Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology
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Exploring Decision Making in School Exclusion

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Declaration

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

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Impact Statement

This study explored Head Teachers' views about exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Head Teachers in England have sole legal responsibility for deciding whether a pupil should be excluded. Disproportionate rates of exclusion for marginalised groups and certain ethnicities are well documented and have risen since 2012. What is more, exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour remain the most common. This study aimed to explore the role that Head Teachers play in the decision-making process, asking about how they navigate this process, the factors they considered, as well as if they consulted others. No research to date has explored this perspective and the findings of this nation-wide study provide important implications for research, practice and policy in Educational Psychology and beyond.

Head Teachers' relationships with other professionals were an important factor in making decisions to exclude. These relationships provide a key area for consideration when thinking about the ways in which Educational Psychologists (EPs) can support Head Teachers in the exclusion decision making process. Educational Psychologists work across the systems that impact upon a pupil's development, through assessing their needs as part of a graduated approach (SEN CoP, 2015), through consultation (Wagner, 2000; 2008) and by providing professional supervision to Head Teachers (Dunsmuir and Leadbetter, 2010). As such, EPs are well placed to either a) facilitate building higher quality relationships between Head Teachers and other professionals, b) develop the perceptions of the EP role so that Head Teachers are aware of the direct contribution they can provide during decision making, for example offering supervision (Dunsmuir and Leadbetter,

2010) or c) work with school systems to provide more early intervention support for pupils at risk of exclusion.

This research emphasises the importance of robust systems and processes in school for responding to and managing Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. By highlighting Head Teachers' views that these systems provide a more objective lens through which a pupil's behaviour can be assessed and responded to, considering intersecting precipitating factors and what the pupil needs in order to develop. What is more, this research illustrates the impact of attachment-informed approaches in schools for developing high quality relationships. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) highlights the role of the graduated approach in ensuring equal access to learning opportunities for all pupils, specifically regarding learning and attainment. The findings of this research highlight the importance of viewing behaviour management practice in this proactive and reflective way. These findings could be incorporated into the existing policy, to illustrate how social, emotional and mental health needs which manifest as behaviour deemed challenging, can be better supported by schools as part of the graduated approach.

The current study sought the views of Head Teachers from a range of locations and representing diverse school contexts. The sample ultimately interviewed for their views in this research, however, represented schools with mostly low exclusion rates. The findings of this research challenge those that explored the influence of group preferences on punitive decision making, as well as research that suggested the Government guidance for excluding was unhelpful. Future research could look at these two viewpoints across both high- and low-excluding schools, to determine whether the views presented in the current study represent only Head Teachers who tend to use fewer exclusions.

Abstract

The disproportionate exclusion of certain groups of pupils in England, and for specific behaviours, remains an issue of national importance. The current research aimed to explore the role that Head Teachers play in this process, given that they have sole legal responsibility to decide if a pupil's behaviour meets the subjective criteria for persistent disruption. Head Teachers' views were sought to answer the following: How do Head Teachers navigate the decision-making process to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour? What factors do Head Teachers consider when making these decisions? Do Head Teachers consult others during the decision-making process? A partially-mixed sequential dominant phase methodology was employed, where qualitative data analysis contributed the greatest amount of information pertaining to the research questions. A survey collecting demographic information was sent to Head Teachers across England. This survey also collected quantitative data, in the form of self-reported measures of the extent to which Head Teachers consulted others, and how well-equipped they felt in decision making for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Maximum variation sampling, using the demographic information provided in the survey, was used to select Head Teachers for interviews. Analysis of qualitative data, using thematic analysis, suggested that Head Teachers' confidence in the education system, position on exclusion, principles and pressure from the system informed how they navigated decision making. Head Teachers' consideration of what a pupil needs, personal approach, school approach and external help and hinderances were themes extracted from the data which related to the factors Head Teachers deem important in decision making. Isolation and Professional vs Personal (relationships) were themes that addressed who and how Head Teachers consulted others during decision making. Quantitative analysis

of data showed there was not a statistically significant relationship between the extent to which Head Teachers consult others, and the extent to which they feel well-equipped in the exclusion decision-making process. These findings highlight the complex nature of decision-making in which a Head Teacher must engage, which is shaped by a range of individual, group and systemic factors. This research provides previously unexplored information about Head Teachers' decision making and how this influences school exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Important implications for Educational Psychology practice are noted, including the role of professional supervision to Head Teachers, and these findings are discussed with relevance to contributions to school practice and the development of policy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research explored English Head Teachers' decision making in relation to school exclusions for 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour'. It aimed to better understand the decision-making process in which Head Teachers engage, and the factors and viewpoints they consider during this process. It was hoped that this would highlight important decision-making points in the process to enable a sharing of good practice and to identify when, where and how, the professional views and practice of Educational Psychologists might be of use in reducing school exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour.

School Exclusion in England: An Overview

What is Exclusion and What Does it Involve?

According to the official government guidance on school exclusions, Head Teachers have sole legal responsibility for deciding whether to exclude a pupil from their school (DfE, 2017). The government guidance for school discipline and exclusions (available on the gov.uk website 'School Discipline and Exclusions'), highlights the fact that Head Teachers can exclude a child or young person from school if they misbehave in or outside school. There are two types of exclusion: Fixed Term (sometimes known as fixed period) and Permanent Exclusion. A Fixed Term Exclusion (FTE) entails a child or young person being temporarily removed from school for an agreed amount of time (up to 45 days in total in one school year). When a pupil is fixed term excluded from school, the school is required to set and mark work to be completed up to the first five days of the exclusion. When the FTE lasts longer than five days, the school must set up full time education elsewhere for the pupil from the sixth day. A permanent exclusion (PeX) means that a pupil is expelled from a school. As is the case for FTEs, when a pupil is permanently excluded, the excluding school must arrange full time education for the pupil from the sixth day.

What Does Current Exclusion Practice Look Like?

National data from the Department for Education show that rate of fixed term exclusions (FTEs) from schools in the year 2018-2019 increased in every type of setting with the exception of special schools (DfE, 2020 - Figures for 2019-2020 are due to be released in July 2021). This is in keeping with the trend seen in data since 2013/2014 whereby the rate of FTE has increased from 3.5 (350 pupils per 10,000) to 5.36 in 2018/19. Similarly, the rate of permanent exclusion increased steadily from 2012/2013 when it was 0.06 (six pupils per 10,000) to 2016/2017 when it was 0.1 (10 pupils per 10,000). Between the academic years of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, the rate of PeXs has remained at 0.1.

Who is Being Excluded?

Nationally, the most common reason cited for carrying out both FTEs and PeXs is ‘Persistent Disruptive Behaviour’, which accounted for 31% and 35%, respectively in 2018-2019 (DfE, 2020). The criteria for persistent disruptive behaviour are not clearly set out by the Department for Education, however, their guidance on issuing exclusions suggests that persistent breaches of a school’s behaviour policy can warrant an exclusion (DfE, 2017). As well as an increase in the rates of exclusions, another pattern evident in the exclusion data from the last decade, is that of over-representation of certain groups or pupil characteristics. Pupils considered to have Special Educational Needs (SEN), those from Gypsy, Roma (21.26 [rate of fixed term exclusion], 0.39 [rate of permanent exclusion]) and

Traveller (14.63, 0.27), Black Caribbean (10.37, 0.25) and White Black Caribbean backgrounds (10.69, 0.24), those in Year 9 (aged 14) and those who are eligible for Free school meals experienced exclusion at a higher rate than their peers who do not belong to these groups (DfE, 2020). For example, children and young people who had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or who were eligible for SEN Support in schools were permanently excluded from schools at a rate of 0.15 and 0.32, respectively in 2018/2019. By comparison, pupils who did not have SEN were permanently excluded at a rate of 0.06. Rates for fixed term exclusions in the same period show that pupils with an EHCP or those eligible for SEN Support were fixed term excluded at a rate of 16.11 and 15.59, respectively. Pupils who did not have SEN were fixed term excluded at a rate of 3.57. Similarly, pupils from Gypsy Roma and Black Caribbean ethnicities were fixed term excluded at a rate of 21.26 and 10.37, respectively. These rates are far higher than the national average FTE rate of 5.36 (DfE, 2020). Pupils who are most likely to be excluded from school are reported to experience a range of other vulnerabilities, including mental health concerns, learning difficulties and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs; Obsuth et al., 2017).

How Does Exclusion Practice in England Compare with Other Countries?

There is a sparsity of research examining the different legislative frameworks in each of the four jurisdictions of the United Kingdom and not much is known about the differences in practice and exclusion rates in each (McCluskey et al., 2019). Literature from the USA suggests similar trends in exclusionary practice, with those who have disabilities, are from low socio-economic backgrounds or are from a minority group (especially Black) more likely to be excluded (Skiba et al., 2014). Since 2012/2013, England's exclusion rates have risen more quickly than anywhere else in the UK which is in sharp contrast to Scotland, for example, where permanent exclusion has been almost eradicated (McCluskey et al., 2019).

Government Guidance on How to Exclude

The Department for Education in England sets out guidance (DfE, 2017) on how to employ exclusion and reports that they support Head Teachers in using exclusion as a sanction where it is warranted. The guidance highlights the Head Teacher's ultimate responsibility for decision making around excluding and states that this decision should be lawful, reasonable and fair. It advises that permanent exclusion should be used as a last resort response to persistent breaches or a serious breach of the school's behaviour policy and when, if the pupil were to remain in school, they would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil in question or others in the school. The guidance recommends that schools should give consideration to the Equality Act (2010) and should not discriminate based on protected characteristics. It advises that schools should consider unmet needs as a cause for disruptive behaviour and try to intervene early, looking past the pupil's educational needs alone. When permanent exclusion is decided by a Head Teacher, the school's governing board must review the decision and decide whether or not to reinstate the pupil in question. The guidance also sets out how parents can appeal a decision to permanently exclude their child which involves an independent review panel (and a First-tier tribunal where there is an allegation of discrimination). If the independent review panel decides the governing board's decision is flawed, it can direct them to reinstate the pupil. If the governing board decides not to reinstate the pupil, they are fined £4,000. The guidance includes the following suggested points for Head Teachers to consider when making the decision on whether or not to exclude:

“• Have I investigated specific incidents with all parties in a sensitive and fair way?

• Did I consider factors that could have contributed to the pupil’s behaviour (e.g. Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) or bereavement) and have I taken these factors sufficiently into account?

• Is exclusion the most appropriate and reasonable sanction, and consistent with the school’s behaviour policy?

• Are all the exclusion reasons clearly recorded, including the impact on others? Are they robust?

• Is relevant evidence properly recorded/retained/documented? (e.g. summaries of interviews, past behaviour, sanctions and support provided.)”

(DfE, 2017; p.51 Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England)

What Are the Outcomes Associated with Exclusion?

Despite its purported use as a viable method for managing behaviour deemed challenging in schools, and to preserve the welfare and education of all pupils in a school (Timson, 2019; DfE, 2017), there is a wealth of literature linking school exclusion to a number of negative outcomes. In a comprehensive literature review of contributory factors to school disciplinary practices, Welsh and Little (2018) highlighted the link between school exclusion and outcomes, including lack of achievement, lower standardised test scores, lower graduation rates, disengagement and lack of belongingness to school systems, higher drop-out rates, entry to, and increased contact with, the Youth Justice System, arrests and a negative school climate. In her book on the politics of urban high school in the USA, Fines provides a critical ethnography which traces the links between school exclusion and widened gaps in education and attainment, lower rates of employment and qualification and higher rates of mental health concerns (Fine, 1991). Pupils who are excluded have also been reported to have higher rates of externalised behaviour, including criminal activity, and internalised behaviours, like self-harming (Obsuth et al., 2017).

The Role of Educational Psychology

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support in the process of assessing factors contributing to a child or young person's behaviour across individual, group and systemic levels in schools (Wagner, 2000). As set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND Code of Practice; DfE, 2014), EPs can contribute to the graduated approach of assessing, planning, doing, and reviewing practice to identify potential barriers to a pupil's success in school and highlight unmet needs with which the pupil may present. An EP's unique contribution to this process comes from the application of psychological theory in practice, which can often add a greater depth of analysis and understanding of a child or young person's needs than a school could alone. EPs are best placed to work directly with children to elicit their views of their situation, with groups of staff to improve their knowledge and understanding of SEND and with the school at a systemic level to ensure their organisational policies and processes are evidence based and promote wellbeing, inclusion and success for all pupils and staff. Working through consultation (Wagner, 2000; 2008), EPs can offer a joint problem-solving approach which encourages collaboration and empowering the systems within which they work. What is more, EPs are well placed to offer professional supervision to school staff, including Head Teachers (Dunsmuir and Leadbetter, 2010). Scottish local authorities have made a commitment to publish all of the action research undertaken by their Educational Psychology services and have a particular focus on how EPs can raise the attainment of children from the lowest socio-economic status backgrounds (McCluskey, Cole, Daniels, Thompson, & Tawell, 2019).

In England, research suggests that Educational Psychologists are not as involved in shaping national policy around promoting the inclusion of the most vulnerable learners, nor in the exclusion decision making process itself. Mills and Thomson (2018) conducted a large-scale research investigation into the landscape of Alternative Provision in England. The researchers conducted interviews with Head Teachers (N=156) and other senior leaders in 276 mainstream primary and secondary schools and Head Teachers (N=144) and other senior leaders in 200 Alternative Provisions across the country. The researchers report that that under half of the schools in their study employed the support of external professionals like EPs in meeting the needs of children and young people who were at risk of exclusion. Head Teachers spoke about the benefits of support from external professionals but highlighted the barriers to accessing this support, including long waiting lists, geographical isolation and budget constraints (Mills and Thompson, 2018). It is not clear from this research how Head Teachers use (or would like to be able to use) external support as part of the decision-making process around exclusion, particularly how they view EPs as potential collaborators in identifying and responding to unmet needs. Nor is the role of EPs, as seen by Head Teachers in mainstream settings, explored.

The role of Educational Psychology in responding to behaviour deemed challenging in the context of exclusion is highlighted by Harold and Corcoran (2013). They call for the creation of a space in which EPs can facilitate critical reflection on current disciplinary practice and dominant discourses in education. It seems that the contribution of Educational Psychology is not being fully explored. Might this be because schools are not reaching out to Educational Psychology Services for advice around the exclusion process? Do school staff, particularly Head Teachers, have a good understanding of the role and remit of an EP? Or do they seek advice elsewhere?

Aims and Research Questions

The responsibility for making the decision to exclude a pupil in England, whether for a fixed term or permanently, rests solely with the Head Teacher of a school (DfE, 2017). The ways in which Head Teachers make decisions about exclusions has not previously been explored by research. Given the subjective nature of the guidance that Head Teachers are provided, and in the context of a large range of literature suggesting how to better support more vulnerable pupils prior to exclusion, this research project aimed to understand 1) how Head Teachers in England navigate the decision-making process around excluding for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour (including both for fixed periods and for permanent exclusion). It also asked 2) what factors do Head Teachers in England consider when making the decision on whether or not to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour (including both for fixed periods and for permanent exclusion)?

The different procedural, cultural and social factors relevant to each of the jurisdictions of the UK, and their subsequent levels of school exclusions, has been highlighted (McCluskey et al., 2019). Given the lack of research about how policy, and social and cultural factors might be of importance in English exclusion practice, an interdisciplinary approach, which includes key stakeholders' views, has been recommended (McCluskey et al., 2019). As such, this research also explored the extent to which Head Teachers consult others to aide in their decision making, with the aim of highlighting where and how the role of Educational Psychologists might be of use. This was done through asking the question; 3) when decision making on whether or not to exclude, do Head Teachers consult other parties?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Review Aims

The aim of the literature review was to explore the factors involved in exclusion decision making for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour at various levels that might contribute to the disproportionate exclusion rates seen nationally (DfE, 2020). The literature review focused on the role of subjectivity in the exclusion process, examining the ways in which individual constructs might influence decision making in schools, from decisions about daily behaviour management practices to those related to excluding a pupil permanently. Additionally, the literature review aimed to explore the role of the Head Teacher in school exclusions and how decision-making forms a part of this role.

The literature review process is outlined below. This is followed by discussion, firstly, of the literature relevant to the interpretation of exclusion guidance and the role that subjectivity plays in doing so. Then, individual, group and systemic biases associated with exclusions will be discussed, through examining the attitudinal factors, social processes and systemic factors important for understanding disproportionate school exclusions in England. Finally, decision making relevant to school exclusion will be addressed, and research from the field of experimental psychology will be included to provide insight into the role of social processes on punitive decision making. Including literature from this field was deemed necessary given the paucity of research on this area within the field of Educational Psychology.

Literature Review Process

A thorough literature review was conducted in order to identify relevant studies based on their research methodology and/or area of focus. The broad terms 'exclusion' AND 'education', 'exclusion' AND 'school', 'exclusion' AND 'inequality', 'exclusion' AND 'decision making', 'exclusion' AND 'discrimination', 'exclusion' AND 'social justice', 'exclusion' AND 'school leaders' OR 'Head Teachers' and 'decision making' AND 'punishment' were used to search the PsychInfo, ProQuest Central, Psychology Database (ProQuest) and ASSIA databases and the University College London online library resources. These terms were selected to provide a wide range of results which were then further refined. Only studies related to the English context were included, with the exception of literature on decision making and exclusion, and racial climate in schools, which draws on literature from the USA. The literature of relevance has been arranged into the following categories which will be discussed in turn below: Interpreting Exclusion Guidance, Attitudinal Factors and School Exclusion, Systemic Factors and School Exclusion, Social Processes and School Exclusion and Decision Making and School Exclusion. These broad categories are based on common topics that emerged from the review of the literature which were deemed helpful in addressing some of the ways in which disproportionate exclusions have been perpetuated.

Interpreting Exclusion Guidance

The factors associated with both high and low levels of exclusion have been explored, with a focus on Local Authority Exclusion Officers' perspectives on the exclusion guidance provided by the government (Cole, McCluskey, Daniels, Thompson, and Tawell, 2019; DfE, 2017). In their study (Cole, et al., 2019), the authors interviewed Local Authority Officers (N=5) and found that there was a general perception of the government guidance as unhelpful in making well-informed decisions about exclusion.

Participants felt that the government guidance (2017) on employing exclusion was unclear and that this played a major role in the increase in exclusion rates since 2012. Previous guidance, they felt, was clearer that exclusion should be a last resort option. Participants reported that the latest guidance (DfE, 2017) seemed less interested in investing time in children and young people but more concerned with removing them from the system. They noted that they had felt unclear on how to combine all of the recommendations of the policy so that they were compatible and resulted in the Government's aim of reducing inequitable practice. One of the main sources of confusion for these specialists was the conflicting messages about behaviour policies and the inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the guidance. Participants described the depth of the guidance on ensuring strict behaviour policies and systems to operationalise them, contrasted with the message encouraging school leaders to be flexible and to consider addressing SEND and other precipitating vulnerabilities instead of excluding.

The authors highlight the confusion caused to exclusion specialists at the local government level. Importantly, this research did not account for the interpretation of this guidance by Head Teachers, for whom it was produced, and who have ultimate responsibility in taking the decision to exclude. Participants noted the increasingly reduced role that Local Authorities have in the exclusion process in schools. The view that this guidance causes confusion may not extend to the current practice Head Teachers adopt in England and might reflect the reduced contact these local authority exclusion officers have with the exclusion decision making process. Research exploring Head Teacher's views on this guidance has not yet been published, to the researcher's knowledge. Also lacking in the literature is research exploring how Head Teachers make the decision to exclude.

The findings of Cole and colleagues (2019) suggest that the differing interpretation of this guidance seems to be a cause for confusion for some exclusion officers and it might explain one of the ways in which exclusion rates for certain pupils continues to increase. Indeed, the guidance includes many subjective qualifiers that might be interpreted differently. Some examples of these include 'disruptive behaviour'; 'sensitive and fair'; 'sufficiently'; 'most appropriate and reasonable sanction'; 'relevant evidence'; 'last resort', 'seriously harm the education or welfare'. What is more, the most common reason to exclude a pupil, Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, is a subjective qualifier and might differ across contexts. How then, might subjectivity influence the decision making of Head Teachers when considering what Persistent Disruptive Behaviour entails. The next section will outline the role of constructivism in the exclusion decision making process.

Towards a Critical Constructivist Perspective

Constructivism is the school of thought concerned with subjectivity, postulating that reality is constructed by an individual based on how they perceive the world. It is seen as the opposite of positivism, which maintains that an objective reality can be ascertained through observations without social interaction. (Burr, 2015). From a constructivist perspective, concepts or constructs are open to subjective appraisal at the individual, group and organisational levels, and can be represented by attitudinal factors, social processes and systemic factors. These subjective appraisals (of individuals, their behaviours and the roles they play in organisations) can be thought about in terms of how they might perpetuate some of the patterns seen in the school exclusion data over the last decade (DfE, 2019). With this in mind, the need for a critical constructivist perspective is highlighted. This critical stance would seek to illustrate the link between subjective constructs like 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour' and the role of attitudinal, social and systemic factors that may influence these constructs.

These factors will be discussed, in turn, below. To do so is not an attempt at tracing a single best fit model, or objective truth, of how disproportionate and high exclusion rates are perpetuated, however, it is an attempt at illustrating the complex nature of school systems and the myriad interconnected factors that culminate in the more frequent exclusion of pupils with certain characteristics (Graham, White, Edwards, Potter, and Street, 2019). The complexity of school systems, it will be argued, would benefit from being viewed through a critical realist lens, drawing on factors deemed to be observable and quantifiable, like a pupil's age, and social constructs, like the notion of 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour', in an attempt to provide an account of how these polarised paradigms can be drawn together to better understand disproportionate school exclusions.

Attitudinal Factors and School Exclusion

The attitudinal factors linked to perspectives on behaviour and what it represents are highlighted by Timpson's report (2019) on the current exclusion climate in the UK, commissioned by the Conservative Government. Timpson implies that the rise in exclusion rates is due to an increase in the presentation of challenging behaviour in schools. He claims there is a polarised debate amongst educational experts: One side represent a belief that behaviour is a choice, and that poor behaviour is exacerbated by a lack of boundaries; and the other side argues that behaviour represents a form of communicating unmet needs. Timpson states that the truth is far more complex and as such, he includes recommendations on how to improve behaviour management in schools as well as recognise and respond to individual needs.

Timpson states:

> *"Whatever lies behind poor behaviour, schools need to be places where children learn and the school workforce can teach, without disruption."* p 7.

Where does this attitude come from? Should we teach children and young people that they should expect a certain standard and that, if this standard is not met, we should be intolerant of those classmates who breach it? Would an approach focused on fostering understanding from all school community members, of individual differences and challenges, lead to future policy makers who are better able to advocate equality?

Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt (2016) think so. They use a social-psychological lens to review extreme racial disparities in school discipline, tracing the role of stereotyping in exacerbating differences. They theorise that relationship-based interventions are important in reducing exclusion rates and call for more race-based and culturally aware alternatives to school exclusionary practice that are capable of overcoming attitudinal biases. This is based on their view that the combination of both pupils' and teachers' expectations and perceptions leads to a perpetuation of biases from teachers and pupils which undermine the relationships between them, and which foster the unequal application of disciplinary measures, including exclusion.

For example, it has been reported that teachers' perceptions of a pupil's ethnicity can influence their appraisal of the seriousness of a behavioural incident (Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015). In an experimental study conducted in the USA, teachers were given vignettes that described a behavioural incident involving a fictional pupil. They reported that teachers' negative perceptions of black pupils' behaviour and personalities increased the likelihood of teachers giving more serious punitive responses. Those teachers who determined that the pupil in the vignette was black, tended to report the behavioural incident described in the vignette as more serious than when the fictional pupil was white (Okonofua and Eberhardt, 2015). Similarly, it has been reported that teachers' perceptions of 'ideal learners' did not include black pupils, leading to a negative stereotype about black pupils' attainment potential from the teachers interviewed across five schools in England (Wright, 2010). Research has also explored the ways in which teachers described pupils' behaviour (Carlile, 2009) and how negative language descriptors can serve to label certain groups of pupils, especially black and minority ethic boys, as problematic.

Similarly, Smith, Aston and Pyl (2012) highlight the distinction made in teacher's attitudes towards boys' and girls' behaviour. They report that teachers tended to perceive boys as having worse and more aggressive behaviour, being less interested in school, and having more challenging home environments than girls.

Elsewhere, Trotman, Tucker and Martyn (2015) highlight the role of teachers' attitudes towards their pupils as an important factor in exclusion. As well as transitions between curriculum key stages, the main themes identified from teacher interviews as important for reducing exclusions included pupil and teacher behaviours and teaching and learning practices. The authors reference dialogic teaching practice as a protective factor for pupils' enjoyment of learning as this fosters a non-judgemental environment for idea sharing from staff and pupils, creating less need to employ disciplinary measures. The authors suggest that high-quality human connections allow pupils to increase liking of their teachers and excel in learning. The importance of a teacher's personal qualities, such as the use of humour and fun during teaching were also highlighted, as well as teachers being more relaxed about rules like listening to music.

The ways in which these themes might be operationalised in a school to promote non-judgemental attitudes is not made clear. For example, are teachers who demonstrate non-judgemental approaches better trained in theories of psychodynamic theories, like attachment theory, (Bowlby, 1979) than those who do not adopt a non-judgemental stance in their practice?

Attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1979; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 2013) suggests that cognitive attitudes, or internal working models (IWMs), can form over time based on our experiences of attachment to key caregivers and later on, that these attitudes can be reinforced by other relationships we form. Where a pupil has formed a poor attachment with their primary caregiver, they may have developed an IWM characterising adults as untrustworthy and ultimately, as posing a threat to their wellbeing. Based on this theorising, if a pupil thinks in this way, a key adult in their life can disconfirm this attitudinal bias. This is achieved through consistently responding and interacting in an attuned way to the young person's needs, which can lead to the IWM shifting to incorporate more positive attitudes towards adults (Boxall, 2002). Conversely, if the adults respond negatively to a young person's challenging behaviour, IWMs characterised by persecutory adults with malevolent intentions might be strengthened, confirming the pre-existing bias (Brethereton, 2013).

