.

> One of the really successful things about this work is that you separate out which kids have a significant special educational need, something diagnosable, and which are kids not making enough progress for a variety of reasons. We would have had kids in the past on the SEN register who were two years behind in their reading age. The reason they're two years behind is because their attendance was only 50%. They haven't really got a special need – they need to be at school more.

The head takes the pragmatic view that it does not matter how elaborate the programmes to support pupils' progress a school develops if the pupil is not present in school to take advantage of them. The focus on attendance has been critical for school management since the turn of the century. Ofsted reports since 2001 refer to the way that school has been tackling relatively low levels of school attendance with the most recent report stating that '(a)ttendance is above average and continues to improve strongly' (Ofsted 2014 p.4). While there are still major social and economic problems within the catchment area, more recent inspection reports have identified the quality of school leadership, the pastoral care system and safeguarding procedures as factors underpinning major improvements in attendance and learning.

The data from the staff reveal a commitment to the building and maintaining of relationships with the children and the parents. One of the advantages that the school has in generating more effective relations with pupils and parents is its size.

Harold Lane is relatively small for a secondary school with a population of 703 pupils. Research from the UK and the US suggests that smaller schools find it easier to generate trusting relations between school participants as well as generating an ethos where children's social and emotional wellbeing are primary considerations (Fielding 2006; Bryk and Schneider 2002).

Relationship building with pupils in school was crucial in creating a broader teaching vantage point. Thus teachers often get a sense of the child's family life through the closer links established with pupils. Moreover, developing a unique and often quite privileged 'home' vantage point gave teachers the opportunity to work more closely with both the child and his or her parents. The following Support teacher made clear connections between the work she does with individual pupils and the potential impact of this work on family life.

You can see the impact that you are having. You can see the impact you're having on their family as well, which is quite a nice role. Because you can see what is happening, you can see the effect you are having.

Relationship building was a similar recurring theme from the interviews with the pupils. One group of year 7 pupils discussed the way they were able to sit down with teachers and talk things through. Though some students preferred to talk through problems with their friends, it was clear that pupils saw the teachers as a source of support. As one year 7 student stated "our tutor she says all the time you can tell me anything. There are a couple of times when I have been to her and she deals with everything". One of the older year 10 students was having difficulties juggling her

schooling and her young carer responsibilities. She emphasised the importance of a relational approach in schools

> If I have problems and stuff I can go and speak to them (the teachers) on my own. There are a lot of one to one relationships that you can have with teachers. You can trust them. There are certain teachers that you can have a really close bond with. Because if you didn't I would not be able to tell anyone about the problems I am having.

In turning to the links between teachers and parents there was a strong professional and emotional investment in working with parents. For many of the teachers the difficulties that children had were believed to be rooted in their home life with children mirroring and reflecting the moods, the behaviour and emotional dispositions of their parents. As one Support teacher who acted as a wellbeing mentor summed up:

> I could quickly phone up a parent, speak to them for a few minutes just to get a bit of information…A lot of the times the kids they base things on the parents. If the parents are struggling then the kids are struggling. So if we can help the parents with their life then that will help the children….

The home vantage point in most instances was a way for teachers to reframe the way they approached children and their parents. This was viewed as normal practice when working with parents when children were struggling with their schoolwork and behaviour. However, there were occasions when teachers were reticent to contact

parents when there had been incidents at school. One relatively inexperienced teacher referred to a boy that he was working closely with in order to improve his behaviour. He referred to the boy's relationship with his father and the possible implications for the boy if the school got in touch with the father: "both my line manager and I are dubious about contacting dad again because perhaps when we do contact the dad, the boy then gets hit"

