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**Exploring the issue of transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3 through
the National Curriculum for English
A middle school perspective**

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Abstract

This study explores the well-documented issue of the academic attainment dip between key stage 2 and key stage 3 through the lens of the English curriculum. Employing critical discourse analysis on two political speeches which set out the aims and rationale for curriculum reform, and on the National Curriculum for English itself (implemented in 2015), this study examines the lack of parity and coherence between the two curricula. This study also utilises data from semi-structured interviews of middle school practitioners to explore first-hand experiences of policy enactment of both key stage 2 and 3. The study explores a body of existing literature on transition, most of which conclude that the issue lies with the social, emotional, and/or behavioural elements involved in the move from primary to secondary school. This thesis, from a middle school perspective where students do not leave for high school until year 9, argues that the issue of transition and subsequent academic attainment dips are as a result of the curriculum. It argues that in order for a more meaningful, fluid transition to occur, the national curriculum needs to be rewritten so the key stage 3 curriculum builds on the key stage 2 curriculum, and offers more cohesion between the two so that secondary English teachers better understand the requirements and expectations in key stage 2, particularly the rigours of the end-of-key-stage SATs.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter contextualises the research by outlining how I became aware of the issues surrounding transition between key stages 2 and 3 specifically in the subject of English, why this is an area that needs further investigation, and why previous research on this area has been lacking. I then present my research questions followed by how my findings could be significant in this area of education. Following this, I present my background and reasons for conducting this research before providing a brief outline of the chapters to follow.

English is one of the core subjects in both primary and secondary education in schools in England therefore it is unsurprising that a considerable body of research has focused on the curriculum in this area. Before moving on to discuss the focus of this thesis, it is first important to outline my understanding of the term curriculum. Curriculum can be seen as instruction, learning experiences, or ‘a blueprint for achieving restricted objectives in a school setting’ (Egan, 2003, 9). As an English teacher, I enact the National Curriculum which is ‘a set of subjects and standards used by primary and secondary schools so children learn the same things. It covers what subjects are taught and the standards children should reach in each subject’ (Gov.UK, 2013). Therefore, my understanding of curriculum, as a teacher, is as a guide to support educators as to the content of students’ learning, as well as setting out the skills students require in order to achieve and to make progress.

The focus of this thesis is on the most recent curriculum reform which came about following the Coalition Government’s election in 2010. Michael Gove was appointed the Secretary of State for Education, and one of his first moves was to reform the curriculum across all key stages, with a view to making it more rigorous and academic. As a result of this aim, the curriculum reform which followed over the subsequent years was considerable; however, one area which continued to be an issue – arguably more so due to the more challenging nature of the curriculum in particular key stages – is the transition between key stage 2 and 3.

The National Curriculum is a programme of study and attainment for key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 which all local-authority-maintained schools in England must follow (Department for Education [DfE], 2014). Since 2010, many schools have converted to academies and therefore they are not local-authority-maintained schools. This means that they have more autonomy

over how they are run which means not they do not have to follow the national curriculum (Gov.UK, 2022). The end of KS2 assessment (SATs) is compulsory for year 6 students in state schools (including academies, free schools and maintained schools) therefore many schools tend to follow the National Curriculum as it helps prepare students for this end-of-key-stage assessment. Many secondary schools also choose to follow the National Curriculum as they must provide a broad and balanced curriculum which will be assessed by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) during routine inspections.

The issue of transition is one that has been extensively written about. In a traditional setting, students in England move from primary school at age 11 (year 6) to secondary school (year 7). The exception to this is the middle school where students generally start in year 5 and move onto high school at the end of year 8. There are currently 102 middle schools in England (The National Middle Schools' Forum [NMSF], 2021). This is a small number compared to the number of primary and secondary schools in England as most middle schools have been phased out over the last few decades in favour of the two-tier system; however, nearly 50,000 students are educated at middle schools (NMSF, 2021). Much of the literature focusing on transition between key stage 2 to key stage 3 considers it from the traditional primary-secondary move yet there is very little available on the transition between these key stages from an English middle school perspective.

In 2015, Ofsted wrote a report examining the efficacy of the key stage 3 curriculum rather tellingly entitled 'KS3: the wasted years?'. Therefore, it is known by teachers in primary and secondary schools that transition at KS2 to 3 does not work as effectively as it should, often resulting in an academic dip for a considerable number of students. Having moved from secondary teaching to middle school teaching in 2014, my interest in the issue of transition and subsequent academic decline is something that has interested me for a number of years.

Research questions

When I embarked upon this study, I had research questions which provided a clear starting point; however, as is inevitable, these changed and evolved as my study progressed. Therefore, what I present below are the final research questions, honed by the months of reading, research and experiences which were at the heart of this study. These questions

were also significantly influenced by the issues I have experienced first-hand as a teacher of English.

1. Where did the latest curriculum reform originate?
2. What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3?
3. How do school staff perceive transition in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?
4. What can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful?

Significance of the research

My hope with this research is that it adds to the already extensive literature on transition; however, considering it from a slightly different perspective. By considering the impact of the curriculum, and looking at how this affects student progress in a middle school, I hope to draw attention to the idea that the curriculum itself needs strengthening, and that whilst the social, emotional and behavioural aspects of transition can have a significant negative impact on students, this may not be solely accountable for dips in academic progress.

Positionality

When I first started working in education in 2010, I was a secondary English teacher teaching students from year 7 upwards. As part of this role, I would be responsible for mapping and reporting on the progress made by all my students. One area which always caused difficulty for me, and other members of the department, was inputting data for year 7 students. We would submit our first data capture in the December and by this time had usually received year 6 data from the students' feeder schools. There were always a considerable number of students whose year 6 data surprised us because it suggested that they were much more able at English than we had seen in their work so far in that first term of secondary school. Given that this had little impact on my immediate teaching, I would not give it much more thought and carry on as before. This naïve and, arguably, unprofessional outlook changed when I moved to work in a middle school. Now I was teaching students English from year 5 to year 8 and fully able to see the level of challenge at key stage 2. What shocked me was the stark contrast between the year 6 expectations as dictated by the end of key stage standard

assessment tests (SATs) and the considerably less challenging key stage 3 curriculum. Another point of contention for myself and members of the English department in the middle school was how students in year 7 seemed to regress. Students who had performed to the best of their ability in year 6 were now, in year 7, producing work to a lower standard. This was the impetus for my researching the issue of transition in English between key stage 2 and key stage 3.

As an English teacher who is currently working in a middle school, my daily work revolves around the KS2 and KS3 National Curriculum. Therefore, it is inevitable that I am bringing my own experiences, and biases, to this research. I wanted to use this first-hand experience of being guided by these policy documents whilst also mitigating my bias to a degree. Taking a qualitative approach to my research, I had to ensure that it was deemed to be credible and trustworthy as this is what it is judged against (Head, 2020). Therefore, I chose two different approaches to my research in order to provide different data sets to analyse and, hopefully, present a final research project which is reliable, trustworthy and as balanced as possible. That is not to say that my experiences as one who enacts the policy has not impacted on my research. Positionality impacts on the research process (Brooks et al, 2014); this is something I tried to bear in mind throughout the project. I knew that my research would need to stand up to scrutiny and my findings must therefore be justified based on the evidence collected and collated in order to be deemed trustworthy (Pring, 2001). I did, invariably, bring my own experiences into the research; as Head (2020) acknowledges, 'researchers are encouraged to think about their own place in a project in terms of their experience and the values and beliefs that underpin the decision to undertake the research and the questions and issues that frame it' (78). By researching in my own context, I was able to also explore the impact of my findings and consider how the issues raised could be addressed in future.

The structure of this thesis

Chapter 2 is where I explore previous literature on the main components necessary to help develop my research project. First, I look at literature on transition, choosing to focus primarily on the primary-secondary transition in English schools. The reason for this is due to the sheer volume of literature written on transition in numerous global contexts. Secondly, I narrow down my research to look specifically at the English curriculum in its current iteration and how it came into being. This naturally led me to read about the former Secretary of State

for Education, Michael Gove, and his drive for curriculum reform as influenced by the educational philosophy of Cultural Literacy. Thirdly, I consider the literature on reading and assessment at key stages 2 and 3. Finally, I explore curriculum looking at two revolutionary proposals to overhauling curriculum.

Chapter 3 is where I explore the methodology of the research. I start with considering my ontological position and epistemology. This then leads to considering my positionality and the impact of this on my research. I then detail the methods used for collecting and collating data, and then to analyse the data, giving a detailed description of the process of analysis. Following this, I examine ethical implications, issues arising from data collection, a reflection on how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on my research, before finishing with the strengths and limitations of my study.

Chapter 4 is the analysis and discussion of two key speeches (by former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove) which marked the beginning of policy change. This chapter interweaves the findings with references to existing literature. This chapter explores the educational philosophy behind the curriculum change, and concludes that Gove's aim of narrowing the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students was unsuccessful.

Chapter 5 is the analysis and discussion of the KS2 National Curriculum for English and KS3 National Curriculum for English. The chapter combines discussion of the data, interweaving the findings with references to existing literature, and situating it within existing research. The findings and analysis show that there is no parity between KS2 and 3 which could account for the underperformance in the early stages of KS3.

Chapter 6 is the analysis and discussion of the interview data gathered in this research project. The findings and analysis show that curriculum is at the heart of the issue with transition, which invariably leads to underperformance in year 7. It also shows that the external accountability caused by the KS2 SATs is a significant factor in subsequent issues with transition.

Chapter 7 is my concluding thoughts where I reflect upon my research, consider next steps, and explore how this research project contributes something original to the world of

education. In this chapter, I reach the conclusion that issues within the KS3 curriculum are at the heart of issues with transition, and that to lessen this problem, the KS3 curriculum must be a continuation of the KS2 curriculum. I also argue that assessment at the end of KS2 should be holistic, and not based on student performance in two SATs papers – reading, and spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG).

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

When embarking on this literature review, I found an overwhelming body of knowledge to draw on. The issue of transition, globally, has been written about at length, as has curriculum reform and, more specifically, the English curriculum. Therefore, it was essential that I narrowed down my search and had clear foci when researching and reading relevant literature. The structure of this literature review reflects the process I took with reading and writing this chapter of my thesis. First, I read literature on transition. Because of the considerable body of work on this area, I had to narrow my parameters to predominantly consider transition in English schools, and more specifically the key stage 2 to 3 transition. Whilst I found a substantial amount of research on this transition, it was centred around the move from primary to secondary school; I found no literature which considered students' transition between the key stages in the middle school context in England. This validated my research proposal as I wanted to make an original contribution to research, and it seemed as though considering transition from a middle school perspective would do just that. Second, I considered English curriculum reform as brought about by former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove when the Conservative Party came to power in 2010. It was impossible to read about this curriculum reform and not learn about the educational philosophy of Cultural Literacy so I have written this section exploring the influence of E.D Hirsch's thesis on this most recent curriculum reform, whilst also looking at the philosophy itself. Following this, I explored literature on assessment and reading in the English curriculum. This was a natural progression from my previous reading as many of the issues with the recent curriculum reform centred around assessment and a lack of understanding for how students develop their reading skills. Finally, I considered what curriculum is and the concept of a linear curriculum, ending with an exploration of two revolutionary proposals for curriculum reform. The focus for this was on the work of Egan (1997), and Alexander (2010), putting forth how the curriculum in primary/lower secondary education could be changed to benefit both students and teachers. The brief concluding thoughts finalise this chapter and consider my research questions before moving onto the methodology chapter where I set out my approach to research and data collection as significantly influenced by my discoveries in this literature review.

Exploring the literature on transition

The body of literature on school transition is extensive which is unsurprising given that transition is a key period of schooling in every child's life. Much of the literature on school transition is from different countries worldwide; whilst this is valuable and insightful, I have decided not to explore these pieces of research extensively in this literature review as the schooling process in other countries is markedly different to our own in the UK¹. However, one commonality across the research is that academic performance is impacted by transition: 'international data are consistent in revealing a 'dip' in attainment following transfer to secondary school, the significance of which is increased because it occurs at different ages in different education systems, thereby making other explanations less likely' (West et al, 2010, 24). Therefore, transition has a detrimental impact on most students' attainment regardless of the age at which they move between schools.

For most students, the process of transition has many factors which require adaptation: altering how they think, getting used to different teachers, learning in a range of subject areas with specialist teachers delivering the content, familiarising themselves with different school rules and expectations, all alongside increased peer interaction (Hopwood et al, 2016). In addition to this, 'research has demonstrated that students exhibit decreases in self-esteem, academic achievement, and motivation' when they transition from elementary to middle or junior high school (Akos, 2004, 1). With regards to academic progress, it takes one to two years post-transition for the academic attainment decline to recover (Topping, 2011). Therefore, there are many adaptations a student is required to make in order to settle into life in a new school. A vast majority of students will experience some negative effects as a result of transition and this is often most clearly reflected in a decline in academic performance which invariably improves as they continue their education (Anderson et al, 2000). This shows that something must be done in order to minimise the decline in attainment experienced by a majority of students post-transition. One significant factor which should be considered is having a national curriculum which is robust and fluid, and therefore allows students to experience continuity when moving between schools at the key transition point. Whilst transition will always be a challenging time for children because of social and

¹ There are even significant differences in schooling between England and other parts of the UK which is why this study focuses solely on transition in English schools.

emotional issues, the impact on academic performance should be minimised with a comprehensive transition curriculum in place for all schools.

There are many periods of transition for English school students throughout their 13 years of compulsory school education. The main periods of transition are when they move between key stages: Early Years and Foundation Stages – ages 3 to 5; Key Stage 1 – ages 5 to 7; Key Stage 2 – ages 7 to 11; Key Stage 3 – ages 11 to 14; Key Stage 4 – ages 14 to 16; Key Stage 5 – ages 16 to 18. For most students, the most impactful transition is the one between Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 3 (KS3) because this is when a majority of students move from primary school to secondary school. There is a considerable body of literature exploring the impact of this transition which will be considered within this paper; however, a majority of the literature focuses on the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties students can face when making this significant transition yet there is considerably less research on the impact of curriculum, particularly the National Curriculum, within this transition². Given the many obstacles students have to overcome when transitioning between primary and secondary school, a dip in academic performance should not be added to this time of considerable change and adaptation. This dip in academic performance between KS2 and KS3 will be the primary focus for this section of the literature review as it seems to be a given that this will happen and it would appear that not enough is being done to safeguard students against this.

In 2015, Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills – a non-ministerial department of the UK government) published a report entitled ‘Key Stage 3: the wasted years?’ The purpose of this report was ‘to get an accurate picture of whether Key Stage 3 is providing pupils with sufficient breadth and challenge, and helping them to make the best possible start to their secondary education’ (1). The fact that this report needed to be written highlights inadequacies within KS3 education provision which is particularly concerning given that this is when most children make the transition from their primary school to secondary school. Within the report, there are numerous issues raised with regards to children’s lack of progress within KS3 yet there is no mention of any inadequacies within the National Curriculum being responsible for this dip in progress.

² For the purposes of this section of the literature review, references to transition will refer to the move from key stage 2 to key stage 3 unless otherwise stated.

Bagnall (2020) argues that most research in the area of transition ‘tends to look at dips in attainment, with many programmes focussing more on the practicalities of the transition and preparing children for the new ways of learning’ (117-118). However, I have yet to see research which focuses solely on the curriculum between KS2 and KS3; much instead focuses on what individual or consortia of schools do or could do to support their students’ transition, for example, visits by teachers between schools. This is problematic because if secondary schools have a large number of feeder schools, there is not the capacity for teachers to visit all of them and therefore some children miss out. In order for transition to have a less detrimental impact on students’ academic progress, Galton et al (2003) argue that ‘the current curriculum, assessment and inspection frameworks needs to be re-appraised to reduce perceived pressures on teachers and give them greater encouragement to innovate’ (74). Whilst this is a good idea, the study acknowledges that secondary schools with a large number of feeder schools struggle to work with all of them closely. Therefore, giving teachers greater encouragement to innovate may bring less curriculum continuity and put added pressure onto teaching staff to effectively liaise with their feeder schools which could be time consuming if there are a number of primary schools in the equation. To ensure that those students with low Grade Point Averages³ do not dip further in their progress, Anderson et al (2000), researching transition in American schools, suggest putting additional support in place, for example a summer academic programme and additional academic assistance post-transition. No mention is made of ensuring that the curriculum is suitably supportive of bridging the gap between elementary and junior/middle school. Once again, the focus is on what the school staff can do to facilitate successful transition, and not what the system can do. Mowat (2019) refers to a number of studies and concludes that programmes of transition tend to offer support prior to, or following transition, rather than bridging the transition. This could account for a dip in performance as children struggle to find a cornerstone around which to centre themselves and their development both academic and personal.

In Demetriou et al’s (2000) study they acknowledge that the curriculum is deficient post-transfer as ‘early adolescence is a period when autonomy, self-determination, and social interaction are important to young people. However, the post-transfer curriculum of the

³ Grade Point Average is calculated using a student’s grades for each subject, divided by the number of credits they have taken (each subject is assigned a credit on merit). The Grade Point Average gives each student a score based on the result of this formula (Princeton Review, 2022).

typical school offers relatively few opportunities for students to make important decisions' (426). Whilst this acknowledges the role of the curriculum in being deficient at this key juncture in young people's education, it talks about the school's curriculum rather than the National Curriculum which drives each institution's curriculum. Also, in Demetriou et al's study (2000) student voice refers to year 7 as a 'high point of engagement' because of students' eagerness to be at 'big school' (429). There is little mention of how this heightened engagement translates to academic performance or progress, particularly in relation to year 6. This is at odds with Doddington et al (1999) who conclude that 'at particular stages in their school career, both secondary and primary school pupils' commitment to learning can become vulnerable. During post-transitional periods in particular – when pupils have adjusted to a new regime – organisational features of schooling can combine with development features to produce a restlessness which may affect motivation and performance' (29). With contrasting beliefs around the impact of transition on students' academic performance, it is difficult to get a clear picture as to the cause of this dip. However, one thing that is clear, is that something is going wrong in most schools given the prevalence of a drop in academic progress.

One significant concern highlighted in numerous studies on transition is that secondary school teachers have an issue with the data generated as a result of the end of KS2 SATs which all children in year 6 in state-funded schools are required to sit (Withey and Turner, 2015; Powell et al, 2006; Doddington et al, 1999; Marshall and Brindley, 1998). In Marshall and Brindley's (1998) research, it was reported that primary and secondary teachers found difficulty in transferring student information; however, under further scrutiny, the issue is far more concerning than a lack of communication as 'distrust and misunderstanding' are at the heart of the matter (123). This is due to lack of trust in the KS2 data generated by the end of key stage SATs. Despite writing over twenty years ago, Marshall and Brindley's (1998) comments on the issues surrounding transition are just as true today as they were in the 90s. In Powell et al's (2006) study, they report that 'several secondary respondents maintained that the 'dip' at KS3 was due to 'inaccuracies' in the SAT assessments at KS2, so that KS2 assessments represented unrealistic levels of attainment' (20). Moreover, headteachers of primary schools raised the issue that they believed some of the work set by secondary schools for year 7 students was less challenging, or simply a repetition of work they had been set in year 6

(Powell et al, 2006). This stems from the lack of continuity between the key stages, and secondary teachers not knowing – through no fault of their own – what the primary curriculum entails⁴.

According to a study conducted by Galton et al (2003), which evaluated the findings from the year 7 Optional Test carried out in KS3 pilot schools, 66% of students in English ‘failed to make a gain of one level’ and 49% of students ‘made no gain in their level score one year after moving from primary to secondary school’ (59). Since this study in 2003, there has been a move away from levels to assess children’s progress, however this research is still significant as it shows that at least half of all children in the pilot schools made little or no progress over the course of their first year in secondary school. Schools will often use their own form of assessment, for example Cognitive Ability Tests (CAT) or other standardised measures, as predictors and target setting for GCSE (Galton et al, 2003). Working with schools across six local authorities, Evangelou et al (2008) found that ‘secondary schools do not appear to ‘trust’ the data on children provided by primary schools at year 6 level’ (ii). Whilst this study only worked with a comparatively small number of secondary schools in England, what this does show is a national problem with the validity of the KS2 SATs. Not trusting the data implies lack of trust in the testing system given that the SATs are externally assessed and schools are subjected to no-notice local authority monitoring visits to ensure that these tests are administered appropriately (Standards and Testing Agency, 2019). The lack of trust from secondary schools indicates that secondary teachers have little understanding and/or appreciation of the demands of the upper KS2 curriculum. This in turn suggests that the KS3 curriculum is not as challenging or as robust in comparison and that the KS2 SATs are so challenging that the level children reach at the end of KS2 in order to sit the tests is unsustainable. Also because of this lack of trust, schools often test their students in year 7 and use these baselines as a measure of attainment (Evangelou et al, 2008). If secondary teachers had a better understanding of the primary curriculum, the need for testing on entry would likely diminish. Also, these baselines tests likely follow the skills and/or knowledge identified as significant at secondary level, but do not consider what children have learnt and

⁴ This issue will be explored in greater detail in a further section of the literature review: ‘Assessment and reading in the English curriculum’.

developed at primary school simply because those creating the tests have little to no knowledge of the primary curriculum.