Where staff are trained on re-framing pupils' behaviour as a form of communicating unmet needs and given more time to respond in more emotionally attentive ways to challenging behaviour, pupils have been shown to be able to better able to regulate their emotions and over time, assimilate with the expectations of the school culture (Bennathan and Boxall, 2013). This nurturing approach, championed by Bennathan and Boxall, has also been shown to be effective in secondary schools (Colley, 2009). Why is it then that this approach and consideration for responding to needs rather than behaviour is not applied more widely in schools?

One study collected teachers' attitudes towards disruptive behaviour in primary and secondary schools using an online survey (N=122; Nash, Schlösser and Scarr, 2016). The findings suggest that teachers commonly believe that pupils can control the way they behave in school. The authors report that teachers believed pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour in school were doing so as a choice in order to be disruptive and not because of underlying needs relating to attachment (Nash et.al., 2016). Based on attachment theory, the authors highlight the need for a nurturing approach, focused on collaboration, to support the most troubled pupils. Their findings highlight a need to pay more attention to the relational processes involved in creating an adequate learning environment for teachers and pupils, moving away from within-person based judgements about why disruptive behaviour occurs, which can lead to negative outcomes for pupils and for staff (Nash et al., 2016).

Given the political focus on outcomes and achievement, it has been suggested that the need to discipline and exclude for disruptive behaviour is increased (Thomson, Tawell and Daniels, 2021). The reactive nature of such approaches is associated with higher levels of stress in teachers (Nash et al., 2016). This can lead to dissatisfaction with the job and a desire to leave the profession. Timpson (2019) references a report by Policy Exchange, in which two-thirds of the teachers surveyed said that they wanted to leave the teaching profession because of dealing with challenging behaviour, highlighting the potential, or fear, of being harmed whilst at work as a key factor. It could be said that the current exclusion system is of benefit to no-one because pupils experience yet another rejection and the adults around them deal with stress and feelings of inadequacy if they have failed to provide a rewarding education (Nash et al., 2016).

Using a psychodynamic lens to examine the exclusion system, Dunning, James and Jones (2005) describe a process by which staff attitudes towards pupils who exhibit behaviour deemed challenging lead to 'scape-goating' these pupils. It is suggested that staff view these pupils as the key reason for the high stress level of their jobs. Conceptualised in this way, exclusion offers a temporary release from this perceived cause of stress, however, does not remove the issue of challenging behaviour on a wider scale. As such, another pupil who exhibits similar externalising behaviours will likely become the next 'scapegoat' and the cycle continues (Dunning et al., 2005).

Clearly, the ways in which school staff perceive behaviour can be influenced by their attitudes towards specific groups of people, about what schools ought to be like, the causes of behaviour and how to respond accordingly, as well as their attitudes about the causes of stress in their roles. Taken together, these attitudinal factors at the individual level might lead to discriminatory practice and the over-representation of certain groups receiving disciplinary measures, including exclusions. The next section will discuss the ways in which systemic factors at the school level and beyond might play a role in driving disproportionate exclusionary practice in schools.

Systemic Factors and School Exclusion

Schools whose systems of operation are underpinned by splitting and projection (Dunning, James and Jones, 2005) tend to locate the cause of problematic behaviours within pupils themselves and do not give consideration to wider systemic causes (Graham et al., 2019). It has been suggested that some National policy also reinforces a within-person conceptualisation of behaviour (Thomson et al., 2021). Such policies, like those that advocate a zero-tolerance approach to managing behaviour, are based on the assumption that behaviour is learned and can be shaped through firm boundaries and opportunities for reinforcement. Research on a programme meant to reduce exclusion rates by offering social skills and behaviour management training to at risk pupils (Obsuth et al., 2016) exemplifies this lack of organisational reflectiveness which might culminate in reductionist hypotheses locating problems solely within the child or young person.

Obsuth and colleagues set out to examine the efficacy of a pre-existing intervention aimed at reducing exclusions and problematic behaviours through social-skills training. Participating pupils were nominated by their schools on the basis that they had had previous exclusions, and/or had engaged in challenging behaviours which would lead to disciplinary action. Pupils in the intervention group accessed a weekly, hour-long group session and an individual session. The theoretical framework underpinning this intervention draws on a theory of change that assumes pupils at risk of exclusion have difficulties with social communication and therefore cannot adequately access the social learning opportunities afforded by the curriculum (Clegg et al., 2009). Data analysis showed that positive effects of the intervention group were not found. Instead, participants in the intervention group showed statistically significant higher levels of self-reported exclusion from school, as well as higher levels of negative behavioural outcomes. Consequently, the authors suggest that social skills training in the highest risk pupils is not an effective strategy for reducing exclusions. Instead, they highlight the need for systemic whole-school interventions that focus on fostering connection to the setting and positive pupil-teacher relationships. The intervention was delivered by core workers who were selected based on having worked with children and young people previously. The level of training or expertise these core workers had is not clear and could provide insight into why the intervention was not successful. What is more, it is not clear that a whole-school intervention alone is better than one run in tandem with a personalised social skills intervention, such as the one evaluated in their study.

The efficacy of a whole-school approach to behaviour management has been critiqued by Welsh and Little (2018). The authors propose that the exclusion process as a form of systemic behaviour management can be explained by Broken Windows Theory (Kelling and Wilson, 1982). Broken Windows suggests that by punishing minor infringements, and reducing disorder, larger, more serious crimes can be avoided. Research examining the validity of the theory over time suggests that there is little evidence to support its claims that there is a direct link between disorder and crime and that this type of policing is an effective use of limited resources (Harcourt and Ludwig, 2006). In the context of school exclusion, this translates to targeting low-level behaviours with punitive responses, with an expectation that no larger behavioural issues will be able to come to the fore in the school environment. This means that the 'problem' pupils can be removed from the system and that there is less need for more severe forms of punishment, reinforcing the idea of safety and order within the system (Welsh and Little, 2018).

In a similar vein, Timpson (2019) reflects on the importance of well-ordered environments in promoting good behaviour for all, using a teacher's quote about protecting the learning environment of 29 pupils by removing the poor behaviour of one to illustrate this point. This zero-tolerance approach to behaviour management is being increasingly used in schools, where there are limited resources and a focus on marketization and academic attainment (Gazeley, Marrable, Brown, and Boddy, 2015). With rates of academisation and competition between schools rising, there is less time to spend on thinking about and responding to the emotional needs of the most vulnerable pupils (Welsh and Little, 2018). As such, zero-tolerance policies are associated with a negative impact on relationships with schools, children and young people's development and they tend to be associated with creating more links with Youth Justice Systems (Welsh and Little, 2018).

Timpson goes on to highlight the need for good leadership and systems in schools to support the reduction of exclusion rates. In order that pupils are given what they need to flourish, schools need to have the required skills and systems in place, as well as consideration for how their policies impact upon the protected characteristics differently and ultimately lead to the overrepresentation of certain groups or characteristics (Timpson, 2019). Research has examined teachers' perspectives on the ways in which school systems might be adapted to ensure an anti-discrimination approach to behaviour management.

From semi-structured interviews with 23 teachers in training from four English universities, Gazeley and Dunne (2013) identified that many of them felt unprepared in dealing with issues of racial and cultural diversity. Trainee teachers, who were undertaking a one-year, secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education, highlighted that they felt uncertain of how schools might counteract overrepresentation in excluded pupils by operationalising the Equality Act (2010). Trainee teachers reported that the focus of their course was on promoting academic achievement and that their tutors communicated that there was not adequate time to cover how racial issues impact upon the process of exclusion (Gazeley and Dunne, 2013). This is despite the four universities training these teachers offering a strong focus on social justice and diversity. The study does, however, present with some limitations regarding the claims it makes.

The trainee teachers in the study were interviewed either individually, in pairs or in groups. It is not clear to what extent social desirability bias played a role in these trainee teachers' responses. Perhaps certain trainees felt better equipped to deal with issues of diversity but decided not to voice this opinion in a group interview. Similarly, opportunistic sampling was used, leading to a small-scale project. As such, the trainee teachers interviewed may not reflect the general feelings of trainee teachers across the country and could also reflect the views of a selection of trainees who were disgruntled about their course and wanted to highlight this.

Studies examining the effectiveness of approaches to reduce the rates of FTEs highlight the need for positive systemic change, characterised by meaningful teacher-pupil relationships (Pratt, 2009) and systems that promote the operationalisation of a culture of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957). In a study examining the effectiveness of transferring pupils to another school within a school partnership in place of excluding in the traditional way, Head teachers highlighted the importance of the system communicating to pupils that their disruptive behaviour was not condoned but that it did not mean that they would be less wanted within school systems (Rose, Stanforth, Gilmore and Bevan-Brown, 2018). Head Teachers' views on inter-school transfers as a means for systemic behavioural management were explored. This study did not examine their views on how they made the decision to use this systemic approach as a means for avoiding an official exclusion. Having outlined the ways in which systemic factors might play a role in the exclusion process, the next section will describe the role of social processes in exclusionary practice.

Social Processes and School Exclusion

Achievement gaps between different ethnic and sociocultural groups in schools are well documented (Rearcon, Robinson-Cimpian and Weathers, 2015). Although the causes for these gaps are unclear, correlational data suggests that trends in educational attainment mirror social structures of inequality in the USA (Condron, Tope, Steidl and Freeaman, 2013). These trends in attainment are replicated in the UK (Gilborn, 2008; Strand, 2012) and are also reflected in exclusion data, with certain Black pupils, those with Special Educational Needs and those from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background receiving more exclusions than peers not from these groups (DfE, 2019). Given that some schools' intake represents a broad range of ethnicities and socioeconomic status groups, and still produce rates of high achievement for all pupils, one cannot infer that ethnicity or social class alone can explain these differences (Mattison and Aber, 2007).

Mattison and Aber (2007) suggest that the racial climate of a school, the ways in which interpersonal interactions between members of different ethnic groups are experienced, plays a major role in the attainment and level of discipline pupils experience. The researchers surveyed African American and European American pupils, 18% of whom were from low-income families. They collected pupils' perceptions of their school's racial climate and found it differed across racial groups. Positive perceptions of a school's racial climate were correlated with higher rates of attainment and lower rates of discipline. African American pupils reported more negative perceptions of their school's racial climate than did European-American pupils.

The authors state that collecting views of racial climate allows for the appreciation of individual differences in perceptions of structural inequalities and the ways in which these are experienced at the individual level. This allows a moving away from attributing gaps in attainment and disciplinary measures to within-person or family characteristics to re-examine the social processes that might perpetuate these differences (Mattison and Aber, 2007). While this may be the case, the research employed surveys to collect individual perceptions of structural inequalities. Participants were asked to answer questions on the topics of racial fairness, experiences of racism, and need for change. Perhaps the individual perceptions collected would have been more nuanced if participants were able to expand on their answers through interviews about their views instead of, or as well as, completing the survey.

In research focused on tracing the link between the role of prejudice and inequality in education, Popa, Laurian and Bochiş (2012) describe a cyclic process that exacerbates disparate outcomes for certain groups. Beginning with the 'in-group' or majority's desire to identify as having superior characteristics, members of the 'out-group' or minority are subject to prejudice based on characteristics the majority perceive as less favourable (Allport, 1954). This schema, or cognitive shortcut, can lead to discrimination when these two groups interact. In the school context, this might mean that staff practice is influenced by unconscious bias and could result in a negative school experience for minority group members, widening the gap in attainment and rates of discipline used for both groups. These gaps serve to further embed prejudiced thinking based on the notion of the existence of innate characteristics within these groups. For example, the idea that majority group members are better able to achieve academically and are less disruptive or challenging in school compared to minority group members. This view could become prevalent in a school where unconscious bias has created a disparity in educational and behavioural outcomes (Popa et al., 2012).

One study examined the effects of perceived teacher discrimination on attainment in Black African and Black Caribbean pupils and found a negative correlation between perceived teacher discrimination and academic achievement (Bryan, Williams, Kim, Morrison and Caldwell, 2018). The perceived discrimination included being ignored or not picked by teachers when volunteering answers; being graded unfairly or held to a lower expectation than white peers; getting in trouble more often with teachers and being viewed as dishonest or more threatening. This, it is argued, leads to a lack of sense of belonging in school, which can lead to poorer academic outcomes as well as greater chances of being disciplined or excluded (Bryan et al., 2018).

The authors make the point that Black Caribbean pupils were less affected by perceived teacher discrimination when they felt a stronger sense of belonging to their school, compared with Black African pupils. This, they state, is reason not to group pupils based on broad ethnic or racial categories when examining the effects of discrimination. This could lead to overlooking the subtle ways discrimination can act in relation to groups or towards specific marginalised characteristics. Similar to Timpson's (2019) suggestions, the authors recommend that schools have robust and sensitive means for collecting and analysing data in order to understand the nuanced characteristics of their pupil intake to avoid discriminatory practice or policies (Bryan et al., 2018).

The notion of intersectionality provides a means for examining the additive effects of discrimination, based on nuanced characteristics. Intersectionality examines the ways in which individual marginalised characteristics can combine to make a person more vulnerable to discrimination (Seng, Lopez, Sperlich, Hamama, and Reed Meldrum, 2012). Its roots are in black feminism (Crenshaw, 1989) and it allows for exploration of the ways in which black women experience discrimination differently, and often to a greater extent, than either black men or white women. Belonging to more than one marginalised group can lead to an individual feeling that they are never quite in a discrimination-free environment. The experiences of Black African Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) young people in America, for example, have been examined to explore the links between their perceived discrimination and psychosocial outcomes (Thoma and Heubner, 2013). The researchers found an additive effect of antigay and racist discrimination on measures of self-reported depression, i.e., Respondents who identified as LGB and black experienced greater discrimination than their LGB and non-black, or Black and non-LGB peers. This illustrates the ways in which social processes like discrimination can manifest in response to multiple characteristics.

In order to combat some of the social processes that underly discrimination and serve to exacerbate inequality on a grander scale in schools, Bryan and colleagues (2018) call for training on recognising and responding to racial biases for school staff which might reduce the incidence of perceived discrimination, increase the quality of teacher-pupil relationships and lead to a greater sense of belonging in schools. This is especially relevant, given that trainee teachers have reported that they felt ill-equipped in dealing with racial issues or how to teach in a non-racist way when joining the practice (Gazeley and Dunne, 2013).

Racial biases may not be the only cognitive shortcuts leading to discrimination in schools. Bourdieu's (2011) theories on the forms of capital and the notion of cultural reproduction within the education system suggest a mechanism by which perceived membership with a social group or class, can bias the interactions one has with perceived members of another group or class. In the context of the education system, teachers from a 'middle class' social standing might respond more favourably to the pupils they perceive as a part of this group, compared to pupils they see as belonging to a lower social class. The perception of one's class is formed by considering their social capital (the groups to which they belong and the beneficial interpersonal connections this creates) and their cultural capital (the ways in which they embody and express membership of their social class; Bourdieu, 1990; 2011). Bourdieu (1990) described habitus as the outward expression of one's cultural capital. It could include the language and accent an individual uses to speak, the past times they enjoy or their values and core beliefs. At the individual level, prejudice is activated when the habitus encountered of another person is not reflective of ones' own group. This notion could explain the more favourable treatment of middle-class pupils and their parents and the less favourable treatment of lower-class families engaging with the education system (Gazeley, 2012).

Studies examining interactions between schools and families during the exclusion process have highlighted the perceived discrimination towards lower-class parents based on an assumption that they would be less interested in the value of the education system in general (Gazeley, 2012). Similarly, teachers have reported that a level of privilege operates when interacting with middle-class parents as it is expected that they will have a greater interest in their child's education and be better able to advocate their position than would working class parents (Kulz, 2015). Clearly, social processes are an important part of how we humans connect but can also explain how we can diverge into disparate groups over time. In the context of education, these social processes, as well as the previously mentioned attitudinal and systemic factors, might be reinforcing structural inequalities - namely, the disproportionate exclusion of pupils with affiliation(s) to certain groups. The next section will address the role that Head Teachers play in decision making in this context.

Decision Making and School Exclusion

The power to make the decision to exclude a pupil from school lies with the Head Teacher alone. However, there has been a limited amount of research into Head Teachers' decision making, especially as it relates to school exclusions (Monk, 2005).

Decisions are a form of meta-problem, because they need to be made when another problem arises in order to improve a situation (Dunning and Elliott, 2019). In the context of primary headship, Dunning and Elliott propose that decisions can present in three ways: closed decisions, where a solution is difficult to envisage, but when a response must be made; open decisions, where there are lots of options available, but it is difficult to select the best one; and dilemmas, where a decision needs to be made between options with seemingly equally positive and negative outcomes. Head Teachers need to consider a number of factors when deciding if a behavioural incident requires responding with an exclusion, including the nature of the incident, the Head Teacher's knowledge of the parties involved, and how the Head Teacher was made aware of the incident (Monk, 2005).

Monk (2005) compares the Head Teacher role in exclusion decision making to the ruling process in the criminal justice system. By his comparison, Head Teachers are given such a large amount of responsibility that, if the role existed in the criminal justice system, replacing judge, jury, prosecution and defence, trials would be unfair and would lead to breaches of human rights. Elsewhere, the Head Teacher role has been described as a gatekeeper, because of the autonomy given when making decisions about which pupils can stay and who must leave (Macrae, Maguire and Milbourne, 2003).

Head Teachers' decision making has been explored in the context of general school improvements (Higham and Booth, 2018; Amina, 2015) but no research has been conducted which explores Head Teachers' accounts of the decision-making process they navigate in school exclusions. What is more, Head Teachers' perspectives on making the decision to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour specifically have, to date, not been sought. Research highlights the role that Head Teachers' decision making can have on reducing exclusions, by breaking the cycle of excluding pupils who are difficult to engage and instead working with them to improve their behaviour (Macrae, Maguire and Milbourne, 2003).

A discussion of the complexity of making decisions to exclude black pupils as a black school leader in the USA is presented by Goings, Alexander, Davis and Walters (2018). They highlight the multiple obligations school leaders have to various stakeholders, some of which are incompatible. For example, ensuring high levels of academic attainment across a school whilst also responding to individual needs requiring a more pastoral approach. In addition to this, school leaders might consider their personal values, risks to their job security, or risks to their social standing when making decisions on exclusion. The interplay of personal views and professional aspirations add a layer of complexity to the decision-making process. Given the well published need to respond dynamically and flexibly to pupils' needs (Cole et al., 2019), how can school leaders be expected to make well balanced decisions? One suggested way of achieving a more equitable outcome is through the use of Moral Architecture (Wagner and Simpson, 2009) to assist in making decisions flexibly and in line with the overarching ethos of a school.

Wagner and Simpson (2009) describe a framework of questions that assist school leaders in making complex decisions about controversial issues. They begin with the main question of 'Who do you want in this community?' and drill down with follow up questions. This approach focuses on applying the philosophies of morality and ethics to developing an ethos, around which systemic decisions can be made, considering a range of factors and viewpoints. The need for reflection and flexibility in applying such scaffolding to decision making, they argue, is incompatible with rigid, zero-tolerance behaviour policies. Do Head Teachers in England apply these methods of deliberation to assist their decision making? The English Government guidance (DfE, 2019) references the importance of Head Teachers relying on clear and firm behaviour policies to shape their decisions, but do not reference a school's ethos as important for guiding choices.

McCluskey et al. (2019) examined differences in policy and practice related to exclusion across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and interviewed key stakeholders on this topic. They found that school ethos played a major role in determining how a school dealt with exclusion. One interviewee from a Scottish Local Authority, where local government has more influence in the decision-making process, spoke about a conversation they had with a Head Teacher. They encouraged the Head Teacher to reflect on a solution to meeting a child's needs once excluded from their school, referencing the use of a risk management plan to validate their decision to exclude. This decision-making process, the authors state, can be distressing for Head Teachers (McCluskey et al., 2019). Staff in Local Authorities outside of England who are in regular contact with schools have an in-depth knowledge of the emotional impact that exclusion decision making can have on the school staff (McCluskey et al., 2019). The researchers highlight concerns from interviewees about giving sole responsibility to exclude to Head Teachers in England. This, they report, is linked with less accountability or challenge. They present the English context as one in which Head Teachers are made to take decisions on exclusions, that these decisions can be distressing to make, and that they are not being challenged by Local Authorities who have little contact with, or knowledge of, the context of their local schools.

Research from the field of experimental psychology on punitive decision making, based on a computerised game (The Justice Game) and fictitious vignettes, suggests that individuals rely on group preferences to guide their decision (Son, Bhandari, and Feldman Hall, 2019). The researcher presented American undergraduate pupils with scenarios in which they had to decide whether or not to offer punishment to a perpetrator. In the vignettes section of the study, the participants were told to make decisions with computerised other players about how to punish crimes of theft and assault committed either to a neutral person or against themselves, when they were the victim of the fictitious crime. It was found that participants increased their desire to restore justice through punishment when the group of computerised others wanted to punish. This group influence was also seen in trials when the group no longer had an influence on the outcome of the decision.

When deliberating on how to punish the perpetrator in the vignettes, participants were asked to rate how severe the punishment should be on a scale of zero to 100. The same group influence was seen on decision making in these scenarios and this influence was greater when the participant was the juror (the crime was committed against a neutral person) compared to when the participant was the victim. Although conducted under laboratory conditions with university pupils participating for monetary or course credit rewards, these results might shed light on the group processes at play when a Head Teacher consults a group of teachers in their school during the decision-making process of exclusion. The results of this research suggest that, if the Head teacher is aware of the group's punitive preference, even when the group cannot influence the decision, the Head teacher might be likely to offer a more punitive response. Might this be true for new Head Teachers, starting in a school with historically high levels of exclusion?

Clearly, the decision-making process around exclusions is a complex one. What is more, exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour require Head Teachers to consider a number of factors and viewpoints in their decision-making to determine what behaviours receive this label. As outlined above, the role of attitudinal factors, social processes and systemic factors in appraising behaviour are well documented, with staff reported to be influenced by biases when making judgements about certain groups of pupils and their behaviour. This can lead to fractured relationships and pupils experiencing a lack of belongingness in schools. These dysfunctional relationships serve to increase the likelihood of certain groups being subjected to school exclusion.

Although there are many recommendations made in the above literature about how to foster high-quality pupil-teacher relationships and the systemic factors that can be ameliorated to reduce school exclusions, the rates of disproportionate exclusions seen nationally persist. Educational Psychologists are well placed to support schools in engaging in change, through introducing evidence-based recommendations, however, the literature suggests that the practice of EPs is not called upon by schools to help with reducing exclusions.

Research has addressed the perspectives of other professionals, including Local Authority officers, about the usefulness of Government guidance on excluding, and suggested ways in which bias might influence staff's decision making about disciplinary measures through gathering the views of teachers in schools. What is not clear from existing literature, is how Head Teachers across England, through their own accounts, navigate the exclusion decision-making process for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour and whether they might be influenced by the same biases as teaching staff in their schools. No research exists which explores a national sample of Head Teachers' accounts of the factors they deem to be important in this process or whether they consult others for advice or guidance.

The current research sheds light on this topic by directly collecting Head Teachers views about how they make decisions on exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. This was done by collecting their views on the extent to which they consult others in decision making, through an initial questionnaire. A selection of questionnaire respondents, based on representing a diverse range of Head Teachers nationally, were then interviewed individually, to explore their views on how they navigate the decision-making process. It is hoped that the combination of qualitative and quantitative data providing a critical realist lens, as well as the national sample of Head Teachers represented, will elicit important information that bridges gaps in the existing literature in this field.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The research employed a partially mixed, sequential dominant status design (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009), using quantitative data collected from online questionnaires from a sample of Head Teachers in the first stage, and qualitative data collected from individual interviews with a selection of these Head Teachers in the second stage. In the first stage, the quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. In the second stage, the qualitative data from a selection of these head teachers were analysed using the Thematic Analysis technique described in the 'Data Analysis' section below. The selection of Head Teachers in the second phase aimed to include a diverse range of participants, based on the demographic information they provided in the first phase.

The Context

This research was conducted in England, collecting the views of Head Teachers across the country from a range of primary and secondary schools.

Research Design and Methodology

This research used a partially mixed sequential dominant status design (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009). It has been suggested that all mixed-research methodologies can be categorised into one of eight typologies (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009). A partially mixed sequential dominant status design is one of these typologies, and entails conducting research over two sequential phases with a greater emphasis on either the qualitative or the quantitative component in answering research questions. In this research, demographic information and information about the extent to which 216 Head Teachers consult others during exclusion decision making were collected using a questionnaire in the initial quantitative phase. Then, in the second, qualitative phase, 14 Head Teachers were recruited for semi-structured interviews from the initial sample of participants who agreed to be interviewed (N=53). Purposeful sampling, employing a maximum variation strategy (Palinkas et al. 2015) was used to guide recruitment from this initial sample who agreed to be interviewed. Purposeful sampling is used to identify and select participants who can provide rich information about a topic of study (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, maximum variation in representation of cases was sought from the participants based on the demographic information provided in the first phase. This was to ensure a greater range of experiences could be accessed, based on participants' school location, school population size, participants' reports of their school's socio-economic and ethnic diversity, and historical rates of exclusions issued for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. The second, qualitative phase of this study was the dominant phase, in that it provided the majority of data that addressed the research questions.

Rationale for Using a Mixed Methodological Approach

A mixed-methodological approach to research can allow for the novel combination of quantitative and qualitative data, producing potentially inspirational ways in which to view and engage with important social topics (Greene, 2008). In line with a critical realist/pragmatist stance, the topic of this research, exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, requires individual constructs as well as objectively agreed criteria, in order that the topic is better understood. Given the paucity of research examining Head Teachers' views of the exclusion decision making process, as well as the socially constructed nature of the term 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour', Head Teachers' views on this subject were collected through semi-structured interviews. This allowed for the collection of more in-depth accounts of how Head Teachers understood and operationalised this definition of behaviour, in navigating the exclusion decision making process.