The school as a network

The relational work carried out by teaching staff generated more open and at times busy lines of communication stretching across the school into the community connecting with a range of supportive agencies, including mental health services, social services and youth and community services. While emphasis on a broader system of support was implemented in an ad hoc fashion, we can view the network as part of an eco system of support centred on school and home extending into the 'meso-system' of professional relations beyond the school (Flaspohler et al 2012; Bronfennbrenner 1979). The concept of a network often challenges conventional hierarchies creating more possibilities for democratic relations (Castells 2004). Yet, teachers refer to more formal hierarchical relationships in school. The bounded responsibilities of schools discussed earlier reinforce the hierarchy and there were clear vertical lines of difference between management and teachers and between pupils and school staff. These lines of difference were acknowledged by the teachers to be useful in giving their disparate roles and responsibilities some structure. At the same time there are important lines of connection that run across the school. The school as a network is partly held together by an elaborate communication system with staff using a varied range of media when communicating with each other, and

with pupils and parents, including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, texting and written forms (Olmsatead 2013). One interesting innovation here is the use of 'life style' televisions, screens located throughout the public spaces within the school, which provide information and models of good life style practices or as the Head of Religious Education stated "(they) pump in information on keeping healthy, looking after yourself". Much of this contact and more generally pupil behaviour and progress are recorded on the school computer system creating a bank of information to which staff have access. Staff were to report all behavioural issues and incidents that took place in their presence as well periodically reporting on the progress of all children. This network generated varying degrees of formality and incorporated regular interactions between support teachers and parents and pupils within the home. In some ways the success of this network generates a sophisticated form of social control in the way that children's routine behaviour inside and outside of school and by implication the dispositions of their parents are carefully documented, evaluated and categorised (Foucault 1979). Nevertheless, this network puts the school in a stronger position to support children's learning. Moreover, within this network school staff are able to connect with parents and tackle what they see as critical 'barriers to learning'.

While this communication allows easier access between the school participants, one of the major innovations in school that has allowed this network to flourish was the appointment of 15 Support Teachers (ST) who take on a number of relational roles within the school (2). First of all, they act as pupil mentors, among other things, running small tutor groups with the more difficult pupils and helping to support children's learning. Second, they act as teaching assistants providing supply cover for subject teachers. This provides greater continuity when subject teachers

are absent from their classes. Third, a key role of the ST is working with pupils and their families on an individual and group basis. The STs provide an expanded school network of support into the local community tackling 'barriers to learning', that arguably have their roots in more traditional boundaries between home and school (Levinson 2008). The ethos of the school and the work of the STs provide more fluid lines of communication between home and school and thus more opportunities for the school to set up quite diverse relations between staff and parents. Crucially, the STs liaise between subject teachers and pupils acting as a pivotal link between pupil, subject teacher, parent and the various welfare agencies with which the school has links. STs provide the 'glue' that binds the complex patchwork of roles and responsibilities within the school to 'external' sources of support from families and other agencies.

In the following extracts STs talk about how this network operates when working with parents. ST2 discusses some of the ways that she links up with the home

> ST 2: we are so diverse in the duties that we carry out and the kind of work that the school needs us to do and because it is quite new to me when I first started. I was shocked at how many students actually need support. They have got these massive things going on at home and it is not just one or two people, it is most of these children have got major things going on in their lives.

The following ST talks about her 'family' responsibilities in terms of attendance

ST3: I have responsibility for attendance so I work with all the students and families that have below a certain per cent of attendance

Interviewer: Right, what does it actually involve then?

ST3: It can involve anything that is removing barriers to those children who aren't attending regularly. It is so diverse.

Interviewer: Do you actually go out and pick them up

ST3: Go out, pick them up, see the family. You know, put them on a personalised timetable; get the nits (head lice) out of a girl's hair at school 'cause that was a barrier. She was getting bullied. We set up class common assessment frameworks with the family because you know maybe there is a problem with mum. Put them onto six-week plans. We do absolutely anything necessary to remove barriers to get children into school (3).