Parker and Robertson (2020) suggest three easy fixes to solve the issue of transition in English between the primary and the secondary classroom. The first is for secondary teachers to have access to, and engage with examples of writing which are secure and at greater depth. They argue that this will give secondary teachers a greater understanding of where their year 7 students have come from, and the skills that need to be built on, as well as setting higher expectations in KS3. The second easy fix is the use of specific terminology which students have been exposed to since year 1. This is particularly pertinent to SPaG (spelling, punctuation and grammar). The third easy fix is that secondary teachers should be aware of the year 6 standards and expectations, and if students in KS3 are not performing to these standards, to go back to year 6 expectations and build from there. Whilst admirable aims, these are not quite so easy to fix as suggested. The main barrier is that of time. Secondary teachers will need to invest heavily in accessing these resources, and given that CPD (continuing professional development) is already stretched, opportunities for these will be limited. The obvious solution is for exemplars and standards to be incorporated into the KS3 National Curriculum, and for the most important and relevant terminology to not be written into a lengthy, inconsequential appendix.

Writing about transition, Galton et al (2003) acknowledge how time consuming it can be for classroom teachers to facilitate when their time would be better spent focusing on the actual teaching. This is a significant argument as students are underperforming following this transition, which would suggest that a priority for schools should be on the content of lessons and supporting students' academic development. However, Galton et al (2003) then go on to say that because transition is now very much a pastoral role, heads of subject may not have contact with year 7 students until they start at secondary school and even then, only for a limited number of lessons each week. Galton et al's argument is that because of this limited contact with year 7 students, subject leads will not be inclined to develop teaching programmes that are tailored to the information provided by the feeder schools. Once again, the researchers ultimately lay the blame at the door of the teachers – in this instance, the subject heads. If the curriculum had true continuity, then the need for departments within individual schools to develop their own transition programme would be unnecessary.

However, Galton et al (2003) do recognise that the National Curriculum is deficient in ensuring continuity between the key stages, particularly KS2 and KS3. In their research, Galton et al (2003) discovered that English teaching in primary schools focuses on literacy skills, particularly creative writing, whereas in secondary schools the focus is on their students' response to literature. This discrepancy between foci is no doubt as a result of the respective establishments' end goals: in primary schools, children are working towards their end of KS2 SATs, and writing portfolio, whereas in secondary schools, students are working towards their GCSEs. It is natural then that teachers have these end points in mind when designing their curricula which accounts for the lack of parity between primary and secondary school curricula. This results in students often making negative or limited progress in KS3 while they get used to the demands of a different curriculum which prioritises skills they may be less familiar with or less confident in applying.

Topping (2011) also argues that lack of continuity is to blame for poor academic performance, stating that 'given the tendency of attainment to stall if not decline in the first two years of secondary school, it is unsurprising that teachers are preoccupied with attainment (although whether secondary school teachers are prepared to accept that this may reflect a problem with the secondary school and not be a consequence of some kind of problem in the primary schools is another issue)' (279). Once again, the blame is being placed on the teachers for students' academic underachievement, this time pitting secondary teachers against primary teachers. Whilst it may be that secondary schools do not deliver curriculum content which sufficiently builds on students' primary school learning or offer an appropriate level of challenge, if this is a national issue then holding individual schools to account will not solve the problem. Secondary teachers should have a clear understanding of the primary curriculum and its end point if they are to plan appropriate content to build on what their students did prior to their starting secondary school, and this should be evident in the National Curriculum. Burgess et al (2008) noted in their study that disadvantaged students – that is, economically poor students – are further disadvantaged following the transition between primary and secondary school. If the curriculum between KS2 and KS3 was more robust and contiguous then the widening gap may be lessened for some of the more vulnerable and disadvantaged students.

Transition is largely the responsibility of the schools which are facilitating the movement. The primary-secondary transition did not become a mandatory area examined by Ofsted until 2007 when secondary schools had to outline their transition arrangements in the School Evaluation Form (Bagnall, 2020). This indicates two key points: firstly, transition is expected to be driven from secondary schools down, and secondly, quality of transition provision is something that has only been considered relatively recently. With secondary schools expected to be the drivers of transition, it could be argued that the input of primary schools is considered of less value. Several studies argue the case for greater interaction between primary schools and secondary schools (Hopwood et al, 2016; Evangelou et al, 2008; Demetriou et al, 2000). Demetriou et al (2000) argue that transition should be led by teachers, students and parents and in order for this to happen, 'schools will need to redirect some of their present efforts towards achieving a better balance between social and academic concerns of transfer as well as at various transition points, and in the process, give greater attention to students' accounts of why they lose ground or lose interest at these critical moments' (439). Whilst the social elements of transition should, and largely do fall to schools (both primary and secondary), academic concerns should be a nationally addressed issue. If students are struggling to make progress, the biggest factor that should first be considered is the curriculum. Transition between schools (and key stages) should not cause academic stagnation or decline and this does not seem to occur at other transition points, for example KS3 into KS4, so should not happen between KS2 and KS3. There is no country-wide protocol for ensuring that effective transition takes place for children moving between schools, and the National Curriculum does not help in making the transition smoother and less disruptive to children's education.

One major difference which students need to navigate between primary and secondary school is the move from being taught predominantly by one teacher to a number of teachers. Because of this, children have to contend with different teaching styles, varying teacher expectations, and different – often new – ways of learning (Topping, 2011). To also be faced with a different curriculum, one which bears little resemblance to that which they followed in primary school, makes the entire transition process a daunting and alien one to a majority of children. Topping (2011) argues that this may cause children's self-perceptions to shift as they get older resulting in them becoming more realistic as to what they can achieve, or mean

that ‘they are increasingly overwhelmed by external perceptions of their worth based on examination results’ (275). This seems to be the case in middle schools post-SATs; students work towards this goal and once it has been done – regardless of the outcome – they are no longer being tested and therefore their self-worth is not a factor determined by education. Whilst the change from primary to secondary school is a big one in terms of subject specialists delivering lessons, and having to adapt to different teaching styles, the curriculum should bring consistency. Also, with subject specialists now delivering the English curriculum, one would expect children’s progress to accelerate rather than the opposite. Therefore, curriculum must be more closely examined and there should be a greater crossover and more parity between key stages 2 and 3. Given that the move from primary to secondary school generally means that students are now being taught by subject specialists, this identified dip is even more concerning and points to a greater issue than merely students requiring time to adapt to their new environment.

When it comes to schools managing transition, Morrison (2000) makes the point that a lot of focus is put on minimising social anxieties surrounding transfer and there needs to be a shift in focus to ‘sustain pupils’ commitment to learning and to ensure steady academic progress’ (46). Given that twenty years later there is still an issue with academic progress and transition, something fundamental has yet to be addressed to ensure that the transition between key stages does not have a detrimental impact on children’s academic development. The transition between primary and secondary school is ‘the biggest discontinuity faced in formal education’ (Bagnall, 2020, 2). Therefore, it is imperative that more focus is given to how this transition can be best managed to support the students, particularly given that academic discontinuity is a major factor in this pivotal period of a child’s schooling.

There are evidently considerable issues regarding all elements of transition and it is easy to blame those directly involved – teachers, schools, even children – rather than casting the net wider and looking at the issue as a national one. From examining the research, it is clear that the focus of transition is on the pastoral side whereas curriculum seems to be a secondary consideration. From the vast number of studies which show that transition is a point of academic decline, it is patently clear that more focus needs to be on safeguarding students’ academic progress and development. The easy option is to make this a focus for individual

secondary schools and make them ensure that curriculum continuity happens; however, given that this is a national problem, there needs to be a national solution.

Cultural Literacy and the English Curriculum

The previous section of the literature review explored issues surrounding transition, with particular focus given to the role – or lack thereof – of the curriculum. It seems pertinent, therefore, to now consider the English curriculum itself. When considering the English curriculum, it is impossible to do so without exploring how it came to be in the form it is today. Whilst issues with curriculum and transition pre-date the focus of this section of the literature review, I have decided to focus on this period of curriculum reform for two reasons. Firstly, I began teacher training in 2009 so have been directly impacted by these changes in my own practice, and experienced first-hand the impact this reform has had on students and teachers. Secondly, this curriculum reform has been one of the biggest in recent years and has caused considerable tension between those working in education and those writing policy. The driver for these curriculum changes, with English being one of the subjects most affected, was the Conservative MP Michael Gove when he was appointed Secretary of State for Education. As this section of the literature review will explore, Gove was heavily influenced by the theory of Cultural Literacy and used this educational philosophy to drive curriculum reform. This section will consider the rationale for this, and also whether this was a successful implementation in driving up standards, particularly narrowing the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers, which was Gove's ultimate aim.

One of the first proclamations Gove made when he entered office was to restructure the National Curriculum for both primary and secondary education. To give weight to his justification for some quite radical changes to education and, in particular, the National Curriculum, Gove cited the works of education professor E.D. Hirsch, chiefly his concept of cultural literacy. Hirsch (1985) explains that 'cultural literacy is the shared information that is often taken for granted by writers, lecturers, professors, and others. It is a census of cultural and natural information that is often alluded to in serious talks, books, and articles' (48). He further refined his definition in his 1988 book stating that cultural literacy is 'the network of information that all competent readers possess' expounding that 'it is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with

an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read' (2). Hirsch (1988) explains that to be culturally literate 'is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world' (xiii). He goes on to explain that cultural literacy 'is represented not by a *prescriptive* list of books but rather by a *descriptive* list of the information actually possessed by literate Americans' (this is in spite of him actually providing an extensive list at the end of his book detailing all the names, dates, books, facts, etcetera that he recommends students are taught in school) (xiv). This is a significant statement particularly with regards to a society – in this instance America – which is a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, and identities. The information possessed by literate Americans will vary greatly depending on their ethnicity, where they live, the type of school they attend, and so on, therefore it is dangerous to make such sweeping statements. Elliott (2021) questions 'how can there be merely a set of knowledge that will free the poor and the non-white from the systemic entrenched disadvantage created by decades if not centuries of colonialism, imperialism and classism?' (107). The issue with Hirsch's list, that was drawn up by white males, is that it does not account for the many and varied experiences, contexts, upbringings and identities of the students who will be studying it.

When the latest curriculum reform came into being, one of the most significant changes to occur was to the GCSE English literature syllabus. Where previous students had studied a unit entitled 'Other Cultures', and had the option of reading texts written by global authors, this was no longer the case. Gove emulated Hirsch's approach to education and made the focus of literature on white, predominately male, British authors. This echoed Gove's wider political views as a Brexit advocate and, alongside his inclusion of British Values into schools, shows that he was motivated to reform the curriculum, at least in part, to return to the old ways and ensure a monocultural, non-inclusive curriculum.

Hirsch does acknowledge that countries differ greatly from each other and therefore have unique cultural knowledge; however, he states that 'the basic goal of education in a human community is acculturation, the transmission to children of the specific information shared by the adults of the group or polis' (1988, xvi). Yet the USA has an immigrant population which makes up 14% of the population (American Immigration Council, 2021), and an indigenous population whose history and culture is overlooked. Therefore, it is a nationalist sentiment to

presume that the purpose of education is to acculturate those minority groups. For a country founded on immigration, settler colonialism and the annihilation of the indigenous population, it is narrow-minded to claim that the goal of education should solely be commonality rather than the broadening of horizons and the teaching of acceptance, tolerance, respect, and experience. Hirsch also overlooks the fact that young people play a pivotal role in reinventing the culture they are part of as 'a culture must always bear the stamp of its current generation' and 'teaching as transmission ... ignores the central role of the learner in learning' (Estes et al, 1988, 17). With regards to the subject of English, Eaglestone (2020) argues that 'knowledge is made up by all the people in the classroom together as they develop their own 'ideas and emotions' and do not simply recall things deposited or drilled into them' (12). Children need to learn, in part, that which is relevant to their life, and not because it is deemed worthy of knowing by older, highly educated (and often political) figures or lofty academics; they also need to play an active role in this learning by shaping their culture and society, and by learning that their input and interpretations are of value.

One of Hirsch's (1985) central arguments is that awareness of cultural literacy is paramount and it is our duty as the 'well educated' to share knowledge, which he deems 'the elusive secret', with 'disadvantaged people' in order for 'some excluded members of society' to be encouraged 'to become members of the literacy club' (48). What Hirsch is arguing here is that the cultural elite – the 'well educated' – are more privileged than those people with an education lacking in comprehensive knowledge of literacy. Hirsch (1985) acknowledges that when it comes to literature, a core curriculum cannot cover 'all the literary works that literate people know and vaguely refer to. Yet those common references, taken together, make up some of the essential mythology of our cultures' (48). The underlying issue with this is argument is who decides what should be known or what is considered worthy of teaching (Elliott, 2021). With regards to literature, the application of cultural literacy is not straightforward, as it 'risks breaking down the process of textual exploration to feature spotting or labelling', and whilst this is acquisition of knowledge, 'it is not the kind of knowledge that is core to the study of literature' (Eaglestone, 2020, 25-26). Eaglestone (2020) goes on to argue that cultural literacy has 'aggravated the focus on assessment' (28). Because cultural literacy is a prescriptive list of knowledge, it is easier to test how much students know, rather than how they have interpreted a text which is a far more subjective process. Rather

than focusing on how well students perform in tests and whether or not they have mastered a particular subject area, Apple (2013) argues that we should instead focus on asking more important questions with regards to what students have learnt: ‘whose knowledge is this? How did it become ‘official’? What is the relationship between this knowledge, and how it is organized and taught, and who has cultural, social, and economic capital in this society? What can we do as critical educators and activists to change existing educational and social inequalities, and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just?’ (5). In order to understand education, we need to ‘situate it back into both the unequal relations of power in the larger society and the relations of exploitation, dominance, and subordination – and the conflicts – that generate and are generated by these relations’ (Apple 2013, 5). Therefore, Hirsch’s drive to share ‘the elusive secret’ is once again driven by those who are dominant in education dictating to the supposedly academically disadvantaged what they ought to know.

This Hirschean approach to education is evident in the new English curriculum, particularly at key stage 2, as students are required to learn an extensive list of grammar and punctuation terms and devices. Whilst year 6 students have to showcase such knowledge in their writing – using fronted adverbials, for example – they also have to sit a spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) paper in which they are expected to identify specific grammatical devices in isolation. As Eaglestone (2020) acknowledges, this feature spotting does not enhance students’ learning of English, but rather focuses on the assessment of students. Students are assessed on SPaG without context and whilst this may give them insight into what Hirsch deems the elusive and secretive knowledge of the educational elite, in real terms it does little to develop students’ learning of English – language or literature.

Hirsch (1985) refers to the ‘common references’ which every American ought to know, but does not acknowledge that there will be significant differences between different areas of society even within the same country where the make-up varies greatly with regards to race, class, socio-economic status, and ethnicity (48). An example that Hirsch (1988) gives about the diversity of knowledge in each country is when he compares the UK to the USA: ‘A literate Briton has to know more about the game of cricket and the Corn Laws than an American. An American has to know more about baseball and the Bill of Rights than a Briton’ (75). Whilst this is only one minor example for illustrative purposes, it raises a number of issues. The

examples he chooses shows that Hirsch little understands the diversity prevalent within these nations. I know very little about cricket and have never heard of the Corn Laws, yet I have lived in the UK for most of my life. I am also writing this as part of my doctoral thesis so evidently not knowing this information that Hirsch deems necessary in order to be able to understand my fellow compatriots has not negatively impacted on my educational progress. What this example does show, however, is the danger of prescribing knowledge. What is relevant in one decade may be deemed irrelevant, factually inaccurate or obsolete the next. This is particularly evident in the key stage 3 English curriculum (explored in depth in chapter 5) as the extensive SPaG knowledge set out as a statutory requirement in KS2 (and externally assessed with figures reported for each school), appears in the KS3 curriculum as a non-statutory appendix. In this instance, the prescription of knowledge is apparently relevant in one key stage then obsolete in the one immediately following it.

Maranto (2021) argues in favour of Hirsch's approach to education, stating that 'as Hirsch shows, teaching knowledge enables *rationality*, understanding how facts fit together and how we fit into our society and polity' (4); however, it depends on the knowledge shared and who deems it knowledge worth knowing. To enable long-term success, it would be better to focus on skills development with pertinent knowledge alongside it, to promote independent thought and criticality. What Hirsch suggests with his philosophy is that knowledge is 'inert, fixed, stable – ready to be delivered, more like a sack of potatoes than a box of delights, to the next generation. In life, though ... knowledge isn't like this at all. It is dynamic, shifting, uncertain, argued over. It is the stuff of debate and uncertainty, not of lists and certitudes' (Yandell, 2017, 250). Knowledge evolves and shifts over time so having a prescriptive, inflexible model is not possible, or appropriate, long-term. Brundrett (2015) points out that 'the origins of Hirsch's work have remained underexamined. It is now part of the mythology of his work that, during the 1970s, Hirsch formulated the idea that a student's possession of relevant background knowledge was one of the keys to their ability to understand a text and a key determinant in their success or failure at school' (54); he goes on to say that Hirsch's work 'is based not on empirical models but on personal and anecdotal experience' (55). Therefore, Hirsch's entire premise for cultural literacy is based on questionable evidence which begs the question as to why this one educational model had such an influence on curriculum reform in this country.

One question that I am often asked by my students is ‘what is the point in studying Shakespeare?’ According to Hirsch (1988) the study of this great playwright (amongst other authors of note) is to generate information that they would ‘find useful in later life’ (113). When I respond to this question from my students, I have not once told them that it will be ‘useful’ to them, more that they are learning about English literary heritage, developing their reading skills (decoding, analysis, etc.), and learning about life during that period. Indeed, the only ‘use’ I have had from what I learnt about Shakespeare whilst at school has been in teaching it to others. Hirsch believes that knowledge of Shakespeare’s more popular plays will enable these young people to more fully engage with society as they grow older; however, the only instance where he has written about knowledge of Shakespeare being useful in everyday life is for understanding the odd phrase someone might use in conversation. As an educator, I do not feel that this is strong enough reasoning to justify this playwright’s inclusion in the curriculum; although, Conservative MP Nick Gibb (2015) celebrated the prescription of Shakespeare in the reformed curriculum: ‘In English, we have established that all pupils should learn three Shakespeare plays over the course of their secondary education’ (16). Gibb makes no mention as to what constitutes *learning* a Shakespeare play – is it understanding of plot? knowing quotations verbatim? remembering characters names and relationships? Using the GCSE English literature curriculum as a guide to understanding what *learning* a play means, it is having to memorise quotations to regurgitate in an exam, alongside exploring character, or theme, or setting. Whilst offering interpretations is a part of the exam process, significant weight is given to including quotations, and referring to the context of the play. This emphasises how knowledge has been prioritised as the accuracy of quotations and facts related to the context of the play are easier to assess than individual interpretations and analysis.

Elliott (2021) argues that ‘cultural literacy is a thin veneer of knowledge that enables understanding, references in the wider discourse without requiring in-depth knowledge’ concluding that ‘this is why it cannot be the be-all and end-all of English teaching’ (107). Hirsch’s model of cultural literacy treats ‘literary and cultural knowledge as if it were scientific knowledge’ (Eaglestone, 2020, 18). Eaglestone’s and Elliott’s arguments are that literature cannot simply be learned, it needs to be interacted with and interpreted, something which

cultural literacy leaves little room for. The concept of *learning* a Shakespeare play suggests that Hirsch and, in turn, the Conservatives who drove curriculum reform in this country, have prioritised the acquisition of certain types of knowledge over the exploration and appreciation of literature. It is strange that this most recent curriculum reform moved to a knowledge-based approach when ‘many nations, including those with very high-performing schools, operate curricula that are very different to the one that has emerged for English schools ... Other nations have moved away from knowledge-centred curricular’ (Brundrett, 2015, 56). Given that one of Gove’s intentions with this curriculum reform was so the UK could perform more competitively on the global stage (Brundrett, 2015; Spohrer, 2015), it is questionable as to why he used this particular educational philosophy as the basis for this reform.

Hirsch’s justification for the conception and implementation of his educational ideology is to promote social equality; this is clearly a positive driver for his philosophy as social equality will lead to a fairer society. In an interview with Hirsch, Goldberg sums up Hirsch’s issue with education in its current form:

‘Hirsch argues that much of his concern with progressive education and its ill effects grows out of his social conscience and his deep belief that “avoidable injustice” must be eradicated. It is simply not fair for schools to withhold from disadvantaged children the background knowledge that the most successful advantaged students accumulate from their home and, to varying degrees, from their schools over a period of years.’

(Goldberg and Hirsch, 1997, 83)

Whilst I agree that it is only right that all children have the necessary knowledge to access their learning, Hirsch’s comments imply that what children from disadvantaged backgrounds know is not valid to help their education. This in turn suggests that what is being studied in schools is aimed at middle class and/or advantaged children therefore implying inequality with regards to access. If what was chosen to be studied accounted for the varying backgrounds within schools then the children disadvantaged would vary; for example, studying texts written by black or ethnic minority authors would be challenging in terms of context for white students but less so for ethnic minority students. The current curriculum

for English is monocultural with only the KS3 curriculum making reference to students studying texts from different cultures. Both the KS2 and 3 curricula refer to students speaking and writing in Standard English with no consideration given to students whose language use may be influenced by Minority Ethnic English groups to which they belong.

Elliott (2021) argues that if we taught texts that drew on knowledge middle-class white students did not have, it would not only level the playing field for academic attainment, but also generate 'broader cultural literacy for all of our students' (111). Hirsch placing the blame on schools by stating that they withhold relevant background information, is unfair – certainly in the UK context – when schools have a fairly prescriptive English curriculum which does not allow for breadth and depth of study, or to teach texts from a range of cultures and contexts. If schools did provide this knowledge, and this knowledge was deemed necessary for success in life, 'the responsibility for the lack of success is implicitly on the shoulders of the child who becomes the adult, rather than the entrenched inequalities in society, or indeed the real social and cultural capital that is used for the reproduction of class and advantage' (Elliott, 2021, 107). Even if schools did prescribe to a set list of knowledge, it still does not mean that students will utilise this when they leave school, or guarantee that it will help students overcome the barriers of social inequality. Whilst Hirsch's aim is commendable, his approach is idealistic, naïve and narrow-minded.