Quantitative data, about the extent to which Head Teachers consult others during this process, as well as the extent to which they felt well equipped in making the decision to exclude, were also collected. It was decided that these data would provide another lens through which to view the decision-making process, grounded in a more objective stance. As well as the benefit of providing different perspectives on the same or similar issues, mixed methodologies can allow the combination of data to be greater than the sum of its parts. Mertens (2011), highlights the potential for mixed methods research to illustrate different versions of reality and assist in facilitating change by increasing understanding of what is real and what aspects of the context should be focused on to promote positive change. This is especially relevant for topics concerned with social justice, and Mertens (2010) highlights the Transformative Paradigm, which is concerned with addressing social issues and inequality. This paradigm focuses on the adoption of a pragmatist stance, whereby the researcher is involved in choosing an explanation of findings that best fits the promotion of social justice for disadvantaged groups, and disregards the paradigmatic conflicts involved in the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

Taken together, it was decided that these qualitative and quantitative methodologies would allow for exploring the objectively ‘real’ elements of the decision making, as well as the individual constructs that facilitate the exclusion decision-making process. This, it was hoped, would reveal the ‘real’ aspects of the process that might be changed in order to reduce the disproportionate exclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Researcher Position and Epistemological Position

The importance of the researcher's presence in interviews to better appreciate subjective experiences has been noted (Mertens, 2003). As well as this presence, mixed-methodology researchers play an important role in collecting data and generating findings (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). This is not done without the influence of the researchers' values, however, and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) highlight the pragmatist researcher's drive to provide a best-fit solution to social problems and address inequalities.

My personal interest in researching exclusion comes from my belief that society should be more equal and my own experience of school. As a resident of London, I am reminded of the impact that inequality has on disadvantaged groups, particularly those who have been socially excluded. During my secondary education in Ireland, I was excluded for a number of fixed periods due to my behaviour which the school deemed to be challenging and which the Head Teacher, through their own admission, was obligated to uphold. These exclusions did not improve my behaviour and served to diminish my sense of belongingness to my school.

My professional interest in the topic of exclusion comes from my work as an Assistant Psychologist in an inner-London specialist Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Secondary school. This school accepted children and young people who had been excluded from other schools due to their behaviour which was deemed to be challenging. I was able to understand the exclusion process from a professional perspective but could also relate to some of the difficulties the pupils faced. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I have worked in two London Local Authorities, one known for its cultural and racial diversity and one for its racial homogeneity and subscription to a grammar-school model. Through these experiences, I have noticed the multiplicative effects of exclusion on children and young people in different contexts, and the effects this can have on later life.

The epistemological stance of this research is informed by critical realism, which sits between the philosophies of social constructivism and positivism (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). Social constructivism posits that reality or truth exists because it is created through social interactions and that knowledge is therefore socially constructed, using language as a tool. It is seen as the antithesis of positivism, which maintains that there is an essential truth or reality that exists independently of social interactions (Burr, 2015). It is suggested that the adoption of a critical realist stance in mixed methodological research allows for the collection of quantitative data with the assumption that there are some aspects of the world that exist independently of our perceptions and thoughts (a positivist ontology), and the collection of qualitative data, with an acceptance that the ways in which we understand these 'real' aspects of the world are socially constructed and agreed upon, and therefore not free of subjectivity (a social constructivist epistemology; Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). By combining these philosophies in one piece of research, it is assumed that the differing strengths and limitations of each can be overcome, providing a new, deeper understanding of the topic of research (Greene, 2008). However, it is also argued that to combine these philosophical positions is problematic because they are attempting to explain our understanding of the world and the creation of knowledge in tandem using incompatible paradigms (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). Despite these seemingly obvious incompatibilities, it is claimed that, from a pragmatist stance, combining methods of research should be based on the usefulness of what they can achieve, paying less attention to the paradigmatic conflicts underlying the combination of these methods (Greene, 2008; Mertens, 2011).

Sampling Strategy and Participants

Phase One

A link to an online questionnaire hosted on the online survey software 'Qualtrics' was circulated by email through the researcher's professional contacts in one English Local Authority; through academic contacts at the researcher's university; and posts on the online forums for TES.com and on the social media platform Twitter, specifically targeting Head Teachers and Head Teacher groups. The researcher created a Twitter profile with a brief description of its purpose available to all other users (Appendix A) and in order to connect with Head Teachers in England, the profile 'followed' users who had included their job title of 'Head Teacher' in their profile's description. The researcher posted two requests for participants on Twitter (Appendix B), and 're-tweeted' these requests a total of three times each, over a four-week period in order to increase the visibility of the requests amongst users.

The researcher also accessed school contact details through the website whatdotheyknow.com, (https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/uk_school_contact_information_in_3) which publishes freedom of information requests and responses. A freedom of information request sent to the Department for Education had been responded to with a file that contained data collected on 17th of December 2020 about all educational establishments in England. This data file comprised 24,943 entries and included information about the setting's location, type of establishment, main school email address and the Head Teacher's first and last names. The information used from this website was the general email addresses for primary and secondary state schools in England, as well as the name of the Head Teacher of each school. State schools include community schools; foundation schools; voluntary schools; academies; free schools and grammar schools. An email with a link to the online questionnaire was sent to each school within these criteria (N=13,152), addressed to the Head teacher, using the Mail Merge function of Microsoft Word (Appendix C)

The initial email sent to Head Teachers included a request to participate in the study, an attached participant information sheet (Appendix D), a debrief leaflet (Appendix E) and an invitation to contact the researcher to discuss any questions or clarify any concerns before deciding whether or not to participate.

Phase Two

The interview participants were recruited from those who completed the initial questionnaire and indicated that they would be interested in participating in the interview (N= 53, 24.5% of total survey respondents). Using maximum variation sampling, recruitment was guided based on demographic information including the geographical location and pupil population of the school at which they are Head Teacher; the socio-economic diversity of pupils in the school; the most represented ethnic groups in the school; the Head Teacher's ethnicity, and number of exclusions issued in the academic year 2018-2019 for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. This approach to selecting participants for interviews was used to ensure a broad range of perspectives could be collected from a diverse as possible group of Head Teachers. Given the paucity of National research into the decision making of Head Teachers, recruitment aimed to select a range of participants' from across the country. Relationships in schools between staff and pupils have been highlighted as an important factor in decision making about punitive responses to behaviour, including school exclusions. As outlined earlier, these relationships might be influenced by pupils’ ethnicity, socio-economic status and the size of a school (Graham et al., 2019). Similarly, Head Teachers’ ethnicity has been reported as an important factor in understanding their decision making around exclusions (Goings et al., 2018). Finally, a wealth of literature exists which suggests that certain practice and processes (in particular, those that are relationship-focused) are associated with lower rates of exclusion (Obsuth et al., 2014). Exploring Head Teachers’ views from both high- and low-excluding schools was decided in order to provide better insight into how Head Teachers conceptualise the practice associated with the exclusion rates in their schools. Taken together, it was decided to recruit participants based on these aspects of demographic information, as they have been deemed important in previous studies of school exclusion and were, therefore, important to consider in this study.

The researcher emailed Head Teachers from the initial 53 who expressed interest in being interviewed, based on representing a broad range across the demographic information outlined above, to set up a date to conduct the interview. A total of 14 Head Teachers were ultimately recruited for interviews. Once a date for the interview had been agreed with each Head Teacher, the researcher sent an invitation to the video conferencing meeting via email, including a copy of the participant information sheet, a copy of the digital consent form (Appendix F), a copy of the participant debrief leaflet and an invitation to contact the researcher to discuss any questions or clarify any concerns before deciding to participate. Interviews were conducted using the application Microsoft Teams. The quality of video interviews compared to in-person interviews has been examined in recent research looking at IBS Patients’ experiences of hypnotherapy (Krouwel, Jolly, and Greenfield, 2019).

The researchers found that, during in-person interviews, participants said more, however, the same range of topics and a similar number of codes were covered in both types of interviews. They concluded that the differences between interviews conducted online and in-person are minimal and that video interviews can provide a good alternative to in-person interviews for qualitative data collection.

Participants were invited to use the video function of the Microsoft Teams calling software to enhance the rapport and enable attuned interaction between interviewee and interviewer. The video-conference audio was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Data collection through videoconferencing was decided due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and its associated restrictions on non-essential travel and contact. Qualitative data collection requires good listening skills, good perception of non-verbal communication and sensitivity to the speaker's mood and tone (Foley and Timonen, 2014). It was decided that data collected through video conferencing interviews would be of good enough quality to allow the capture of these forms of communication more readily than a telephone interview, in the context of the social distancing guidance associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Procedure for Data Collection

Phase one

The first stage of this research involved Head Teachers across England answering an online questionnaire about their own and their school's demographic information, as well as their experience and views of the exclusion decision making process. Head Teachers were sent a hyperlink to the questionnaire which was hosted on the online survey software 'Qualtrics'. Head Teachers firstly had to read through the participant information presented at the start of the questionnaire, and were informed that they could contact the researcher if they had any questions or concerns about participating. They were then prompted to tick in agreement to the clauses of the consent form. Participants were then presented the questions sequentially. The questions required answers to be provided either through selecting an answer from a drop-down list, using a scale to provide an answer, or through typing an answer into a ‘free-text’ box. A completion bar was displayed throughout the questionnaire for each participant, which indicated the participant’s completion rate of the questionnaire at any given time. Once the participant had completed all questions, they were prompted to provide their email address if they were interested in being interviewed in the next phase of the study. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their time and informed that the questionnaire was now complete. The questionnaire duration was between five and ten minutes long for each participant.

Phase Two

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 Head Teachers in England, lasting approximately one hour each. Once a Head Teacher had been selected for interview, the researcher contacted them by email to arrange a suitable time for the interview. This email was sent with the participant information sheet, debrief sheet and the consent form attached. Once a suitable time was confirmed, the researcher sent an invitation link to the participant for a Microsoft Teams virtual meeting. At the start of the interview, the researcher thanked the participant for their time and gave them the opportunity to ask any outstanding questions they had, or to voice any concerns. The researcher then reminded the participant that the interview was going to be audio recorded and began the recording. The interview started with the researcher reading out a description of the topics the interview was going to cover. The first question on the interview guide was always asked first, and depending on the answers provided, the researcher proceeded with asking the remainder of the questions, or added additional questions in response to unexpected topics being discussed by participants. Once the researcher was satisfied that the Research Questions had been addressed, the interview was ended. The researcher again thanked the participant for their time, and sign-posted them to the debrief sheet if they had any concerns about what had been discussed and wanted to speak with someone about these.

Measures and Materials

Phase One

The questionnaire sent to Head Teachers (Appendix G) was developed to collect demographic information about the Head Teachers and their schools (to be used when recruiting participants in the second stage of the research), as well as to address the third research question. It was deemed important to use a standard of agreed terminology when collecting personal demographics, to ensure sensitivity when asking participants about protected characteristics, and to ensure familiarity with the language used. As such, the nomenclature of demographic information employed by the Office for National Statistics (https://www.ons.gov.uk/census) in collecting Census data was adopted for the questionnaire items. The questionnaire began with outlining the aims and research questions of the project, followed by the participation requirements, and a digital consent form. The questionnaire concluded with an invitation for participants to provide their email address if they were interested in being contacted by the researcher for an interview.

Collecting Demographic Information. The demographic information questions asked Head Teachers about their; age, ethnicity, country of birth, first language, religion, education level, and years of experience as a Head Teacher, the location of Head Teacher’s schools, the size of the pupil population in their school, a rating of the school’s socio-economic diversity, the least and most represented ethnicities represented in the pupil population in their school, as well as details of pupils who were at risk of exclusion and who were ultimately excluded, and details of the numbers of Fixed Term and Permanent Exclusions, as well as the number of exclusions (both Fixed Term and Permanent) for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. The questions relating to the number of exclusions issued were based on figures from the academic year 2018/19, due to the interruptions caused to school attendance in the academic year 2019/20 by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collecting Quantitative Data. The questionnaire included questions about the extent to which Head Teachers consult others during the exclusion for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour decision making process, and their view of how well equipped they feel in making the decision to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. These questions were presented with a sliding scale, numbered 0 to 10, on which participants were required to answer these questions. The question ‘What is the extent to which you consult other parties/peers/professionals during the exclusion decision making process?’ was presented with a value of zero which represented the answer ‘I don’t consult others’ and a value of ten which represented the answer ‘I always consult others.’ The question ‘What is the extent to which you feel well equipped in making the decision on whether or not to exclude a pupil?’ was presented with a value of zero which represented the answer ‘I don’t feel well-equipped at all’ and a value of ten which represented the answer ‘I feel extremely well equipped.’ These questions were created for the purpose of this study.

Phase Two

A semi-structured interview guide was used during the individual interviews with Head Teachers (Appendix H). It included an opening statement about the topic to be discussed, followed by six questions. These questions either directly asked about the research questions, or about the participants' views on, and experience with, the exclusion decision making process. The first question asked about exclusion practice in general in the participant's school, with a focus on eliciting any key points in the process and its perceived function. The next questions asked participants to describe an incident of decision making about exclusion that was particularly difficult, and then to reflect on an instance when the exclusion decision making process led to a positive outcome. The following questions addressed Research Questions two and three by asking about the factors that influenced decision making, and if participants called upon advice from other parties in this process. The final question asked about participants thoughts on the future of exclusion in their schools and if they would change anything if they could. This was intended to provide a positive ending to the interview.

The semi-structured nature of the interview schedule allowed the order of the interview questions to be changed and the researcher to ask additional questions, depending on the responses given and the flow of the conversation. This flexible approach allowed the researcher to get more in-depth responses from participants, particularly as they explained important moments in their careers which influenced their decision making, thereby providing a richer picture of their experiences (McCartan and Robson, 2016).

Data Analysis

Phase One

A total of 466 participants completed at least 5% of the questionnaire questions, with 216 of these completing 100% of the questionnaire. In order to ensure as complete a data set as possible for each respondent, only the responses from participants who completed 100% of the questionnaire were included in the quantitative analysis (N=216). This meant that they had provided answers to at least the questions about their; age, ethnicity, country of birth, first language, religion, education level, years of experience as a Head Teacher, and the location of their school in England. The data were checked for consistency in the ways in which questions were answered and edited where necessary to ensure homogeneity. For example, in answer to the question about years of experience as a Head Teacher, answers that had been written in words rather than in digits were changed to digits. One respondent answered the question about their age with the symbols '**%**' and '**"**', which the researcher interpreted as a typing error intended to represent 52, using the same keys on a computer keyboard.

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations and frequencies, were produced for the quantitative data collected from these 216 respondents using the SPSS. In order to address the third research questions, a Pearson's correlation was undertaken to examine the relationship between the variable 'extent to which the Head Teacher consults others during the exclusion decision making process' and 'extent to which the Head Teacher feels well equipped in making the decision on exclusion'.

Phase Two

Thematic Analysis, particularly the approach to doing so outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019), provides a useful tool for engaging reflectively and reflexively with understanding and analysing qualitative data, whilst keeping in mind the researcher’s role in knowledge creation. It allows for the adoption of a pragmatist stance in engaging with ‘real’ and ‘socially constructed’ issues in tandem, particularly in research adopting a mixed methodological design (Creswell and Poth, 2018). It was decided to employ Thematic Analysis on the basis that it provided the best fit for the pragmatist stance of the research. Other approaches to qualitative data analysis, it was decided, would not have fit with this pragmatic philosophy. For example, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Moustakas, 1994) and Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014) adopt constructivist paradigms, assuming that there is no true reality. Similarly, Narrative approaches to analysis are associated with post-modernist perspectives which are more concerned with deconstructing dominant narratives but not necessarily with facilitating tangible change (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

This research used the six stages of Thematic Analysis originally outlined in Braun and Clarke’s 2006 paper, whilst being mindful of their more recent critiques of some of the ways in which Thematic Analysis has been applied to qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). As such, the approach taken to analysis of the qualitative data collected included:

Stage One. The audio recordings of interviews were transcribed using the online software Otter. Following this automatic transcription, the researcher read through the transcripts whilst re-listening to the audio recordings to check for accuracy in the transcripts. Each transcript was then re-read on Microsoft Word, with the researcher highlighting interesting sections or words that related to the topic of exclusion decision making, and making initial notes about ideas that these interesting excerpts inspired.

Stage Two. The highlighted transcripts were then re-read, and the highlighting was edited to encompass initial codes which related to answering the Research Questions. This theoretical approach to coding (rather than an exploratory, inductive approach) was decided given the large amount of data collected through the 14 individual interviews, which lasted approximately one hour each. Once each transcript had been reviewed, with initial codes highlighted, the researcher then began a process of refining these initial codes and noting the code in a column on the left of the transcript (Appendix I). Given the importance of subjectivity in the researcher's role when generating codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019), inter-coder reliability was not checked. Instead, the researcher presented iterations of coding (at each of the stages of code development above) to their first and second supervisors, and then a codebook (Appendix J) was shared with them. This was done in an attempt to increase the clarity of the decision-making process the researcher employed when deciding what constituted a code, and why. The researcher's initial notes were consulted throughout this process to ensure reflection on earlier interpretations of what each participant had said, as well as to generate further thinking about how to code.

Stage Three. The codes from each interview were next grouped according to emerging categories. The categories that were established allowed for the creation of patterns in the content of the codes. The researcher noted down brief sentences which attempted to describe these patterns. These descriptive sentences were initially discussed with the researcher's first and second supervisors in order to review their applicability to the codes generated and in relation to addressing the research questions. Once agreed to be applicable, the patterns were then summarised by labelling them with initial themes (Appendix K).

Stage Four. The initial themes were reviewed to ensure that they were relevant to the codes within individual transcripts and also between all transcripts. When the codes were deemed to be applicable at both of these levels, they were collated and presented visually in an initial thematic map (Appendix L)

Stage Five. The thematic map was shared with the researcher's first and second supervisors for feedback on its applicability to capturing the richness of the data set. The thematic map was reviewed and revised as new initial themes were added, to ensure coherent links and stories were being presented by the analysis. Through this process, the researcher was then able to name and define each revised theme. The final themes were then presented in a final thematic map (Appendix M).

Stage Six. Whilst writing the results section of the research analysis, the researcher reviewed and selected the most pertinent extracts from the transcripts which provided a good basis for epitomising each of the final themes, thereby linking them in one narrative about Head Teacher's Decision making in the exclusion process for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Again, feedback on the selection of these extracts was sought from the researcher's first supervisor, and amendments were made to ensure that the extracts provided a rich picture linked to the theme it represented.

Piloting

Phase One

The questionnaire was shared with three of the researcher's professional contacts (fellow trainee educational psychologists, one of whom was a former assistant Head Teacher) and two of the researcher's personal contacts (one former Primary school Head Teacher in England, and one current Primary school Head Teacher in Scotland) in order to review the clarity of the questions and the usability and ‘flow’ of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback provided by professional colleagues, changes were made to some of the questions relating to the ‘drop down’ options provided for reporting ethnicity and country of birth, because they were difficult to use in the first iteration of the questionnaire when they provided a large range of potential answers. Feedback from the researcher’s personal contacts was provided through telephone discussion. This led to changing the wording of the questions relating to the number of exclusions given as it was unclear whether these were to be reported based on how many pupils had been excluded or how many days of exclusion were issued in total, including instances for the same pupil/s.

Phase Two

The researcher used professional and personal contacts to review the initial interview schedule for flow and appropriateness for addressing the research questions. These contacts included a former primary school Head Teacher in England, a current primary school Head Teacher in Scotland, and a fellow trainee EP who was a former assistant Head Teacher. The researcher piloted the interview guide with these three contacts over the telephone, and then these contacts provided feedback through a discussion with the researcher. As a result of this consultation, changes were made to the order of questions asked, so that questions relating to more personal constructs and beliefs were asked at a later stage, with a general question about how exclusion is used in the participant’s school asked first as a warmup question, as it was felt that asking for personal reflection too early in the interview was not conducive to providing rich answers. The wording of questions was also amended to clarify that participants should answer regarding both fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions, rather than focusing on just one type of exclusion.

Ethical and Professional Issues

Given the sensitive nature of the topic of exclusion, and the methods employed in this research, a number of potential ethical issues arose that needed to be considered and addressed by the researcher. These were proposed to the awarding University's Ethics Committee for review before the study began. The issues will be described below, and the steps taken to mitigate risks to participants will be described.

Firstly, the research was planned and carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, school staff were required to work in novel and flexible ways, both at schools remaining open as 'Hubs' and working from home. Head Teachers may have had a lot of extra work to do during this period, related to risk assessment and management. There was a potential that adding another piece of voluntary work, in the form of participating in this project could have created another form of pressure in their daily lives. As such, the researcher ensured that research participation was made as brief as possible, through careful consideration of the way the semi-structured interviews were carried out. This was done by keeping the research questions to hand on a post-it note during interviews so that the researcher was able to ensure the discussion was concise and relevant to addressing these questions. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the participation requirements were set out clearly to participants, through the participant information sheet and through providing the option for participants to clarify any aspects of the participation that were not clear before participating, via email, and at the beginning of the interview. The researcher offered flexibility to participants when setting up the interview times, working around Head Teachers' availability. Participants were also offered the option of taking breaks during participation, to avoid creating pressure to complete the questionnaire or interview in one sitting.

The second ethical issue that arose related to informed consent. Given the researchers links to a Local Authority in their role as a Trainee EP, and links to their University, participants may have felt obliged to participate in the study. In order to mitigate this possibility, the researcher outlined in the participation information sheet that participation in any aspect of the research was not mandatory. It was also outlined that choosing not to participate would have no impact on participants' reputation or job standing and that individual data would not be shared with the Head Teachers' school.

To ensure informed consent in phase one, a participant information sheet was included at the beginning of the questionnaire. This outlined the research methodology; aims of the project; ethical considerations relating to the nature of the topic and participants' right to remove themselves at any point during their participation without any implications for them or their school. It also highlighted that participants could take a break from participating at any point if they felt the need to. The researcher offered to speak with potential participants to clarify any questions and to address any concerns they might have had about participating, having read the participant information sheet. Consent from participants was gained through their digital ticking of a box relating to each of the consent points outlined on the consent form. Participants were not able to move on to begin the questionnaire if they had not first ticked to agree to each of the consent points.

In phase two, participants were requested to return their completed consent form to the researcher before the day of their scheduled interview. The researcher sent a reminder email to participants who had not returned their completed consent form the day before their interview, explaining that participation would not be able to go ahead without first completing and sending this to the researcher. Informed consent was ensured by requiring participants to tick in agreement on the digital consent form to each of the points and to use their digital signature on the document. At the end of individual interviews, the researcher thanked participants for their time and signposted them to the debrief leaflet in order to discuss any concerns or issues that might have been raised as a result of discussing their experiences.

A third issue relates to the topic of the research, which had the potential to cause distress to Head Teachers, especially those who may have had difficult experiences with excluded pupils, or with managing the exclusion process. To prevent distress being caused, the researcher adopted a respectfully curious tone in the interviews, using neutral responses to answers given in order to avoid judgement making about the views or practices described. During interviews, the researcher used active listening to increase attuned interactions and support rapport building with participants. The researcher drew on the skills of consultation from the Educational Psychology field (Wagner, 2008) to facilitate discussion on emotive topics in a containing way (Bion, 1962). It was made clear to participants that they could choose to take a break or end their participation at any point during the study if they wanted to, and that they would not need to provide a reason for doing so. The researcher also provided participants with a debrief sheet which included signposting to services related to managing mental health and wellbeing of school staff to support them in seeking help if it were required following discussion of difficult topics.

Another ethical issue related to the confidentiality of participating in this research. In order to protect participants' privacy, the data collected was de-identified by removing or changing any mention of names, places or other specific information that would identify a participant or a third party. Participant numbers were assigned to each data set, immediately following each interview, and contact details of participants who agreed to be interviewed were linked to a participant number in a password protected document to prevent participants being identified by a third party. These data were kept in password protected, encrypted files. Only the researcher and first and second supervisors had access to data collected in this study and this was not shared with any other party.

During the reporting of findings, the researcher ensured that a range of perspectives were presented. This was to prevent a biased account of the views collected in the interviews, which could have served to incorrectly present the views of all participants or leave others out. Similarly, the researcher was mindful of reporting contrary viewpoints where they were presented, in order to provide a balanced view and to avoid presenting only positive aspects of the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter will outline the findings of the research project. It will begin with discussing the findings of the quantitative analysis. Then, the qualitative analysis will be addressed, describing the themes of relevance in answering the research questions sequentially. The research questions to be addressed ask: 1) How do Head Teachers in England navigate the decision-making process around excluding for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour; 2) What factors do Head Teachers in England consider when making the decision on whether or not to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour; and 3) when decision making on whether or not to exclude, do Head Teachers consult other parties?

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data collected in this research related to the extent to which Head Teachers consult others in the exclusion decision-making process, and the extent to which they felt well-equipped in making the decision to exclude. The analysis of these data will be used to address RQ3 in examining if there is a relationship between the extent to which Head Teachers consult others and how well-equipped they feel in making exclusion decisions.

A total of 215 Head Teachers rated, on a scale of zero to ten, the extent to which they consult others during the decision-making process for excluding for persistent disruptive behaviour ($M=8.41$, $SD= 2.52$). In total, 216 Head Teachers rated, on a scale of zero to ten, the extent to which they felt well-equipped in making the decision ($M=8.52$; $SD = 1.67$).