We mentioned the problem of children's attendance at school as a problem earlier in the paper. While in many schools attendance is a taken for granted feature of children's school participation, Harold Lane has had to work hard in improving levels of school attendance. STs play a more direct and literal role in connecting the school with local families by picking children up from their homes and bringing them into the school. Teachers refer to the caring work that takes place in school in conjunction with other agencies. The communication network allows them to pick up potential problems early alerting parents and subject teachers, and in general providing a framework within which problems that children have can be tackled (Durlak et al 2011). The parents we interviewed were strongly supportive of the preventative role of the school in terms of the speed and fluidity of the contact between them and the school, and in the way that parents could draw on the role of

other agencies as a consequence of the on-going links they have with the school. One of the parents interviewed was able to work with the school to help her daughter who had mental health issues

> *My daughter was quite depressed and at the school it was Mrs X that I contacted.. We were going to CAMS for a while (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). CAMS informed the school of any medication Alice was taking. Mrs X came to see me and liaised with me…so the school knew how to help Alice.*

Emotional work

An important dimension of the relational work that routinely takes place within the school is the focus on the emotions. The emotional dimension also forms a dominant thread running through the school network allowing a range of different types of relationships to develop within the school and between the parents and the school. First, there is the teaching of emotions as skills and resources that can be developed by children in and through their engagement with the curriculum. The school had introduced a national government initiative to support children's emotional wellbeing, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) (Woods and Warin 2014; Humphrey et al 2008). The focus here is working with children's emotional capacities in order that they improvement their engagement with teachers and learning processes. At the same time, much of the emotional work in school is dispersed and fragmented across the school with 'wellbeing', 'friendship' and 'self- esteem' groups set up by Support Teachers with children in order to help them develop their social and emotional capacities.

Second, there is the emotion of teaching and engagement with pupils and other school participants. Teachers saw the school as a context and an occasion for the expression of emotion among pupils. While there was clearly a commitment among staff to various forms of professionalism in their day-to-day routines within the school, almost all teaching staff thought that teaching was 'emotional'. One of the English teachers referred to the notion of empathy

> *In lots of ways it (my work) is emotional because you have to have I think quite strong empathy or empathetic skills to be a teacher so you can connect on some sort of emotional level. You can't just deliver a lesson and not have any emotional contact with a student, you need to be aware of students' feelings… you have to be aware of if they have go issues going on once you have taught them for while …I think it is emotional from our point of view as well because you do get really involved if you care about them.*

One of the Assistant Heads referred to a boundary between the teachers' professional sense of self and the expression of emotions.

> *You can still remain professional. Sometimes, you have to get close to that line because we are working with such difficult families and difficult children, with so any emotions of their own. You sometimes have to push the border a little bit to get results, and you do get results, but really remain professional. It is really a tough one, especially in a school like this.*

For some teachers the emotional dimension of their work was a response to the emotional nature of the school population both in terms of the age range of pupils and the problems they bring into the school. Most teachers interviewed referred to the middle years of secondary school, the age range 13-16 as a highly emotional 'hormonal' group. For most teachers the emotional dimension of the school is also the focal point of much of the 'caring' work done with the recentring of children's wellbeing, a precondition of learning in class. When asked what kind of role the emotions play in her work at the school, the following Support Teacher replies

>*It is hard not to let your emotions with the job that I do and I think that helps you know, get the most support we can for these students. I think that it is the case so much that we are not just looking at attendance figures, you know that have got to be printed and sent to the council. We want these children to achieve, we want them to come in and obviously when bad things are happening to those children, we feel for them you know. We want to help them all we can.*

The pupils interviewed provided specific examples of the ways Harold Lane supported them emotionally. This included overcoming truancy and dyslexia, on-going support for a pupil acting as a carer and supporting a pupil who had recently arrived from Romania and who had initially spoken virtually no English. One year 9 girl was getting help with anger management issues. When asked what emotions teachers should show she stated, 'caring, honesty and loyalty'. She went on to say 'they (teachers) show a lot of emotion, like when you are upset they are really comforting. They know how to deal with the situation'. The emotional dimension of

the school as a social and relational network makes it easier for the children to articulate their concerns and interests. All pupils interviewed agreed that they had some voice and were generally listened to. One year 9 boy refers to the way that the school helps when he had difficulties with other pupils in class.