Somewhat disparagingly, Hirsch blames both schools and home for the gap between middle class and disadvantaged children stating that with regards to the disadvantaged, neither provides an adequate education (Goldberg and Hirsch, 1997, 83). Rather than tailoring the curriculum to support those disadvantaged students by considering their context, Hirsch argues that schools should teach 'solid academic content' alongside the skills necessary to learn the content (Goldberg and Hirsch, 1997, 83). The issue here comes with who decides what is considered to be solid academic content. By forcing students to study texts beyond their ability or comprehension, simply because some academics and/or politicians deem it worth knowing, the damage to their literacy skills (not to mention their confidence) will be considerable with potentially life-long negative effects. Writing about powerful knowledge as a curriculum principle, Young (2014b) argues that it 'refers to features of the particular knowledge itself that is included in the curriculum and what it can do for those who have

access to it ... knowledge is 'powerful' if it predicts, if it explains, if it enables you to envisage alternatives' (74). This issue comes with who decides what knowledge is worthy of curriculum inclusion. Young (2014b) offers three criteria for defining powerful knowledge: 1. as 'distinct from the 'common-sense' knowledge we acquire through our everyday experience', but this is limited as it depends on our everyday contexts and experiences; 2. as 'the basis for generalizations and thinking beyond particular contexts or cases', that is, knowledge that helps one develop their thinking skills; 3. knowledge that has been developed by 'clearly distinguished groups with a clearly defined focus or field or enquiry', for example novelists and playwrights, which is specialist knowledge and therefore why it is more 'difficult to acquire and why acquiring it requires specialist teachers' (74-5). However, this once again raises the issue of who decides what knowledge is worth knowing, 'whose culture, and hence who literacy, is being represented? And whose culture, whose literacy is marginalised, or excluded?' (Yandell, 2017, 250). Whilst Young (2014b) argues that a knowledge-based curriculum is a good thing as it allows children to be better informed to make 'the best choices that will decide their educational future' after they finish formal education at 16, he acknowledges that the recent curriculum reform is not the best approach, and that Gove's 'traditional, old-fashioned and backward-looking view of knowledge' has no place in the current education system (84). Curriculum reform was evidently influenced by Gove's education as the GCSE English literature curriculum in particular echoes Gove's studies as a first year Oxford undergraduate (Hands, 2015).

Speaking at a conference prior to his becoming Education Secretary, Gove (2009) cited the work of E.D. Hirsch as inspiration for his future curriculum reform arguing that where a society shares understanding of 'the nation's past, a shared appreciation of cultural reference points, a common stock of knowledge on which we can all draw, and trade, is a society in which we all understand each other better, one in which the ties that bind are stronger, and more resilient at times of strain' (4). Gove's interpretation of Hirsch's ideology is that in order for society to function in the most lucrative way, everyone needs to share the same reference points which will, somehow, makes us more cohesive. This appears to be regardless of ethnicity, religion, etcetera. This viewpoint is supported by Maranto (2021) who, writing in this post-Covid, post-Trump world, states that 'Hirsch makes a powerful case that the gradual dumbing down of the country shows the long-term impacts of the anti-intellectual ideologies

dominating the academic field of education' (2). However, applying Hirsch's model as a solution to this apparent problem is to create students who have learnt reams of information which has been deemed necessary, rather than developing their independent thinking skills and considering the ever-changing world around them. Cultural literacy is a difficult concept to base a curriculum around. As Gordon (2018) argues, 'cultural literacy manifest in students' responses to literature is not an easily quantifiable commodity: its extent and expression differs across classrooms, communities and countries' (32). Cultural literacy does not accommodate different cultures and contexts within the classroom but rather gives a blanket, nationalist approach to the curriculum. In an open letter to Hirsch, Professor of English Wayne Booth (1988) argues that 'the truth is that nobody learns anything *by* being taught it *unless* by teaching we mean discovering how to turn passive indifference into an active grasping of some corner of the world's riches' (18). Therefore, relevance is the key to active engagement within the classroom, and students should want to learn and discover knowledge rather than simply being fed information.

One argument that Hirsch makes is that there needs to be consistency within the curriculum, particularly at elementary school level (Goldberg and Hirsch, 1997). This not only ensures parity of learning but means that if children move between schools or districts, they are able to keep accessing the core curriculum. This is the benefit of having a somewhat prescriptive National Curriculum as it allows children to immediately connect with their learning should they move schools, without having to worry about being exposed to unfamiliar content. However, the content within the National Curriculum is what needs to change rather than the document itself. In response to the danger of giving educators a prescriptive list from which to teach their students, Booth (1988) argues that 'if students are led to see learning as something that others *give* them, they will become permanently passive ... to any further learning; curiosity will die' (17). In contrast, Young (2014c) argues that 'content is important, not as facts to be memorised ... but because without it students cannot acquire concepts and, therefore, will not develop their understanding and progress in their learning' (97). When Gove became Education Secretary, a National Curriculum review led to a redrafting of a new curriculum, 'the outcome, following extensive input from the Secretary of State himself and his schools minister, was a strange mixture of detailed prescription down to lists of spellings in core subjects for primary schools to cursory documents on some secondary foundation

subjects which contained little more than broad and very unspecific statements' (Lightman, 2015, 21). The issue with a prescriptive, content-heavy curriculum, as with the key stage 2 English writing, and spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) curricula, is exactly this; children lose their ability for creative expression as they are so constrained by the SPaG requirements and writing conventions as dictated by the National Curriculum. In this age of ready access to information, it is key that students are not given more information, but rather the tools to 'sieve through it to be able to judge what is believable and what is not, to evaluate the evidence, to interpret the data received and reported, and to critically appraise the quality of such information' (Huat See et al, 2017, 389). A cultural literacy approach to education does not allow this to happen.

A further argument Hirsch (1985) makes is that people do not necessarily need in-depth knowledge of any or all subjects, but enough 'prior information about the subject to grasp this fuller exposition' and that 'our students need know only a smattering about some things, and this gives them and their teachers time to go into more detail about other things' (48). Therefore, the teacher is meant to act as the guide in the exploration of books, topics, historical events, and so on, and it is not on the student to know all there is to know about whatever is the focus of their study. It is known that a child gets the most out of reading a text when they are able to interpret what they are reading and apply previous reading experiences to help them with this (Scott, 1988). Children access texts on a deeper, more meaningful level when they understand the context, but also as a result of exposure to a body of literature which allows them to make comparisons and spot themes, commonalities, etcetera. However, prescribing what literature children read is ultimately restrictive because teachers know their classes best and should therefore be able to choose texts with some relevance to their students' context, and/or select texts which they know will challenge their classes in different ways. Alongside motivation, choice is a significant factor in creating lifelong readers: 'students who choose what they read ... tend to be motivated, read more and show greater language and literacy development' (Clark and Rumbold, 2006, 21). When children read for pleasure, it has significant benefits to their engagement and development; however, 'pleasure is not foregrounded in schools in ways that would leverage and develop student reading and that would help students grow as readers and human beings' (Wilhelm and Smith, 2016, 25). This is often because there is little scope within the curriculum to allow

for pleasure to be the primary focus when educators are selecting which texts their classes will study. In the current English curriculum – at key stages 2 and 4 – students are required to know a huge body of information. At KS4, it is quoting verbatim from their literature texts to regurgitate in exams, alongside considerable contextual information about and around the text. At KS2, it is knowing about punctuation and grammar in a depth and detail that is not seen again until the A level English language syllabus.

In a recent interview, Hirsch argued that private and state schools should be able to deliver the same ‘high-literacy inducing curriculum’; however, state schools are ‘prevented from doing so by a system of ideas that regards schooling as fostering natural development individuality, instead of regarding it... as the induction of children into the national tribe’ (Create, 2016, 4). In England, I would argue that state schools are not able effectively to foster individuality, independent thought, or nurture creativity to the extent they could, due to the prescriptive nature of the curriculum. For example, in end-of-year writing portfolios, year 6 students must show that they can follow the same conventions in order to achieve the expected standard, such as using semi colons to separate independent clauses. There are no criteria for assessing creativity and therefore individuality. Another line of Hirsch’s argument in favour of cultural literacy being embedded in schools is that the narrowing of the curriculum and neglect of the arts has caused a decline in the reading ages of 17-year-olds in the USA (Create, 2016). By following the concept of cultural literacy, this curriculum reform has achieved what Hirsch warns against: the narrowing of the curriculum. Hirsch states that his thesis is ‘a broad curriculum’ which ‘is the best means to form good readers and competent citizens’ (Create, 2016, 7). The Conservative government, led by Gove as Education Secretary, appears to have taken the idea of a prescriptive curriculum from Hirsch’s concept but has overlooked the importance of a broad curriculum leading to – particularly at key stages 2 and 4 – a worryingly narrow English syllabus.

Hirsch’s concept of cultural literacy received mixed responses upon his first introducing it, with his critics vocal in their disregard for his educational ideology. In response to Hirsch’s point that America’s literacy problem was becoming an even greater concern, Booth (1988) responded by saying that ‘all nations have education problems. Nations that are ethnically and linguistically monolithic have relatively simple educational problems. Nations like ours [USA] that are complex beyond anyone’s comprehension have threateningly complex

problems' (13). It would appear, particularly since the Brexit referendum that politicians like Gove aspire to have a more ethically and linguistically monolithic nation and if this were the case, taking the cultural literacy approach would be effective. Arguing against Hirsch's declarations to the contrary, Campbell (1988) points out that cultural literacy 'is a mirror image of the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and values of dominant American cultural groups, particularly those in possession of high social economic status in American society' (85). Referring to a conference of sixty English teachers which Hirsch was invited to attend and discuss cultural literacy, Booth (1988) says that he learnt from his colleagues that 'tinkering with the information content of teaching would make little difference *unless* the more serious problems are addressed with at least as much energy' (20). A knowledge-rich curriculum only succeeds in further widening the gap between the most and least disadvantaged as it requires a level of knowledge and understanding not available to all students prior to, and during, their education. Campbell (1988) warned of the dangers of Hirsch producing a list of what every American needs to know as it 'could well result in pedagogical practice given to drilling content into students rather than accenting the changing contexts of facts and utilizing student experience' (84-5). This is precisely what Gove achieved when he overhauled the English curriculum as students are now expected to quote lines of literature verbatim, or be able to identify esoteric grammatical devices in a body of text.

Hirsch (1988) identifies two types of curricula that he believes needs to be taught in schools: the extensive curriculum which is formed of 'traditional literate knowledge, the information, attitudes, and assumptions that literate Americans share'; and the intensive curriculum which allows for, as the name suggests, intensive study of 'materials that are appropriate for [students', schools', teachers'] diverse temperaments and aims' (127-8). Hirsch makes it clear that the extensive curriculum on its own is not enough and there needs to be the opportunity for students to study certain areas in more depth which is where the intensive curriculum comes in. There is scope within the National Curriculum for English for both an extensive and intensive curriculum. Schools can choose which Shakespeare play to study, for example, and they have autonomy over other texts. The issue here, however, is the extensive curriculum. Children should have breadth of knowledge but this is difficult to teach in a meaningful, non-superficial way. Information pertinent to the text being studied will be shared by teachers if it will help their students better understand what they are reading. What I find problematic

with Hirsch's proposed extensive curriculum is that a considerable amount of content be covered because a small number of people – policy makers – deem it worth knowing. If children are taught well, taught to be curious, to find out answers for themselves, to identify meaning within a text, then it will not matter if they do not understand a specific historical reference or Shakespeare quotation because they should have the skillset to work it out, or the curiosity to find out for themselves. As Waters (2015) argues, 'we surely want a system that sees young people leaving fuelled with a desire to continue their learning' (73). It is more often the skills gleaned from education that are more applicable in everyday life than the content of the learning which is why we 'forget most of what we learn, and almost all of what we have no continuing use for' (Booth, 1988, 18).

As is often the case when examining issues within education, teachers are – at least in part – apportioned the blame. Hirsch (1985) argued that teachers needed to recognise 'the validity of the concept of cultural literacy' in order for it to, hopefully, 'subtly affect some of their intensive curricular choices' (49). Following the Govean reform of education, teachers now have fewer choices as to what their students study due to the prescriptive nature of the curriculum; Gove determined that all school-age children should be exposed to the same bodies of work or funds of knowledge in order to make them greater contributors to society when they enter the workforce. It would be unfair to blame Gove and his political party entirely for the considerable changes to education, and subsequent problems as 'changes to the English school system began before 2010' however, 'they were consolidated and extended by the Coalition Government and have resulted in a paradigmatic change' (West, 2015, 21). Whilst the KS2 English National Curriculum – which is one of the foci for this thesis – does not prescribe specific literary works that children must study, the end of KS2 SATs has such a level of challenge that choosing texts which do not prepare children for this challenge will hamper their educational progress and development due to underperformance in this national assessment. Thoughts about *how* and *why* children learn have been replaced with a concern for *what* they learn, which is where the system has failed our students (Campbell, 1988). Additionally, the system has become driven by assessment because 'attainment has almost come to mean the same as schooling' (Gorard, 2010, 52).

Gove, in enacting policy change and basing this on Hirsch's model of cultural literacy hoped to decrease the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students; an admirable

aim, but one that has not succeeded. What Gove did not consider is that the most valuable gift that schools can give their students is a love of learning. With a passion for knowledge, children will take it upon themselves to learn independently focussing on areas of particular interest to them. This passion to self-educate is something that will stay with children long after they leave school; however, by forcing students to learn facts and quotations verbatim, we run the risk of spoon-feeding our children to such an extent that natural curiosity will diminish resulting in a well-read generation who are contemptuous of literature. Cultural literacy is an ambitious and well-meaning theory on the surface, but the truth is that it does not consider the variety within school classrooms today. Prescriptive lists will invariably fail to cater to the needs and differences within a class. Teachers know their classes better than any policy maker or politician so it is time for these out-of-touch interlopers to listen to the professionals in schools and support their aim to provide a relevant and engaging curriculum which promotes a love of learning and intellectual curiosity.

Assessment and reading in English

Having explored curriculum reform, its origins and the impact this has had on schooling in recent years, it is now important to look more specifically at one of the key issues as a result of Govean curriculum reform, that of assessment. Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the disconnect between the key stage 2 and key stage 3 English curricula, it is necessary to also explore the disconnect between curriculum and assessment in English, particularly at KS2 as, I believe, this is a significant factor in the lack of parity between these two key stages and a reason for the academic dip so often seen (and written about) in students at the start of KS3. This has been an issue for many years; however, since the curriculum reform and subsequent assessment changes, this has become more concerning. During this part of the literature review, the focus will predominantly be on reading because this is what is externally assessed, and schools judged on, at KS2⁵. There is no external, formalised assessment at KS3 – yet another disconnect between the two key stages – so the focus is the issue of assessment and reading at KS2. There are, however, arguments threaded throughout exploring the issue of

⁵ SPaG is externally assessed also, but results are not used as a way to assess schools – and hold them to account – in the way the reading results are.

how reading is prescribed in both key stages, and the issues regarding the assessment of reading.

Reading is an essential component of the English curriculum from key stages 1 to 4 yet there is a disconnect, particularly at key stage 2, between reading and assessment. At the end of KS2, students have to sit a compulsory test (SATs) in reading where they are then given a grading: working towards the expected standard; working at the expected standard; working at greater depth. This grading, along with other data, generates a target grade for their performance at GCSE. However, the more immediate purposes of the SATs are as a performance measure of students, and of schools: 'the results are to be used to hold schools to account for attainment and progress in reading; to inform parents and other schools about individual performance; and to act as a benchmark between schools both locally and nationally. These uses are about reporting, accountability, and the summation of learning' (Tennent, 2021b, 486). Unlike the curriculum, the government can use these results as a way to monitor schools nationally. The National Curriculum is a statutory document but it does not need to be followed by academies, free schools or private schools (although most state schools do opt to follow it). However, all schools (excluding those which are fee-paying) have to get their students to sit the SATs at the end of KS2. This is a more powerful tool for the government to wield than the curriculum as there can be far more measurement and therefore accountability following an assessment. Richmond (2017) argues that 'it is through the system of tests and examinations that a government can exert closer control over classrooms than through the requirements or advice of a curriculum statement' (266). The curriculum lays out what schools are expected to teach whereas, in theory, the KS2 assessment gives a tangible judgement on how successful this teaching has been.

Because the National Curriculum is written by government employees and not those working within education, there is a disconnect between the policy document and what actually happens in schools. Despite writing over 10 years ago, Jewitt et al's (2009) argument that 'a raft of policy interventions has led to a more strictly stipulated content, and correspondingly more prescribed and standardized styles of teaching and assessment in English' still rings true today (10). Government interference in education, particularly since Michael Gove became Secretary of State for Education, has increased with high-stakes testing driving performance, and a desire to perform more successfully globally (Brundrett, 2015; Spohrer, 2015). The

English curriculum has long since been a preferred tool for politicians to enact curriculum changes; however, ‘the debate about curriculum and assessment in English is now a totemic battle between those with power but no knowledge and those with knowledge but no power’ (Hodgson, 2019, 82). The government does not utilise the expertise of teachers and educators when designing curriculum and assessment which has therefore led to this disconnect between the two. This is ironic given how English is a subject so valued by those in power because ‘the diverse and multidimensional skill-set literacy represents is understood as the main commodity of exchange that schools create. From a political point-of-view, it has currency’ (Moss, 2017, 59). All students should leave school as literate individuals as this will enable them to contribute to the working population and therefore society. Whilst no stakeholder in education would wish for any young person to leave school with poor literacy skills, the government using the curriculum as a tool to push its own agenda is dangerous and short-sighted. When the National Curriculum was introduced in 1989, it was welcomed by many as the principle driving it was an admirable one; however, ‘progressive English teachers soon found themselves represented in the media and by the government as a fifth column to promote leftist ideologies and undermine language and manners’ (Hodgson, 2019, 82). This denouncement of teachers has continued, most notoriously with the former Education Secretary, Michael Gove referring to the educational establishment as ‘the Blob’ and denying ‘the need for experts’ (Hodgson, 2019, 82). When the Education Secretary is wilfully, and very publicly, not utilising the expertise of those working in education, it is inevitable that policy documents produced to be enacted in schools will not be appropriate, or of benefit to teachers and/or students.⁶

The end of key stage SATs are the driver of the curriculum in KS2. Whilst the curriculum does not reference the tests themselves, all state-funded schools have to administer these externally assessed tests. The value of these tests, which are traditionally taken at the end of a child’s primary education before they move to secondary school, are debatable. Some believe that SATs results are not a reliable indicator of student performance in year 6 as they are coached to the test therefore boosting their score (Withey and Turner, 2015). There is

⁶ It would be remiss to not mention here that it is incredibly rare for Education Secretaries – regardless of their political persuasion – to consult educators on changes to education. When a group of academics and noted educators were asked to consult on the proposed changes to the curriculum prior to its publication, virtually all of their recommendations were ignored and the original curriculum published in spite of this (Eaglestone, 2020).

also a disconnect between how teachers of KS2 view the test compared to their KS3 colleagues, with primary teachers valuing the data generated by the SATs in contrast to secondary teachers who see little value in this information (Marshall and Brindley, 1998). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, KS2 SATs have not taken place for two years (in 2019 or 2020), and the 'deafening silence' from secondary schools in response to this lack of data suggests that secondary teachers pay 'little to no attention' to these results (Tennent, 2021a, 9). It is understandable that KS3 teachers working in secondary schools have little to no understanding of what the KS2 SATs entail as the curriculum at KS3 makes no mention of them, and does not make explicit which skills have been assessed in KS2. Because these teachers are not aware of end of KS2 expectations, the data produced carries little meaning and does not correspond to the data used in KS3.

With regards to writing, which is internally assessed then externally moderated, Parker and Robertson (2020) argue that secondary teachers do not have an awareness of KS2 expectations: 'Ask someone in a secondary what a moderated end-of-year 6 piece of writing which meets the criteria for 'greater depth' looks like. They frequently wouldn't know' (47). This does not mean that the blame should be laid at the door of secondary English teachers; if clear links were made between the standards and expectations at KS2 to KS3, teachers would know what, for example, a greater depth piece of writing would look like. Whilst writing at KS2 is internally assessed then externally moderated⁷, this is not the case for the SATs which are externally assessed and therefore seen to carry more weight. The SATs are the driver for the curriculum in KS2 but given how little the results are valued by KS3 teachers, it begs the question as to why these tests continue, or why the KS3 curriculum does not place more emphasis on the outcome of these tests. The answer goes back to government interference in education, more specifically in assessment. The SATs can be, and are, used by the government as a way to hold schools to account and make comparisons between schools (Tennett, 2021a). Measuring student progress and attainment is therefore a secondary outcome of these tests which could also be why KS3 teachers do not utilise them or have particular faith in them; these tests have been designed with school assessment in mind, not student assessment.

⁷ External moderation happens in schools every 3 to 4 years, with 25% of schools within the local authority selected for moderation (Richmond, 2017).