In order to address RQ3, a Pearson's product-moment correlation was run to assess the relationship between the variables ‘extent to which Head Teachers feel well equipped in deciding to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour’, and ‘extent to which Head Teachers consult others in the decision-making process’. Preliminary analyses using the EXPLORE command in SPSS showed the relationship to be linear, and there were no outliers detected. To assess normality of distribution, an analysis of skewness and kurtosis was conducted in SPSS. This revealed a high level of negative skewness (-1.64, -1.85) and kurtosis (3.46, 2.79) for the variables ‘extent to which Head Teachers feel well equipped in deciding to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour’, and ‘extent to which Head Teachers consult others in the decision-making process’, suggesting a non-normal distribution. The Pearson's product-moment correlation was run despite data not meeting the normal distribution assumption, as the test is deemed to be robust to deviations from normality (Havlicek and Peterson, 1976). There was no statistically significant correlation between the extent to which Head Teachers feel well equipped in deciding to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour, and the extent to which Head Teachers consult others in the decision-making process, $r(213) = -.046$, $p = .506$.[1]

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[1] A Shapiro-Wilk's test was run, and it was found that $p < .05$, suggesting there was a non-normal distribution. Therefore, the data variables were logarithmically transformed. Following this transformation, the variables were tested again, using a Shapiro-Wilk's test, where $p <.05$, suggesting that there was not a normal distribution. As a result, a non-parametric test was chosen as the data did not meet the basic assumptions required for a parametric test. A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between the extent to which Head Teachers feel well equipped in deciding to exclude for

Qualitative Analysis

The details of interview participants and their schools, including its pupil population, the number of exclusions given for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour in the academic year 2018/2019, the school's location by region, the most represented ethnicity, a rating of socio-economic diversity in the student population, and Head Teachers' ethnicity are presented in Table 1. Quotes from the interviews conducted are labelled with participant numbers which can be consulted in Table 1 for context.

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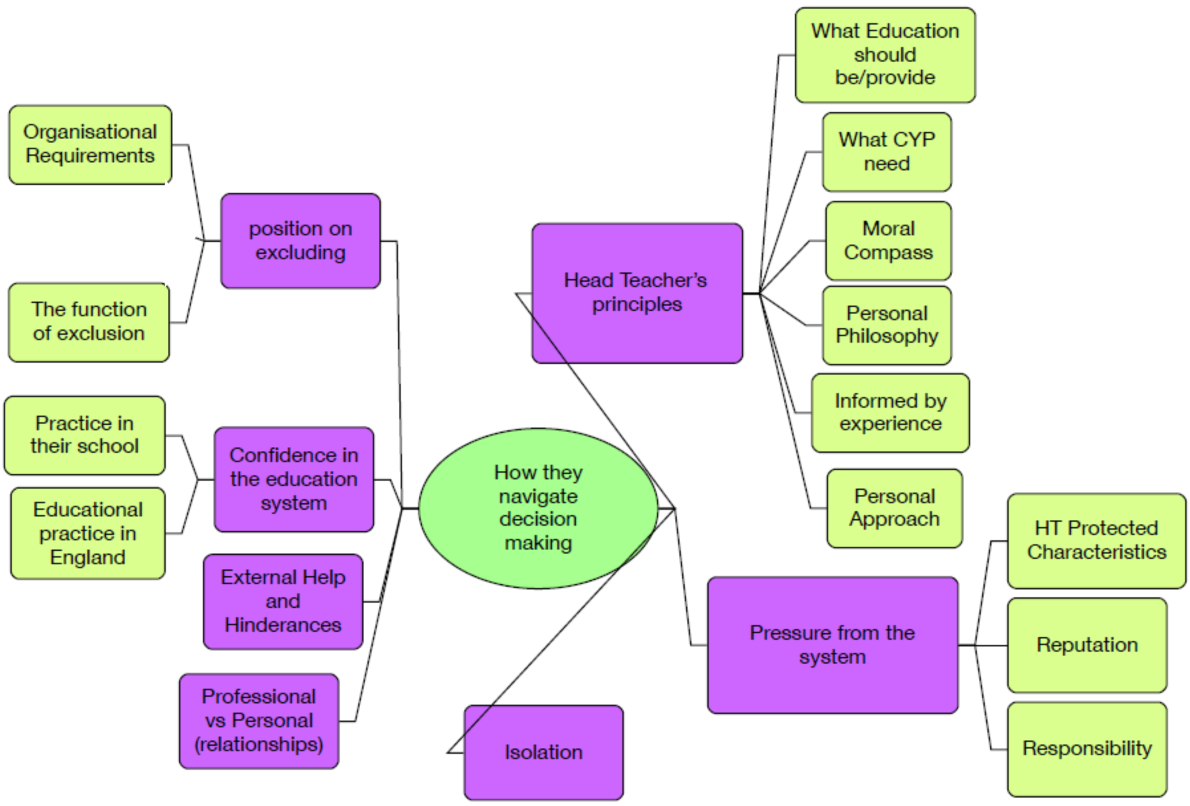
persistent disruptive behaviour, and the extent to which Head Teachers consult others in the decision-making process. There was no statistically significant correlation between the extent to which Head Teachers feel well equipped in making a decision to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour, and the extent to which Head Teachers consult others in the decision-making process, r_s (213) = .085 p = .765.

Figure 1

Thematic Map of Main Themes and Related Sub-Themes



Note. This figure illustrates the main themes elicited from the interview data in purple, with sub-themes in green.

Table 1

Details of Interview Participants and their Schools

Participant Number	School Type	School Size	Number of School Exclusions for PDB in 2018/19	Region	Socio-economic Diversity Rating (out of 10, where 10 is extremely diverse)	Most Represented Ethnic Group	Head Teacher's Ethnicity

1	Primary Mainstream School	47	0	Yorkshire and the Humber	0	Other Ethnic Group	White
2	Secondary Mainstream Faith School	1150	100	North West	6	White	White
3	Primary Mainstream School	480	3	Greater London	8	Not Reported	White
4	Primary Mainstream School	Not Reported	0	North West		Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	White
5	Secondary Mainstream Faith School	700	0	North West	5	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	White

6	Primary Mainstream School	900	5	South East	9	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
7	Secondary Mainstream School	2100	0	Greater London	9	Asian/Asian British	White
8	Primary Mainstream School	420	6	East Anglia	1	White	White
9	Primary Mainstream School	500	0	North West	7	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	White
10	Primary Mainstream School	330	0	South West	2	Black/African/Caribbean/	White

						Black British	
11	Primary Mainstream School	500	0	East Midlands	2	Other Ethnic Group	White
12	Secondary Mainstream School	1300	0	North West	8	White	White
13	All-age special school for severe and profound learning needs	150	1	North West	8	White	White
14	Primary Mainstream School	570	2	East Anglia	2	Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Groups	White

Research Question One

Relating to RQ 1, the themes that captured the ways in which Head Teachers navigate the exclusion decision making process, were: ***Confidence in the***

Education System; ***Position on Exclusions***; ***Head Teachers' Principles***; and ***Pressure from the System***. Throughout this and the next chapter, themes and subthemes will be presented in bold text.

Confidence in The Education System. The first theme identified as relevant to RQ one was Head Teachers' *Confidence in the Education System*. This related to confidence both within their school, described by the subtheme *Practice in their school* and more widely across the country, in the subtheme *Educational practice in England*. Head Teachers' confidence in these areas was important in describing how they navigate the exclusion decision-making process.

Practice in their school. When Head Teachers felt confident that the systems and staff in their school were aligned with their approach, it was seemingly easier to determine how to respond to a potential exclusion. When staff and systems were working as Head Teachers intended, Head Teachers spoke about being able to make better informed decisions, based on information they felt was free of staff biases and showed clear evidence of prior support and the impact it had had. One Head Teacher described how a pupil's behaviour could be easily misinterpreted and described by staff:

8 - *So a teacher might say to you, 'oh, my goodness, you know, little Jimmy threw a chair, it was a disaster of a lesson, it's really, really dangerous.' I think, 'oh, my goodness, Jimmy's thrown a chair, this is shocking.' And then you drill down, and you find that the classroom is empty when Jimmy threw the chair, and Jimmy threw it into the corner of the room away from the staff that was supervising. And that is…actually demonstrates quite a lot of control from Jimmy. Because probably he*

was, he wasn't managed very well by the staff, or he was in a really, really heightened position when the staff intervened.

Another Head Teacher referenced a system for reducing the level of staff bias in reporting behavioural incidents:

7 - *…a really detailed risk analysis. And part of that risk analysis is actually just…just drilling down through teacher and staff subjectivity*

Head Teachers highlighted the importance of having robust systems and processes in place for managing behaviour. This was often linked to creating a shared understanding, or objectivity, regarding what behaviour looks like to different staff members and how to respond to it.

9 - *We've got a behaviour management structure, which is an escalating scope of response, which is well understood by all staff. So, there's a flowchart which people follow through, for whether you're a lunchtime supervisor, or a class teacher, TA. And the expectation's very clear*

What made Head Teachers more confident in their schools' practice, was ensuring that staff and pupils understood these policies and the expectations of them. Head Teachers noted that this was helpful for increasing the quality of communication and understanding within the school community. One Head Teacher spoke about how they used the school's values to create a behaviour policy which was easy for pupils to understand.

1 - so our values: respect, courage and friendship. And what we've done is we've actually used those as the basis for our behaviour policy - because you have to have

a behaviour policy. So, we find that those are really accessible for the children, but they're very versatile

Others referenced using the system they expected to be followed in discussions with staff to reinforce understanding of how staff should be managing behaviour and behavioural incidents deemed challenging.

6 - *I always said, If I'm putting a system in place, and you don't use it, then it's not happened. Because sometimes staff will try and bypass and get "I want this child excluded" where I'm like, "sorry, you didn't do ABCD. So obviously, all that stuff didn't happen, because you have no evidence".*

Head Teachers voiced the importance of staff members approach to managing behaviour and engaging with the systems in place in their school. Head Teachers often reflected on the importance of the relationship between pupils and staff members, and that this dynamic interaction was influenced by both parties. As such, some Head Teachers spoke about appraising the practice of staff members when deciding on exclusion. In some cases, Head Teachers spoke about moving staff on if their practice was not in line with the Head Teacher's approach.

2 - *Sometimes you've gotta do what you've gotta do. You know? I've probably permanently… Permanently excluded more staff in my school than I have done pupils. And that's challenging…and that's challenging in itself.*

It seems that Head Teachers justified their decision to remove staff from their school in order to benefit the running of the system as a whole. Head Teachers did also frequently praise their staff teams for the ways in which they practiced and for their expertise. Some Head Teachers were confident to delegate important jobs to other staff members in the knowledge that this would provide the best outcomes. Others deemed themselves lucky to be surrounded by the colleagues they had because of how well they could implement the Head Teacher's vision for their school.

> 9 - *Yeah, I think, I think we're quite fortunate in… I think the leadership and management of the school is pretty good at change management. And we often - we do present change as being a dynamic process.*

Head Teachers often contrasted their school's systems and processes when they first took up the post of Head Teacher, with more recent descriptions, where they had become more established in their role, reflecting on the changes that had occurred. Some described initially having to make decisions to exclude pupils because their school did not have the necessary systems or processes in place to support pupils with managing their behaviour.

> 6 - *We are an inclusive setting; we don't want to exclude. I did this initial thing, because of the level of violence that was in this primary school and the inability of staff to work with inclusion and have those systems in place*

Educational practice in England. Head Teachers referred to educational practice in England, often critically, as a way of grounding their approach to practice. Head Teachers spoke about approaches they deemed to be ineffective or even damaging to children and young people's development, such as the use of isolation booths or shouting at children as punishment. By providing this contrasted image of educational provision, Head Teachers explained that their approach was more beneficial to pupils and staff, providing evidence of why it was a good idea to run their school in the way they do. One Head Teacher explained their disdain with the practice of some school leaders.

> 6 -*There are huge fines now, and not fines, but cost implications. But some heads have contingency funds so that if they need to permanently exclude, they can. Lots of schools work together just to bypass permanent exclusion, and they just pass children round and round and round for seven years and, they get no education being passed from school to school. And then finally, they're out. And no one knows why the child can't read*

Having this knowledge of the wider national education system allowed a splitting between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice to occur. This construct served to reinforce Head Teachers’ confidence in their own and their school’s approach, as well as reduce their confidence in what was presented as more commonly used practice in the country.

> 1 - *Personally, I just think actually what [exclusion] should be is that should be more of a record of the school saying we couldn't cope. Or the services saying we didn't get it right, rather than the child having a label of having had an exclusion, if you see what I mean. So, it's a quite a different view, I have of it*

Head Teachers also spoke critically about the role of Government in creating the educational landscape that currently exists nationally. Referring to Government principles about increasing academic attainment in order to increase social mobility, as well as implementing austerity measures and academisation, Head Teachers communicated frustration that the state was not perpetuating good practice. This further reinforced their views about working in their own, different way, which includes a reluctance to exclude.

11 - *I've been in that culture under Tony Blair, God love him. You know we were not to exclude anybody and then the Tories came in. We were stripped and exclusion was back in again and then, obviously, lots of people got excluded. And then they changed across to the big Academy Chiefs who went and excluded 100 people on the first day, everyday. And left after a year and then a million pounds had gone missing from the school*

Taken together, Head Teachers levels of confidence in educational practice influenced their decision making about exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. This was supported by robust processes and systems in their school, which were operationalised by staff they deemed to be highly competent, and were well understood by staff and pupils. Head Teachers’ lack of confidence in national educational practice served to reinforce their commitment to their own approach to managing behaviour and decision making about exclusion.

Position on Exclusions. In order to navigate the decision-making process, Head Teachers described relying on their position on excluding, which was informed by the subthemes of *Organisational requirements*, and the *Function of exclusions*. A Head Teachers’ position on the use of exclusion was often influenced by their professional experiences. These experiences helped Head Teachers with identifying what constitutes good, or poor practice, knowing when all support options in school have been exhausted, routes for accessing additional support locally, as well as support that exists post-exclusion, knowing some incidents require exclusion to be used, and knowing that change happens over time.

Organisational Requirements. Head Teachers spoke about their knowledge of the organisational requirements of local and national contexts, and the provision that existed for supporting children and young people who are at risk of exclusion. This included knowledge of strategies or services that could be employed to support a pupil in school, locally, as well as describing the support available to pupils after they had been excluded.

> 5 - *there is a very, very little externally, that you can access in an area like [name of Local Authority] that will support these children. And that's a problem. Quite often you've… you've done everything within the school, and you've gone, "What else is there?" Nothing. And that's it. That's why you have to exclude.*

Often, Head Teachers were critical of the support available from the Local Authority (LA), due to the limited resources and funding they could provide. Some Head Teachers described using exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour as a way to gain additional resources from their LA to support the pupil at risk of exclusion. This was achieved through either upholding the exclusion to ensure the pupil is known to the LA,

> 6 - *Everybody said that we had done everything, if not more, or definitely more than you - is reasonably possible for this individual child. But by doing that [exclusion], sadly… sadly, it's the only way to get support for children, because the system is broken. And by triggering that OFSTED for that Local Authority, it put a spotlight on this one child who then got everything she needed.*

or by withdrawing the exclusion, in order to appease the LA officers who Head Teachers described as not wanting any exclusions on the LA's record. Head Teachers described their relationship with the LA and knowledge of its organisational requirements, which meant that they knew how to access additional support, either by threatening to exclude a pupil, or by highlighting a pupil through excluding them.

9 - *I have issued a permanent exclusion before in the hope that the local authority then come back to me and ask me to remove it if they can provide alternative placement. And that's happened before. So that PEX [Permanent Exclusion] is issued, and then it's removed by the head teacher, by myself. And the Local Authority has stepped up to the mark and said, they'll provide something really good because they um, they really care about their PEX data*

Head Teachers knowledge of the support available to pupils in their local area following exclusion also influenced the decision-making process. Many referenced budget cuts when describing the lack of options available to pupils, or were critical of the ways in which Pupil Referral Units were operated. This knowledge of the organisational requirements of local provision, or lack thereof, supported Head Teachers' decision making. They chose not to exclude in some instances, knowing that the pupil would not receive adequate support afterwards.

5 - *Most pupil referral units just don't meet the needs of these children. What you do is, you take, in our case, 140 permanently excluded children. So, they've reached a level of behaviour that is, you know – extreme - and we put them in one building. That's not good. You know, and they don't always get the best type of support in those buildings*

The organisational requirements and culture of schools was called upon by many Head Teachers, generally relating to whether a school does or does not exclude. Most Head Teachers described taking a case-by-case approach to reviewing the appropriateness of an exclusion.

12 - *So you know, I think I think it is an individual decision. And you… it's quite complicated. And every - every case is different.*

When decisions were influenced by a pre-determined position on excluding in one Head Teacher's case, it meant that exclusions had to be issued in order to maintain a consistent approach to enforcing the behaviour policy of the school.

7 - *And because I represent the school - the school's philosophy - we would, we would always say to pupils, for instance, you know, "Fireworks coming up. If you bring fireworks in school, you will be permanently excluded." That's…and pupils are going to get that message. And then if I… somebody brings fireworks in and I don't permanently exclude, that's confusing. And that's a confused message.*

Some Head Teachers explicitly stated that their school does not exclude children and young people for any reason.

4 - *we don't exclude at all. So- so the role of - So exclusion plays no part in our behaviour management policy*

The same Head Teacher reflected on the benefit of removing exclusion as an option.

4 - *So once you've kind of taken that option away, you then have to become creative in that case*

Others explained that their school never excluded for persistent disruptive behaviour, whilst some Head Teachers discussed not using permanent exclusions in their school.

12 - *thankfully, we haven't. In the last few years, we haven't had to use it [permanent exclusion] at all*

The organisational requirements of Head Teachers' schools were described in relation to their knowledge that change happens over time. Whether this knowledge came from training, independent research or from practical experiences, Head Teachers spoke about the idea of implementing something different and needing to wait for a period before it could become embedded within the organisation.

13 - *I think when you introduce something new, you're looking at a minimum of three years, five years before it becomes just what you do.*

This applied to changes in the organisation, like upskilling staff through training and getting them on board with the Head Teacher's approach, to changes at the pupil level, in terms of shaping their behaviour, as well as to changes in Head Teachers' own practice, which were often described through formative experiences that shaped the ways in which they practice now. Knowledge of the change process meant that Head Teachers were more confident in holding their position not to exclude, for example, when taking over a school where the organisational requirements would have historically led to issuing an exclusion. One Head Teacher described needing to wait for the organisational and cultural requirements of the school to become embedded in this case.

2 - *You know when you take over a school, you spend the first six months of your time building that leadership narrative around what goes on in your school. And so, what starts to happen is that children and staff, if it's done well, they start to understand what the cultural norms [of the school] are.*

Function of Exclusion. The function of exclusion helped Head Teachers with making decisions to exclude. Most head teachers were critical of exclusion, particularly because of its usefulness. These Head Teachers explained that exclusions do not work as a deterrent or in helping children and young people to moderate their behaviour, and this viewpoint meant that it was easier to decide not to issue an exclusion.

12 - *we haven't done a fixed term for some individuals when we possibly could have, because we thought actually, will this fixed term exclusion give us the outcome we want. And the outcome we want is obviously for this child to be - be back behaving appropriately in school and, and functioning in the school. We don't - we don't want this child to go. So… So sometimes, instead of the fixed terms, sometimes instead of fixed term exclusion, we've … we've put in different support, like counselling or mentoring*

Head Teachers who were opposed to exclusion referenced the impact that excluding a child or young person had on their future and life chances, highlighting that exclusion was often another rejection of the pupil and communicated that they were not wanted. Those who did use exclusion but were critical of it tended to describe it as a necessity, albeit a negative one.

9 - *so I think exclusions are a necessary evil*

As such, Head Teachers vocalised a need to try everything possible to avoid exclusion. In this way, the negative connotations of exclusion provided motivation for Head Teachers to decide against excluding and instead re-visit what else could be done to support the pupil.

Head Teachers described the use of exclusion to fulfil certain functions and in specific circumstances. The idea that exclusion could be employed in order to send a wider message about behaviour expectations to other pupils was commonly described. This was usually in the context of the Head Teacher taking over a school that had become overwhelmed by behavioural incidents. In these cases, Head

Teachers described the school culture needing to be realigned, with exclusion providing one way to assist with that change. Other Head Teachers alluded to exclusion providing a means for stopping the influence of some pupils' behaviour on the wider school population.

> 2 - *There are sometimes that you need to use… use them. Because the action of the child begins - this does sound a bit strange - Begins to pollute the school culture to such a degree that you can't move forward with certain groups of pupils*

Head Teachers provided common reasons for which an exclusion would be appropriate. These included bringing onto the school site a weapon, often a knife, or drugs, as well as violence towards a staff member. It seemed that Head Teachers had clear ideas about when exclusion was appropriate, which helped them to navigate the decision-making process when it came to persistent disruptive behaviour. This was because Head Teachers alluded to the fact that some behaviours are manageable, and some are not. Bringing a weapon or drugs into school, or physical violence against a staff member were seen as clear examples of unmanageable behaviour. Contrasted with Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, which can include talking in class and thereby disturbing the learning of others, these unmanageable behaviours suggest that Persistent Disruptive Behaviour is manageable. This reinforced the idea that Persistent Disruptive Behaviour could be addressed without needing to exclude.

Head Teachers who did employ it, mostly qualified exclusion as a last resort, where they had exhausted all options for supporting a pupil, but where the pupil was still exhibiting behaviour they deemed to be challenging. One Head Teacher used the term by disagreeing that exclusion was a last resort. They justified this by explaining that a pupil would need to continue being educated after the exclusion, and so it would not be the last resort for that pupil, but instead it was for the school.

4 - *And, you know, because…because what happens is, it's not the very last resort, is it? Because that child has to go on somewhere.*

Head Teachers' positions on exclusions, informed by organisational requirements and perceptions of the function of exclusion, were described as helpful in making decisions. Their position on exclusion was influenced by their knowledge of their school's and local organisations' requirements, as well as criticism of the efficacy of exclusion and its long-term outcomes. Where Head Teachers did employ exclusion, they did so for specific reasons, and contrasted these with Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, which was presented as a manageable behavioural presentation that required a different response.

Head Teachers' Principles. Head Teachers relied on their principles to aide in the exclusion decision making process. These principles were influenced by their P*ersonal philosophy*, being guided by a *Moral compass*, and their views on *What education should provide*.

Personal Philosophy. Head Teachers mostly described a humanistic personal philosophy, characterised by working towards positive goals that were achievable for their school and the community within it.

14 - *I suppose the moral compass is wanting people to have good lives, happy lives, where they've got resilience and the skills to check things for them to continually improve and learn.*

Many Head Teachers referenced their own and their school's agency in facilitating change. This was evident in the ways in which Head Teachers spoke about their approaches to behaviour management, for example. Most Head Teachers adopted a relational, nurturing approach in their schools which was focused on fostering inclusion, connection and wellbeing in staff and pupils. One highlighted that relationships in their school underpinned their low rates of exclusion.

10 - *The relationships with staff and children are key, there's a really close relationship between staff and children.*

When describing difficult encounters with pupils exhibiting dysregulated behaviour, one Head Teacher described how their philosophy guided the school's relational, emotion coaching approach adopted in the school.

4 - *we have to rise above that and go "Do you know what? That's not appropriate, and I'm not putting up with it. But let's sit down and talk about it in a real calm, rational way, when we are both in the right place to do that*

With the goal of high-quality relationships between staff and pupils in mind, most Head Teachers presented exclusion as its antithesis. Others alluded to the legacy they would leave behind at their school. Head Teachers spoke about their philosophy of creating meaningful and lasting change as a goal for their work. This served to justify excluding pupils when they might influence the behavioural culture of the school, or by embedding a non-excluding approach with the aim of it being upheld after their departure from post.

6 - *So I was the head of one of the schools, and leaving that you think, oh, what's my legacy? What's left behind?*

Moral Compass. Head Teachers alluded to being guided by a moral compass when decision making about exclusion. Compassion and equity characterised the approach that most Head Teachers described when navigating the process, and adopting a utilitarian viewpoint fit well with following their moral compass. Holding in mind the needs of the school organisation as a whole and comparing these with the needs of a pupil who was at risk of exclusion for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour was described by all Head Teachers. Mostly, Head Teachers used equity to justify reasonable adjustments or providing extra resources to pupils who were at risk.

10 - *I think all you can do is be fair and equitable and try and make the most honest decision you can, and try. And it's not just a simple case of human misbehaviour. It's never that simple.*

1 - *I would say probably advocate more for children that are more needy, possibly human nature*

This was done whilst carefully monitoring the impact that doing so had on the organisation. When the impact of a pupil's behaviour and the resources required to support it began to affect the school experience of others, Head Teachers adopted a damage limitation approach, deciding which route forward would benefit the majority of the school population. One spoke about excluding a pupil to benefit their peers

11 - *actually sometimes you have to save the year group.*

What Education Should Provide. Head Teachers views on the role that schools and education should take in children and young people's development helped to inform how they navigated decision making about exclusions. Head Teachers commonly expressed the view that school systems should be like a family, offering mutual respect, unconditional positive regard and a sense of belonging to its members. With this in mind, one Head Teacher spoke about exclusion in a family context.

> 4 - *It's like being a parent, isn't it? You can't say to kids, "well you're really annoying me you just have to go for a few days and then come back when I'm ready." You have to create a situation, you know, think really [inaudible] about how you can coexist, and it'd be a safe environment for both of you*

Seeing members of the school community in this way seemed to foster more compassion and empathy, which helped Head Teachers in making difficult decisions about exclusion, because of a reluctance to ostracise a 'family member' but also because of a duty to do the right thing for the other members of their 'family', knowing that they would still be held in positive regard.