> Say you have got trouble with people in class, they will bring you out together (the teachers) and you speak, and you resolve the problem so we don't go crazy'

More generally, most of the children interviewed felt that they could have some influence, certainly to the extent that the school would think about their suggestions and occasionly act on them.

Conclusion

Michael Fielding refers to a contemporary model of schooling distilled from educational orthodoxy, the school as a 'high performance learning organisation' (2006). Here the 'activities and worth of schooling… are dominated by outcomes, by measured attainment...(and where) the significance of both students and teachers is derivative and rests primarily in their contribution, usually via high stakes testing, to the public performance of the organization' (Fielding 2006, p. 304). It is clear from our data that our case study school barely approximates to this dominant conception of schooling. We are not in a position to make general claims about small secondary schools in challenging socio-economic contexts. Nevertheless, we have generated insights from participants in one school that tell us something about the strategies and practices adopted in working with and sometimes confronting what was often referred to by school staff as 'barriers to learning'. Our focus is on the social and emotional forces in school that bind people together in a broader network of support

that comes a little closer to Fielding's (2006) alternative model of the school as a 'people oriented learning community'. The dominant model of the 'performing' school tends to subordinate the affective and social dimensions of schooling to pupil attainment. In raising the profile of the socio-emotional dimensions of schooling we are not rejecting the idea that schools should be trying to promote academic excellence. We are arguing that an emphasis on academic attainment is only one aspect of a school's ethos. School outcomes are only one indicator of the school's commitment to the education and nurturing of children as good citizens and centred human beings.

In one sense, Harold Lane is a success story: incrementally formal and informal judgements are made that position it as an 'improving school'. The head makes it clear that these judgements are important within a wider local and political context. Nevertheless, the dominant school narrative here is what can broadly be referred to as children's wellbeing, in particular children's social and emotional capacities. In both cases the reference points are 'external' to the school, with children's material and home circumstances influencing the nature of the teaching and the learning. This changes the shape of the school in that the boundaries between school and home are necessarily porous. In challenging what teaching staff refer to as the 'barriers to learning', the school has developed an extensive network of support, a social and emotional learning network that incorporates parents as well as pupils and teaching staff. Our empirical focus has been on school participants including a range of teaching staff with varying responsibilities. We have also worked with small groups of pupils and parents in drawing out the significance of the school as a social and emotional network. We have adopted a more ecological approach in presenting our case study in that we have treated the school as a single unit of

analysis incorporating the viewpoints of differing school participants. Our research is only really a starting point in that we have presented a pilot study of the social and emotional work that takes place in school. We would like to have deepened the analysis to include more parents, and potentially parents at odds with the practices within school. In presenting the school as a network we could also have accentuated the complicated and messy nature of the communication structures across and beyond school by incorporating the role of various welfare agencies as well as the voices of parents. We are aware of the significance of the inter-agency dimension (Cummings et al 2011). The support teachers, in particular worked closely with a number of welfare professionals. In this paper we can only really hint at the investment that the school has made in relations with social and health services in its commitment to 'challenging the boundaries to learning'.

Notes

1. *The parent is referring to the relative relaxation of rules at Harold Lane. In some schools children are punished if parents do not or are unable to provide their children with the appropriate resources for participating in the classroom.*

2. These are school staff without formal teaching qualifications. A number do go on to qualify as teachers and remain in the school. Some of the subject teachers we interviewed had started as support teachers.

3. Common Assessment Frameworks were set up in 2003 by the Labour government to ensure that safeguarding issues and issues relating to children's

needs were shared across the spectrum of agencies involved in supporting children and families.

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