At KS3, there is no longer any formalised, external assessment and since the removal of levels, each school has their own assessment system. Therefore, the outcomes of the SATs can be rendered meaningless or of little value, particularly as ‘the information offered bears little relation to the curriculum about to be undertaken’ (Marshall and Brindley, 1998, 132). Despite writing over 20 years ago, Marshall and Brindley’s (1998) arguments are still applicable today showing how little has changed with regards to curriculum continuity between KS2 and KS3; also pertinent is their argument that government targets force schools to teach to the test which can have a detrimental impact on student progress and love of learning. This argument is supported by Withey and Turner (2015) who also suggest that the outcomes of the SATs can be used to average the performance of the school and make comparisons across schools often in a league table. As well as being a tool with which to judge schools, SATs also impact negatively on the curriculum as ‘a further consequence of high-stakes testing is for the curriculum to become separated from the assessment process. This impacts upon classroom practice as the curriculum becomes notional; and attention switches to focus on those subjects being tested’ (Tennent, 2021b, 482). With schools being placed under considerable pressure thanks to the nature of this high-stakes testing, it is inevitable that many teachers will reduce the wider curriculum to focus more on those subject areas being assessed. As Moss (2017) asserts, ‘in a high-stakes testing environment, schools must teach children whatever the assessment asks of them’ (62). Not only does this impact on the wider curriculum at KS2, but it can have a profound impact on the students and teachers with ‘potentially negative personal and emotional consequences’ because of teaching to the test (Tennent, 2021b, 482).

With the government driving curriculum reform, assessment has become of paramount importance with little consideration given to teaching and learning; therefore, there is a discernible gap between curriculum and assessment (Moss, 2017). This is particularly true in English where the reading of texts is often subjective and, at times, ambiguous. Subjecting all students to the same form of assessment with strict marking criteria (as in the KS2 SATs) goes against the idea of reading for pleasure and autonomous exploration of texts. The high-stakes testing environment primary (and middle) schools now face actually decreases the quality of teaching and learning because many teachers prioritise teaching to the test, subsequently leading to the narrowing of the curriculum (Education Commons Select Committee, 2017). A

way to combat this would be to use teacher assessment rather than a single test result to assess student ability and progress. Teachers recognise, in a way that policy makers do not, that testing does not showcase the best of a child's ability (Maksimovic and Vuletic 2017). Hall (2015) argues that a child failing to reach their target in a test is a reflection of the school's failure to provide an adequate education. As all teachers know, students do not start school 'on a level-playing field', and 'without paying attention to the levels of disadvantage reflected in school catchments, a list of the best schools produces a list in which schools with more socially advantaged pupils dominate, rather than schools that genuinely represent the best teaching and learning' (Moss, 2017, 59). Using a standardised system as a way of assessing schools and their students does not consider varying abilities; schools who have a high proportion of disadvantaged, EAL or SEN students are judged against those who do not. This is not a fair reflection of each cohort and is, potentially, damaging for the school and, in turn, the students.

Wiliam (2010) argues that stakeholders in education – students, teachers, parents, other taxpayers, employers, and the wider community – expect to know what students have learned, and 'it seems plausible that this can easily be evaluated through the use of straightforward and familiar instruments, such as achievement tests' (107). This line of logic is hard to argue with, however making such a judgement through achievement tests shows a lack of trust in schools and their teachers, or even a lack of trust in the system itself. As Wiliam (2010) recognises, the issue of school accountability is a difficult one as it is the financiers and the consumers of the education to whom schools should be accountable. The issue with the current system in England is that the government finance education therefore they think this gives them the right to dictate both the curriculum and the assessment.

Arguing to remove assessment entirely would be wrong, however it is clear that changes need to be made. Richmond (2017) reasons that 'continuous formative assessment throughout the years of schooling is more important than brief summaries at the ends of key stages ... because good formative assessment actually affects future progress, rather than merely offering a snapshot of that moment in progress' (276). This is also echoed by Wiliam (2013) who believes that assessment should be used for guidance and instructional purposes rather than the more traditional forms of testing which are of little to no value. Unfortunately, formative assessments carry far less weight than summative assessments for those outside

of the classroom. Teachers know the value of formative assessment as it allows misconceptions to be quickly and effectively addressed; students also appreciate the immediacy of the feedback this allows. In contrast to these formalised, externally assessed summative tests, there is no set assessment model at KS3. When levels were removed in 2015, schools had to create their own assessment models leading to lack of parity across schools nationally. It also meant that the SATs results became less relevant to secondary schools as in most secondary schools, the use of levels continued across KS3. This could be one reason for the academic dip in KS3; however, this dip has been an issue for years prior to the move away from giving students levels for their attainment. The use of formative assessment across KS3, with no externally assessed summative assessment at any point in the key stage could be a way to explain the attainment dip in KS3. Whilst I am not arguing that there needs to be an externally assessed test in KS3, it could be a way to address this attainment dip. Richmond (2017) maintains that 'modes of assessment have a profound effect on what is taught and learned in the curriculum, and how it is taught and learned' (266). Whilst the KS2 curriculum does not explicitly state that the end goal is the KS2 SATs, every school with a year 6 cohort knows that they will be judged on the outcomes of this assessment and therefore work towards securing an acceptable result year on year. The lack of external accountability in KS3 could be part of the reason for the dip in progress and attainment.

Reading is a vital skill for all students yet the way reading is approached in the curriculum shows a lack of understanding of *how* students develop their reading skills from basic word level to full-text comprehension. In order for students to be able to fully engage with a text, they need to have the requisite contextual knowledge, alongside text-level decoding skills, to understand what they are reading. The current National Curriculum and KS2 assessment is deficient with regards to reading in that 'no developmental pathway has been mapped for reading comprehension generally, or its component parts specifically, such as inference making. There is no evidence to show how comprehension looks different between a 10-year-old and an 11-year-old, for example. Therefore, it is not possible to say what the 'expected' level looks like' (Tennent, 2021a, 9). With the SATs being graded in such a way, it shows the lack of understanding by those creating the assessment with regards to how students learn and develop their reading skills. The other issue with classifying students following the SATs is that it can be demotivating (another possible reason for the attainment dip in KS3). As

teachers know, lack of student engagement can lead to underperformance, and the same is true with reading. Students who struggle to read become demotivated; consequently, their opportunities to progress and develop significantly reduce thereby leading to 'strong negative feelings about reading' which in turn creates 'a vicious circle in which poor readers remain poor readers' (Clark and Rumbold, 2006, 7). Whilst students cannot be forced to enjoy reading, they should at least have the tools to be able to understand that which they are reading. There has been found to be a significant relationship between positive attitudes to reading and higher attainment (Sainsbury and Schagen, 2004). If the curriculum does not allow for students to enjoy reading, but instead focuses on the need to unpick a text almost to word level, the pleasure of reading diminishes. Equally, if the SATs deem students as merely at the 'expected standard' or more damagingly 'working towards the expected standard', the pursuit of reading for pleasure also diminishes.

There is the belief that children, those from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular, struggle to read well in part because they do not have the knowledge base to help them fully understand the content of what they are reading (Huat See et al, 2017). The argument that children need to have the contextual knowledge to understand the text on a more meaningful level is correct; a student cannot fully appreciate, for example, Jules Verne's 'Around the World in 80 Days' if they do not know that air travel was not available in the Victorian era, or that many parts of the globe were less developed and therefore less easily traversed than they are today. As well as students being able to understand what they are reading, it is also important that they take pleasure from reading. Whilst this is not an essential part of the reading process, it does help student progress and engagement considerably. However, often 'pleasure is not foregrounded in schools in ways that would leverage and develop student reading and that would help readers as students and human-beings' (Wilhelm and Smith, 2016, 25). Whilst reading for enjoyment does appear a limited number of times in both KS2 and 3 National Curricula, it is not prioritised. The high-stakes testing and accountability schools face with regards to the end of KS2 SATs does not often allow for reading for pleasure to be prioritised; schools have targets which they are measured against and failure to meet these can lead to additional scrutiny and inspection. At KS3, there is arguably more scope for reading for enjoyment to be prioritised as the curriculum is not driven by a high-stakes

external assessment at the end of key stage; however, the curriculum is still prescriptive in terms of the types of texts students need to read across these three years.

Clark and Rumbold (2006) argue that in order to develop lifelong readers, students should be able to choose what they read and have opportunities to do so in informal environments. The National Curriculum at both KS2 and 3 leaves little room for student autonomy over reading choice but there is the expectation at KS2 that schools are ensuring that their students read outside of school (DfE, 2014). This is incredibly challenging for schools to monitor therefore it would make more sense for the curriculum to give more time over for independent exploration and reading of texts. The high-stakes testing culture in upper KS2 makes this challenging as schools, understandably, prioritise preparing students for their SATs. One idea as to how reluctant readers can become more engaged with literature is for them to engage with more diverse materials which, traditionally, are not generally considered to be acceptable reading material, for example, magazines, webpages, blogs, text messages, joke books and so on (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Whilst many students would no doubt enjoy reading such materials, and may well not even realise that they are 'reading' in the traditional sense, there is a concern that children are being exposed to non-Standard English in these types of texts (particularly those published without having been edited). As the curriculum only accepts Standard English over other forms of English, reading these more informal text types may hinder student progress and not aid in the development of their reading skills. Clark and Rumbold (2006) go on to argue that 'schools need to recognise that a diverse range of reading materials will encourage students to read, and they will need to engage children in the planning and delivery of reading and library activities' (27). There is no mention made of broader resources helping nurture a child's love of reading, such as public libraries, but, once again, the assumption that this can only be achieved in schools. Given the amount of money cut from education over the last decade, school libraries have become a luxury and many schools have not been able to keep them open for financial reasons. The curriculum should be broad and robust enough to allow for students to have some autonomy over what they read, but this is not the case.

Whilst reading in the curriculum is a bone of contention for many teachers of English, it is the KS2 assessment which is the most damaging aspect of students' learning. KS2 is 'weighed down' by the 'inappropriate demands of KS2 testing' (NATE, 2020, 15). The curriculum and

the assessment model at KS2 are asynchronous because the outcomes of the SATs have been prioritised over the learning taking place. This dichotomy has occurred because ‘instead of building the curriculum and then deciding how it can best be assessed, the assessment tools themselves simply become the curriculum’ (Moss, 2017, 62). Moss (2017) goes on to argue that ‘by separating out, rather than holding together, the tools for assessing pupil performance and the responsibilities for curriculum resourcing and design, a whole new set of tension points have opened up’ (62). The rationale for this is clear: ‘As the government undoubtedly understands, legally binding tests and examinations on which schools’ effectiveness is judged will constrain teaching much more effectively than will curricular requirements, particularly if those requirements are transmuted to a ‘benchmark’ to be ‘used and improved upon’ (Richmond et al, 2017, 6-7). The KS2 SATs are a tangible way for schools to be held accountable, much more so than how closely they adhere to the curriculum because that is a much more nebulous thing to measure. It also means that school performance can be measured from afar rather than through school visits to assess how the curriculum is being delivered and to what degree of success.

Unlike at KS2, KS3 assessment is not formalised or externally assessed; it is up to schools to decide on an assessment model, which further emphasises the lack of parity between the two key stages. Many schools opt to start the GCSE curriculum early because they are not constrained by KS3 SATs (or an equivalent test). Because of the demands of the new GCSEs, there is a ‘tendency to narrow’ the KS3 curriculum, which is problematic. As well as nurturing creativity and engagement in English, a more varied and open curriculum would aid teacher retention as it would allow teachers to ‘develop their own creativity and give them a greater sense of ownership of what they do’ (NATE, 2020, 14). Rather than taking this approach, NATE (2020) argue that the KS3 English curriculum could provide a valuable, restorative, inspirational contrast ‘after the stresses of the KS2 tests and the prescriptiveness of the KS2 curriculum’ (NATE, 2020, 15). As preferable as this sounds to a reduced KS3 curriculum in favour of starting GCSEs early, many students struggle with the transition from KS2 to KS3 so the KS3 curriculum itself must consider what has been learned and tested at KS2, and develop from there, gradually making it more creative and engaging. An additional point to note is that in the above quotation, NATE acknowledge that KS2 is a stressful part of students’

education which leads one to question why such high-stakes testing is occurring in the first place.

Doddington et al's (1999) research on the attainment dip between primary and secondary school recommended that each year group has 'a clear and academically compelling identity that motivates pupils as they move forward' and 'ensuring that pupils do not see work relating directly to tests and examination as the *only* stuff that counts' (36). These concluding recommendations suggest that it is only year groups or key stages which culminate in an externally assessed test where sufficient motivation is garnered to aid students' academic progress. This brings up serious questions regarding the format of the current schooling system if students are generally only motivated by examinations and subsequent results. This is echoed in Powell et al's (2006) research wherein local authority officers, headteachers and teachers were asked about the performance dip; the curriculum-related factor that they identified as being a contributor to the dip was 'pupils being more focused in year 6 because they were aware that they would be sitting KS2 tests and were being taught with a definite aim in mind' (19). Oates (2011) argues that 'the interaction of curriculum and assessment is an important matter. Assessment can drive learning in a beneficial manner' (130). This could account for the KS3 dip as it is the only key stage where students are not externally assessed or assessed against national criteria. Therefore, one argument for preventing the academic decline following the transition to KS3 would be getting students to sit an externally assessed test at the end of the key stage. However, until 2008, students in year 9 – the end of KS3 – did have to sit SATs but these were abolished because they were deemed unnecessary particularly with GCSE results providing the main indicator for school performance (Marshall, 2008).

This section of the literature review has considered some of the issues surrounding reading in the National Curriculum, particularly at KS2, and the issue of assessment at KS2. There is far more literature on KS2 assessment because it is such a contentious topic. The disconnect between the curriculum and the assessment model leads teachers of English to almost work backwards using the assessment as a way to deliver the curriculum. Given the high-stakes nature of assessment at KS2, this is understandable. The lack of literature surrounding KS3 assessment speaks volumes because it is so variable between schools. What is clear, however is that the rigorous assessment system for reading in KS2 is at odds with the lack of formalised

assessment at KS3. This thesis explores some of the reasons behind the assessment dip in the transitional phase between KS2 and KS3, and from the examination of this literature, it seems that high-stakes testing in one key stage and a distinct lack of any formalised assessment at the other could be a contributing factor.

Curriculum reform

Given that in this thesis the focus is on the National Curriculum for English in England, it is pertinent to explore what curriculum is. An additional question which arose from exploring curriculum in general and the National Curriculum in particular was whether or not learning is linear. Therefore, this issue will be considered in this section and, following this, two different proposals as to how the curriculum could be constructed so it is not linear. The two curriculum models selected are suggestions from academics as to how the curriculum (particularly for the subject of English) could be constructed so it defies traditional expectations and approaches but is of greater benefit to the students studying it. The first to be explored is the approach suggested by Egan (1997), and the second is from the Cambridge Primary Review study (Alexander, 2010).

The concept of curriculum is one that is widely debated, with many scholars of curriculum studies offering various definitions and explanations. The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2022) defines curriculum as ‘the courses offered by an educational institution’ or ‘a set of courses constituting an area of specialization’, citing the etymology as from the Latin *currere* meaning to run, action of running, or course of action. Egan (2003) explains curriculum as ‘the study of any and all educational phenomena’ (16). To E.D. Hirsch, as explored in the previous section on Cultural Literacy, curriculum is a prescriptive list of knowledge that every American student should know. As a teacher who is responsible for delivering a curriculum to my students, I understand curriculum to be a guide as to the knowledge and skills students should develop throughout their education; a guide which allows students to build on this knowledge and skill set as they progress through school. The purpose of the National Curriculum is to ensure parity across the nation so that students in different parts of the country are all studying – broadly – the same thing.

In education, particularly notable in the National Curriculum, linear learning is commonplace because the assumption is that students learn in the same way, but this approach to learning

does not create an environment which is enriching or as supportive as it could be (Graham, 2021). This is compounded by research in which studies 'often assume students will continue learning at the same rate throughout the entire school year' (Kulifeld and Soland, 2021, 142). This is despite the fact that 'learning can often be messy, complicated and unpredictable ... The process of learning anything complicated can quickly become a dense, involved journey full of twists and turns' (Foster, 2022, 50). Because of this, learning should not be expected to be simple and straightforward, with gradual, measurable progress (Foster, 2022). There is an assumption within linear classrooms that students learn homogeneously; therefore, this results in all students being given the same teaching or instruction, and there is an expectation that their learning is demonstrated within the same activity (Graham, 2021). Due to the nature of the National Curriculum, classrooms have to be linear in order to deliver what is required, particularly as teachers are under pressure to ensure students have mastered a particular skill or objective within a set time frame (Graham, 2021).

Foster (2022) argues that a linear curriculum is not something to apologise for provided there is the understanding that students will need to revisit content for their long-term development. Foster (2022) goes on to say that because time in linear, it is inevitable learning will be linear to a degree as lessons are sequenced and ordered in a specific way. Because of this, Foster (2022) argues for a 'monotonic' approach to the curriculum as 'monotonic progress is unidirectional' and students are all on the same trajectory, they may just be in different positions along this (50). However, Graham (2021) argues that unlike the economic world which is moving away from industrialisation and towards personalisation, schools continue to be unchanging and incapable of moving beyond a traditional, homogeneous approach to teaching found in linear classrooms.

In opposition to most studies which use estimates, Kulifeld and Solan's (2021) study concludes that the assumption that 'learning occurs at a constant rate throughout the school year' is 'often not justifiable, particularly in reading' (169-70). This is, in part, due to the pressures of testing at set points, for example the key stage 2 SATs, which means that gains made earlier in the year when assessment preparation is at its height are often larger than later in the year (Kulifeld and Solan, 2021). Additionally, there are 'no adequate procedures for estimating how long a given unit of instruction will take to be learned by students with different aptitudes' (Carroll, 1989, 27). Therefore, linearity in the curriculum is not the most inclusive

or appropriate approach given that there are many other factors – student ability, external pressures – which dictate how the learning takes place. There is also the issue within linear learning of students lacking motivation, having fewer opportunities to develop socially and metacognitively, and fewer opportunities to achieve mastery of content (Graham, 2021).

To combat the issues that arise from linear learning, suggestions have been made as to how the learner can best be supported on their learning journey. Carroll (1989) suggests that ‘instructional materials should be prepared and sequenced on the basis of the best research on the cognitive skills involved and matched in a challenging way to students’ levels of aptitude, skill, and knowledge’ (30). This not only allows for teacher autonomy in the classroom, but also ensures that students’ individual needs are catered for where possible. Graham (2021) advocates for a more flexible and personalised approach to learning in the classroom, and for teachers to move from instructors to mediators and coaches to allow student autonomy in learning and decision-making. Kallick and Zmuda (2017) also suggest that personalised learning is the approach best suited to ending standardisation in the classroom where there remains ‘one curriculum for all, one age group and one grade at a time, and one set of tests to determine learning’ (1). Kallick and Zmuda (2017) explain personalised learning as ‘an umbrella term under which many practices fit, each designed to accelerate student learning by tailoring instruction to individuals’ needs and skills as they go about fulfilling curricular requirements’ (1-2). Therefore, personalised learning is not a removal of the curriculum but rather having a curriculum which is more flexible in how teachers can impart content and allow students to grow and develop at a rate best suited to their needs and abilities. In the approach to personalised learning suggested by Kallick and Zmuda (2017), they advocate a project-based approach where the outcome is not immediately apparent, which is in direct opposition to the current systems of standardised testing. Whilst this would result in different projects happening across the classroom, it would give scope for students to ‘fully develop their voice, have their capacities to co-create, and explore the benefits of social construction and self-discovery’ (14). For this to succeed, personalised learning ‘requires the teacher to relinquish control and expectations for linear and uniform learning’ (Kallick and Zmuda, 2017, 122). In an ideal world, this would be attainable, however the current curriculum constraints means that teacher autonomy is not possible to this degree. What follows is an exploration of two different approaches to

curriculum as posed by academics, which take a non-linear more personalised approach to learning both of which are markedly different to the National Curriculum.

Egan (2003), writing in 1978, recognised that there was a lot of confusion around curriculum: what it is, its function, whether it should be a blueprint, a list of objectives, or an evaluation of student achievement. Egan (2003) argues that 'if one lacks a clear sense of the purpose of education, then one is deprived of an essential means of specifying what the curriculum should contain' (14). Therefore, when the curriculum is being developed, those enacting it should be involved in the process. However, curriculum is rarely designed with the child in mind, rather 'you shape children to the mould evident in the adult population, and its range of beliefs, skills, commitments, etc.' (Egan, 2003, 19). Whilst this continues to be the case, there is an argument that the curriculum delivered to school-age children will not be as beneficial as a curriculum designed with children in mind.

In his 1997 paper, *The Educated Mind*, Egan explores how a different approach to curriculum could benefit students, arguing that since the mid-nineteenth century curriculum has predominantly been about 'what skills and knowledge are required to prepare the masses, female and male, for productive work, good citizenship, and satisfying leisure' (205). Egan (1997) goes on to argue that there is a conflict in the curriculum between preparing students for 'productive roles in the modern economy' and exposing them to culture that had previously been the domain of the elite (205). From this, Egan (1997) identifies three areas that influence curriculum: 1. 'the socializing idea' which helps to prepare students for life outside the classroom, e.g. sex education, consumer education, etc.; 2. the curriculum based on Plato's idea that it is about 'initiating students into the forms of disciplined knowledge, and into some forms at a significantly deeper level; it focuses on developing familiarity with the culture that has accumulated in Western literature tradition; 3. the curriculum based on Rousseau's idea which suggests a focus on 'extending, elaborating, reorganizing, reconstructing, and transforming the student's individual experience'; it is about 'procedural skills' rather than 'any specific privileged content' (206). This combination, on paper, appears as though it would deliver a well-rounded curriculum providing a holistic education for all students, both of benefit within the school environment for academic success, but also to help prepare them for life after education. Egan goes on to argue for a completely different

curriculum to one which we currently see in schools; one which is more cohesive and coherent.