Pressure from the System. Head Teachers described being influenced by Pressure from the System around them when making decisions to exclude. This related to the pressure of their *Reputation*, and how this influenced making decisions both directly and indirectly, as well as the *Responsibility* of the Head Teacher role. In some cases, Head Teachers' protected characteristics seemed to moderate this pressure. One Black Head Teacher spoke about the additional pressure they faced from the school community when first joining the school:

> 6 - *There was like racist rants, and it was - I think for the first year and a half - it was brutal. Police were on site pretty much every day. It was… it was tough, but I had to show them that I wasn't going to go anywhere*

Reputation. A Head Teacher's reputation was often referenced in regard to making decisions in general, but especially with the way they handled matters of exclusion. Head Teachers spoke about how they were perceived and judged by parents, staff, pupils and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED). They presented the role of Head Teacher as one under constant scrutiny by many stakeholders, and the decision to exclude as emotionally burdensome one:

10 - *many professionals are put under pressure to believe that it's [exclusion] the most harmful, damaging thing that you could possibly do to a young person, which is the mother of guilt trips.*

Parents were described in terms of trying to engage them in earlier stages of behaviour management when disengaged, trying to explain the rationale behind a decision to exclude their child, or engaging parents of other children who were concerned that the behaviour of another child was disrupting their child's learning or wellbeing. Head Teachers described the pressure created because of trying to maintain a positive reputation with parents. One Head Teacher spoke about the pressure of engaging with well-informed, educated parents who were sceptical about the school providing more support to a child with dysregulated behaviour and wanted the same for their child.

1 - *they were, they were quite manipulative in trying to get to get things their way. But they weren't right. And I think I'm quite happy to stand up for when I know that what I'm doing is for the right reasons. But I think yeah, I mean, you can't help yourself. But you know, there's those children that you know, haven't got somebody in their corner*

Head Teachers were aware of their reputation amongst pupils and the pressure they were under to demonstrate a certain image to pupils, in order to maintain credibility. They described needing to find a balance between being strict and warm. Some head teachers verbalised their view of themselves, stating that they were strict and could be firm with pupils when necessary, which was important for being able to enforce boundaries and communicate expectations.

12 - *I'm not shy about permanent exclusion. I've permanently excluded five children in one day. I don't believe in all that softly-softly stuff*

Head Teachers also described their engagement with pupils as part of how they were perceived. Some took the time to meet with all pupils in an exam year, whilst others spoke about spending time walking around the school and engaging with children to build their reputation as present and approachable.

6 - *I tend to be out about all day, every day, seeing the kids, seeing the staff, making sure the kids see me*

Head Teachers described the emotional and professional challenge provided by their reputation amongst staff. Especially when starting their Headship in a new school, Head Teachers referred to getting staff 'on-board' with their vision. This was sometimes incompatible with some staff members, who did not agree with their new school leader's approach.

14 - *I think whenever you introduce something new, you start off with a group of people who really get it, a group of people that show up, and a group of cynical people. And you start using it, and you deal with those different proportions. And if it works over time, then the cynics go.*

Some described staff who were used to having pupils excluded by previous Head Teachers and did not like the new approach to reducing exclusions.

> 2 - *If you use the fixed term exclusion to make a member of staff feel better about themselves, then I do think they're in the wrong job (giggles). And that approach, at the school I'm currently in, was not popular at first.*

Head Teachers referenced their awareness of how staff perceived their stance on exclusions. They described finding a balance between making staff feel supported whilst ensuring pupils had appropriate provision and adequate chances to make the right choices regarding behaviour. Head Teachers did not want to be seen as a Head Teacher who would not exclude, as this was linked with staff feeling undermined and unsupported.

> 13 - *when I first took over the school, 13 years ago, there was a policy of not excluding, and that was very clearly known within the community. And when I took over the school behaviour was off, there was no-…Because it was literally no matter what you could do, you know, you're, you're not going to be - nothing's going to happen to you*

> 10 - *it's when you personally feel highly committed to the child, and that your own values and commitments feel that the child should be in school. And then you recognize that your colleagues who are responsible for the implementation of your vision for their child are exhausted or hurt*

Head Teachers commonly discussed appraisals of them and their school made by OFSTED. Many deemed OFSTED judgements unimportant and criticised the focus on academic attainment, however almost all Head Teachers spoke about OFSTED, suggesting that the opinion of the regulatory body was another they held in mind when making decisions to exclude.

Responsibility. The unique role of the Head Teacher was commonly referenced as a source of pressure. Most Head Teachers spoke about the statutory requirement for them to make the final decision about excluding a pupil for persistent disruptive behaviour. Even when they were against the notion of exclusion in principle, some described the internal conflict created by the requirement to make the decision. Some spoke about the implications this had on mental health and wellbeing.

2 - *I think it's draining. It doesn't get me down. It doesn't make me feel awful. It feels draining. Because… Emotionally, it takes a lot out of you. And even though you know it's the right thing. And you go home and you've got headaches. And you don't say anything. It's part of the job.*

Head Teachers described needing to consider their reputation in decision making about excluding for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. As well as the responsibility placed on them in needing to make the final decision, this created pressure which added a layer of complexity to navigating the decision-making process.

Research Question Two

Relating to RQ 2, the themes identified in the data which best captured the factors identified by Head Teachers as important to consider during the exclusion decision-making process were: ***Considering what a Pupil Needs****;* ***Personal Approach****;* ***School Approach***; and ***External Help, and Hinderances***.

Considering what a Pupil Needs. Head Teachers described a need to look beneath behaviours deemed challenging when making decisions on exclusion, with a focus on considering and identifying what a pupil needs. They referred to a pupil's age and year in school helping to determine what they need, which was important for decisions about excluding. This included considering the impact of excluding a pupil at key transition points of their educational career and how this made the decision to exclude more difficult because it was not what the pupil needed:

5 - *I hate losing a year 11 - absolutely hate it. I'd rather put them in a cupboard and hide them away, or do something else. But to be honest with you, there is nothing else for them.*

Head Teachers commonly discussed the need to consider whether a pupil had Special Educational Needs (SEN), diagnosed or otherwise, and what had been done to meet these when deciding on exclusion. Head Teachers often referenced Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder when describing the SEN they would commonly look out for in pupils who might be at risk of exclusion. Other SEN described by Head Teachers included unmet attachment needs and learning difficulties or disabilities and how these can present in a pupil. One Head Teacher spoke about considering:

8 - *whether there were an SEN and whether the pupil understood what they were doing, what the consequences of what they were doing, whether it's something we could have done before. To prevent that happening, those would be more things on the mind to, to worry about, to investigate before I made any decision*

The Head Teacher of the Specialist setting spoke about needing to give pupils greater understanding because of their limited ability to follow the expectations of the school:

> 14 - *a lot of the young people we work with don't necessarily have the cognitive ability to understand things like restorative justice or to understand other people's perspective on it.*

Pupils' protected characteristics were referenced by some Head Teachers when discussing the aftermath of exclusion. These Head Teachers highlighted the overlapping levels of disadvantage that some pupils face, with exclusion an option a pupil did not need, when it would provide another level of disadvantage if it were agreed:

> 5 - *we do have a growing number of Asian children and Black children within our school. I'm more conscious about the fact that they're gonna have a much more challenging life.*

Head Teachers described child and adolescent development using behaviourist and psychodynamic principles to justify how best to support them. For the most part, Head Teachers spoke about pupils' emotional wellbeing as more important than their academic attainment. In the context of pupils at risk of exclusion for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, Head Teachers considered their emotional needs first, before thinking about how to increase their learning and attainment levels.

> 1 - *He was adopted from care, but he was two academic years behind when he came to us and a little bit behind, but that wasn't the problem. The problem was his.*

He knew that. He had been told that. He didn't have any self-worth. So rather than spending all your time giving him extra boosting lessons, he actually needed a bit of work on finding himself

Head Teachers were critical of some behaviourist approaches to managing behaviour, including zero-tolerance behaviour systems that apply consequences based on a rigid predetermined structure using 'if… then' logic. This approach was seen to be restrictive, and Head Teachers expressed views about needing to respond to behaviour in a compassionate and flexible way, in order to meet individual children's and young people's needs. Some Head Teachers referenced the multiple factors at play behind a pupil's behaviour which needed to be considered

13 - *A lot of the behaviours are to do with either home life or to do with them growing or it could be like that, it could be some self-conflict within themselves, trying to self-identify who they are, linked… linked to identity, you know, racial identity, sexual identity, whatever, you know, all those sorts of things.*

Children and young people's biological development was referenced regarding the influence of puberty on behaviour and how easily behaviour could change. Most Head Teachers explained that children's behaviour tends to escalate as they entered into adolescence and some suggested that there was a cut-off point of when a school system was able to change a pupil's behaviour. One Head Teacher presented the idea that some pupils' needs are not suited for mainstream education.

11 - *If they're at risk of permanent exclusion in year seven then they shouldn't be in mainstream anyway*

Head Teachers were able to rationalise their decision making about excluding by relying on their knowledge of principles of child and adolescent development. One discussed the concept of emotional regulation skills development, highlighting that children and adolescents are still developing these skills, and that adults need to support them in managing their emotional responses, rather than providing punitive responses to them.

> 4 - *And whether that's a 16-year-old child, or a six-year-old child, we're the adults, we have the capacity, we have the emotional resilience to get over it. And we're not the ones who are in an emotional state that… that is, is, is making us react in that way, for whatever reason*

School Approach. School systems for managing and monitoring behaviour were discussed by all Head Teachers as an important factor to be considered. Relying on staff following agreed processes meant that Head Teachers were better informed about specific incidents that had occurred and the factors that perpetuated these. One Head Teacher spoke about relying on these systems to ensure their decision making was as fair as possible

> 6 - *that's mainly why I'm so systems driven in this approach, maybe not. I think it's fair, I do believe that life isn't fair. 100% life isn't fair. But I try and be as fair as possible in these decisions, because I know the… the magnitude of repercussions of what it could be. Children might be excluded or permanently excluded.*

Where adequate systems were not in place, either because they had yet to be implemented, or where staff had not followed due process, Head Teachers were able to justify trying other approaches to support a pupil exhibiting behaviours deemed to be persistently disruptive.

Personal Approach. Head Teachers discussed their professional approach as an important factor. This related to the ways in which they were able to engage more difficult to reach pupils and parents in instances when a holistic support plan could be implemented at home and in school, and their commitment to adopting evidence-based practice.

3 - *I had parents crying because they couldn't cope with the child at home. And then I thought I'd made the wrong decision. And then I said, "Alright, bring him in full time, we'll manage somehow." A lot of the time he would spend with me personally in my office. We built Lego roller coasters. You know, I was just trying to find things that he was interested in, to engage him somehow, in some form.*

When Head Teachers referenced using practice that had a good foundation in research, such as Trauma informed practice, or the recommendations for targeted intervention made by EPs, it was easier to commit to working with a pupil and their family, rather than issuing an exclusion.

4 - *all of that decision making is based on research - is based on attachment for, you know, principles, and it's based on understanding behaviour, and it's based on lots of science, and lots of research.*

A Head Teacher's Personal Approach described how they might consider whether working collaboratively with pupils and parents had been explored as an option to avoid excluding. Similarly, they described relying on evidence-based practice to look for other factors to consider, like the importance of high-quality relationships in school as a protective factor to avoiding exclusions. Their personal approach guided them in identifying alterative avenues to be explored before making exclusion decisions.

External Help and Hinderances. Outside of the school system, Head Teachers spoke about a pupil's environment when deciding to exclude, weighing up if these environmental factors were positive or detrimental to the pupil's development. These included the pupil's homelife, the socio-economic status of their community, and the pupil's peer group outside of school.

Head Teachers referenced a pupil's family makeup, particularly if they were Looked After by the Local Authority, as a strong reason not to exclude.

> 7 - *So, the looked after child. You don't exclude looked after children, you know the unspoken rule*

Other considerations were regarding a pupil's caring responsibilities outside of school, and whether they were known to Social Services for safeguarding concerns. These factors made it more likely that a Head Teacher would not exclude, again, relating to the level of social disadvantage and exclusion that a pupil already faced.

The level and type of external support available to a pupil was also important to Head Teachers in decision making. Most external professionals, including EPs, were deemed to be important at an earlier stage of intervention. Head Teachers highlighted the role of these professionals in providing evidence that would help to secure additional resources and funding to support pupils who were at risk of exclusion. They also highlighted the difficulties faced in accessing these services, whether due to financial constraints or a lack of services available locally, and the quality of work these services provide:

> 12 – *often, a lot of the support we buy in externally is more advice. Rather than actually coming in and doing it. Obviously, we get speech - some speech therapists come in, and so they're actually, actively working with children. But a lot of the advice*

that typically [comes from] behaviour support and education psychologists, they don't actually work with children

10 - *99 percent of services out there aren't providing the right level of support, externally.*

Whether this external support had been accessed provided a decision-making point regarding alternative options to exclusion.

Head Teachers commonly referred to the Government guidance on exclusion as an important document to consult. Some found the general guidance helpful, as it allowed them to adapt their approach to each situation being considered, as well as reinforcing their role as the sole decision maker in the process. One Head Teacher kept a box full of important legislation and guidance, which they referred to whilst stating:

5 - *I mean, in terms of exclusions, the law is that only I can exclude*

The Equality Act was referenced as a document to consider, in terms of meeting equality duties around reasonable adjustments for potentially marginalised groups, as was the Keeping Children Safe in Education document which helped in outlining the ways in which to support vulnerable pupils. All Head Teachers referenced the content of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, either directly or indirectly. Head Teachers discussed the importance of Quality First Teaching and a graduated approach to supporting learners' needs. One expressed the view that good support at the Quality First Teaching level prevented the occurrence of persistent disruptive behaviour.

12 - *And if you've got really good behaviour systems and really good teachers, you don't get persistent disruption. So… that we've invested heavily on CPD, invested very heavily on pastoral teams, we've got a very large pastoral team. And so, you've got to be doing both*

Another made a similar point about providing support to address and work with Persistent Disruptive Behaviour in order to avoid needing to use exclusion.

9 - A*cross those years, I have probably done the equivalent of about 10 days fixed term exclusion, and they've all been for aggressive behaviours. Part of that is because we would put lots of other things in place first, for the persistent, disruptive behaviour.*

Head Teachers described considering a range of factors across different systems when making the decision to exclude. At the individual pupil level, these included the pupil's age and stage of education, whether they had a SEN and their emotional regulation skills. A pupil's ethnicity was referenced in relation to whether they were already at a level of social disadvantage. At the community level, Head Teachers referenced a pupil's home life and family makeup, as well as their social economic status. They also considered systemic factors at school, whether they were implementing evidence-based practice and the level of parental engagement. At a wider level of influence, Head Teachers considered whether a pupil had had involvement from, or was known to, external professionals, including social care, Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapists, Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and Local Authority Inclusion Officers. Thinking more broadly, still, head Teachers spoke about the national legislation that helped them with making decisions about exclusion for Persistent Disruptive behaviour. This included the Government guidance on exclusion, the Equality Act, the SEN Code of Practice and Keeping Children Safe in Education, the child protection and safeguarding legislation.

Research Question Three

The themes that were identified in the data which addressed whether Head Teachers consult others during the decision-making process were: ***Professional vs Personal*** and ***Isolation*****.** Professional vs Personal related to the relationships Head Teachers had with other professionals and this influenced the ways in which they were consulted, and Head Teachers' views on how useful the guidance provided was. Isolation described the Head Teachers' need for reaching out to others for advice, either because they valued the professional opinion and expertise of the consulted party, or because of their need for emotional support which was not always available to Head Teachers in their role.

Professional vs Personal. Head Teachers spoke about eliciting advice and guidance from a range of professionals. Some of these professionals provided guidance in a professional, more formal way, whereas others provided personal challenge and guidance. The Governors of Head Teachers' schools were often referenced as a good place to go when seeking advice on the decision-making process. One Head Teacher saw consulting Governors as a standard part of the process:

10 - *The process is quite clear, you know, you have to put a case together, you're actively - you have to talk to Governors.*

However, Governors' roles were often described relating to whether they supported or wanted to overturn a decision already made by the Head Teacher, which is an existing requirement for Governors. Other professionals who offered support that was more formal in tone were LA officers. Head Teachers referenced the fact that LA officers would usually provide advice not to exclude, due to their requirement to keep exclusion levels in their Authority as low as possible.

> 11 - *The local authority employ somebody who's responsible for exclusion safeguarding. I'll always ring her before I exclude them. Generally, it's to - I don't think it makes a difference but actually I think, it's good to be honest enough to go "I just want to check this through, I want to sound it out first." She'd be my first person going, "we can't do that. You can't do this."*

Engaging LA officers was described as more of a formality than a necessity for some Head Teachers. Staff in school, especially members of the senior leadership team, like deputy Head Teachers and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo), were called upon by some Head Teachers to aide in the decision-making process. One Head Teacher described engaging these professionals in a specific meeting to discuss implementing a tiered behaviour policy, of which exclusion was a part.

> 8 - *The decision to move through the tiers is not just a tallying up process, it's done in, what we call a professional intervention meeting. So, where you have professionals around the table, from that the Assistant Head in charge of behaviour, who would lead that, to the stage leader … And they would meet - potentially the SENCo, depending on who the individual was. So, we would investigate that before they got to that stage, and then we make a decision about whether then we got to tier two, or tier three or tier four.*

Depending on their relationship and the format of the consultation, this could become professional discussion or, for some Head Teachers, debate and heated conversations. One Head Teacher, who had a good relationship with their Deputy, described how they would deliberate on the decision:

5 - *we'd sit down with everything and go, "right, let's thrash it out, is this a permanent exclusion?" And we would argue back and forth. And we'd look at every angle.*

Similarly, Head teachers reached out to other Head Teachers for advice and support, which tended to be described by Head Teachers as more informal and relaxed and related more to their emotional wellbeing rather than specific advice about what to do.

1 - *if I need to, I can ask people [other Head Teachers], and they, they tend to… I can get answers for things. But sometimes it's the emotional support that you want a little bit more*

Head Teachers described consulting these parties through individual conversations, group meetings of school staff and telephone conversations with Governors and LA officers.

Isolation. Head Teachers frequently referred to the Head Teacher role as an isolated one. This isolation was used to explain part of the challenge of the role, given the level of responsibility, but also why Head Teachers were motivated to seek out guidance and support that would not otherwise exist. Some Head Teachers highlighted that they were not the most knowledgeable about incidents or dealing with complex situations, and so welcomed professional challenge and guidance from others. This included seeking the views of staff members in the decision-making process, which could be useful, but was influenced by the Head Teachers' position in the school. One spoke about having a good working relationship and feeling emotionally supported by their colleagues, but at the same time feeling isolated because of not being able to discuss confidential information with them:

12 - *So I'm lucky that I've got those two, who I can sort of be quite honest with and share my, my thought processes sometimes and how I'm feeling so there are - there are things that I can't tell them, and there are things I have to deal with that are confidential.*

One Head Teacher spoke about including staff, but needing be clear about how much of their views would be taken on board in the final decision, and the need for staff to know that there was a difference between the Head Teacher's final say and staff advice on the matter:

1 - *I've got to make sure that there is a difference and that they know that*

Head Teachers discussed the difficulty with finding someone they could trust to have open discussions about the decision with. This was attributed to the Head Teacher's level of seniority in their school making it difficult to consult colleagues who they line managed, as well as due to other Head Teachers not wanting to collaborate, often linked to the school's reputation. One Head Teacher described this challenge

7 - *Being able to talk through things is really useful in all aspects of headship. Being able to talk to someone you can trust - and that's the difficult thing with being a head - finding someone you can trust, who's not going to say, "oh that Head is struggling over there!"*

One Head Teacher referenced the common perspective of the Head Teacher job as a lonely one, however, reported that they did not find it to be, and had found ways of making connections with other professionals

14 - *So, you know, as a head teacher, you get lots and lots of opportunities to mix and to … and to professionally, get along with. You don't have to be an Island. And people say to me all the time you find headship is a really, really lonely job. Well, I've never found it as a lonely job. I've always worked well with neighbouring schools, I've always supported neighbouring schools*

It seemed that Head Teachers were both motivated to seek support and reluctant to do so, depending on the support network available to them, either formally, or when they had created it themselves, informally.

Through analysis of themes in the data, it is clear that the exclusion decision making process is a complex one. A number of pertinent factors are considered by Head Teachers when navigating the process, and these decisions are also informed by the quality and quantity of support available for Head Teachers when making decisions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will outline the findings of this research project in the context of literature exploring school exclusion and decision making. First, a conceptual summary of the findings related to each of the research questions will be presented. Then, these findings will be considered with regard to what new information they provide in the field of Educational Psychology, how they differ from the claims made by previous studies, and novel questions that emerge as a result. This will be followed by a discussion of the implications of this research on training and policy. Next, an overview of this study's methodological limitations and strengths will be presented, along with the researcher's reflections on the research process. The chapter will end by making suggestions for future research, followed by an overarching conclusion of the study.

Conceptual Summary of Findings

In answer to RQ1, the themes Confidence in the Education System, Position on Exclusion, Head Teachers' Principles and Pressure from the System, described the ways in which Head Teachers navigate the exclusion decision making process for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Head Teachers described feeling confident in the systems and processes in their school which served to reduce subjectivity in labelling behaviour and increase understanding amongst staff and pupils about behavioural expectations and the roles and responsibilities they played. Conversely, Head Teachers described practice in England which was deemed to be less effective or harmful to staff and pupils' wellbeing. Their confidence in their own practice, contrasted with the practice they saw as poor elsewhere, served to help them navigate the decision-making process, knowing they could trust in their approach.

Head Teachers' Position on exclusions, informed by organisational requirements and the function of exclusion, was another important theme which describes how they navigate the decision-making process. Head Teacher's knowledge of their school's and Local Authority's organisational requirements helped them to navigate the decision-making process, either by enforcing agreed processes in school, or going outside of usual process in working with Local Authority officers. The function of exclusion was important in decision making, and Head Teachers described their criticisms of its usefulness in shaping behaviours, as well as its long-term outcomes. This criticism led to decisions not to exclude, especially when a pupil would be further disadvantaged. Head Teachers spoke about using exclusion to realign the behavioural expectations of the school, and when there were clear reasons to exclude very serious behavioural incidents, like bringing a weapon into school. Again, these specific incidents of behaviour were contrasted with Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, illustrating how the function of exclusion was used to help navigating the decision on whether to exclude for behaviours that could be managed by means other than exclusion.

Head Teachers' principles, informed by their moral compass, personal philosophy and beliefs of what education should provide, were described as important to Head Teachers in helping them navigate decision making. This included relying on a humanistic philosophy, centred on facilitating positive change and high-quality relationships, as well as creating a long-lasting impression on the school community. Compassion, equity and utilitarianist principles helped Head Teachers navigate the complex decision-making process and they described how holding these principles in mind made decision making more straight-forward. Similarly, Head Teachers often described what they thought education, and school, ought to be. This was frequently done in terms of a family unit, underpinned by love and mutual respect. Consequently, Head Teachers were able to make decisions based on whether they would fit into these loving and respectful criteria.

Finally, important when navigating the decision-making process for Head Teachers was the sense of pressure they experienced from the system around them. This was captured by the subthemes of reputation and responsibility, which described the multiple parties Head Teachers were accountable to, the various perspectives these parties held about the Head Teacher, as well as the statutory obligations that guided their role and how this added extra pressure to the role in making decisions about exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour.

In answer to RQ2, Head Teachers described considering what a pupil needs, personal approach, school approach, and external help and hinderances when discussing the factors they deemed important to consider in the exclusion decision making process. Head Teachers described considering a range of factors across different systems when making the decision to exclude. At the individual pupil level, these included the pupil's age and stage of education, whether they had a SEN and their emotional regulation skills. A pupil's ethnicity was mentioned by one Head Teacher, in relation to whether they were already at a level of social disadvantage. At the community level, Head Teachers referenced a pupil's home life and family makeup, as well as their social economic status. They also considered systemic factors at school, whether they were implementing practice to support the pupil which was evidence-based, and the level of engagement with the pupil's parents. At a wider level of influence, Head Teachers considered whether a pupil had had involvement from, or was known to, external professionals, including social care, Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapists, Child and Adolescent

Mental Health services and Local Authority Inclusion Officers. Thinking more broadly, still, Head Teachers spoke about the national legislation that helped them with making decisions about exclusion for Persistent Disruptive behaviour. This included the Government guidance on exclusion, the Equality Act, the SEN Code of Practice and Keeping Children Safe in Education, the child protection and safeguarding legislation.

In answer to RQ3, Isolation and Professional vs Personal were themes identified in the data that captured how, and who, Head Teachers consult when making decisions about exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Head Teachers described the relationships they had with others who they consulted, and how this tended to dictate the ways in which they consulted them.

Statistical analysis of quantitative data collected from 216 Head Teachers nationally, determined that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the extent to which Head Teachers consult others during decision making, and the extent to which they feel well-equipped in making the decision. Most Head Teachers reported that they commonly sought advice from others in the exclusion decision-making process, evidenced by the mean rating of 8.41 (out of 10) for the extent to which they consult others during decision making.

Discussion of Findings

Confidence in the Education System

The ways in which Head Teachers relate to the systems and processes in their schools highlighted how they navigate the decision-making process. When Head Teachers were confident in their school's systems, they reported clearer expectations and communication with staff and pupils. This confidence allowed Head

Teachers to rely more on these agreed systems and processes when decision-making, instead of subjective staff accounts, either about a pupil's behaviour, or how they responded to this behaviour. Okonofua (2015) highlights the importance of having relationship-based interventions operational in school in order to reduce exclusion. Head Teachers referenced the relationships between children and staff as important when making decision about exclusion. This supports claims about the importance of meaningful relationships between adults and pupils in reducing exclusions (Pratt, 2009; Okonofua 2015), and the need for more relationship-focused approaches in schools (Trotman et al., 2015).

When Head Teachers spoke about the practice of staff, they described staff approaches as nurturing and attuned when children were being well supported to manage their behaviour, corroborating the ideas of Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991; 2013) and Boxall (2002), about challenging a pupil's negative Internal Working Model through consistent attuned interactions. Head Teachers also alluded to some interactions that might reinforce a pupils' negative Internal Working Models, based on staff taking the view that some pupils choose to be disruptive (Nash, et al., 2016) because of within-person, or family characteristics (Mattison and Aber, 2007). In these instances, Head Teachers referenced the importance of training and Continual Professional Development to align staff views with their own, or alternatively, dismissing staff from their school when they did not practice in the ways the Head Teacher expected. The Head Teachers in this study seemed to achieve lower exclusion rates for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour by increasing the positive, enriching encounters pupils experienced and reducing those that create difficulties in relationships. This, they described, was done through employing robust systems and processes and investing in staff training. Interestingly in some cases, Head Teachers saw pupil behaviour as manageable and malleable, but not the behaviour and mindset of adults. Head Teachers did, however, reference the impact of behaviour deemed challenging on staff stress and wellbeing, speaking about the importance of making staff feel supported, further supporting the findings of previous research about staff wellbeing (Nash, et al., 2016). This was through ensuring proactive behaviour management systems were in place and listening to staff when they were struggling.