In the early years of education, Egan (1997) argues that a mythic approach should be taken and advocates for language and literacy to focus on language development. He believes that jokes should form a central part of the curriculum as the word-play employed within jokes helps to extend vocabulary and make language explicit, as well as giving children the skills to describe the world around them articulately. He goes on to say that exploring, for example, metaphors, through jokes can help children to understand confusion or different meanings of words. Egan (1997) argues that jokes are a key component in a child's development of language as young children often delight in retelling or creating their own jokes or word play. Thus, children are exploring and developing language in school in a similar way to outside of the classroom. Whilst an unconventional approach to early primary years curriculum, jokes 'can be a fertile means of building awareness of language and of developing increasingly sophisticated language use' (Egan, 1997, 211). Additionally, jokes are a source of fun, and 'a form of language whose use carries a reward' (Egan, 1997, 211). From this explanation, therefore, it is likely that children would engage enthusiastically in the development and deliberate manipulation of language thereby furthering their understanding of their own learning.

Egan (1997) goes on to outline what else a language and literature curriculum could entail, extolling the virtues of sounds and songs, poetry (particularly those containing word-play thus building on the curriculum in the education stage preceding it), and reading stories from around the world with a focus on oral tradition and linking to cultural context. Egan (1997) also suggests the study of the 'great mythic or religious stories of the world' which he recognises as contentious, but argues that this will help children to understand 'the cultural experience that surrounds them' (212). This line of argument is similar to that of E.D. Hirsch, however, unlike Hirsch, Egan advocates for diversity within the curriculum, and valuing texts (oral or written) from beyond the country in which the curriculum is being enacted. Egan (1997) writes that this approach to studying language and literacy will not only help with language development, but also to help children make sense of the world around them. Unlike E.D. Hirsch, Egan (1997) acknowledges that this approach could be difficult in multicultural societies but argues that 'if our primary concern is education, the issue to

address is the strategic one of how to present these stories in an acceptable way, not how to negotiate their disappearance from the curriculum. We will sensibly be flexible and sensitive to particular situations, and be prepared to let our decisions turn on courtesy and kindness rather than on a narrow logic and ideology' (213). Egan's approach therefore implies teacher autonomy as the teacher would know their class well enough to use texts within the parameters of the curriculum to help with both their language and cultural development. A further argument Egan (1997) puts forward is for separate subjects to be taught together, for example an arts segment which would focus on studying that which stimulates the five senses. In primary schools, it is generally the class teacher who teaches the core and non-core subjects, so this approach would not be too far removed from current practice with just the obvious difference of the timetable not labelling sessions according to specific subjects.

Following this period of education, Egan (1997) thinks that there should be a more Romantic curriculum, ensuring that there is an adequate period of transition between the two approaches. The Romantic curriculum focuses on 'transcendent human qualities' and that which inspires awe and wonder (Egan, 1997, 218). This approach allows students to study a particular area or topic in considerable depth and allow students to think creatively and to ask questions. Egan (1997) explains that the aim of this is to 'build gradually and randomly a particular level of knowledge about the world that stimulates, bit by bit, wonder and awe at being alive in this world at this time' (219). As part of this, students would learn about the lives of influential people and people of note including those who 'revolt against conventional forces' (Egan, 1997, 220). Egan (1997) places emphasis on students developing their oral skills by regularly presenting information they have researched and collated, possibly even role-playing to develop their understanding of certain people or types of people. With regards to literature in the Romantic curriculum, Egan (1997) proposes exploring the lives of, for example, the poet alongside their works. This would allow for students to develop their understanding of context and where poets drew inspiration for their works.

Egan (1997) proposes that students get increased exposure to language, and that etymology, rhetoric and exotic languages should play a contributing factor in this development of literacy. By exotic languages, Egan (1997) is not referring to modern foreign languages, but rather one which differs greatly from their own, e.g. for a native English speaker, Sanskrit, with the aim

of getting 'some insight into how a very different language delivers a representation of the world' (226).

Egan (1997) argues that the middle school years lacks curriculum inspiration because 'the clear socializing and basic information-providing that drives the early curriculum fades and the urgency of vocational preparation does not yet give precise direction' (226). Egan is arguing that his Romantic curriculum can help students at this stage of a student's learning journey as it builds on that which comes before it, but has a clear focus on exploration and development of key skills, alongside building of knowledge through both teacher-led instruction and self-discovery.

Egan (1997) goes on to outline his proposal for curriculum in the final years of education, but given that the focus of this thesis is on the key stage 2 to key stage 3 curriculum, it will not be explored here. However, what Egan does show is that his curriculum is cohesive with ample time devoted to transition between the different phases of his curriculum. He stresses the importance of transition between the three curriculum phases and plans for transition within this model; he ensures that careful consideration is given for the transition points to ensure students are given the tools to approach new learning and a new curriculum, whilst utilising the skills and knowledge from the prior curriculum. Anticipating backlash against this quite radical curriculum proposal, Egan (1997) defends his ideas by arguing that 'single-minded devotion to "job-ready skills" is a recipe for vocational redundancy in a decade or so, at a terrible cost to the intellectual resources of the individual' (226). Egan, therefore, is arguing that the curriculum in its current iteration is too focused on preparing students for working life after education, and not about providing enough intellectual resources to sustain them once they have left full time education.

This view is echoed in Alexander's (2010) Cambridge Primary Review which will be explored in this section of the literature review. Whilst the review focuses solely on the primary curriculum, it lays solid foundations upon which the secondary curriculum can be built and developed. Much like Egan's proposed curriculum as explored above, the Cambridge Primary Review focuses on the breadth of subjects studied at primary level. For the purposes of this thesis, the English curriculum will be the main focus with some reference to other subjects where relevant.

In reference to the many teachers and head teachers spoken to about changes that need to be made to the curriculum during the review process, most were in agreement that 'oracy should be given a much more prominent place in the curriculum' (Alexander, 2010, 219) and that the distinction between speaking and listening and oracy should be made clear. Alexander (2010) explains the difference between speaking and listening – which is the phrase currently used in the curriculum – and oracy as 'oracy encompasses talk in all areas and contexts of learning' (219). Given that debate and recitation of poetry are speaking and listening requirements in the National Curriculum, it would be expected that general oracy skills (to enhance communication, allow for discussion, etc.) would be as much, if not more, of a priority.

In the proposal for a new curriculum, Alexander (2010) argues that the curriculum in its current form should allow for depth and breadth of study but that 'the initial promise – and achievement – of entitlement to a broad, balanced and rich curriculum has been sacrificed in pursuit of a well-intentioned but narrowly conceived 'standards' agenda' (237). Consequently, those subjects or opportunities for thinking time, talking, problem-solving and exploring in depth, are given less priority than they should be. Alexander (2010) goes on to say that 'the problem of curriculum is inseparable from the problem of assessment and testing. Unless the national assessment system is reformed, especially at KS2, changes to the curriculum will have limited impact and the curriculum outside the favoured zone of tested subjects will continue to be compromised' (237). Despite the most recent curriculum reform, this is still an issue and one that, arguably, has worsened given how high stakes the KS2 SATs have become with the increase in level of challenge, and the introduction of the spelling, grammar and punctuation assessment test.

One issue raised in the Cambridge Primary Review is that an aim of the national curriculum was to allow for parity and continuity from primary to secondary 'by devising a single framework for the age-range five to 16, divided into four key stages and defined in terms of a single set of subjects' (Alexander, 2010, 239). However, despite those working in education welcoming this 'many in the primary world saw this as an imposition of a secondary view of the curriculum on primary schools and believed that in the process something distinctively and properly 'primary' had been lost' (Alexander, 2010, 239). This suggests that transition between primary and secondary phases of education were not given adequate consideration,

and instead a secondary down approach was taken which consequently impacted negatively on the content of the primary curriculum.

Using the results of the review, and the input of the many education practitioners spoken to, Alexander (2010) concludes that language, oracy and literacy should be at the 'heart of the new curriculum' (268) with oracy in particular given more prominence. Additionally, literacy by the end of key stage 2 'must be more than functional. It is about making and exploring meaning as well as receiving and transmitting it' (Alexander, 2010, 269). Therefore, talking should be as important as reading and writing, and incorporated into both. The review goes on to argue that instilling a love of literacy, its exploration and development will help academic progress, but also with those less tangible but no less important skills like growing imaginations and children better understanding their place in the world (Alexander, 2010).

A central principal to the proposed changes in the Cambridge Primary Review is there being two curricula which work together: the national component, and the local component. The national component would be created by an expert panel made up of primary practitioners with secondary representatives to allow for curriculum continuity, and would broadly set out the content, process and progression expected within the primary phase. The local component would also be drawn up by an expert panel (the review suggests significant input from the Local Education Authority (LEA) but given that most of these have been phased out in favour of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) in recent years, this would have to be comprised of experts from within MATs and any existing LEA structures still in place) as well as utilising input from children themselves and would focus on 'celebrating culture and community' (Alexander, 2010, 274). The curriculum allocation and aims are laid out in figure 1 below.

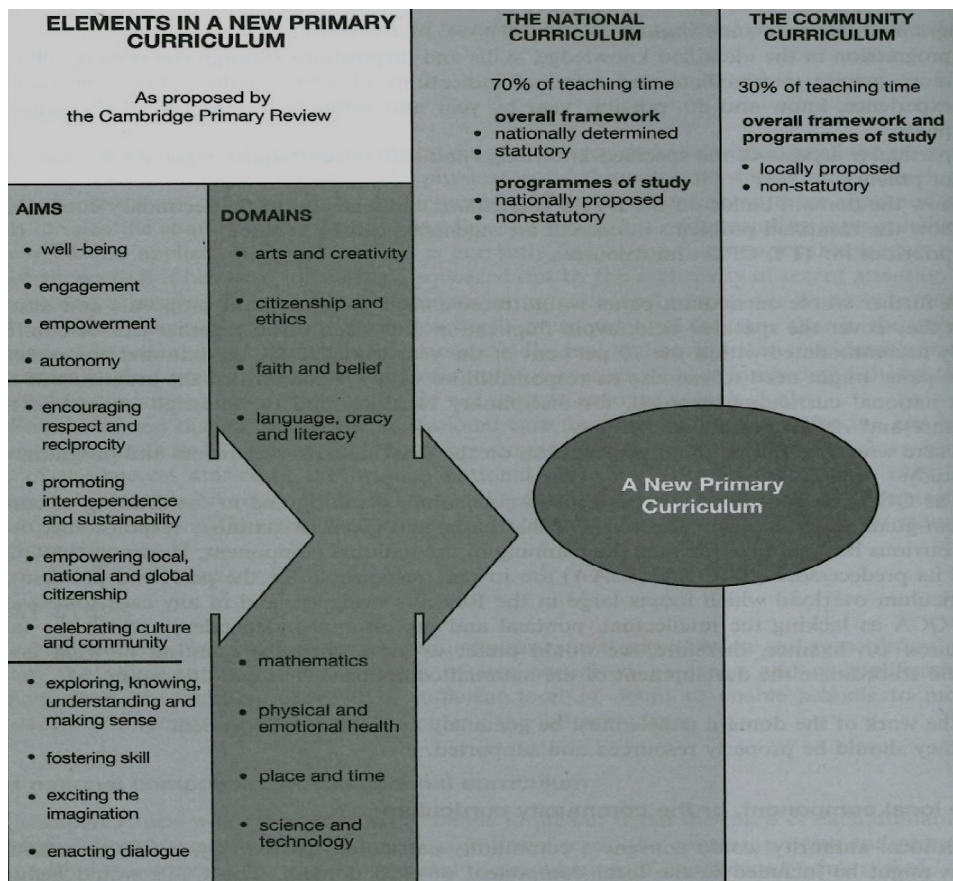


Figure 1 Elements of a new primary curriculum (Alexander, 2010, 274)

When summing up the proposals for a new primary curriculum, Alexander (2010) makes several key points in relation to the English curriculum which warrant further exploration. The first is that the primary curriculum should serve to prepare children for life after school taking into account what they may need to know in future to better serve their future needs and to create lifelong learners. A further point is that high standards can be achieved with a curriculum that ‘celebrates’ oracy alongside language and literacy which gives children opportunities for depth of exploration and discovery (Alexander, 2010, 276). Another key point of particular relevance to this thesis, is that the new curriculum should take the transition to secondary education into account. There should be teacher autonomy in schools but enough guidance provided to ensure parity, progress, and secondary readiness. This would be set out in the national component as discussed above, and the inclusion of secondary teachers into the expert panel would ensure that this fluidity can be catered for in the primary curriculum. Following on from this, the report signifies the need for the new curriculum to be expert-led with school-based practitioners contributing as they understand

the needs of the primary curriculum and its students, as well as the limitations. One of the final points in the proposal is that the new curriculum allows for teacher expertise and autonomy yet is guided enough to allow for parity across schools nationally.

Alongside these proposals, there is also the suggestion that assessment is reformed 'so that it does its job without compromising children's statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum' (Alexander, 2010, 277). The report is not advocating the removal of assessment altogether, but ensuring a system is in place so it measure child's progress and attainment, and is of use to secondary schools, rather than as a measure with which to judge schools. To ensure parity and consistency in assessment at key stage 2, the proposal is for 'a well-written assessment criteria and teacher training [which] can lead to an appropriate level of reliability in teacher assessment, and this can be reinforced through a rigorous moderation process' (Alexander, 2010, 324). This approach would value teacher expertise and would also signify a fairer process as children can showcase a range of skills and broader body of knowledge. In order to aid this, a pupil portfolio of worked examples would be provided to allow for a holistic judgement. There would also be the opportunity for group moderation between teachers nationally which enables teacher professional development as well as validity in judgement of children's work. Disbanding the SATs in favour of other assessment processes reduces a 'tendency to teach to the test' (Alexander, 2010, 324). One proposal for setting a test as a form of assessment is giving children different texts and questions from a large bank available so children do not all sit the same test and therefore cannot be coached to the test. For this new approach to assessment to work, student assessment must no longer be attached to school accountability as it makes any form of assessment high-stakes, and teachers may still end up teaching to the criteria (Alexander, 2010).

The Cambridge Primary Review offers some interesting points for curriculum to develop to better prepare children for life after school, ensure that transition to secondary school is more fluid, and to best utilise teacher expertise. What the proposal does not do is prescribe what the curriculum should contain but acts as a guiding document – a springboard – to aid future curriculum reform. By utilising an expert body of practitioners who are actively involved in the delivery of the curriculum on a daily basis, it will ensure that what students learn throughout their primary education will be of value as well as reinforcing the importance of the teacher as expert. Removing the KS2 SATs in favour of teacher-assessed portfolios or

student work, or students sitting tests made up from a wide range of texts and questions, will ensure that a more holistic judgement is made and avoid narrowing the curriculum so the focus is only on those subjects and skills that will be assessed. This also alleviates the high-stakes, high pressure environment that has been created as a result of the existing testing model.

This section of the literature review has explored two different approaches to the curriculum which could be adopted by English schools. Although very different, both approaches value the teacher as expert, and understand the need for preparing students for life beyond school rather than just for the next set of examinations. In order for future curriculum reform to be beneficial to students and school staff, it must offer a guide for teachers to follow and not be overly prescriptive; teacher autonomy of knowledge of their class will allow more personalised learning opportunities for the demographic within their classroom. A national curriculum should be used as a tool for schools to develop their own curriculum best suited to the needs of their cohort, whilst ensuring parity nationally so students across schools in England are being given the same opportunities for academic development as well as personal growth.

Concluding Thoughts

This literature review has examined a considerable number of works on the issues of transition, curriculum reform, cultural literacy, and assessment in English. Embarking on this journey into exploring transition in English between key stages 2 and 3, I knew that I would read a lot of literature attempting to explain the cause of the attainment dip between these two key stages. What I was not prepared for, however, was the lack of consideration given to the role of the curriculum in explaining the cause of this dip. Having explored the motivation behind the most recent curriculum reform, and considered the lack of parity between the curriculum and assessment model, it is clear that if the issue of transition is to be addressed, it needs to happen on a national level. However, it must be worked on by educators, those who have working knowledge of curriculum implementation and impact, not a politician with an interest in a specific educational philosophy.

At this point, it would be pertinent to look at my research questions once again:

1. Where did the latest curriculum reform originate?
2. What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3?
3. How do school staff perceive transition in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?
4. What can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful?

This literature review has looked in depth at existing research into transition, curriculum, and assessment in English in key stages 2 and 3. Whilst the literature has not provided the answer to my research questions, what it has shown is that there is a considerable disconnect between the two curricula despite this being a pivotal point in a child's schooling. Much of the existing literature supports the idea that students during this transitional phase do struggle with making academic progress, and it postulates that the causes for this academic dip are predominantly social, emotional and/or behavioural. Whilst this is part of the problem, it does not account for the academic dip of students who do not move schools from key stage 2 to 3. Additionally, very little of the literature focuses on English teachers' and other school staffs' perception of the issues surrounding transition from an academic, rather than pastoral perspective. With regards to the third research question, the literature has offered some suggestions as to how the academic dip can be mitigated to ensure students in year 7 do not struggle to make progress; however, the research studies cited either show little success in applying these strategies – either because communication between primary and secondary schools is not robust enough (this is not down to failings on the part of either school but shows the time pressures teachers face in both establishments), or because the perception is that students should be 'catching-up' on what they failed to achieve in key stage 2. Therefore, it is clear that alternative answers need to be sought which is what is driving the research in this thesis.

The four research questions above will be considered in more depth in the following chapter where I will set out my approach to addressing them in my own research project. Much of the literature on the issue of transition and how to solve it did not satisfy me because many of the arguments were not relevant to the middle-school context. The literature reviewed in

this section was invaluable in helping me to develop my ideas about what I wanted to find out, and how I would go about doing this. What follows is the methodology where I outline the approaches I took to address the research questions, and explore the issue of transition between KS2 and 3 in my own context – a middle school.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the existing literature exploring transition, cultural literacy, and reading and assessment in the English curriculum. What now follows is the methodological approach I took to my research, and the methods of research I employed. The driving force for my research were the following questions which I kept at the forefront of my mind when constructing my data collection strategies:

1. Where did the latest curriculum reform originate?
2. What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3?
3. How do school staff perceive transition in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?
4. What can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful?

I begin this chapter by discussing my philosophical position followed with my positionality and therefore the context in which my research is placed. Following this, I discuss each of the methods used to collect the data and my approaches in analysing the data. I then consider the ethical issues surrounding my research and methods of data collection before reflexively exploring issues identified with my research, including the impact of COVID-19, then offering my concluding thoughts.

Methodology

Methodology has been defined as ‘the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods you use’ (Wellington, 2015, 33). Therefore, it is important in this chapter that I explore how my understanding of reality and knowledge influenced my approach to research and, ultimately, guided my research in the selection of appropriate research methods.

Ontological position

As a researcher, it is important to develop an understanding of your ontological position as it allows you justify the rationale for having approached the research in that particular way, and your choice of research methods. Throughout the research process, this has been a steep learning curve for me not least because I had to develop my understanding of ontology before even beginning to consider my ontological position. Wellington (2015) defines ontology as 'the study or theory of 'what is', i.e., the characteristics of reality' (343). Crotty (1998) explains that ontology is 'concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality' (10). Scotland (2012) echoes this by explaining that 'ontology is the study of being' and that 'researchers need to take a position regarding their perceptions of how things really are and how things really work' (9). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words *what is*. Prior to starting the EdD, I had not once considered my perception of reality and how much my experience constructs the reality around me. I very quickly realised that I was an interpretivist as I considered research in the context of the participant; that is, reality as constructed by those experiencing it, and that listening to and hearing the voices of my research participants would shape the research and allow this to happen organically. According to Scotland (2012), 'the interpretative epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena. The world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it' (11). Therefore, as an interpretivist, I would draw on both my research participants' experiences, and my own experiences to become a part of the research. This meant that I considered individual contexts within my research, as well as considering the wider picture. As an interpretivist, I acknowledged that my research would be subjective, to a degree (Atkins, 2016).

Researching interpretivism allowed me to understand that value-free knowledge is not conceivable (Scotland, 2012). This aligned to my views on researching, and giving my researchers a voice whilst also considering their context. Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) recognise that 'interpretivism is a more 'people-centred' approach which acknowledges the researcher's integration with the research environment – that is, where each will impact on the perceptions and understandings of the other' (14). It was important to me to take an approach to my research where I could incorporate myself into the research environment, and 'attempt to consider the events from the perspective of the *subject*' (Brundrett and

Rhodes, 2013, 14). Being an interpretivist, I could also allow my own experiences and subjectivities to become a part of the research. Having decided to interview colleagues with experiences of the English curriculum, I recognised that they are all working within, and therefore experiencing, their own socially constructed realities as opposed to a single reality in which their own experience is not influential. As an interpretivist I was able to give my research participants the opportunity to express their experience of their constructed reality, but also allowed myself – as the researcher – to have the best opportunity to understand their context and experiences because of this.

Whilst there would inevitably be a commonality within the terms used by the research participants, particularly given that they worked in the same school, this would not be indicative of a single reality. The research participants I invited to join the study held different positions within the school meaning that their perspectives and experiences would be different; therefore, their realities would certainly be different.

Epistemology

Epistemology is ‘philosophical study of the nature, limits, and grounds of knowledge’ and ‘is concerned with what distinguishes different kinds of knowledge claims, i.e., with what the criteria are that allow distinctions to be made and how what exists can be known. What knowledge counts and by what evidence?’ (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013, 14). Scotland (2012) explains that ‘epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words *what it means to know*’ (9). There are generally considered to be two camps when it comes to epistemology – positivism and interpretivism (although in reality it is more nuanced than this). Positivists believe in ‘objective knowledge of an external reality which is rational and independent of the observer’ and positivism is generally associated with the collection of hard quantitative data which is done objectively and in a value-free way (Wellington, 2015, 26). Obviously, this raises the issue of whether or not research can ever be value-free but this is not the place in which to engage in the debate. In contrast, interpretivism ‘accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct’ (Wellington, 2015, 26). With regards to the concept of knowledge, it can be considered both ‘hard, real, and capable of being transmitted in a tangible form,’ however, ‘it can also be argued that it is subjective and based on experience and insight’ (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013, 14). Because of this,

educational researchers tend to champion an interpretivist approach to research as it considers the human element to the data collected (and the data collection process). Young and Lopez (2011) argue that some scholars 'believe that the search for "truth" is a falsity because it subscribes to a particular worldview that silences or further marginalises competing perspectives' (341). The interpretivist approach is generally a qualitative one which has the participant at the heart of the study because it is about interpreting shared experiences due to the researcher's involvement with their participants.

Cohen et al (2007) argue that researchers who are 'opponents of positivism ... [believe] that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated, and that their model of a person is an autonomous one, not the plastic version favoured by positivist researchers' (19). When I first started planning my research project, I realised that I was an interpretivist because my research centred around people's perspectives of the curriculum; being an interpretivist ensured that I could better understand the individual interpretations of the world around my participants.

In recent years, research has been playing a more prominent role in school-based education. Since the creation of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), it is not uncommon to hear teachers and school leaders citing research as the foundation for their practice. Whilst this is a good thing given the history of educational research (and researchers) being far removed from the classroom, there is now a focus on toolkits being produced, based on the hard facts discovered in research, the intention of which is to support schools in implementing the outcomes of the research. However, the outcomes of the research, and subsequent toolkits, do not take into account individual school context and it can therefore be difficult for schools to apply the findings of the research.

Positionality

As a qualitative researcher, positionality is a key concept to consider before, during and after conducting one's research. 'The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument' (Bourke, 2014, 2); therefore, it is inevitable that one's experience will influence the processes of data collection and analysis. However, it can be mitigated as when applied 'positionality is achieved not only by candid admission of one's biographical orientation, but also by subsequent self-reflection to bracket, not exclude, this orientation

from the research and design process' (Relles, 2016, 313). Positionality needs to be made clear by researchers so that readers 'can know *'where we are coming from'* and to avoid any impression that we speak from any sort of universally authoritative, God-like plateau' (Lavia and Sikes, 2010, 88). These citations show the importance of being aware of your position as a researcher, but also acknowledge how positionality can aid the authenticity of the research. Positionality is the acknowledgement that despite aiming to be objective, the researcher will inevitably be subjective at some point in their research; however, 'to achieve a pure objectivism is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity. We can strive to be objective, but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities' (Bourke, 2014, 3). Researcher subjectivity is inevitable as 'different researchers can look at the same issue or phenomenon, and find value in different artefacts and behaviours or stress different elements as most important or most interesting' (Dean et al, 2018, 275). Researcher reflexivity is key if the research is going to be trustworthy; however, researcher bias will invariably have some influence on the research process. If the researcher is reflexive, bias will not necessarily be mitigated, but it will be evident to those who consider the research and its findings.

Whilst conducting my research, I was doubly aware of my positionality. Firstly, as I was conducting research in a field where I had significant experience, and secondly because my research was being conducted in the school where I worked. I have been an English teacher since 2010, and have worked in a middle school setting since 2014. Therefore, I have considerable experience of the key stage 2 and key stage 3 English curricula having taught both for many years (and simultaneously since 2014). Having experience of delivering both curricula meant that I had to be mindful of entering into the research with preconceptions and biases; I had, after all, chosen this particular area as the focus for my doctoral thesis as I had deemed it in need of investigation and scrutiny. As a former secondary school English teacher who moved into the middle school setting, I was surprised to discover how little parity there was between the key stage 2 English curriculum and the one in key stage 3. Whilst I had to be aware of my preconceptions and biases impeding or influencing my data collection, I also valued my experience in this area as it allowed me to understand my research participants' views from a point of understanding. I believe that the knowledge I shared with my participants enabled them to open up more about their views on the differences between the curricula because they understood and respected my similar expertise in this area, and

knew that they did not need to explain certain parts of their responses as we shared this expertise.

Interviewing colleagues in my current place of work was, in part, a conscious decision. I had hoped to access colleagues from other schools but given the Coronavirus outbreak at the start of 2020, and the subsequent school closure, I decided to keep the research within my school. (The impact of COVID-19 on my research is explored in a section below.) The colleagues invited to participate in the research were from different parts of the school, with varying roles, but all of whom had some experience of the English curriculum. I had to be conscious of my positionality throughout the interview process due to potential perceived power dynamics by my colleagues. Some of the school's teaching assistants volunteered to be participants and I had to be aware during the interviews that they may feel a power dynamic given that their very role in the classroom was/is to 'assist' me as the teacher. With regards to my fellow teachers, I made a concerted effort in the interviews to be the researcher rather than the teacher and therefore was not my usual opinionated self.

Perryman (2011) writes about conducting interviews within the school where she used to work then became a consultant, stating that she was 'very aware of power whilst interviewing' (869). With the exception of interviewing teaching assistants, my other research participants were either on the same level as me – classroom teachers – or staff with additional responsibility; therefore, I did not have to worry about the power dynamic in this sense. However, I was aware that as a researcher I may be perceived as holding the power as *I was interviewing them*. To mitigate this as much as possible, I made my interviewees aware that all comments would be confidential, and throughout the interviews I responded to their points rather than trying to link their responses to my practice or views. Despite this, there was still a danger with conducting insider research and that was my colleagues being aware of my views on transition and the curriculum from previous informal discussions. This was unavoidable, and, as Perryman (2011) argues 'it would be artificial to act out an objectivity that everyone knows does not exist' (870). Nevertheless, I feel that conducting research within my own context was beneficial as I gleaned rich data from the interviews which I believe I would not have been the case had I been working with participants with whom I did not have a pre-existing relationship.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Whilst considering the issue of transition in the English curriculum, I started to read up on how these most recent iterations of the curriculum came into being. These, somewhat unsurprisingly, lead me to read speeches delivered by the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove. These speeches were illuminating in how they set out his rationale for curriculum reform and I knew that I had to explore them in more depth in order to fully understand how and why such dramatic curriculum changes came into being. I had previously encountered and applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in an EdD assignment and thought it would be an appropriate approach to take in the exploration of these speeches. Given my background as an English graduate and English teacher, exploring language is something I enjoy so it was too good an opportunity to miss.

There is no standardised approach to CDA but rather numerous frameworks that exist under this broad umbrella term (Machin and Mayr, 2012). However, it is widely agreed that CDA explores language as a power resource used by many for social or political gain (Bryman, 2015; Machin and Mayr, 2012; Mullet, 2018; Van Dijk, 2015). My interest in CDA was due to the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. I felt that this was particularly pertinent when examining speeches made by a prominent politician who was not only promoting his political party's aims, but also acting for reasons of self-interest.

Embarking on CDA, I knew that there was a good chance that my bias as an educator having been impacted by the curriculum reform brought about by the speeches delivered by Gove could impact on my findings. Mullet (2018) warns of the impact of research bias or limitation when it comes to applying a CDA framework to a text, stating that 'these limitations leave open potential for the research to further the researcher's own ideological agenda, rather than the agenda of the disempowered (123).' Therefore, it was imperative that I did not let my bias or preconceptions influence my exploration of the chosen texts. Mullet (2018) recognises that CDA is complex and nebulous, and in order for the researcher to be trusted, 'transparency (e.g., in the form of a clearly articulated analytical framework) is crucial' (139). Alongside exploration of the speeches, I also chose to analyse two key policy documents: the (upper) key stage 2 and the key stage 3 National Curriculum for English. My reason for choosing these policies was because I wished to examine documents which were presented to schools in order to inform what is taught within them, in contrast to Gove's speeches which

were delivered to a select audience and only made accessible to educators en masse after their delivery. The policy documents were more of a guiding document for schools rather than a rationale for curriculum reform so I thought it would be interesting to not only apply CDA to a different style of text, but also to explore how these documents were formed from Gove's initial thinking on the need for curriculum reform. Moreover, I wished to examine how well the transition between the KS2 curriculum and KS3 curriculum for English was catered for.

I initially chose to follow Hyatt's (2005) critical literacy frame for CDA when exploring the political speeches as it has a clear structure to follow meaning that I was more focused on the analysis of specific parts of language and critiquing this as opposed to a more general critique of the text which would potentially have been driven by my bias. Having said that, it was inevitable that my bias as a teacher having been impacted by these curriculum reforms would in some way impact on my analysis. I revisited the analysis several months after having written it and found that by using the framework, I had not fully allowed myself to explore the texts in the depths I wanted. I also found that, given how much more I had read in the intervening months, there was a considerable amount of context I wished to incorporate and following the critical literacy frame did not allow me to do this in the way I wanted. Therefore, I revisited my analysis of the two speeches and instead applied Hyatt's (2013) critical discourse analysis framework to it which I had used on my analysis of the National Curriculum.

With regards to analysis of the National Curriculum, I also initially used the critical literacy frame to analyse the documents but found that I was unable to explore the documents in the way that I wanted, partly because the language use within the curricula was less fruitful in terms of analysis; I struggled to apply the critical literacy frame simply because the two policy documents were lacking in the language devices Hyatt outlines in his framework. I then decided to use Hyatt's (2013) critical discourse analysis framework as I had applied it to policy documents before and found it to be a useful tool; additionally, I wanted to mitigate my bias as much as possible. I was approaching the research with first-hand experience of how the change to the curriculum brought on by Gove's reforms had impacted on students, particularly with regards to the transition between KS2 and 3; therefore, my bias as a professional was bound to impact on my research. However, by following Hyatt's framework, I believed that this would allow me to mitigate the amount of personal bias I applied to the analysis which could have influenced the outcomes of research. Below, I outline my Hyatt's

critical discourse analysis framework and my experience in using it to explore both political speeches, and the National Curriculum for KS2 and 3.

Hyatt's Critical Discourse Analysis Framework

As stated above, there is no single approach to critical discourse analysis, and I chose to apply Hyatt's CDA frame to my chosen policy documents due to its consideration of context as equal to language. Hyatt (2013) explains CDA as offering 'a systematic framework for analysis, uncovering how language works as agents in the discursive construction of power relations' (837). Therefore, CDA allows the analyst to deconstruct the text through close examination of the language used, but also to consider the text within the context it was written. Hyatt (2013) argues that 'with the centrality of context to language, CDA allows the investigation of the relationship of language to power and to other social processes, actors and relations' (837). Hyatt's framework considers the importance and impact of language choices within policy documents alongside the contextual factors which influenced them. I chose to apply Hyatt's critical discourse analysis framework to the two speeches, and the two national curriculum policies as I felt that consideration of contextual factors was as important as the language analysis. Hyatt's (2013) framework for CDA is an 'orientation to policy analysis' that 'offers an approach to the social analysis of discourse, particularly relevant to the processes of social transformation and change' (837).

What I found whilst conducting CDA on the national curriculum documents is that they were not as fruitful as the speeches, in terms of CDA, as they are more clinical and do not rely on building a rapport with the audience. However, I was surprised to discover that there was still nuance within the policy documents which left them open to interpretation and critique. As policy texts are often written by multiple authors, they are rarely completed or closed documents; additionally, they are 'the product of compromises at various stages... There is *ad hocery*, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formulation process' (Ball, 1993, 11). Therefore, policy is not a perfectly refined document, rather a best-fit compromise by those involved in its production. Policies are also 'contested and changing, always in a state of 'becoming', of 'was' and 'never was' and 'not quite'' (Ball, 1993, 11); therefore, a range of readers will result in a range of interpretations. Because of this, 'authors cannot control the meaning of their texts – policy authors do make concerted efforts to assert such control by the means at their disposal' (Ball, 1993, 11); however, different readers will

respond to and interpret the texts in varying ways. Using Hyatt's framework allowed me to see the nuances within the policy document more clearly thanks to the consideration of contextual influences on how these documents came into being.

Analysing the KS2 and 3 national curricula was a challenge for me as I am so used to implementing these documents in my day-to-day role as an English teacher. I knew it would be impossible for me to pretend that I would not be analysing these documents without bias so instead chose to embrace my experiences of the curricula as working documents and critique them accordingly. Using Hyatt's CDA framework did, however, allow me to consider wider contextual influences on the policies and better understand why the curricula is presented in such a way. My teacher bias undoubtedly led me to look upon the documents with a heavily critical eye (that's not to say I am wholly negative towards the documents – there are many parts of the curricula which I know to benefit the students I teach) but by considering contextual influences on the policies, I was better able to analyse the language within the context it was written rather than just through my experienced teacher lens. This did prove challenging for me, but understanding how and why certain policy decisions were made allowed me to critique the policies in such a way where my expertise benefitted my analysis as I was able to draw on first-hand experience of implementing it.

Using Hyatt's CDA framework ensured that my thinking was focused on the key issues and points with the policies; this allowed me to recognise my bias and keep it at the forefront of my research to ensure that it aided my analysis rather than impeded it.

Semi structured interviews

Interviews allow researchers to 'probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives' (Wellington, 2015, 137). Therefore, as a qualitative researcher interested in people's experiences, I chose also to conduct interviews for data collection. Additionally, I chose interviews as I wanted the experiences and thoughts of others to play a role in my research; I wanted to facilitate rather than dominate this area of the research study. As Bourke (2014) acknowledges, 'research represents a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants. As such, the identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process' (1) which was one of the biggest lures for me when deciding to conduct interviews for data collection. The purpose of

these interviews was to understand how educators view the current transition in English between KS2 and 3, and what – if anything – could be done to improve it.

As an interviewer, it was imperative that my intentions – the motives and purposes behind the interviews – were known to my interviewees, but that the interviews themselves were a ‘platform’ for the interviewees and not me as interviewer (Wellington, 2015, 139). In interviews, it is important that a rapport is established between interviewer and interviewee; additionally, the interviewer needs to let their interviewee know – implicitly or explicitly – that they share ‘background knowledge and prior conceptions’ with them (Wellington, 2015, 139). Because I was interviewing colleagues, relationships were already established and, whilst my colleagues knew that I was studying for an EdD they did not know in much detail what the chosen focus for my study was until I approached them to participate in the research. As conversations about transition and progress has taken place many times over the years, I ensured that the interviews were not my platform by giving my interviewees the time and free-rein to respond to the questions.

Selecting research participants was, in some ways, an easy part of the process given that my hand was forced by COVID-19 restrictions. Due to school closure in March 2020, access to English practitioners was limited given that people were struggling with their own personal and professional challenges. Fortunately, I was able to access colleagues within my school who held a range of roles – I simply emailed and asked if they would be willing to participate in a 15/20-minute interview via video calling. I was also able to interview two previous colleagues who now work in different schools teaching English by emailing and asking if they would be willing to participate in the research. As Wellington (2015) recognises, ‘key informants at all ‘levels’ can be valuable in establishing different perspectives and also in creating some kind of ‘in-house triangulation’ (140). Most colleagues responded that they were happy to participate in my research, and I was able to interview colleagues with a range of job roles and varying years of experience. This is outlined in the table below.

Participant	Job role	Age	Gender	Years of experience of the English curriculum
A	Deputy Headteacher	39	F	3 (MFL teacher for 15 years previously)
B	Chair of Governors	70	M	12 as Chair of Governors. 20 as School/parent governor
C	Head of English	37	F	15
D	SENDCO	46	F	20
E	Former Head of English	39	F	16
F	English consultant	66	F	40
G	English teacher	39	M	3
H	English teacher	46	F	7
I	English teacher	31	F	7
J	Teaching assistant	51	F	6
K	Teaching assistant	55	F	10
L	Teaching assistant	39	F	1
M	Teaching assistant	50	F	5

Table 1 Overview of participants involved in interview

My choice to conduct semi structured interviews was because I would have the flexibility to decide on the ‘range and order of questions’ within my framework (Wellington, 2015, 141). Bryman (2015) argues that flexibility is a key component in semi-structured interviews particularly with regards to ‘varying the order of questions, following up leads, and clearing up inconsistencies in answers’ (483). Additionally, it allows the interviewee to ‘develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher’ (Denscombe, 2017, 204). Given my choice to interview colleagues with varying experiences of the English curriculum, I had to adapt my questions and even miss some out as I knew that my interviewees did not have the requisite experience to answer them. For example, the teaching assistants I interviewed have supported in many English classrooms and delivered interventions, but have not engaged in curriculum development simply because it is not part of their role. I also occasionally varied the order of the questions when the interviewee had made a point which led organically to a later question to be asked rather than the following question on my list. In some instances, an interviewee answered a further question in a response which led me to skip asking the question specifically so as not to force them into repeating their response.

When planning my interview questions, I followed Wellington’s (2015) process – see Figure 1 – first brainstorming initial ideas, then classifying them, removing themes and ideas that were not relevant, and finally creating meaningful questions. Then, following discussion with my supervisor, I adapted some questions which were closed and would not give interviewees the opportunity to expound on their views. The questions I ultimately decided on were:

1. What difference do you notice in the performance and/or achievement and/or progress in year 7 compared to year 6?
2. What difference do you notice in curriculum expectations between year 6 and year 7?
3. What demands are placed on children in year 6 and year 7, and how – if at all – do these differ?
4. How is planning and assessment used in year 7 and how does this differ from year 6?
5. How well do you think transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3 is catered for in the National Curriculum?
6. How could the National Curriculum be more effective in ensuring a more continuous transition from year 6 to year 7?
7. How, if at all, does your pedagogy change from year 6 to year 7?

(Note: whilst not explicitly stated in the questions, I made it clear prior to and during each interview that it was in relation to the English curriculum only.)

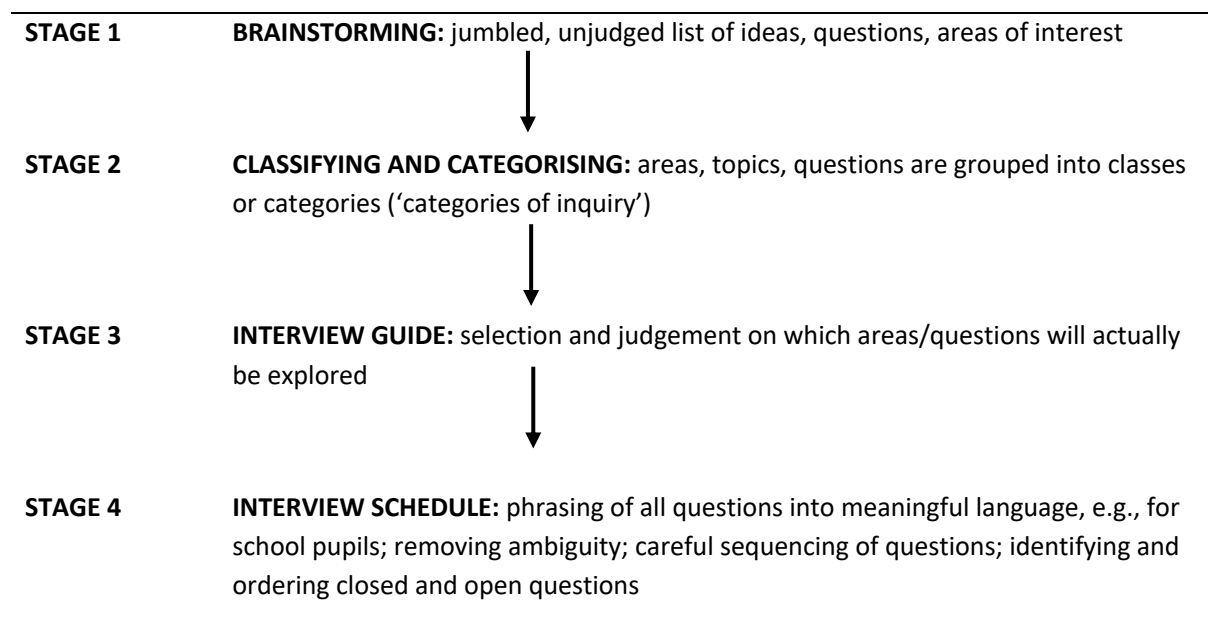


Figure 1 Forming interview guides and interview schedule

Wellington (2015, 143)

Throughout each of the interviews, I became more confident in what Wellington (2015) describes as ‘probing’, more particularly ‘tell me more’ probes where I asked my interviewees to elaborate or expand on their viewpoint (147). This allowed me to still follow the question structure, but also enabled my interviewees to give more personalised and specific responses to these questions. Whilst I probed interviewees, I had to be careful not to ‘over probe’ which could lead to interviewer bias as ‘the interviewee may be goaded into certain responses’ (Wellington, 2015, 147). There were moments, particularly in the first interviews, when I found myself inadvertently leading my interviewees into a response more in-line with my way of thinking (see example in Figure 2 below). Fortunately, I quickly realised that my probing was actually prompting, and I apologised to the interviewee for trying to lead them or put words into their mouth, and rephrased the enquiry.