Head Teachers' Principles

Head Teachers' principles were described as an important element of the decision-making process. This includes their views on what Children and Young People need and what education should provide, as well as following their personal values and moral compass which guided them towards inclusive practice and fostering a sense of belonging in their pupils. The Head Teachers in this study described how their principles, values and moral compass led to decisions that allowed high-quality relationships between staff and pupils, characterised by Unconditional Positive Regard (Rogers, 1957).

The influence of Head Teachers' principles on the decision-making process was described when focusing first on developing Children and Young People's wellbeing, before expecting them to engage in learning and increasing their academic attainment. Head Teachers in this study explained their views about behaviour being a form of communicating unmet needs, and so described responding to behaviour deemed challenging with a focus on meeting needs. Timpson (2019) suggests that there exist two schools of thought on this matter. As well as some educational professionals viewing behaviour as an indication of unmet needs, he references professionals who see disruptive behaviour as a choice on the pupil's part. The Head Teachers in this study did not communicate the latter viewpoint. Perhaps Head Teachers who hold the former belief are more engaged with supporting the development of pupils' behaviour because they have more sense of agency in changing these pupils' school experiences. This seems to lead to relationships characterised by unconditional positive regard. This unconditional positive regard was communicated to pupils in explaining that their behaviour was problematic, not them as individuals. This is in keeping with research by Rose and colleagues (2018) who explored the ways in which Head Teachers communicated with pupils who were given alternatives to exclusion.

Pressure from the System

The pressure Head Teachers felt from their relationships with others describes an important influence on their decision-making. The range of stakeholders Head Teachers were accountable to, and responsible for, was referenced as making the decision a more difficult one, because of the need to balance competing priorities. This is in line with the view presented by Goings and colleagues (2018), that the multiple obligations Head Teachers had to various stakeholders made the decision-making process more complex. Similarly, the link between the complex decision making and Head Teachers' wellbeing was discussed in this study. This is in line with McCluskey and colleagues' findings (2019), who reported the distress that taking difficult decisions could cause Head Teachers.

Although Head Teachers in this study spoke about how school staff expectations added complexity to the decision-making process, they did not seem to waiver in their stance on exclusion when they felt there was more to be done to support a pupil. This contradicts the findings of Son and colleagues (2019), who suggested that punitive decision making in an experimental study was influenced by the group’s preference. In this study, however, Head Teachers often spoke about going against staff preferences for exclusion. Perhaps these participants represent a cohort of Head Teachers who are confident enough to be firm in their decision, despite external pressure. This would explain the lower exclusion rates reported by most Head Teachers. Alternatively, these findings might be explained by the ‘real-world’ issue of exclusion being discussed, compared to the fictitious scenarios presented in Son and colleagues’ study (2019). Future research might explore the extent to which Head Teachers are influenced by group preferences in both high- and low-excluding schools, as well as through experimental studies like that of Son and colleagues (2019).

Head Teachers spoke about one-off incidents that added pressure to decision making, like a serious behavioural incident from a pupil needing immediate action. This aligns with McCluskey and colleagues (2019) who proposed the increased focus on attainment means that schools must choose between removing a pupil who was persistently disruptive or working with them over time to shape their behaviour. The former approach, associated with making reactive decisions was not favoured by Head Teachers in this study. They spoke about taking measured decisions over time that would benefit all within the school system. This proactive approach to managing behaviour is recommended by Nash and colleagues (2016), who highlight the negative impact that reactive approaches have on teachers’ wellbeing.

Considering what a Pupil Needs

Some Head Teachers spoke about responding in a culturally and racially sensitive way, so as not to perpetuate disproportionate exclusions. This was referred to when discussing a pupil’s characteristics on a case-by-case basis, and not regarding a school system that could respond in this way. Both Timpson (2019) and

Okonofua and colleagues (2016) highlight the importance of having culturally sensitive and non-discriminatory systems in place in schools. The Head Teachers in this study who discussed pupils' ethnicity as part of the exclusion decision-making process did so without referencing an agreed policy or process. This might mean that their practice is open to unconscious bias (Popa et al., 2012), and could inadvertently perpetuate the disproportionate exclusion of certain groups. Future research might directly explore the ways in which Head Teachers adopt systems and processes at the whole school level that are non-discriminatory and racially and culturally sensitive.

A pupil's protected characteristics were referenced during the exclusion decision making process that Head Teachers engaged in. Head Teachers did not, however, discuss the impact that a pupil's protected characteristics might have on their interactions with staff across the school. Given that discrimination, both direct and indirect, has been reported as experienced by pupils particularly from teachers (Bryan et al., 2018), future research could examine Head Teachers' awareness of this racial climate (Mattison and Aber, 2007) in their schools, and how this relates to exclusions. Indeed, if Head Teachers did not discuss this in the current study due to being unaware of this dynamic, it could be the case that their school systems might benefit from training on recognising racial and other biases, as suggested by Bryan and colleagues (2018).

Head Teachers also described the behaviour of pupils as important in the decision-making process. For the most part, they perceived 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviours' as manageable in the context of their schools, which were adopting system-wide approaches to preventing behaviour escalation (i.e., relationship-focused approaches). This is in line with recommendations made by Obsuth and colleagues (2014), who state the importance on working with the system around the pupil to help shape their behaviour, rather than attempting to train the pupil's behaviour through interventions based on anger management alone. Future research might examine Head Teachers' perspectives of the efficacy of interventions that target individual behaviours compared with those that focus on systemic change. Given that Head Teachers have sole responsibility for choosing to exclude, it might be useful to understand how effective Head Teachers think interventions at each of these levels can be in shaping pupil behaviour and reducing the overall need for exclusion.

Personal Approach

Head Teachers' approach to exclusion informed how they navigate decision making. When Head Teachers in this study took a non-excluding approach to running their school, they illustrated a determined personal stance. This stance was often informed by evidence-based practice, like the work of Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991; 2013) and Boxall (2002), but was also described as relying on their moral compass. Head Teachers communicated their reliance on personal values when making decisions about exclusion, which can make the process more complex, as reported in existing literature on this topic from the USA (Goings et al., 2018). Head Teachers in this study described using a strong guiding stance to make decisions about exclusion, rather than a systematic process for analysing the moral components of the decision, like the Moral Architecture framework proposed by Wagner and Simpson (2009). This study did not explicitly ask about the use of such a framework, which could explain why Head Teachers did not talk about using one. However, future studies might explore this further, with more specific prompts to elicit

Head Teachers' views on using such frameworks and if they might be of benefit in reducing the complexity of the decision-making process.

Head Teachers' protected characteristics were discussed, in relation to how they either added pressure to the decision-making process because of others' pejorative expectations, or by relieving pressure, when their protected characteristics had positive connotations within the school community and at wider levels. This replicates the findings from the USA of Goings and colleagues (2018) who referenced the impact that a Head Teacher's ethnicity had on the exclusion decision making process.

School Approach

Head Teachers spoke about being mindful of a pupil's context when decision making about exclusion. Head Teachers referenced the importance of good teaching and learning practice, including the universal behaviour management practices used with all pupils. Having these in place, Head Teachers felt, led to fewer incidents of Persistent Disruptive Behaviour and lower rates of exclusion, a point supported by the literature (Trotman et al., 2015; Bennathan and Boxall, 2013; McCuskey et al., 2019; Timpson, 2019) and relevant for primary as well as secondary schools (Colley, 2009).

Head Teachers also referenced the school's culture and the goal they aimed to achieve by using exclusions. Head Teachers spoke about turning around the culture of a school, when there were previous high rates of exclusion. This links with the point made by Dunning and colleagues (2005), who suggested that schools develop a culture of splitting and projection, culminating in the scapegoating of pupils at risk of exclusion which serves to perpetuate a cycle of over-excluding. The Head

Teachers in this study spoke about breaking this cycle by changing the culture of the school. Head Teachers also referenced the function of exclusion as sending out a wider message. Their practice tended to contrast with the views of Welsh and Little (2018) who suggested that using exclusion to send a message led to serious outcomes for minor infringements. In the current study, Head Teachers spoke about using exclusion for serious incidents, like bringing a weapon into school, in order to send a message about what was acceptable to other pupils. However, Head Teachers in this study tended to rely more on behaviour management and relationship-focused approaches to send wider messages about day-to-day behavioural expectations. It seems that using exclusion in this way is compatible with reducing overall exclusion rates, when systems and processes for managing behaviour exist and are implemented at an earlier point in the exclusion decision-making process.

External Help and Hinderances

Head Teachers spoke about the relationships they or the school had with parents of children at risk of exclusion. Previous research suggests that bias can impact the ways in which Head Teachers engage parents from a lower socio-economic status (Gazeley, 2012). This included making assumptions about a parent's willingness to engage in school processes and procedures. Head Teachers in this study reported that they engaged sensitively with parents who were from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds, often referencing their awareness of the multiple disadvantages these families faced and striving to avoid perpetuating further disadvantage through excluding their children. Head Teachers who actively engage parents, with high expectations of them, reported using less exclusion for managing Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Trotman and colleagues (2015) highlighted the importance of building this type of home-school relationship in the pursuit of lower exclusion rates.

Head Teachers spoke often about the support available to them, both during the decision-making process and in managing Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Whilst they spoke positively about the support offered from Educational Psychologists and other behaviour support services available locally, accessing these services was reported to be a barrier, due to geographical location, financial constraints or waiting times, similar to the findings of Mills and Thompson (2018). Head Teachers were often critical of the input Local Authority officers provided. This is in keeping with research that reported that the Local Authority have little influence in the decision-making process and little knowledge about specific school contexts (Cole et al., 2019). The description of engaging with Educational Psychologists that Head Teachers presented in this study fits well with the way of working employed in Scotland, where there is more focus on the role of Educational Psychologists in conducting research and in raising the attainment of disadvantaged groups (McCluskey et al., 2019).

The general landscape and culture of education in England was referenced by Head Teachers when describing their decision-making process, as well as the legislation that exists currently. They spoke about the increased focus on educational attainment nationally, as well as the marketisation of education and how this influenced their decision making. Gazeley and colleagues (2015) suggest that this shift has increased the use of exclusion, particularly for pupils whose behaviour would interfere with the attainment of others. This point was expressed by Head Teachers, too, in that they were aware of this practice nationally and used this awareness to prevent their school following the same patterns. Marketisation in education was spoken about, however, Head Teachers in this research provided more of a positive account of its influence. Some spoke about the benefit of belonging to an Academy chain in having more financial resources to support the development of their school, compared to relying solely on support from Local Authorities.

Similarly, Head Teachers' accounts of the use of legislation, particularly of the Government's guidance on employing exclusion, was mostly positive. This provides a different perspective to the Local Authority officers who reported that the guidance was too vague and ultimately confusing (McCluskey et al., 2019). Head Teachers in the current study felt that the guidance provided room for interpretation, which afforded them more autonomy in operationalising their goals. This highlights the lack of Head Teachers' views currently available in the literature regarding helpful and hindering factors in the exclusion decision making process. Perhaps Head Teachers whose schools run with a low-exclusion approach are able to spend more time engaging with and interpreting the Government guidance. Again, future studies might explore the perceived benefits of using the guidance by Head Teachers in both high- and low-excluding schools.

Quantitative Results

Analysis of quantitative data showed there was not a statistically significant relationship between Head Teachers' ratings of the extent to which they consult others and their feeling well-equipped in decision making about exclusions. Most Head Teachers surveyed reported a high level of consulting others during the decision-making process, as well as a high level of feeling well equipped in decision making. According to the qualitative data analysis, the relationship Head Teachers had with other professionals were important in determining who, and how they were consulted during decision making. Head Teachers described formal, professional consultation with some parties, and informal consultation with a personal tone with others. It is not clear from this research how useful Head Teachers found the advice they sought from others. In the case of one Head Teacher, local authority officers were always consulted as part of the process, however, the advice from these officers remained mostly the same; do not exclude. The high average ratings provided by most Head Teachers about the extent to which they consult others and the extent to which they feel well quipped in making decisions about exclusion might suggest that most Head Teachers consult others and that most Head Teachers feel well equipped to make exclusion decisions. These high average results could also suggest that only Head Teachers who tend to consult others, and who feel well equipped to make the decision, participated in this study. Future research could specifically collect the views of Head Teachers who do not often consult others, to better understand how and who these Head Teachers turn to for advice. Future research could also explore the impact that consulting others has on Head Teachers' decision making, to determine voices that are helpful, and those that might reinforce the pressure put on Head Teachers by their obligation to make the final decision.

Summary

The current study provides important findings in the field of research examining the factors linked with disproportionate school exclusions in England and the ways in which Educational Psychology might be employed to reduce them. To the researcher's knowledge, no research exists that examines Head Teachers' decision making about exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour in England. Thompson and colleagues (2021) highlight the need to include the views of multiple stakeholders in the exclusion process, given the often-competing demands of those involved. They suggest identifying and conceptualising the key features of good practice amongst these professionals in the area of exclusion for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. In addressing this topic, the current research provides previously unavailable information about what Head Teachers think of their role as the ultimate decision-maker in this process, their views on government guidance, and how they navigate the complex process of making decisions related to exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. In doing so, the research findings provide more context for interpreting the complex process of exclusion. For example, the findings replicated views presented in research about the importance of Head Teachers' personal values in the process, the impact of multiple obligations to various stakeholders, the benefits of adopting robust systems for behaviour management and a relationship-focused approach in schools, and the importance of understanding pupils' behaviour as part of a wider, inter-related system. (Pratt, 2009; Goings et al., 2018; Okonofua, 2016; Timpson, 2019; Obsuth et al, 2014).

Conversely, as discussed above, the findings of this project challenge claims made by existing research about the influence of group preferences on punitive decision making, the role of punishing minor infringements to send a message to other pupils about behavioural expectations, the role of bias in interacting with parents from low SES backgrounds, the perceived usefulness of Government guidance on exclusion, and the impact of academisation and the marketisation of the education system in England (Son et al., 2019; Welsh and Little, 2018; Gazeley, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2019; Gazeley et al., 2015)

This research provides a novel lens for examining the issue of increasing and disproportionate exclusion rates in England. By better understanding the process by which exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour are decided from the decision makers directly, the mechanisms that perpetuate disproportionate exclusions can be explored (Thomson et al., 2021). This allowed for the discussion of helpful and hindering factors involved in the issue of exclusion, and where attitudinal, systemic and social processes might influence decision making. Doing so has highlighted potentially unexplored areas for future research and ways in which practice might be changed as a result. The next sections will discuss the implications of these findings on practice and policy.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Practice

This research highlighted the role that Head Teachers' decision-making plays in exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. In examining the extent to which Head Teachers feel well equipped in making the decision, and consult others during this process, important questions have come to light. Do Head Teachers tend to consult the same parties for advice about exclusion decision making? If this is the case, could Head Teachers be helped to build relationships with others that might be more helpful? These relationships might provide a key area for consideration when thinking about the ways in which EPs can support Head Teachers in the exclusion decision making process, to enable a multi-professional approach to the process. EPs work across the systems that impact upon a pupil's development, through assessing their needs as part of a graduated approach (DfE SEND Code of Practice, 2015), through consultation (Wagner, 2000; 2016) and by providing professional supervision (Dunsmuir and Leadbetter, 2010). As such, EPs are well placed to either a) facilitate building higher quality relationships between Head Teachers and other professionals, b) develop the perceptions of the EP role so that Head Teachers are aware of the direct contribution they can provide during decision making, for example offering supervision (Dunsmuir and Leadbetter, 2010) or c) work with school systems to provide more early intervention support for pupils at risk of exclusion.

EPs tend to work most closely with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) of a school, whose statutory role is to plan and oversee the special educational needs provision of a school (DfE SEND Code of Practice, 2015). The findings of this research provide renewed motivation for EPs to work alongside Head Teachers, as well as with SENCos. Given the key role that Head Teachers play in decision making, EPs could work with them to guide them during both the decision-making process, and in agreeing and implementing systemic change that would prevent exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour.

Head Teachers discussed the relationships they have with other professionals and how these played a part in the exclusion process. Of particular relevance were Local Authority officers, who Head Teachers tended to describe as providing formal advice which was not always helpful. EPs are well placed, as colleagues of the Local Authority officers, to facilitate building the relationship between Head Teachers and their local Council. EPs could work with both these parties through consultation to shift perspectives so that there is a clear shared goal being worked towards. This would need to be trialled with one or two schools, where the perspectives of the different professionals could be elicited and realigned to improve outcomes for the pupils of these schools. This collaborative approach across divergent perspectives in the exclusion process has been recommended by Thomson and colleagues (2021), and EPs are well placed to begin this type of work.

Head Teachers also described the isolation that their role creates, and how this meant they had to forge their own relationships in order to receive professional and emotional support. EPs are trained in solution-focused approaches and in supervising other professionals. In offering this service to Head Teachers, EPs might provide a reflective space, in which Head Teachers could reflect on the complexity of the exclusion decision making process, and the ways in which their personal characteristics might play a role in this complexity, as suggested by Goings and colleagues in the USA (2018). Similarly, this research highlights the importance of Head Teachers' personal values in the decision-making process and how they align with the policies and procedures they implement in their schools. Again, EPs could provide a reflective space for Head Teachers to identify and discuss their core values and how they might operationalise these in a meaningful way in their schools. This is particularly relevant for new Head Teachers, whether they have recently started in a new school, or on their journey as a new Head Teacher.

The role that high-quality relationships and attachment principles play in improving emotional regulation and behaviour and reducing exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, is outlined in this research. EPs could provide training to schools highlighting this point in the context of building relationships with all pupils, not just those at risk of exclusion. This training could highlight the benefits to staff and pupils when their interactions are attuned and relationships and nurturing. Given that teachers report the stress caused by having to manage behaviour deemed challenging, training to help understand and respond appropriately to this behaviour would benefit staff and pupils alike.

Similarly, EPs could provide training to schools on recognising and responding to unconscious bias, and working with hard to engage families. The findings of this research highlight the fact that Head Teachers tended to make decisions about exclusion of pupils from specific groups on a case by case basis.

EPs could introduce and explore frameworks that can be used to promote culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice. EPs are also well placed to train schools on ways of engaging harder to reach families, with unconscious bias in mind, in line with the recommendations made by Bryan and colleagues (2018).

Policy

This research emphasises the importance of robust systems and processes in school for responding to and managing Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. By highlighting Head Teachers' views that these systems provide a more objective lens through which a pupil's behaviour can be assessed and responded to, considering intersecting precipitating factors and what the pupil needs in order to develop. What is more, this research illustrates the impact of attachment-informed approaches in schools for developing high quality relationships. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) highlights the role of the graduated approach in ensuring equal access to learning opportunities for all pupils, specifically regarding learning and attainment. The findings of this research highlight the importance of viewing behaviour management practice in this proactive and reflective way. These findings could be incorporated into the existing policy, to illustrate how social, emotional and mental health needs which manifest as behaviour deemed challenging, can be better supported by schools as part of the graduated approach.

Similarly, the Government's guidance on exclusion for Head Teachers (2017) could be amended to include case studies of how Head Teachers have navigated the exclusion-decision making process by operationalising their guidance. Although Head Teachers in the present study referred to the general nature of the recommendations as helpful, a clearer picture of good practice could be illustrated which might help new Head Teachers to plan how they navigate the exclusion decision making process.

Finally, the latest version of the Government's Keeping Children Safe in Education policy (2020), which relates to child protection and safeguarding, places more emphasis on the role that behaviour has in communicating poorer mental health in the context of safeguarding concerns. This policy could be updated, in line with the findings of this research, to include examples of how to respond to this behaviour, as well as being able to recognise it. This would include specific guidance on implementing evidence-based relationship focused approaches to responding to pupils' behaviour, and could name EPs as key partners in developing and promoting this practice across the schools in which they work.

Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The sampling technique employed in this research presents a potential limitation of this project. Participants self-selected which means that the findings of this study may be influenced by volunteer bias. The Head Teachers who took part in this study may have represented a distinct group of Head Teachers who are motivated by similar principles and who use similar practice. As a result, the findings of the current study may have excluded the views of a sub-group of Head Teachers who did not want to participate.

The purposive sampling employed in the second phase of the project to recruit Head Teachers for interviews, whilst aiming to recruit a diverse range of participants, is prone to researcher bias, as well as volunteer bias. This means that the views presented, again, cannot be deemed representative of the larger Head Teacher population. The researcher is aware of their own bias inevitably involved in selecting those to be interviewed based on constructs the researcher deemed important.

Similar to this point, is the range of levels of exclusion represented by the interview participants. Eight participants reported not having used exclusion for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour in the academic year 2018/19, five had issued fewer than 10 in this period, whilst only one participant reported issuing 100 exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour in this period. This suggests that the findings are less easily generalisable to a wider population of schools with high (over 100) instances of exclusion for PDB.

The contact list for school email addresses used was finalised some months before it was used by the researcher. Therefore, some Head Teachers in England may not have been provided the opportunity to participate. Similarly, not all of those Head Teachers who agreed to participate in the interview stage were contacted for interview due to the volume of interest shown, the time constraints of the research project as dictated by the University, and the purposeful sampling employed to increase the diversity of the interview participants. As a result, this project might be omitting important views and data from other Head Teachers in England.

The questionnaire collected self-reported data from participants which is vulnerable to social desirability bias. This means that participants, although they were assured of anonymity, may have not answered truthfully, especially given the contentious topic being explored.

The tensions between paradigms underpinning mixed methodological research are well documented (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). A pragmatist stance allows for a creative re-appraisal of the juxtaposing viewpoints associated with qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A strength of this study is the intentional use of mixed methods, and with them their paradigms and assumptions, on the basis that each is valuable in describing a worldview. This Dialectic stance (Greene, 2008) is an important one for the context of this research. It allows for the combination of the potentially divergent epistemological and ontological stances of Head Teachers and EPs, by engaging with and seeking to explore the tension this causes. This provides a foundation for a wider dialogue between these groups, by engaging with the constructs, and quantifiable factors of importance in the exclusion decision making process.

Within the qualitative component of this research, employing a semi-structured interview guide allowed for more in-depth discussion of the issues raised by participants, deemed to be of importance to the participants by the researcher. As a result, the data collected offers more insight into the relatively unexplored area of Head Teachers' decision making related to exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour.

Despite the social distancing guidance in place during the completion of this research, interviews were still possible through video conferencing. This meant that a larger range of Head Teachers could be consulted, in terms of their geographical location, and the number of interviews completed was larger than is typical in this type of qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Reflection on the Research Process

The current research project was subject to a number of changes and iterations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had initially intended to carry out in-person interviews with Head Teachers across two London Local Authorities, one a former professional placement provider, and the other, a current professional placement provider. Despite the changes required in order to comply with the social distancing guidance in effect, I feel that the final iteration of this project provides important information about the national context, something that would not have been possible in the earlier conceptions of this research. The need for constant reflection and refinement of the methodology was challenging, but provided important learning points for me about being clear on the aims of the research project, being confident in the methodology I decided upon, and the need for flexibility in working with real-world issues.

As a result of broadening the sample, a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Given the time constraints of the DEdpsy degree, I was not able to engage with all participants from the first phase who offered to participate in interviews, nor was I able to explore the range of themes across all interviews in great depth. Although the limitations of these points are outlined above, the issue presented an opportunity for me to reflect on the importance of balancing the quality of findings from a research project with the quantity of data collected, harnessing a greater understanding of the role of the researcher in taking important decisions and the responsibility that comes with it.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of the current study have provided a new lens through which to explore exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. They relate to previous research in this area by either corroborating findings, highlighting new information, or by challenging them. As such, a number of directions for future research have been highlighted, which will be summarised below.

The current study sought the views of Head Teachers from a range of locations and representing diverse school contexts. The sample ultimately interviewed for their views in this research, however, represented schools with mostly low exclusion rates. The findings of this research challenge those that explored the influence of group preferences on punitive decision making, as well as research that suggested the Government guidance for excluding was unhelpful. Future research could look at these two viewpoints across both high- and low-excluding schools, to determine whether the views presented in the current study represent only Head Teachers who tend to use fewer exclusions.

This research also found that the Head Teacher’s interviewed did not describe using a framework to aide their decision making. Future studies could seek to ask specific questions about Head Teacher’s knowledge of these frameworks, and whether they are implemented in the decision-making process.

Finally, Head Teachers in this study referenced the importance of high-quality relationships between staff and pupils to reduce the need for punitive responses to behaviours and consequently in reducing the need to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. The focus of this study was on the subjective nature of individual accounts of behaviour, specifically Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Findings did not elicit whether Head Teachers took into account the racial climate of their schools, when considering what made these relationships high-quality. Future studies could seek to ask specific questions about how Head Teachers perceive the racial climate in their schools and what this might mean for how they make decisions about exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour.

Overall Summary and Conclusions

This research explored English Head Teachers’ views on how they navigate the exclusion decision-making process for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. The negative impact of exclusion on pupils is well documented. Given the rise in disproportionate exclusions for certain groups of pupils seen nationally, this research aimed to explore the role of Head Teachers' decision making in excluding for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour. Using a partially mixed sequential dominant phase methodology, a national sample of Head Teachers provided insights into the exclusion decision-making process. Findings suggest that the decision-making process is a complex one, and Head Teachers were influenced by their knowledge and confidence in the education system, their position on exclusion, their principles and by pressure in the system when navigating this process. Head Teachers described considering what a pupil needs, personal approach, school approach and external help and hinderances when discussing the factors they thought were important to consider in the decision-making process. Isolation and professional vs personal (relationships) were themes identified in the data which best captured how and who Head Teachers consulted during decision making. Taken together, these findings provide important implications for the practice of EPs, highlighting where and how their skill set could be employed to aide Head Teachers' decision making and reduce school exclusions. Practice in schools, with an emphasis on relational approaches and building high-quality interactions is suggested as a result of these findings, and suggestions for policy makers about illustrating the importance of systems and processes for responding to Persistent Disruptive Behaviour are advocated. Future research in this area could examine Head Teachers' views on navigating the exclusion decision making process across schools with high- and low-exclusion rates.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Twitter Profile Information

Profile Name: Doctoral Researcher

Profile Biography: Doctoral researcher interested in how Head Teachers in England navigate the decision-making process on whether or not to exclude.

Appendix B: Twitter Posts (tweets)

Head Teachers - What is it like for you to FTE/PeX a pupil?

How do you make the decision?

Share your thoughts in this 5min survey from the UCL Institute of Education: (link to Qualtrics survey)

Head Teachers - What's your process for deciding whether or not to FTE/PeX for 'Persistent, Disruptive Behaviour'?

Share your views in this 5min survey:(link to Qualtrics survey)

Appendix C: Email to Head Teachers

Dear Head Teacher

I am an Educational Psychologist in Training and I am conducting doctoral research on the decision making process Head Teachers use when considering whether or not to FTE/PEx, specifically for Persistent, Disruptive Behaviour.

To share your views in a five-minute survey, please follow the link below, where you will also find more information about the study.

https://uclioe.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6L6I4cscARaWiLb

Thanks for your valuable insights,

Michael

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Exploring Decision Making in School Exclusion

Institute of Education

Information Sheet for Participants

My name is Michael Chambers, Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education, and I am inviting you to take in part in my doctoral research project, 'Exploring the decision making process on whether or not to exclude: How do Head Teachers in England decide?'.

My training as an Educational Psychologist requires completion of a doctoral degree, which includes carrying out research and working for Local Authorities as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

This information sheet will try to answer any questions you might have about the project. However, please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

Michael Chambers, Doctoral Pupil, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Why are we doing this research?

With my research I am hoping to explore the decision making processes used by school leaders when exclusion is being considered.

Why am I being invited to take part?

The researcher is inviting Head Teachers across England to take part in the research project, which involves an interview conducted using the Skype for Business application.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be sent a link to the online interview by email along with a consent form you will need to compete and return to me.

The interviews will be conducted using the application ‘Skype for Business’ and will take approximately 60 minutes. You will be able to terminate your participation during the interview or research project at any time without consequence. Interview questions will focus on your experience of making decisions to exclude and how you navigated this process.

The interviews will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. I will analyse the data from the transcripts to identify themes which help to answer the research questions.

With this research I hope to better understand the factors deemed important to Head Teachers when making the decision on whether or not to exclude a pupil from school.

The data collected in this project will be anonymised, so your school and staff members will not be identifiable from the completed research paper and participation will have no impact on status or job standing.

Could there be problems for me or the school if I take part?

It is unlikely that participation will cause any problems, however, you may find the topics of discussion related to challenging scenarios or social issues distressing. If you want to withdraw from participation for any reason and at any time during the research, you are free to do so. Additionally, I will offer the option of taking a break at any time during the interview if needed. At the end of interviewing, I will provide signposting to relevant services and professionals should you want to discuss any concerns that arise during the interview.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research will be outlined in a report which will form part of my Doctoral Thesis. Participants' identity will be made anonymous in this research.

The data collected in this study will be held in an encrypted file for 10 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part is entirely optional. There will be no negative repercussions for you, your school or staff members if you choose not to be involved.

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions whilst deciding whether or not to take part, you can contact me using the following details:

Michael Chambers

xxxxxxxxx@ucl.ac.uk

0xxxxxxxxxx

Data Protection Privacy Notice

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

Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice

The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be performance of a task

in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for

scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are

able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and

will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to

contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at dataprotection@ucl.ac.uk.

UCL Institute of Education

20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

+44 (0)20 7612 6000 | enquiries@ioe.ac.uk | www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe

Appendix E: Participant Debrief Sheet

Institute of Education

Exploring Decision Making in School Exclusion

Further Questions or Concerns?

If any of the themes covered in this research project have raised questions or concerns for you, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Michael Chambers via email sent to xxxxxxxxx@ucl.ac.uk.

Additionally, here are some links you may find helpful if you would like to discuss any questions or concerns you might have relating to your mental health and wellbeing:

The Mentally Healthy Schools website on how to support staff wellbeing - mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/supporting-staff-wellbeing/

The Anna Freud Centre website on supporting staff wellbeing –

annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resources-for-schools/supporting-staff-wellbeing-in-schools/

The NHS Website 'How to access Mental Health Services' –

nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/

The NHS website ‘Moodzone’ - nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/

The section on mental health at work from the mind.org website. -

mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/

If you are struggling, speak to someone you trust like a friend, colleague or your GP.

UCL Institute of Education

20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

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Appendix F: Participant Consent Form
Exploring Decision Making in School Exclusion

Consent for Interviews

UCL Institute of Education

	(tick as appropriate)
I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	☐
I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the interview at any point.	☐
I agree for the interview to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	☐
I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports (these will be anonymised).	☐

I understand that all school safeguarding protocols will be followed as appropriate, should concerns be raised ☐

I understand that I might be asked questions about my ethnicity, age, geographic location, and other personal information. ☐

Name:…………………………………………………………………..………………….

Signature: ………………………………………………….……………. Date: …………..……..

Name of researcher: Michael Chambers

Signature:[redacted]………………………. Date:

Appendix G: Qualtrics Questions

How do Head Teachers Navigate the Exclusion Decision Making Process?

With this research we aim to answer the following questions:

1. How do Head Teachers in England navigate the decision making process around whether or not to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour? 2. To what exent do Head Teachers consult other parties when making the decision to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour? This questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Please answer openly to provide a representative overview of the current exclusion context; your answers will be kept confidential unless they contravene safeguarding guidelines. At the end of the survey you will be invited to show your interest in participating in an interview with the researcher during the summer of 2020. Two interview participants will be selected based on representing different English regions. Further participants will be selected based on criteria which fit the developing theory from subsequent interviews.

These interviews will provide a chance for you to provide your insight into what is working well and what might need revision, and could contribute to the development of policy and practice. You may exit the questionnaire at any point should you wish to by closing the window.

Thank you for your time and valuable insights.

Exploring the decision making process on whether or not to exclude: How do Head Teachers in England decide?

20/06/20 – 20/01/21

Information Sheet for Participants

My name is Michael Chambers, Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education, and I am inviting you to take in part in my doctoral research project, 'Exploring the decision making process on whether or not to exclude: How do Head Teachers in England decide?'.

My training as an Educational Psychologist requires completion of a doctoral degree, which includes carrying out research and working for Local Authorities as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

This information sheet will try to answer any questions you might have about the project. However, please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

Michael Chambers, Doctoral Pupil, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Why are we doing this research?

With my research I am hoping to explore the decision making processes used by school leaders when exclusion is being considered.

Why am I being invited to take part?

The researcher is inviting Head Teachers across England to take part in the research project, which involves completing a brief online questionnaire.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be taken to the online questionnaire which will ask for information on demographics, your school's context, exclusion process and location. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked if you would like to participate in an online interview with the researcher at a later date and you will be prompted to provide your email address if interested.

I will analyse the data from the questionnaires to identify topics or themes important in answering the research questions.

With this research I hope to better understand the factors deemed important to Head Teachers when making the decision on whether or not to exclude a pupil from school.

The data collected in this project will be anonymised, so your school and staff members will not be identifiable from the completed research paper and participation will have no impact on status or job standing.

Could there be problems for me or the school if I take part?

It is unlikely that participation will cause any problems, however, you may find the topics of discussion related to challenging scenarios or social issues distressing. If you want to withdraw from participation for any reason and at any time during the research, you are free to do so.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research will be outlined in a report which will form part of my Doctoral Thesis. Participants' identity will be made anonymous in this research. I will share the results of this study with you in the form of a research report once the research has been completed.

The data collected in this study will held in an encrypted file for 10 years, after which time it will be destroyed.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part is entirely optional. There will be no negative repercussions for you, your school or staff members if you choose not to be involved.

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions whilst deciding whether or not to take part, you can contact me using the following details:

Michael Chambers

xxxxxxxxxxxx@ucl.ac.uk

0xxxxxxxxx

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found here: www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/participants-health-and-care-research-privacy-notice The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be performance of a task in the public interest. The legal basis used to process special category personal data will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes/explicit consent. Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at dataprotection@ucl.ac.uk.

Please read and tick the following if you agree with each point in order to participate in this research project.

- ☐ I have read and understood the information leaflet about the research. (1)

- ☐ I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations they will not be attributed to me. (2)

- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, without giving any reason and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used. (3)

- ☐ I understand that I can contact Michael Chambers at any time and request for my data to be removed from the project database. (4)

- ☐ I understand that the results will be shared with the UCL Institute of Education Research Council and in research publications and/or presentations. (5)

- ☐ I understand that all school safeguarding protocols will be followed as appropriate, should concerns be raised (6)

- ☐ I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. (7)

☐ I agree for the interview to be audio recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the project. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). (8)

☐ I understand that I will be asked questions about my ethnicity, age, geographic location, and other personal information. (9)

Page Break

What is your age (in nearest year)

____

Please select your ethnic group

○ Asian / Asian British: (98)

○ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British: (104)

- Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: (108)
- White: (113)
- Other ethnic group: (118)
- Any other ethnic group, please describe (120) ____

What langauage is primarily spoken in your household?

____

Page Break

Country of birth

____

Please select your religion

- ○ No religion (4)
- ○ Christian (5)
- ○ Buddhist (6)
- ○ Hindu (7)
- ○ Jewish (8)
- ○ Muslim (9)
- ○ Sikh (10)
- ○ Any other religion, please specify (11) ____

Please select your highest level of qualification

○ Bachelor (53)

○ Masters (54)

○ Doctorate (55)

○ Other, please specify (56)

____

Time in post as a Head Teacher

○ Less than one year (1)

○ More than one year, please specify (2)

____

Location of your School (by Region)

○ Greater London (4)

○ South East (5)

○ South West (6)

○ West Midlands (7)

○ North West (8)

○ North East (9)

○ Yorkshire and the Humber (10)

○ East Midlands (11)

○ East Anglia (12)

Page Break

Please rank the following from most represented to least represented by your pupil intake.

_______ Asian / Asian British: (1)

_______ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British: (4)

_______ Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: (5)

_______ White: (6)

_______ Other ethnic group: (7)

How diverse is your pupil intake regarding socio-economic status

- ○ 0 (0)
- ○ 1 (1)
- ○ 2 (2)
- ○ 3 (3)
- ○ 4 (4)
- ○ 5 (5)
- ○ 6 (6)
- ○ 7 (7)
- ○ 8 (8)
- ○ 9 (9)

○ 10 (10)

Number of fixed term exclusions issued last academic year (approx if figure not known)

____

Number of permanent exclusions issued last academic year (approx if figure not known)

____

Number of exclusions for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour last academic year (approx if figure not known)

____

Of those pupils being considered for exclusion (at risk of exclusion) from your school in the last year, what percentage (approximately) were ultimately excluded?

	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Percentage of Pupils excluded/ total at risk of exclusion ()	

School population size

Extent to which you consult other parties/peers/professionals during the exclusion decision making process.

0 (0)

1 (1)

2 (2)

3 (3)

○ 4 (4)

○ 5 (5)

○ 6 (6)

○ 7 (7)

○ 8 (8)

○ 9 (9)

○ 10 (10)

Extent to which you feel well equipped in making the decision on whether or not to exclude a pupil.

○ 0 (0)

○ 1 (1)

○ 2 (2)

○ 3 (3)

○ 4 (4)

○ 5 (5)

○ 6 (6)

○ 7 (7)

○ 8 (8)

○ 9 (9)

○ 10 (10)

Page Break

The researcher, Michael Chambers, will be conducting further online interviews using Microsoft Teams which will explore how Head Teachers navigate the decision making process on whether or not to exclude.

If you would like to be contacted to discuss participating in a 50-60 minute interview, please enter your email address below.

____

Appendix H: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

This interview will explore your experience of the exclusion decision making process, focusing on exclusions for 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour'. I'd like you to think about how you have managed to navigate these experiences, reflecting on the feelings that emerged and what this has meant for you and your practice.

1. Can you tell me about how exclusion, both FTE and PEX, is used in your school? What are the key elements or points in the exclusion process? How do you manage the feeling of responsibility? (Probe for function and outcomes)

2. Can you tell me about a time when you found the decision making process to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour particularly difficult? (Probe for thoughts, feelings and significance.) What did you take from this experience?

3. Can you tell me about an instance when you were involved in the decision making process to exclude a pupil for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour that lead to a particularly positive outcome? (Probe for thoughts, feelings and significance.)

4. When deciding whether or not to exclude a pupil for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour, what:

- School policy helps you make the decision? (Probe for school ethos, examples of preventative work, in-house and external/ EPs)
- Legislation/guidance helps you make the decision? (Probe for equality act, SEN CoP.)
- CYP factors are helpful to consider? (If protected characteristics/ social graces/social care-safeguarding/developmental levels not mentioned, ask about them).
- Personal factors that you bring to the table do you consider? What about other personal factors that might play a role that you hadn't considered? (Probe for leadership style/ professional perspectives values/protected characteristics).
- Community Factors are considered? (Probe for community demographics, Youth offending pathway, social exclusion).

5. Do you call upon advice from other parties when making the decision to exclude for Persistent Disruptive Behaviour? Whose advice is helpful?

6. What are your thoughts on the future of the exclusion process in your school? Is there anything you would change if you could? What about as a result of what you have talked about today?

Appendix I: Interview Transcript with Codes based on Interview 8

Codes	
	Researcher (R): Brilliant. So, thanks again, (Name), this interview will explore your experience of the exclusion decision making process with a focus on exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. So, I'd like you to think about how you've managed to navigate these experiences, reflecting on the feelings that have emerged and what this has meant for you and your practice as a Head. So, I'll start off with asking, do you have any questions before we begin? No. Okay, brilliant. So, could you talk, first of all, tell me about how exclusion. Sorry, I'll start there, again, exclusion for persistent disruptive behaviour, both fixed term and permanent how that's used in your school. Participant (P)
Don't pex for PDB FTE to prevent PEX Managed transfers On site provision Respite provision with other providers FTE PDB part of step beh system Tracking system for praise and consequences CYP move through tiered response system for beh management	So, we don't tend to use permanent exclusion for fix - for persistent disruptive behaviour. We tend to use other means to address that. And that might be through fixed term exclusion -talk about that in a second - but also investigating other alternatives to those exclusions, like managed transfers And we've got an onsite provision that we just started in September, but unfortunately, not really got off the ground. And the way we were hoping for all the reasons, you know, to do internal, we got like an internal unit we've setup. Also got arrangements with other providers to do respite. So that's the way - we wouldn't normally use permanent. So, in terms of persistent disruption, fixed term exclusion, so we would use that as part of the armoury. And that's, we've got like a step behaviour system, step one, through to 11. And a fixed term exclusion is on the road along with that, and that - that's based upon points that are generated through consequences and praises on - we use Sims is our - But we've also got class charts, as our way of managing that process. And you obviously move your way through up, you move your way through the tiers, depending on how persistent your persistence is. R Yeah. And I think I wanted to touch on that - talking about the kind of subjective nature of persistent disruption and what that might look like, and how do you think that Sims plays a role in maybe equalizing that process for everyone?
Professional meeting to discuss moving CYP through beh policy tiers AHT, stage lead, SENCo Decisions made based on moving through beh policy, rather than on whether to exc or not.	P I don't think it plays any, any role, that's just a vehicle for recording praises, and, you know, praise and consequences and then giving the tallying process, we wouldn't move. So, we have a tiered system as I say once you reach a certain tier, then you would receive a fixed term exclusion from the system. The decision to move through the tiers is not just a tallying up process, it's done in, what we call a professional intervention meeting. So, where you have professionals around the table, from that the Assistant Head in charge of behaviour, who would lead that, to the stage leader and the leader, and they would meet -

	potentially the SENCo, depending on who the individual was. So, we would investigate that before they got to that stage, and then we make a decision about whether then we got to tier two, or tier three or tier four.
	R Okay. And that tiered system, do you think that's that? Does that add anything towards that process being a bit more uniform for everyone? Just thinking about how to get from that objective place to that subjective place, or vice versa?
Tracking system for beh removes subjectivity between staff descriptors Staff skills and experience Tallying system is flawed so needs moderation What beh is communicating Address student beh Address staff practice	P But yes, it provides a moderating process. Yeah. So inevitably, and this happens within schools as much as it does across them, is that one person's disruptive youngster is another one who's not effectively challenged. One person's - Teachers, through varying skill and experience, will deal with situations that will, with the same student, will create a different outcome. So inevitably, there is - there has to be some moderating process. So, a tally system - tallying system can never be… can never, never be the fair or objective for that reason, because it's - it's based on human error isn't it? Our human perception around what the behaviour is, and even what that behaviour means or what our behaviour is categorized as so that moderating process I think of… of the tiering system, if you like, sits parallel to the - the totting up of consequences, which would lead them to be… having a conversation about whether to move them up, you know, the consequences of that- that conversation, rather than moving the student up is to address a particular teachers way of dealing with a particular students or providing support for students to avoid those - those consequences being - being achieved. Yeah…
HT does not attend beh management meeting- AHT does this AHT has embedded system with staff	R So, it sounds to me like you've got a mixture of that kind of quantitative data and qualitative data that you use to help it all-
	P I have to say, I've never been in one of these meetings. I'm not gonna say it's below my pay grade. Because that's a bit rude. But we're a very big school and we've got people doing different roles. So, it's led by an assistant head teacher, and she's been in post, I think this is her third year in post now. And she's done quite a lot to bring about both praise and consequences system that's understood and known, but also a process for moderating and, and understanding the behaviour in the school and how to address that.
HT is aware of students moving up beh system which helps inform decision about excl Size of school Difficult to know each CYP	R Okay, and with that in mind, it sounds like those pastoral sort of team meetings are a really helpful way of kind of delegating and deliberating. And when it comes to you, in terms of having to sign off on these exclusions, do you think that those processes beforehand mean, you've got less responsibility in terms of making a decision, based on limited information,

Heads of school exclude up to 15 days Exec Head excl over 15 days Beh policy outlines role of HTs in excluding CYP behaviour putting others at risk Risk of losing out on education Send signal to CYP to moderate their beh Send signals for other students re boundaries HT experience in the school HT experience Never excluded for PDB Managed transfers instead of Excl School's historic excl practice Exclusions signal confusing messages to CYP about what a final chance is. HT reflecting on own Philosophical position Importance of knowing your own philosophy	P We have to - It hasn't happened here yet. But it could happen. And that is part of it - is actually part of our behaviour policy that - that could be, could be. If you're like tier 11, a permanent exclusion, em, it would be very unusual for me not to know, the students who are moving through. I get the information, obviously, I don't look at it all, we're a school of 2000. So it's always difficult to know, every student as an individual, but if - if a student was - was moving to a situation where there was a possibility of that becoming, at risk of permanent exclusion, the two heads of school, we have one of the Upper School and one of the lowest school, they would they will deal with that, and they have the responsibility and right to exclude up to 15 days, before it gets to me, I only get involved when it's over 15 days, and permanent exclusion, they would never exclude for 15 days without referring it to me anyway. Yeah. So, you'd be on - it would be on your way. They do have that- they have that responsibility. But that - that's more of a collegiate approach at the top well, necessarily, actually, what our specific policy describes. R Yeah, so it sounds like that collegiate approach offers that balance of kind of responsibility. Yeah. And - and what would you say the function of exclusion is in terms of your perception of it, both fixed term and permanent? P It's two things, well is three things, maybe. The first thing is obviously, if - if the students behaviour brings others at risk, and in whatever context that might mean risk of losing out from an education risk of their safety, risk of the site safety. Then that student not being on site is - is a response to that, is going to prevent that from happening again. Two, is, is I think, to, to send signals for individual students to moderate their behaviour, and not do whatever the behaviour is. And three is to send a signal to other students that we are serious about holding the line in terms of whatever the line we are holding in particular behaviour that you're referring to. R Yeah. Okay. And I want to focus in now a bit more on a specific case, if you have one, or you can think of one, for the exclusion for persistent disruptive behaviour, or a student who's at risk of permanent exclusion. And I want you to think about the decision-making process around whether or not to exclude that student and when it led to a particularly difficult outcome, or it was a particularly difficult decision-making process to go through. Have you got anything to mind that you can think of that? P I've been here, I've only been here two years. But I've been a Head for 16 years. So, I've got plenty of experience of -of exclusion in all its … formats. And we, in the time I've been here, we've never excluded for persistent disruptive behaviour. That's not been something we've ever done. We've always looked to managed transfer students somewhere else before that's, that's happened. And that - that has, I think, served us

Staff and CYP know where HTs line is. Long FTE instead of PEX is bad - confuses student about beh and consequence Excl doesn't address PDB Prosecuting for something that might have happened 18 months ago. Punishment should be linked to the beh Straw that broke camel's back is only a straw. Confuses parent's too. Exclu useful when younger students have done something silly/ outside parent's values Excluding as early intervention Excluding in y9,10,11 is not good. CYP age and stage - if you haven't got them in line with school culture by y8… CYP age and stage Factors outside of school	reasonably well, certainly, since I've been here. In terms of, I think the school's history before I came, the previous head teacher had a no perms exclusion policy whatsoever. And they didn't, didn't see that - they would do everything, but permanently exclude. One of my concerns about the number of exclusions when I came here and the length of the exclusions were, the signalling process to a student is quite confusing. If you, for instance, exclude for something that's quite serious as a pattern of behaviour as a final chance. And then what? You know, where does that leave school in terms of its philosophical position on the next instance? So, is a final chance having to do something of equally serious nature? Or is it if anything happens, you're likely to be permanently excluded? You know, to mean, I think in terms of - in terms of running the philosophy around exclusions, it's quite important that you do - you do understand what your own philosophy is around there, and what, what you will and won't do, and the days cascaded across the school. And I suppose that I think probably having been here now for about 20 months, that that position would be quite clear, from my perspective. What - where my line is, relative to anybody else who's been here before. We'll come back, though. So that's probably easier. Where I think exclusion gets you into trouble is where you do a long-fixed term exclusion, instead of a permanent exclusion, even for persistent disruptive behaviour, because I don't think it leaves you anywhere to go. Then I don't think - It leaves the student feeling confused about - about the relationship between the negative, whatever it is, whatever they've done, even over a period of time, and the sanction. And that, and also that - that does speak to persistently bad behaviour - excluding for a long period of time, for persistently bad behaviour - it doesn't seem to address the behaviour at the time it's happened, because you're sort of prosecuting them for something that may have happened in the previous 18 months. And I think that's, that's confusing, always. Best is where punishment is - if you want to use that word - is, is closely associated with the thing that was wrong. Okay, so difficult with persistent destruction, because, you know, all the tallying up basis, you may have done lots of worse things, before the point of which you are permanently excluded. And, you know, the school may think, it's the straw that broke the camel's back. But it may only be a straw. Whereas you've already been, you know, logging on, you know, boxes, and then you're excluding the straw. And the two things don't - I think that's confusing for parents as well, actually. R Yeah. And that's because it kind of sounds like students might get a bit confused as to everything else before this was fine. Now, I hadn't really thought of it in that way before. Have you got … Have you got anything that kind of springs to mind in in terms of an experience, where a student was excluded, and led to a particularly positive outcome? Using that exclusion process to facilitate a positive change? P I think the only time I think exclusion has ever been a particularly positive situation is where younger students - on the individual themselves first, particularly younger students - have done something

Exclu successful for setting boundaries re fire alarms misuse A line up of CYP Addressing smaller behaviours to prevent larger behaviours Warning/cultural reminder. Knives/weapons Mitigating factors HT and school's philosophy	silly. And I'm not gonna say out of character, because that, that that's too black and white. But they've done something perhaps, that they wouldn't -that would have sat outside their, and their parents value system, and that they get a shock from that and the support to the parents and the school. And the sooner it is taken actually provides the opportunity to - to remedy a set of behaviours. If you're, if you're excluding a student in 9, 10 11, for persistent disruptive behaviour, I've never seen that go positively. That I've never seen that have an impact on a youngster where you would say, "wow, you know, that, that - that's made a massive impact on that youngster", because many respects, you haven't really got them by year 8 in terms of school culture, and this, that and the other. That's not to say you wouldn't exclude in year 10, it tends to be - again, a single, single instance of stupidity, you know, like a rash response to a situation, or, or a response to an emotional response to something that may not be to do with school. And that exemplifying itself in a particular behaviour. I think in terms of positive outcomes for exclusion fixed term, if you want to, I've been in schools where fire alarms have been done repeatedly, which is incredibly disruptive, and quite debilitating to everybody's morale and feeling of wellbeing. If you're able to identify a student through that. This, this done quickly. And to make an example of them, not the necessarily you would you know, publicize to the whole school that, you know, X has done this. And they, this has been a consequence, but that you've managed to make some public show of it, i.e., taking somebody from the line in a line-up outside during the fire drill. Because somebody set that the fire alarm off, I think that has a massive impact on - on other youngsters, then. You know, there is- because they all think, in big schools that, you know, you let the fire alarm off. And, you know, it's all very funny for the student who's done it. And that's it. And no deep nothing ever happens about it and nobody ever knows about it. But if there's a perception that the school does know about it, does do something about it. I think that can nip that in the bud. Yeah. So as a sort of, as a warning almost as part of a bigger cultural reminder.
Needing to stick to word re what is excludable - fireworks SEN EHCP- think very hard about excl	R Okay, and so it sounds like you haven't really found much difficulty in terms of being tasked with excluding because of the systems you've set up around you whereby you've got those supportive senior colleagues below you who can do all of the decision making, which means you're only getting really the most difficult or the most extreme versions of that, I'd imagine. And can I ask, what … what factors do you kind of call upon when you're making decisions about some of those more serious cases that do come to you, or if you were to offer advice to a more junior colleague about what does and doesn't need to be considered when you're looking at a child in context for exclusion?
Emergency annual review taken place? CYPs level of disadvantage Disproportionately affected groups	I mean, it was, obviously, the event causing the exclusion would be, would be probably the most significant thing. So, there are certain things for which, you know, I would have a fairly hard and fast rule. Around knives - bringing a weapon being one of those. I would, what I would, what I would be saying to someone who brought that to me now, I'd be saying, you know, "what, are there any mitigating factors? What are the