Transcription from interview 10 – Participant B

Participant B: Because we are middle deemed secondary, they are used to the idea of walking round school between lessons.

Interviewer: So, in terms of our transition then ... erm, pastorally, would you say that ... would you say then – I don’t want to put words into your mouth – that any issues that we have with transition from year 6 to 7 is less to do with sort of the pastoral side of things and more to do with the curriculum, academic-y side of things?

Participant B: Yes. I mean, we still have er ... you still have those youngsters who are going to require pastoral support.

Interviewer: Yep

Participant B: But by and large, that has diminished when they’re in year 7.

Example extract from interview transcript showing prompting rather than probing

Figure 2 Leading the interviewee

Due to restrictions in place as a result of the pandemic (imposed by the University of Sheffield), interviews took place via video calling. There are some downsides to doing video interviews but I felt like these issues did not impact on the quality of the data I gathered or on the value of the interview. Video interviews are not dissimilar to face-to-face interviews as both parties can still see one another in real-time (Bryman, 2015, 491). Deakin and Wakefield (2014) warn of the issue of struggling to build a rapport during online interviews however did not find this to be an issue in their respective PhD research. Bryman (2015) also suggests that there is no significant evidence which points to video interviews significantly reducing the rapport between interviewer and interviewee. Given that I already knew my participants, lack of rapport was not an issue. There is also the issue of people feeling uncomfortable seeing themselves on screen (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). I gave all my participants the option of telephone or video interviews and all opted for the latter. As the interviews took place several weeks after the first COVID-19 lockdown was imposed, it could be that the participants were used to video encounters in both professional and personal contexts due to COVID-19 restrictions and therefore felt comfortable communicating in such a way. It has been argued that 'in the disembodied interview, all the subtle visual, non-verbal cues that can help to contextualise the interviewee in a face-to-face scenario are lost' (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014, 605). The interviewees were all colleagues I knew well and I could see throughout each interview that they all behaved in a manner similar to how they would during face-to-face encounters therefore this did not seem to be an issue; however, had I been interviewing participants with whom I had little to no rapport, this may well have been an issue.

Given that I was interviewing colleagues with whom I had worked for some time, and that these interviews were taking place within the school day on the school site, it did not feel as though I was interviewing my interviewees remotely. In some instances, my interviewees were sat in the room next door to me. Another issue identified with interviewing is ambiguity with the meanings of terms being used in the questions (Wellington, 2015). I was interviewing colleagues within my school where we naturally have a shared vernacular so this did not pose an issue. Fortunately, connectivity was not a problem and none of the interviews were interrupted by loss of internet signal. As the interviews were taking place during very challenging times – schools had just reopened to key year groups after a two-and-a-half-

month closure – I was conscious of the length of the interviews. I wanted to avoid ‘inattention’ and, more importantly, ‘fatigue’ so as not to make this an onerous task for my interviewees (Wellington, 2015, 150). Therefore, they lasted (for the most part) between 10 and 20 minutes. I was satisfied that my interviewees had given me valuable data but, more importantly, that they had not had to give up too much of their valuable time.

I feel like my interviews were a success: the interviewees answered all the questions without any obvious discomfort; all thanked me afterwards for the opportunity to take part; the data was fruitful, and despite conducting the interviews at a strange and unsettling time, I managed to respect the expertise and time of my colleagues. However, I do feel that I could have made some minor changes. Firstly, I did not conduct a pilot interview. Pilot interviews allow the interviewer to eliminate ‘ambiguous, confusing or insensitive questions’ (Wellington, 2015, 145). Additionally, they can help in ‘determining if there are flaws, limitations or other weaknesses within the interview design’ and will allow for required adaptations to be made before conducting the study (Turner, 2010, 757). This was a conscious decision given that access to English practitioners was limited because of the impact of COVID-19, and I did not want to ‘waste’ an interview. In hindsight, a pilot interview would not have been a waste as during my first interview in particular, I struggled with my identity as a researcher experiencing ‘imposter syndrome’ (Clance and Imes, 1978). I had to battle through the self-doubt that arose that made me feel like I had no right to be asking these questions given that I struggled to see myself as both teacher and researcher (Gray, 2013). As time went on and I conducted more interviews, my confidence as an interviewer grew and I felt more comfortable probing my interviewees. The first interviews conducted were worthwhile and generated interesting responses; however, the later interviews were more probing and generated what I felt were deeper responses which were arguably of more value than the initial interviews.

Denscombe (2017) argues that there are issues with using interviews for data collection in terms of validity and reliability. With regards to the validity of the data, it is ‘based on what people say rather than what they do. The two may not tally. What people say they do, what they say they prefer and what they say they think cannot automatically be assumed to reflect the truth (Denscombe, 2017, 221). As far as I can see, this is a risk one takes when conducting interviews and cannot be fully safeguarded against; however, by probing participants it is

possible to gain further clarity or explanation of points which helps to validate their responses. The issue of reliability is to do with interview consistency which Denscombe (2017) argues is 'hard to achieve' (221). My reason for keeping the questions the same in each of the interviews was to ensure as little inconsistency as possible. A further issue identified with conducting semi-structured, or open-ended, interviews is the difficulty that can arise when coding the data (Turner, 2010); this will be discussed in more detail in the coding and thematic analysis section in this chapter.

Coding and Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Before conducting the interviews, I had in mind that I wanted to thematically analyse the data using thematic analysis, more specifically Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. This was as a result of many discussions at EdD study weekends and hearing both lecturers and peers extolling the virtues of this approach to interview analysis. When I started reading Braun and Clarke's work, and watching a series of online lectures delivered by Victoria Clarke, I gained an appreciation for the flexibility of this approach and thought that it would work well with my approach to data analysis. I was particularly drawn to the idea of the role the researcher plays in interpreting the data – as an English graduate then teacher, interpretation of texts is something I have a lot of experience with. However, to mitigate the amount of researcher bias, I followed Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis as this ensured I followed a clear structure which was in no way restrictive. In its most simplistic form, thematic analysis can be defined as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 79). Therefore, I set about analysing the data I had collected in order to be able to identify these themes which would then form the cornerstone for my analysis.

I took the decision not to transcribe my data but instead listened to the interviews time and again. (I have included two examples of transcripts in the appendix for the purposes of this thesis, Appendix 1.) Whilst this is not the common approach to interview analysis, I found it helpful as being able to listen to the intonation of speech, and the delivery of particular words and phrases meant that I could connect with the data on a level I was not sure would be possible from a typed transcript. My initial approach to thematic analysis was to code the data. In order to help with this lengthy process, I created a spreadsheet upon which I could do this in an orderly way. Having read Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis

prior to embarking upon my own, I knew that it was important to write throughout the analytical process and this is 'not something that takes place at the end' (86). Whilst listening to and coding the interviews, I used a spreadsheet with the following headings: code, key analytical/descriptive point, note/quote, source. When listening to the interviews, I wrote down quotations – or paraphrases or summaries of key points – attributed a code to that piece of data then wrote a key analytical/descriptive point. Sometimes this took the form of a brief summary to better help me understand what the interviewee had said; other times, this was more analytical as I interpreted what was inferred or suggested with that particular comment. Doing this allowed me to more easily identify themes as I was exploring and writing about the data before I had even started the analysis chapter.

My initial attempts at coding the data were not successful as I struggled to pick out the key parts of the interviews and apply codes to them. However, this did not impede my progress; in fact, arguably, it made for strong thematic analysis in the long run. Braun and Clarke (2022) argue that 'good quality coding and themes result from dual processes of immersion or depth of engagement, and distancing, allowing time and space for reflection and for insight and inspiration to develop' (7). When I first embarked upon coding interviews, shortly after having conducted them, I found the process quite overwhelming and was convinced that I was doing it wrong (despite assurances from peers and research papers that there was no 'wrong' way to code). Therefore, I ended up walking away from my interview data for several months before revisiting it. Giving myself the time and space to reflect on the data I had gathered, rather than coding it immediately afterwards, meant that I was able to approach it with more insight because I had given it considerable thought over the intervening months. Whilst the data was not new to me, I did listen to the interviews with fresh ears and was able to pick out ideas more easily than the previous time I had attempted to code. Whether this was because of the time and distance away from the data, or because of increased confidence in my ability as I researcher, I do not know.

Having coded the interviews and written key analytical/descriptive points on my spreadsheet, I then set about identifying themes within the data. When identifying themes within the data, I was careful to heed Braun and Clarke's (2022) warning that 'themes are not waiting in the data to "emerge" when the researcher "discovers" them; they are conceptualized as *produced* by the researcher through their systematic analytic engagement with the data set,

and all they bring to the data in terms of personal positioning and metatheoretical perspectives' (7). Self-awareness as a researcher is key with using this approach because it is inevitable that one's experience and bias will impact on how data are analysed; therefore, it is vital to be aware of one's position when conducting thematic analysis. Before approaching the interviews, I had an idea of what subjects would be discussed due to the nature of my questions. When I came to thematically analyse the interview data, I loosely had potential themes in mind given that I had already heard the interviews once having conducted them. Themes are key to thematic analysis (as the name would suggest) because 'themes capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set'; in order to do this convincingly, 'researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 82). Whilst working on my spreadsheet, coding the data, I noted down potential themes when I thought of them. I then started attributing codes to each theme to see if the themes I had named would work with the data set.

Before settling on the themes, however, I decided to first follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice that after naming themes, 'you can clearly define what your themes are and what they are not. One test for this is to see whether you can describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences' (92). I found this a useful exercise as I was able to write about three of my four themes straightforwardly but I did struggle with one of the themes. I had initially grouped codes into a theme named 'student performance and well-being' but I found that I could not clearly or succinctly articulate the theme. Therefore, I knew that this particular theme would not work when it came to analysis. Consequently, I revisited the data set and considered a theme which would better expose the key points within the data. I still wanted the theme to encompass student performance and well-being, but not be defined as this. I decided on 'Existing approaches to transition' as this covered student performance and well-being, but also allowed me to incorporate other codes within the data.

Having then decided on the themes and written a brief summary and content of each, I embarked upon the process of writing the analysis. Using thematic analysis as my method of exploring the data allowed me to more creatively interpret it because 'data analysis is conceptualized as an art, not a science; creativity is central to the process within a framework or rigour' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, 7). It was clear to me that presenting my findings from the

data was not simply relaying what I deemed to be the key pieces of information, but incorporating an 'analytic narrative that compellingly illustrates the story' I was aiming to tell about my data, and therefore taking my analytic narrative 'beyond description of the data' in order to 'make an argument' which correlated with my research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 93). Therefore, when writing my thematic analysis, I ensured that I was giving a thorough narrative of the data whilst interpreting my findings.

Ethics

Before embarking on my data collection, I gave considerable thought as to the ethical considerations surrounding my study. I decided to use interviews as a method of data collection as I wanted to gain different perspectives but also give those with knowledge and experience of transition a voice to share their experience and expertise. In analysing the interview data, I had to be aware of exploring the data in an ethical way rather than imposing my own bias and preconceptions on it. This is why I chose to use a thematic analysis approach as coding prior to generating themes helped me to spot patterns and, I hope, truly reflect what my participants were sharing in their interviews. The greatest ethical issue I faced throughout this research process was researching within my own context; that is, conducting data collection in the school where I worked. I had to think carefully about how this could affect my research participants. I found Wellington's (2015) eight-point code of ethics a helpful guide to ensure that I approached my data collection with as ethical and considerate a stance as possible. In his reflection on a study conducted four years previously, Taber (2006) raised an important point regarding how ethical education research is if it is not approached as a two-way process. If the participant is not also benefitting from the research then it is merely an act of data collection rather than collaboration. This was key to my data collection as I hope that the outcomes of my research will in some way benefit my participants in the future.

Prior to starting data collection, I had to undergo a rigorous ethical review with The University of Sheffield; this was particularly challenging given that my research had to change from the initial application in February 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions in place from March 2020. This ethical review helped me to ensure that ethical considerations were at the forefront of my mind throughout the data collection process, from writing the interview questions to

contacting potential participants, to the interviews themselves. It also helped me to understand the importance of safeguarding the data once it had been collected.

I was aware that, while on the surface, the area of interest for my research was not sensitive or contentious, some interviewees may find it difficult to talk openly lest it be seen as a criticism on the school. Pring (2001) explains that ‘few schools provide the forum in which teachers might question the educational priorities so often determined by pressures from outside the school’ (420). Therefore, I had to be mindful that interviewees – most of whom were still working at the school – may be unwilling to comment negatively on the issues raised in the interviews in case it was seen as a criticism of the school. Subsequently, I ensured that my interview questions were about curriculum and the interviewee’s own practices rather than specifically about the school. Research participants had already been given an information sheet (Appendix 2) explaining that their data would be anonymised and I reiterated this prior to each interview. Each participant also signed a consent form (Appendix 3).

Following data collection, I ensured that all data was kept anonymously; voice memos were stored on password protected devices and were labelled by location of interview rather than by the participant’s name or job role. As custodian of the data, I kept these password-protected devices in my home to avoid any potential breach of confidentiality and only myself had access to the data. (Interviewees had been invited to listen back to their interviews to ensure they were happy with their responses but none accepted this offer.)

Having explored how ethical considerations played a significant role in data collection, I will go on to consider the issues that arose through data collection. Issues regarding trustworthiness of the data will be explored in the ‘Strengths and limitations of the methodology and methods used’ section below.

Issues from data collection

The section below will explore in detail how COVID-19 impacted on my research so I will only touch on it in this section. When it became clear that I would be unable to conduct my research as originally planned, I had to make changes; I had hoped to interview staff from at least two other middle schools in the area in order to increase my sample size; however, because of issues surrounding school closure due to COVID-19, I did not feel that it would be

appropriate to contact colleagues from other schools at this challenging time. Subsequently, my sample size is relatively small – 13 people were interviewed – yet this still generated a significant amount of data so I do not think this had a detrimental impact on the study. A further issue as a result of COVID-19 restrictions was that of access. Despite conducting the interviews in the June and July of 2020 when year 6 children were back in school for face-to-face teaching, the University of Sheffield had not yet allowed face-to-face interviews to happen again. Therefore, despite being in the same building as many of my interviewees, I had to conduct video interviews. Logistically, this was challenging at times as I tried to conduct the interviews within the school day to avoid overburdening staff who were working in challenging, unprecedented conditions. Additionally, I had to make sure that staff were able to access and confidently use video calling software. From my perspective one significant challenge was ensuring that I had two devices available to me – one to conduct the interview through, and a second to record the interview (I did not feel comfortable recording the interviews on the same device through which it was being conducted as I wanted to focus solely on the interview and not be distracted by worries that the recording was not happening in a background application).

These were relatively minor issues but ones which still required forethought and planning. Fortunately, the data collection went smoothly with only one interview slightly disrupted by a slow internet connection, however this was only a hindrance for a matter of seconds and the flow of the discourse was not lost. Having adapted my data collection so it could work within the parameters of the COVID-19 restrictions – as set out by the University of Sheffield, the school in which I worked, and government guidelines – I was able to embark on this part of my research fairly comfortably. However, I did have to change my approach to data collection quite significantly as I was due to commence in March 2020 when the pandemic hit. The next section outlines how COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions impacted on my research and how I had to adapt it accordingly.

[How COVID-19 impacted on my research](#)

My original intention when conducting this research was to disseminate questionnaires about curriculum and their experience of transition to all year 7 and 8 students in my school (approximately 150 children). Once these questionnaires had been analysed, I was then going to select six student participants who would form the case study for my research on

transition. The plan was to conduct an initial interview with them – having first acquired permission from both themselves and their parents/carers – discussing their questionnaire responses and exploring further thoughts and reflections on their transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3. I had then planned to observe their learning in English, look in their English books and speak with their English teachers about each students' performance and progress. Finally, I planned to end the cases studies with a second interview with the student participants again discussing and reflecting on their experience of transition. The plan was to gain ethical approval in March 2020 (which was granted midway through the month) and then begin collecting in April 2020, after the Easter holidays. However, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK, schools closed on March 20th two weeks prior to the Easter holidays. The University of Sheffield then announced that face-to-face research would not be allowed until further notice. With no children in school to participate in the questionnaire or interview stages, it became apparent that it would be very difficult for me to conduct research as originally planned.

In the hopes of still keeping children at the heart of my research I considered various options as to how this may happen. Below I outline the options with a brief explanation as to why I did not think they were feasible:

- disseminate questionnaires via email or the home learning tab of the school website. *Many of the children in my school did not have ready access to the technology necessary to access an online questionnaire. Students were often having to share devices with siblings also attempting home learning and I did not feel that it would be fair or appropriate to ask children to devote their home learning time to filling in a questionnaire. Also, the students in my school were not used to accessing their school email as a means to communicate with their teachers so there was a risk that only a small number of students would access the questionnaire.*
- contact parents directly using phone or email asking if they would be happy for their child to participate in a phone interview, provided their child also gave consent. *Firstly, I would not want to select children deliberately to participate in interviews as I had originally intended to select them based on their questionnaire responses. I was sure that bias would play a role in my selection of participants and I would potentially overlook participants if I did not have a prior relationship with them or their parents.*

Additionally, I was aware of the added pressure on children and their parents during this time of lockdown and did not want to add another obligation into their already challenging schedules and situations.

- wait until schools reopen to disseminate questionnaires and/or interview students. *Given that school reopening was not set for a particular date and given what was happening in other countries globally, it seemed that it would not be prudent to wait as this could potentially be a lengthy period of postponement. Additionally, when students do eventually return to school, they will have had a significant disruption and interruption to their education which I felt could skew their reflections on the transition. Also, year 7 students will have only experienced 6 and a half months of key stage 3 learning which therefore will not have given them a comprehensive enough experience of the key stage 3/year 7 curriculum to reflect on it accordingly. I could have simply approached the year 8s who experienced transition last year, but felt that they may not be able to reflect on their experiences given their break in time away from school. Also, I was faced with the distinct possibility that research may not be able to take place until September when the year 8 students would have left middle school to start year 9 at high school and would therefore be less accessible to me.*

Because of the reasons listed above, I made the decision to continue with my research rather than wait for schools to reopen and instead work with adult participants. I chose to interview practitioners within school who have experience of the transition of the English curriculum between key stage 2 and 3, namely teachers, teaching assistants, and senior leaders.

Strengths and limitations of the methodology and methods used

One of the strengths of my research is my use of two research methods: critical discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. Whilst not a mixed methods approach in the sense that both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, this could still be considered as such. By using two approaches to data collection and analysis, this allowed me to explore the key issues raised in my research questions from different sources. Denscombe (2017) refers to this as 'triangulation' explaining that this approach to a research topic 'can be better understood if it is viewed from more than one perspective' (167). Therefore, using more than one method helps with the trustworthiness of the findings. Another strength of the study is

the variety of interview participants. I did not just interview middle school teachers but also members of the Senior Leadership Team, a governor, and teaching assistants. This also added trustworthiness to the data because it came from a variety of sources all with different experiences and perspectives on transition between key stage 2 and 3.

During the research process, I became aware that my bias and preconception could threaten the trustworthiness of my data. However, following discussions with my supervisor and reading literature on bias in qualitative research (particularly Roulston and Shelton, 2015), I realised that this could be a strength of my research. I was never going to be able to fully remove myself from the research and nor did I want to. Given that I was implementing the policy documents in my day-to-day teaching that I was critiquing in my research, it would have been impossible to remove all bias from this part of the process; however, by following Hyatt's CDA framework, I was able to ensure that I did critique the documents in a structured way whilst using my working knowledge of the national curricula as an additional tool in the analysis.

When interviewing my research participants, I was careful to ask questions which did not force them into a particular line of thinking; however, there were times during interviews when I found myself almost putting words in my interviewees mouths as I wanted them to validate a thought which I agreed with (see Figure 2). When I realised I was doing this, I quickly rephrased the question or point however I may have already influenced the development of their response with my comments. Pring (2001) argues that 'one general principle of good research is that conclusions are supported by evidence and that the relation of conclusion to evidence, and the evidence on which these conclusions are drawn, should be open to scrutiny' (410). With this thought in mind, I chose to interpret the interview data using thematic analyse. The initial process of coding allowed me to identify commonalities and patterns within the data from which I could then generate themes. This ensured that my conclusions should be able to stand up to scrutiny given that I followed a clear and logical process.

One area which could arguably be a limitation of my study is that I only interviewed staff from one school. (There were, however, three exceptions: these were participants who had previously worked at the school, but had since worked in environments very different to this establishment so could not draw on subsequent experience). Had I been able to interview

staff from other middle schools, I may have gained different perspectives on transition and therefore reached a slightly different conclusion. However, this was a small-scale study from the outset so something I was aware of from the start of the process.

Given that this study focuses in part on the children's experiences of transition, it would have been beneficial to include voices of students and their perspectives on transition. Unfortunately, due to restrictions caused by COVID-19 and my reluctance to post-pone my study, I was not able to access children in order for this to happen. I have no doubt that working with students as research participants would have added an extra dimension to the study and this is a factor which could be considered in future studies on this area. The same is true for including the voices of parents/carers. This is a fairly limited study and reflecting on my practice, I believed it to be best for the integrity of my research for me to make more general claims with the view to raise awareness of issues and perceptions of these issues in a few areas. This is in the hopes that future research on transition considers the factors raised by this study, particularly the role of the curriculum in transition.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological approach taken in this study, and my reasons for taking an interpretive approach. I then discussed the methods used for data collection and subsequent analysis, explaining how these approaches best addressed my research questions. I also explored the ethical considerations surrounding my research and considered factors which impacted on my data collection.