Guidance on equity duties (equality act?) GRT Black Caribbean Abhorrent act vs disadvantaged group Difficult decision - relies on personal philosophy Racism as a trigger for fighting for e.g. Case by case approach Aftermath of exclu - withdrawing CYP education Historical exclusions did not have an impact Punishment might have fit the crime, but nothing done afterwards to prevent reoccurrence HT view on length of exclusion	mitigating factors?" Because my, my principle here, my starting point would be to permanently exclude. "What, what's going to prevent me from doing that? You know, what are the mitigating factors here? What, what, what narrative?" Does -I have to satisfy my own philosophy? And because I represent the school, the school's philosophy, we would, we would always say to students, for instance, you know, fireworks coming up, if you bring fireworks in school, you will be permanently excluded. That's, and students are going to get that message. And then if I - somebody brings fireworks in and I don't permanently exclude, that's confusing, and that's a confused message. So, I would need to know, were there any mitigating factors, aside from that, of the things that I will be considering would be the student themselves in terms of their characteristics. So, SEN would be one factor that would, would definitely influence my decision, if they had an EHCP. Or was going along that route (inaudible) I'd be very be minded not to exclude them. It has to be fairly extreme for me to exclude any ECHP students. Although I would do it, but I'd have to - I'd have to think very carefully about that. And I have to say, if it was, for instance, for persistent disruptive behaviour, I would want to know that there had been an emergency annual review, before we've done that. If it was for fixed term exclusion, were there alternatives, could they be in school? And because we already know they're incredibly disadvantaged in lots of ways, you know, could something else be done, that doesn't mean they have to be at home for five 7, 10 days? Whatever it might be. I'd also be then looking at particular groups that were disproportionately affected. So mainly to look at what the guidance would say around my equality duties. I think the SEN thing for me sits more with a, philosophical duty, but I'd also want to look at my equality duties around groups that are disproportionally excluded. It's quite difficult - that one because if -if a student is from a particular group, maybe the traveller or black Caribbean, and yet they've done something abhorrent, you know, where does - where… where does that fit with you? Is that because they've done something abhorrent, but they're a traveller, that they are not going to get permanently excluded? Well, that sits less comfortably with me. I think, if it was a mitigating factor, I think if you were to say mitigate - some elements of racism in in the lead up to a fight or something, then, you know, I would look at that as a mitigating factor. But also, all I would say was to be more mindful of my duty to look at the board. I don't think I would be that more mindful. Actually, I think I'll be as mindful of any exclusion but in terms of SEN, I would certainly want to be clear about R Yeah. So, I think I asked you a bit of an unfair question, because I was asking you, in general, what would you do, but it's quite obvious that you can't take a general approach because you need to think about case by case scenario as it sounds. P I play with exclusion one hundred percent case by case. And because effectively, you're withdrawing a child's education. And I think this school particularly had a much more, a much more hard and fast - they would exclude kids for five days, 10 days. I'd have another look at some of the

Longer exclusions don't make a difference	records or some of the youngsters in year 10. And year 11, there might have been 50 days exclusion over I think - what… what's that, you know, anybody, you could ask me the question, you could ask me the question. What was the impact of those exclusions? Of the kid being excluded? Well, what was it? Clearly wasn't very much, because clearly, they keep being excluded. So maybe the punishment did fit the crime. But the - the things that needed to happen afterwards to prevent it happening, again, didn't happen, or maybe the punishment didn't fit the crime. But you have a question.
	R Yeah. And so, it sounds like, you've got this distinction between a punishment that can also be a learning experience for a young person. But there are some punishments that don't help them learn or change or grow in a way that you want them to fit into the culture or the philosophy of the school.
Staff aligned with HT view that exclu was sometimes appropriate HT view that excl were too high and not having impact Staff level of experience in the org meant easier to change agenda/approach Staff Perceptions of leadership approach	P I think in terms of - So one of the other aspects of exclusion is this: Obviously a fixed term exclusion could be for one day, it can be for lunchtime, or it could be for 45 school days in the term. And, you know, I think. It was thinking about the length of an exclusion. And then if you want to ask about that, I'll deal with it. Now. The question: What's the difference? And I would say this, what's the difference? We're excluding for five days? Or 10? days? What- what? What- what are we gaining? What's the child gaining from the five or 10 days? Yeah, that would ask senior leaders bringing that kind of exclusion to me, "what, what, why not just doing them for two days? or three days? What? What's the benefit of their? What have you? …
	R Can you give me some insight into the approach you've taken with maybe helping staff come on board with your philosophy, if they haven't sort of slotted in with it naturally? I'm imagining a discussion maybe with a senior leader who saying no, we need to go for 10 days, and you're saying no, go for five. And how have you helped to get sort of the school staff on - on your vision?
External agencies impact CYP but not exclusion process	I think, what I would say in terms of, I'd say there was some frustration at the approach before I arrived in terms of the no exclusion approach. And that me saying "I don't believe in no permanent exclusion" Actually, was quite welcome. So, in terms of, I mean, I make no bones about it. When I came here, the exclusions were far too high, and needed to be reduced, the number of days was far too high, and needed to be reduced. Because, you know, just a cursory glance at the evidence would suggest that they weren't having an impact. And, you know, maybe I was lucky that the school - you know, partly as a result of having so many fixed term exclusion - put someone into - somebody into post for years, starting in September, before I started in June, to start looking at behaviour and thinking about behaviour a bit differently. And because obviously, I knew I was coming in about February, at the time that those conversations with that person, and I didn't feel as though you

CYP sense of safety/cared for to prevent excl. CYP learning needs External services support with earlier issues Role of EP Inclusion service LA Traded service Inclusion team provide PSPs HT views on how schools use PSPs Inclusion service rarely has positive impact Support services for at rick CYP do not exist Casual admissions process CYP moving around the system Schools in difficulty accept most challenging students Restorative justice is labour intensive HT view of schools using restorative justice loosely	know, I was pushing to a closed door. But I was pushing a colleague who was new in post, she probably had less and less at stake in changing things than maintaining the status quo than some - some of them might have had. Yes, I think that was… I think there's a recognition that it was a risk to the school as well, having that many of the fixed term exclusion, obviously, this term we have none, so it's been quite good term so far. Yeah. R Interesting. And, again, I'm going to finish up with just asking you about some sort of your thoughts on external kind of partnerships and how they might influence the exclusion process in your school. It sounds like you've got a fairly clear idea of what you want that to be and what it is, obviously as a trainee, I'm interested in if you think about other services like the SEN-type services. Like speech and language or EPS, inclusion, local authority officers. Can you give me a brief insight into kind of what your views are on those external agencies, whether they're private or state funded? P Well, I think I didn't, I didn't really think that they, they have a huge impact on exclusion, per se. I would say all of those services leave aside the inclusion service for a second. But all of those services do have an impact on youngsters. And I think all - everything that we know about education, will tell you, that a child is engaged and able to engage with - with the work at the appropriate level, feels challenged, supported, and cared for, that they're less likely to be excluded. And if those things are not the case, if they - they can't access the work, if they are in a place where they don't feel safe. All those dangerous behaviours and negative behaviours are more likely to occur, not to say if you've got all of the great things in place it thinking bad things aren't happening. That's not true. But I think certainly if you have more of those. So, you know, if you look at the support of an EP, look, support of SEN support, services to support youngsters more generally, they would all be good things in terms of avoiding exclusion, in terms of alternatives to exclusion. Again, if that's the thrust of your question, and the role of the inclusion service, I would have to say that the role we have - We buy into to the inclusion service, that their only real involvement is the pastoral support plans. I'd say pastoral support plans, unless they are understood in the context of a of a whole behaviour policy, are totally irrelevant. And schools just use them as a precursor to getting rid of people. And I know that that's, that's, that's something that schools will always want to make sure they've done to make sure that ticked all the boxes, if I'm being honest. Rarely do they have, in my experience a really positive impact on youngsters. (Inaudible) ...I have seen that, whether that's been the PSP or not, I don't know. But the incentive, the support more widely to get provision that might be more suitable for youngsters, who pled not suitable to mainstream. There is - I mean, that those services do not exist. And that schools are often left with some quite troubled youngsters, who - and there's a lot of them going around the casual admissions process now, because schools will put pressure on parents, they will then lead that to go home educate, and then they'll just

HT view of not being critical as resources are sparse HT experience in ed HT approach to practice, - act in haste, repent at leisure. HT view on being reflective about emotional reaction Involving adults who know CYP best HT has agreed and disagreed with staff HT power to make ultimate decision communicated to staff Staff can be emotionally blackmailing Modelling practice for SLT HT using experience in decisions making	circumvent the admissions code by applying to another school. And it's an absolute scandal, what's going on around that. These youngsters are just moving around the system. And always the schools which have most difficult - find ourselves accepting the most difficult students. And that - that's a scandal in itself. This is hidden, and nobody wants to have a conversation about that, because it's too difficult. R So, it sounds what's really coming out strongly is that idea of preventative work rather than restorative in terms of some of the services that would come in an earliest stage to work with building skills that young people can develop, to stop themselves getting excluded, rather than coming in after that's been an issue. P I mean, restorative justice is something that I think schools grapple with. I don't think they are that terribly effective, because, you know, they're incredibly time consuming to do if you want to do them properly. And it does take quite a bit of skill, if you've homophobically bullied me, and to have that restorative conversation between - between you and me and to broker that- I think that's quite a difficult and quite a difficult process, and one, which requires some skill and training and time. And if it's, if it's not done with those things in place, then it will leave, you know, the victim feeling doubly victimized, and potentially, will, may or may not have any impact on - on the perpetrator. Because in the wide context, they're a victim in them - in themselves. You know, it's something that is incredibly time consuming to do while I think schools don't, in my experience, at least don't do brilliantly. You know, I've had a lot of schools paying lip service to the idea, but it's not quite the crux of what it means. To be restorative justice, striving. with any of those schools doing that, because I think it's quite difficult. I don't think it's an easy - I wouldn't be critical of schools who do that, because the amount of resources they would need to put into made that work effectively is quite significant. R Yeah. And as you mentioned, the skill level needed to mediate a conversation at that level of difficulty. And I want to finish off by just finding out a bit more about you, (Name), if you're happy to answer a question about what personal factors you bring to the role of as a head teacher, but specifically that decision making process that I'm alluding to, what personal factors you bring to that role that you think help or hinder the process. Experience. So, I've been a senior leader since, I think - I've been on senior leadership teams since about 1995. So quite I mean, I know I'm only 25, you're a bit surprised about that (giggles). But I'm, I've been in this game for a long time, I've seen - seen most things, I think also someone who believes in act in haste, repent at leisure. And, you know, inevitably, when something happens in school, you're going to have an emotional reaction to it. I think at least recognizing that you're going to have an emotional reaction to it is a good thing. In the sense that, you

	know, something bad's happened, but lots of bad things have happened in my time as a senior leader. That your emotional reaction is always to go route one, we need to get rid of that students. But, you would never want to act on that impulse. You don't want to - Take some time, I always want to also, I would also always look to allow those people who know the student best to be part of the conversation, but let them clearly know. So that is my decision, not theirs. And, you know, I disagreed with lots of colleagues. But I've also been persuaded by colleagues over the years, even recently, and my experience has been, when you are clear about that dynamic that, you know, I'm, I want to know what you think about this, and I generally take it on board. But at the end of the day, it's my decision I found people have taken that - have used that opportunity wisely, and have not looked… Because some people can be quite emotionally blackmailing about these situations, because you are talking about potentially some youngster's life and their opportunities being curtailed by permanent exclusion, for instance. And I would also, I would also say that, you know, you can model that for your other senior leaders, and in taking the same decision, then I think that's a good thing. And I will always seek to avoid permanent exclusion, unless it was absolutely necessary, in my opinion. And the absolute necessity would be that they couldn't be admitted to another school immediately, through a managed transfer where a period out of school was necessary for that student to reflect on something that is pretty bad, that has happened. So, I suppose experiences that thing I bring to it more than anything. R Okay, yeah, that's really interesting. Question. Oh, yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much. And I'm aware of the timing. So, I'm going to let you go (name). But I just wanted to finish off by asking if you had any other further questions for me, or any sort of comments, or… P Not really. Good, good luck. So, what are you're a Trainee EP? R Yes, I'm in my final year. So, I'll be submitting this as my thesis in May time. So, I'll be producing a research report at the end, I'm offering that to all of the head teachers who've done my interviews if you're interested. P Good luck with everything. Yeah, you too. Thanks so much, (name).

Appendix J: Codebook based on Interview 1

Code Label	**Description**	**Qualifications or exclusions**	***Examples***
Never Excluded	Mentions how they currently or have previously operated regarding use of exclusion	Can describe their practice or the practice of others	*Okay, so I haven't ever excluded im im just about to start my thrid year as a head. But I have been teaching since 1994. I personally have never excluded either fixed term or permanently.*
Staff mindset	Describes how staff think, feel, or behave in relation to understanding CYPs behaviour	Can include what staff ave said or done, as well as the HT's perception of the views of their staff	*There are a lot of people who've been in that school for - you know - for longer than I've been a teacher who are so set in their ways and*

Code Label	Description	Qualifications or exclusions	*Examples*
			have not often understood the demographic of children begins to change over time.
No better alternative	Expresses view that Exclusion is the only option	Including views that exclusion is the ‘end of the line’ and critique of this view	*We need to, because there isn't a better procedure in place, but not because it's the right procedure*
Exclusion is a Sign of failure	The view that exclusion is not beneficial and indicates a fault in the school’s system	Can describe personal feeling of ‘letting a child down’ as well as general view of what exclusion	*If I'm honest, I think it's a sign of failure. That you, and the school alongside the supporting bodies that should be there to support you haven't done what they*

Code Label	Description	Qualifications or exclusions	*Examples*
		represents for them	*should've done for the child.*
Secondary diff to primary	Highlights the differences between secondary and primary school regarding approach to behaviour management and the relational aspects of the structures therein	Includes contrasting descriptions between how both settings manage similar situations, as well as how staff conceptualise their role in CYPs education (and general development)	*There's a lot of pushback from from secondaries and secondary heads, secondary teachers, and a lot of pushback about understanding kids, because it's more, you know, it's more about the transmission of knowledge,*
Developmental changes	Gives consideration to the biological and social development of	Including evidence of when HTs	*I appreciate the behaviours come with a difference as*

Code Label	Description	Qualifications or exclusions	*Examples*
	CYP and how these impact on their functioning.	considered a CYPs developmental stage, as well as critique of practice that does not seem to take this into account.	*the children get older.*
Exclusion doesn’t work	Same as ‘exclusion is a sign of failure?’		*But I genuinely just think that it doesn't work as a deterrant*
Aftermath of Exclusion	Discussing the consequences of exclusion for the CYP or their family	Focused on the negative impact that exclusion can have	*It causes massive feelings of shame of it breaks down relationships*
Exclusion to ask for help	HTs using exclusion to highlight to others that they cannot meet child’s needs with their	Including personal experiences of doing so and	*I think if it is used its because you're basically saying help I can't cope,*

Code Label	Description	Qualifications or exclusions	*Examples*
	current level of provision	ideas about what it should be used for	*we can't offer the child what they need, we're not getting it right.*
Exclusion as respite for school	Expressing that the school system/staff benefit from the time away from managing a CYP’s behaviour	Including personal experience or description of what other schools do	*We need to have some time when the child doesn't come to our setting*
I do things differently	HT expresses that the approach they take to behaviour management/exclusion is uncommon	Including their views as well as actions	*Yeah, that's kind of my view about it I suppose. slightly Extreme possibly.*

Appendix K: Grouping Codes into Patterns which Informed Themes

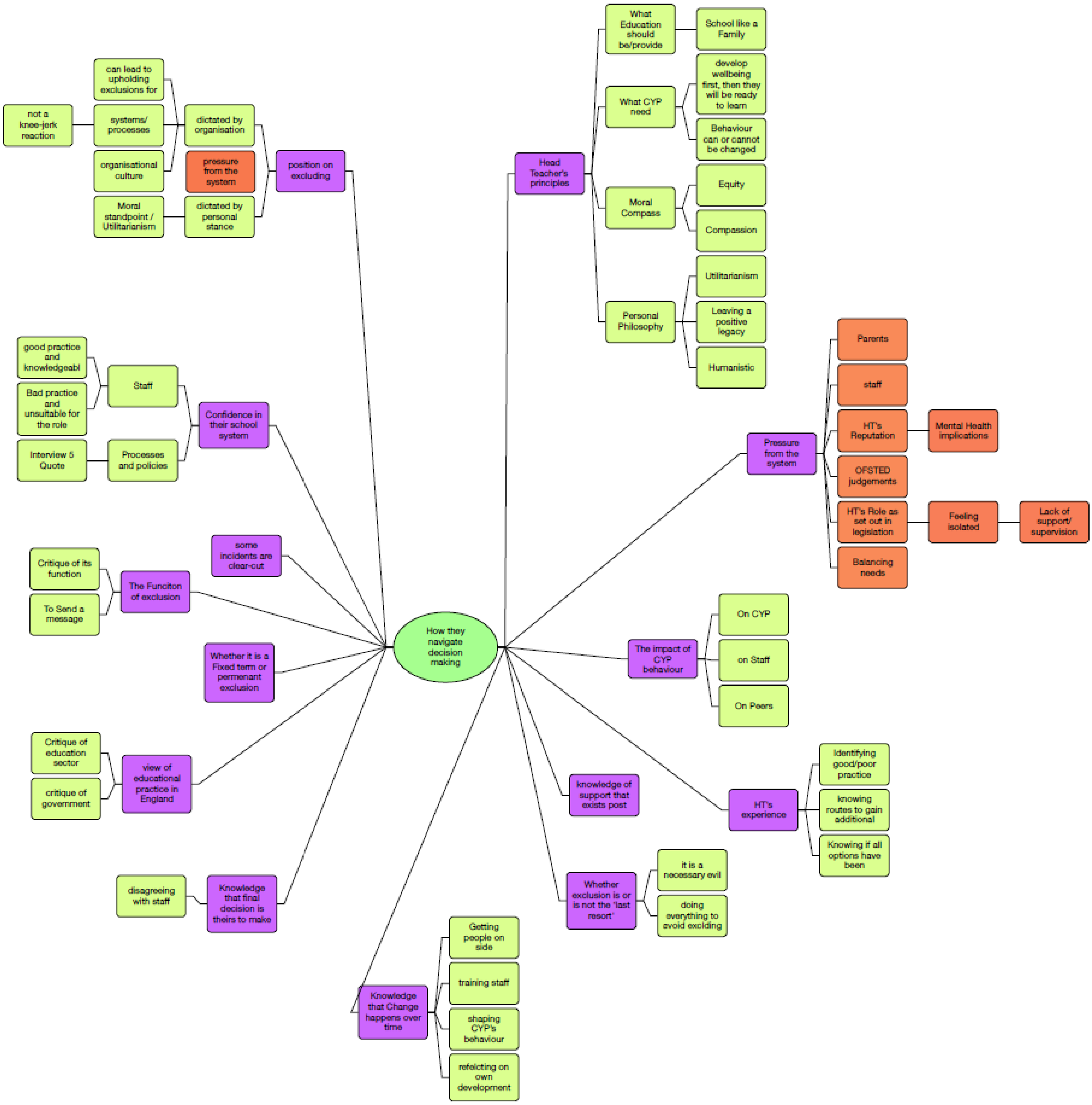
Emerging Category/Pattern	Code
Position on exclusion/either do or don't as a system/culture. and some specific instances within that (mean a HT has to uphold an exclude in order to be consistent -linked to pressure from the system??) Decisions made based on policy/process/ system Decisions made based on: • Principles about what education should be/what children need • Feelings of confidence in /pressure from system and its components (i.e. staff) • Morals around equity/ humanism/compassionate world view Some incidents are clear cut The impact of behaviour on the CYP, their peers and the staff around them. The function of an exclusion helps HTs decide whether or not it should be used. -HTs were critical of the function in general, however, there are specific occasions they felt it was appropriate to exclude to	Don't pex for PDB Decisions made based on moving through beh policy, rather than on whether to exc or not. Staff skills and experience Tallying system is flawed so needs moderation Address student beh Address staff practice HT is aware of students moving up beh system which helps inform decision about excl Difficult to know each CYP CYP behaviour putting others at risk Risk of losing out on education Send signal to CYP to moderate their beh Send signals for other students re boundaries HT experience in the school HT experience Never excluded for PDB School's historic excl practice Exclusions signal confusing messages to CYP about what a final chance is. HT reflecting on own Philosophical position Importance of knowing your own philosophy Staff and CYP know where HTs line is. Long FTE instead of PEX is bad - confuses student about beh and consequence Excl doesn't address PDB Prosecuting for something that might have happened 18 months ago. Punishment should be linked to the beh Straw that broke camel's back is only a straw. Confuses parent's too. Exclu useful when younger students have done something silly/ outside parent's values Excluding as early intervention Exclu successful for setting boundaries re fire alarms misuse A line up of CYP Addressing smaller behaviours to prevent larger behaviours Warning/cultural reminder.

achieve a desired outcome (e.g. sending a signal to other students about boundaries when HT first started in the school).	Knives/weapons Mitigating factors HT and school’s philosophy Needing to stick to word re what is excludable - fireworks Abhorrent act vs disadvantaged group
HT experience level is called upon to justify good/poor practice, determine routes for gaining more support, and whether or not all has been done to support a CYP.	Difficult decision - relies on personal philosophy Racism as a trigger for fighting for e.g. Case by case approach Aftermath of exclu - withdrawing CYP educating Historical exclusions did not have an impact Punishment might have fit the crime, but nothing done afterwards to prevent reoccurrence
Distinction between FTE and PeX	HT view on length of exclusion Longer exclusions don’t make a difference
Knowledge of support that exists following exclusion	Staff aligned with HT view that exclu was sometimes appropriate HT view that excl were too high and not having impact Staff level of experience in the org meant easier to change agenda/approach
Criticism of educational practices/state of the education sector in general	Staff Perceptions of leadership approach HT views on how schools use PSPs Casual admissions process
Exclusion is the last resort/ approach involves doing as much as possible to avoid exclusion/necessary evil	CYP moving around the system Schools in difficulty accept most challenging students Restorative justice is labour intensive HT view of schools using restorative justice loosely HT view of not being critical as resources are sparse
Knowing that the final call is HTs to make (if there are disagreements with staff etc)	HT experience in ed HT view on being reflective about emotional reaction HT using experience in decisions making Schools aren’t perfect.
	FTE to prevent PEX Managed transfers On site provision
School beh policy where exlcu is part of a pathway/spectrum with a series of steps/actions that can be	Respite provision with other providers FTE PDB part of step beh system

taken to prevent, which also allows for more objectivity in defining behaviours consequences (includes staff roles in this?) Size of school can determine the level of proximity HT has to individuals/cases and the knowledge they have about them/ this can lead to taking on more responsibility in smaller schools - HTs spoke about knowing at risk children well, though. CYP age and stage (linked to idea of crystallised behaviours by a certain age/ if CYP hasn't conformed by a certain age they just won't 'get it' - idea that QFT is providing appropriate training/upskilling of CYP) External factors which are mostly reflective of the school's community, including SES, parental education and employment status/ CYP peers (gang involvement) were important. A CYP's SEN - ASD and ADHD frequently referenced CYP's ethnicity/cultural background	Tracking system for praise and consequences CYP move through tiered response system for beh management Professional meeting to discuss moving CYP through beh policy tiers AHT, stage lead, SENCo Tracking system for beh removes subjectivity between staff descriptors What beh is communicating HT does not attend beh management meeting- AHT does this AHT has embedded system with staff Size of school Heads of school exclude up to 15 days Exec Head excl over 15 days Beh policy outlines role of HTs in excluding Managed transfers instead of Excl Exclu useful when younger students have done something silly/ outside parent's values Excluding in y9,10,11 is not good. CYP age and stage - if you haven't got them in line with school culture by y8 CYP age and stage Factors outside of school SEN EHCP- think very hard about excl Emergency annual review taken place? CYPs level of disadvantage Disproportionately affected groups Guidance on equity duties (equality act?)

CYP's ability to regulate/understand beh and consequences/ ability to learn from consequences Work that external partners do/ role of EPs at early intervention stage. External professional input is limited by access and funding HT criticism/praise for external partners/the systems they work in. (including LA EPs quality lottery/freedom of choice. Rely on the school's Ethos/Vision/Values etc Training staff formally, through peer support, through modelling, through observations and feedback.	GRT Black Caribbean CYP being able to understand their beh/. consequences of Could school have done more to prevent this beh External agencies impact CYP but not exclusion process CYP sense of safety/cared for CYP learning needs External services support with earlier issues Role of EP Inclusion service LA Traded service Inclusion team provide PSPs Inclusion service rarely has positive impact Support services for at rick CYP do not exist Restorative justice is labour intensive HT approach to practice, - act in haste, repent at leisure. Modelling practice for SLT HT view of arrogance of other professionals/ we know best Involving adults who know CYP best HT has agreed and disagreed with staff HT power to make ultimate decision communicated to staff Staff can be emotionally blackmailing

Appendix L: Initial Thematic Map



Appendix M: Final Thematic Map