In the following chapter, I share the analysis of two key speeches which influenced policy, and discussion of the findings of these analyses, bringing in references to existing literature and positioning this research within previous research.

Chapter 4 – Analysis and Discussion of key speeches

In the previous chapter, I outlined my methodological approach to the research, and the methods I used to collect and then analyse the data. What follows in the next three chapters is a presentation of the data with discussion of my findings interwoven. This chapter focuses on exploring the two key speeches with the subsequent two chapters exploring the National Curriculum, and interview data respectively. I decided to interweave analysis and discussion as I felt that incorporating the discussion, and citing relevant research, would better help contextualise my own research and subsequent findings. Throughout the analysis, I will be drawing on the work of educator and philosopher Paulo Freire to strengthen my arguments and show that policy is something that needs to be done with the receiver rather than to them.

This chapter focuses on two key texts – speeches by Michael Gove (one from just before his appointment as Secretary of State for Education, and one four years into this role). The rationale for selecting the two speeches is because Michael Gove spearheaded the curriculum reform whilst in position as Education Secretary, and it is interesting to see how his speeches – one predating his appointment – show his philosophical approach to education, and outline his aims for curriculum reform. These speeches, and the National Curriculum in the following chapter, were analysed using Hyatt's (2013) Critical Discourse Analysis Framework. Throughout the chapter, references will be made to the appendices where the annotated speeches can be found which show the approach to Critical Discourse Analysis taken when exploring and examining the speeches.

Before exploring each text and incorporated discussion elements, it would be pertinent to revisit my research questions as these were at the forefront of my mind during data collection, and subsequent data analysis:

1. Where did the latest curriculum reform originate?
2. What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3?
3. How do school staff perceive transition in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?

4. What can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful?

Speech 1 – ‘What is Education for?’ Michael Gove

A speech to the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) entitled ‘What is education for?’ by Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families Michael Gove (Gove, 2009)

This speech by Michael Gove, setting out what he considers the role of education to be, was selected because it explores the rationale behind the curriculum reform Gove spearheaded after the coalition government was formed in 2010 and he was appointed Secretary of State for Education. It is significant because it outlines Gove’s views on what the school education system should look like, how the gap between state and independent education needs to be closed, and also provides a theoretical basis for his subsequent curriculum reform.

Gove’s speech begins with a direct address to the Royal Society of Arts and specifically its CEO Matthew Taylor. Given that this is a speech to a live audience, Gove’s use of the first-person pronoun ‘I’ throughout is expected; however, it also forms a personal connection with the audience particularly at the beginning of the speech when he expresses gratitude for the opportunity to speak to them. Whilst establishing a relationship with his audience at the beginning of the speech, Gove uses the second person pronoun ‘you’ to acknowledge his listeners and give credit to the work they have done as members of the RSA. By speaking directly to his audience, Gove sycophantically builds a relationship and therefore ensures that they are more inclined to his way of thinking throughout the speech. The first-person pronoun ‘I’ dominates throughout the speech which therefore presents Gove as the key agent in driving forward the proposals he sets out (appendix 1). It also adds an assertion of authority: Gove’s audience should trust him and recognise him as an authority on these matters. At the time of speaking, Gove was Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, and was looking forward to the upcoming General Election in which he hoped for – and indeed uses this speech to lobby for – a Conservative Party victory.

Given that the Labour Party was in office at the time of speaking, Gove highlights the inadequacies of this government with regards to education making the distinction between his party and the Labour party with the use of ‘their’; this allows him to differentiate between

Labour's failings and his party's achievements should they come into power. This establishing of a disconnect allows Gove to reassure his audience that there is a definite 'them and us' distinction, and a vote for the Conservatives will ensure the current office will not be able to continue their inadequate educational provision, namely making school qualifications easier to obtain, and ensuring a more rigorous curriculum is taught in schools which echoes that which is delivered in independent schools. Gove's oscillating between 'I', 'we' and 'our' throughout the speech asserts his independence – he can achieve great reform on his own – but also assures his audience that he is backed by his political party. Gove continues to cultivate his bond with his audience with statements such as 'what we do not have – and what we desperately need' (2) to emphasise that this is a collective issue affecting him as well as them. Although Gove appears to be taking ownership of the education of all children, his use of inclusive pronouns 'our' and 'we' reminds his audience that a collective sense of responsibility and duty is needed for success (appendix 1).

When outlining his vision for educational reform, Gove cites the work of American educationalist E.D. Hirsch, specifically his theory of Cultural Literacy (appendix 1). Hirsch is the only educationalist Gove cites yet this theory is the one which underpins Gove's beliefs, and becomes a hugely significant influence on subsequent policy reform. Hirsch (1985) writes about cultural literacy as an 'elusive secret' which is kept by the well-educated from disadvantaged people, and if this 'finite' content of knowledge was instead to be shared, 'perhaps some excluded members of our society will be more encouraged to become a member of the literacy club' (48). By presenting cultural literacy in such a way, it is as though those disadvantaged people (although Hirsch does not define in what way(s) they might be considered so) could easily be inducted into realms of the well-educated. This supports Gove's view that education should be accessible to all. Hirsch (1985) goes on to say that 'if teachers recognized the validity of the concept of cultural literacy, that might subtly affect some of their intensive curricular choices' (49). Cultural literacy, which is essentially a list of core knowledge Hirsch believes all Americans ought to know, could be considered reductive. Huat See et al (2017) argue that 'the point of education is not simply the acquisition of knowledge, but also skills to synthesise and comprehend the information confronted. This is especially so in the new global knowledge economy, where children are constantly bombarded with information' (389). The proliferation of electronic devices and ways of assessing information

means that children are able to readily access huge amounts of information; ‘therefore, what children need is not simply more information, but the ability to sieve through the information, to be able to judge what is believable and what is not, to evaluate the evidence, to interpret the data received and reported and to critically appraise the quality of such information’ (Huat See et al, 2017, 389). The body of knowledge that underpins the theory of cultural literacy is not necessarily conducive to the development of key skills. Gove is referring to the theory without any working knowledge – he has never worked in the education sector – of what this would look like in practice.

For many decades, education – schooling in particular – has become a place where politicians showcase some of their power with the intention of influencing the voting public to subsequently give them increased power (Waters, 2015). By making this speech heavily focused on himself, Gove is informing his audience as to how he will singlehandedly change education for the better. Before taking on his role, Gove considered educational issues comprehensively which was unlike his predecessors as ‘most education ministers have been content to nudge, prompt, reorient, but otherwise survive.’ (Finn, 2015, 109). Gove, however, approached his appointment with a clear sense of purpose and direction and, subsequently, managed to achieve a considerable amount (Finn, 2015). Gove had a clear view on how he wanted to change education, firmly situated within the educational philosophy of E.D. Hirsch’s Cultural Literacy. Whilst this shows that he was invested in changing education, and was using an established approach (albeit one from the USA) to frame his reform, he was hampered by his personal views and experiences of education. One of the first things Gove did upon entering office was announce a restructure of the national curriculum for both primary and secondary education, ‘but framed the whole process from the start with his own views about the value of a traditional and narrow interpretation of a ‘good education’’ (Coiffait, 2015, 3). Throughout this speech, Gove assures his audience that he has a clear focus as to how he will achieve this as his approach is underpinned by a clear educational philosophy. However, excessive political intervention in education ‘undermines the sources of autonomy of teaching, which depends on specialist knowledge’ (Young, 2014b, 69). Gove’s plans, though well thought-out, ended up alienating him from those enacting his policy reform, thereby widening the disconnect between policy makers and educators.

Gove's proposal, backed by cultural literacy, is at odds with Freire's (2017) educational philosophy which is that which is that pedagogy 'must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed' if they (the oppressed) are to 'regain their humanity' (44). Freire is arguing that those privileged few, in this case politicians, should work with the rest of society who are deemed less privileged to ensure that they receive an education which works for them and takes into account their circumstances. Cultural literacy, the educational philosophy Gove is influenced by, is a top-down process identifying what people should know, as deemed worthy of knowing by a select few. Whereas Freire's educational philosophy contrasts this as he believes that critical literacy should be a bottom-up process of starting with the everyday knowledge of the people. Shar (1992) explains that 'for Freire, curriculum is controlled from above as a means to impose the dominant on each new generation of students. Knowledge is not neutral. Rather, it is the expression of historical moments where some groups exercise dominant power over others' (27). Shar (1992) goes on to argue that traditional curricula in schools 'interferes with the democratic and critical development of students' which then leads to passivity and students who 'do not see themselves as people who can transform knowledge and society' (27). Therefore, policy writers and proposers must work with policy receivers in order to create policy – in this case the national curriculum – which benefits all, rather than dictates what the privileged few think everyone ought to know.

In this speech, Gove praises teachers, referring to them as 'wonderful' (3) stating that his government will 'give teachers the powers they need to keep order in classrooms so teaching and learning can be the centrepiece of every school's life' (16) (appendix 1). This suggests that teachers will be given the tools to manage challenging behaviour, but it also implies that teachers will have some autonomy over what their students learn, as well as how they teach it. However, this is undermined by his assertion that parents will 'exercise the sort of power and control currently enjoyed by those in the private sector' (15). By stating that parents will have more involvement in their children's education, it contradictorily suggests that schools will not have the ability to make decisions Gove suggests they will. Gove promised a high level of autonomy to schools but this 'was matched by an equally high level of accountability' (Lightman, 2015, 18). Gove came into the role of education secretary with a clear plan to overhaul the curriculum, something which many of his antecedents had not; however, 'Govean engagement with the curriculum ... represented a remarkable personal and political

intrusion into an expert and professional forum' (Hands, 2015, 40). Many of these reforms were not welcomed by teachers and those enacting these changes on the ground level. Lenon (2021) goes so far as to argue that following the curriculum reform 'the disputes which followed might have been avoided if Gove had left it to the expert group of teachers that ultimately helped write the national curriculum; by expressing his personal preferences he alienated teachers who rightly objected to a secretary of state dictating what children should learn' (50). Having gone from praising 'wonderful teachers' (3) for their work in schools, Gove undermined their professionalism and expertise by drawing up his own curriculum, dismissing the suggestions made by the experts he originally employed to help guide the reform.

Gove made some ambitious statements in his speech and was able to deliver on much of what he said even if this was not well received by education professionals; 'the coalition's term of government between 2010 and 2015 was remarkable for the scale and pace of its reform in education ... this was an exceptional period of policy and one characterized largely by conflict with the educational establishment' (Lupton and Thomson, 2015, 4). Gove enacted a considerable number of policy changes, to the detriment of the teaching profession. Nightingale (2019) argues that Gove's 'micromanagement of teachers and the pursuit of targets' lead to diminishing numbers of teachers (19), not least because Gove 'tapped into a sociological tradition that, viewed casually, had focused on faults within schools, which then allowed him to oversimplify the debate: background-blaming is where inadequate teachers hide to make excuses' (25). From Gove praising 'wonderful teachers' (3) in his speech, he very quickly moved to placing blame on their shoulders showing that he was motivated by getting votes rather than working with the profession to make improvements which would benefit all children, and the education sector itself. Despite praising teachers, Gove is intimidating, through such a self-centred speech that he is unlikely to consider the views, knowledge or expertise of those with experience of working in education and will in fact drive forward any curriculum change using his own agenda and limited expertise.

Moving on to talk about his vision for schools, Gove (2009) uses the adverbs 'less' and 'more' (1,2) to describe the roles that schools should be performing, and these adverbs highlight the contradiction and shift in foci that has occurred under the Labour government (appendix 1). He then uses the verb 'eclipsed' (2) when referring to how the role of education has been changed; however, the verb choice emphasises that – like an eclipse – things can go back to

normal provided the right political party is voted in (appendix 1). The verb also suggests a time of darkness within the world of education, but gives the audience hope that light will soon shine through under the right leadership. Gove goes on to describe schools under Labour leadership as 'instruments' (2) (appendix 1). The use of this noun makes school seem less significant by reducing them to mere tools therefore showing the Labour government's misuse and mis-governance of them. This is then followed by the use of the adverb 'desperately' (2) to emphasise how necessary a dedicated department for education is, unquestionably so. Coupled with the positive verb 'championing' (2), Gove is showing how a Conservative government would hold up and celebrate schools whilst supporting them (appendix 1).

The suggestion from this part of his speech is that Gove will elevate the position of schools whilst providing a nurturing environment for them to best support their students. The reality, however, is quite different as 'the current settlement in England can best be described as high autonomy and high accountability' (Moss, 2017, 62). Whilst schools have more autonomy in terms of curriculum – in English, for example, the KS2 and KS3 curriculum is open in terms of what texts are taught – the level of accountability faced by all schools is tremendous. Results at KS1, 2 and 4 are published and the KS2 and 4 results are used as a measure of success for schools regardless of the make-up of their cohort. Gove has given schools the autonomy he promised but they are still governed by a high-stakes testing environment within education (Moss, 2017). As a result of Gove's reforms, 'teachers came to think that they were expected to jump through hoops as they made the pupils they teach jump through them too' (Waters, 2015, 68). Therefore, Gove's intention of improving education resulted in narrowing student experience and reducing teacher autonomy. The role of teachers, due to this curriculum reform, has affected their day-to-day jobs with Besley (2015) going so far as to argue 'the pressure on performance so intense that the very nature of learning and personal guidance and support that teachers provide has become distorted' (134). Ultimately, the impact of Gove's reform was damaging and deeply rooted as he intervened too much, therefore undermining an entire profession by denying teacher autonomy and not allowing these professionals to utilise their specialist knowledge (Young, 2014a). Freire (2017) argues that teachers end up being narrators and this narration 'leads students to memorise mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers", into "receptacles" to be

“filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are’ (44). Whilst Freire is not stating that it is the teacher or the policy maker who decides on the narrative, what he is stating is that learners are expected to be passive, to receive knowledge to be perceived to be learning. Students who unquestioningly absorb that which their teacher tells them, will be more likely to perform well on assessments, and therein lies the issue with the current assessment model in place in England. Teachers are having to ‘jump through hoops’ in order to get their students to pass exams, and in doing so are not allowing their students to develop their own sense of curiosity and exploration.

Following on from this celebration of schools, Gove then uses the adjectives ‘emancipatory’ and ‘liberating’ (3) when describing the values of education (appendix 1). Through these adjectives, Gove is showing the power that education can have. As part of Gove’s reform, he was driven by the aim to close the gap between state and private education. This is, unquestionably, an admirable goal and one supported by those working in education; however, curriculum reform, whilst having some potential benefits, cannot make up for the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged (economically, racially, socially, etc.) students. Young (2014b) argues that ‘the roots of inequality are in the society not in the curriculum; at the same time it is important to ask what the curriculum can do for pupils that make it worthwhile’ (73-74). Gove’s aim was to address social inequality through just one medium – education, specifically the curriculum – rather than looking at wider issues and solutions. Often, education is used by politicians as a panacea to societal issues, and whilst it can provide some solutions, it cannot achieve total advancement on its own: ‘education is a place where some of the wrongs of society can be mended, but it cannot mend them alone. We can improve examination results for students, and that is helpful in terms of ‘life chances’, but it is not the only outcome of education that matters, not even in ‘life chances’ (Elliott, 2021, 107). Young (2014a) also argues that schools are seen as a way to solve societal issues ‘that have their origins elsewhere and which schools alone can never solve’ (10). Education is an ‘early form of control that enables governments to ensure that future citizens follow their governance and through [minimizing and annulling] the students’ creative power and [stimulating] their credulity serves the interest of the oppressors’ (Freire, 2017, 46). Subsequently, the government refuse to accept more creative approaches to education which

may broaden the minds of the students. The two innovative curricular presented in the literature review (Egan and Alexander) would be in opposition to what the government wants because they are too liberal, and provide too much room for growth, curiosity, and exploration. The oppressed are more easily dominated if they are taught to adapt to the world around them, rather than resist barriers to their development (Freire, 1997).

In contrast to this, Gorard (2010) contends that ‘schools and teachers may want to concern themselves a little less with the efficiency and effectiveness of their approach to instruction, and a little more with the kind of people they want their charges to be. Schools, in their structure and organisation, can do more than simply reflect the society that we wish to have’ (62). This is a naïve and optimistic outlook which takes no consideration of the pressure on schools to perform. This idealistic view of schools is damaging and, once again, presents them as the solution to societal ills. One thing Gove did achieve in his attempt to help close the gap and benefit the most economically disadvantaged students was introduce the Pupil Premium⁸; however, this was ‘an isolated policy – a rare example of investment in the life chances of disadvantaged children among a broader range of policies which have reduced family incomes and depleted services’ (Lupton and Thomson, 2015, 10). Through his curriculum reform, Gove did achieve a degree of what he set out to do, particularly with Pupil Premium students, but in the long term, he ended up widening the gap as his reforms alienated those most in need of support and opportunities.

Gove uses positive, arguably romantic language, to describe education through the use of nouns and adjectives such as ‘destiny’, ‘wonderful’ and ‘precious’ (2) (appendix 1). These almost mythical terms suggest that we can hark back to an era of education provided it is put into the hands of the right government. These words also emphasise the power and value of education and educators; this is done in part to show how significant education is to society, but also to show that educators themselves are valued which will then, in turn, get them and their advocates on side of the Conservative party and make them more persuaded to vote

⁸ Pupil premium is funding paid to schools to improve attainment and education outcomes for disadvantaged students. Students are identified as eligible for the pupil premium if they are eligible (or have been eligible in the past 6 years) for free school meals, have been adopted from care, are looked after children, or if they have a parent serving (or retired from) the Armed Forces. Schools can choose how they wish to spend the funding, but it must be used to improve attainment for these identified disadvantaged students (DfE, 2022).

them in at the next General Election. His appeal to this demographic of the voting public is explicit despite his penchant for blaming teachers for the many issues he identifies within education. However, despite Gove's waxing lyrical about how wonderful education is, particularly for social mobility, Moss (2017) argues that 'education for personal development, for the love of learning itself, has been subordinated to the perceived primary goal of education – the service of the economy' (62). In his speech, Gove says 'I believe that education is a good in itself' (2), and that 'the principle guiding every action is the wider spread of excellence, the initiation of new generations into the amazing achievements of humankind' (19). This therefore shows that he only perceives education as wonderful because it is a commodity which can be used and exchanged. Gove's aim with curriculum reform, on the surface, was to ensure that state education was on a par with independent education, but he was also driven by the goal to improve the UK's global standings in education. The curriculum reform in England, as headed by Gove, 'can be seen as part of a wider phenomenon of education systems driven by the desire to increase national competitiveness at a time of globalization, and across much of Europe, either in an attempt to make learning more relevant to students or in order to further democratize education systems that were previously one element of repressive regimes' (Brundrett, 2015, 51). Spohrer (2015) also argues that the curriculum reform held an ulterior motive for Gove: 'in a similar vein with the previous government, the idea of a global knowledge-based economy is evoked to suggest that investment in 'potential' increases both the competitiveness of the nation and opportunities for upward social mobility' (102).

As stated above, politics has long since used education as a tool and this is no different now: 'as with previous governments, education has been presented as the chief driver of social mobility on the assumption that the trapping of the population's human resources will create a more economically prosperous nation and increased individual opportunity' (Spohrer, 2015, 102). By attempting to romanticise the role of education and educators, Gove is attempting to emphasise the importance of education for personal growth, but counter his presenting education as a commodity. He does not deny that he views education as a fundamental resource of society to be tapped into, and does refer to education as a 'good' (2); however, from this speech and his subsequent policy changes once he became education secretary, it is clear that he was driven more by improving the UK's standing in global education than by

improving education for the sake of the students. Nick Gibb (2015), Minister of State for Schools who worked closely with Gove on curriculum reform states that 'our reforms are based on a desire to see social justice through equalising the unfair distribution of intellectual capital in British society. Unlike so many other inequalities, this is one that schools – if performing their function properly – have the power to address' (15). Here Gibb makes it seem as though the purpose for the curriculum overhaul enacted by Gove and himself is to close the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students (a laudable aim); however, when considered in the light of Gove's comments in his 2009 speech, it would appear that he is motivated by a desire to boost the economy through closing this gap, rather than supporting these students. It is also worth noting that Gibb's remark about schools performing their function properly is yet another barbed comment at educators for not meekly capitulating to this government's decrees.

In his speech, Gove particularly references 'poor children' (8) and those children on free school meals stating that they are being denied their 'intellectual inheritance' (4) and citing statistics which show how few of this demographic go on to achieve academic excellence (appendix 1). These children are given additional economic support therefore the government expects a return on their investment which, under the Labour government, does not seem to be happening. Gove is taking a vulnerable and disadvantaged demographic to support his point that the current system of education is failing all, and most worryingly, those in desperate need of education in order to escape the deprivation – economic and intellectual – in which they currently exist. Freire (2017) refers to 'welfare recipients' who are the more oppressed in society because they exist on the fringes; they are regarded as 'the pathology of the healthy society which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality' (47). This view is apparent in Gove's argument that the most economically poor students need the most support so they can achieve at school, with the intention that they can then make positive contributions to society after their formal education ends. The government are willing to invest in them as in the long term, they expect their investment to produce obedient, fully functioning members of the workforce.

In a study on transition, Burgess et al (2008) concluded that in the transfer between primary school and secondary school, economically poor students are further disadvantaged compared to their non-poor peers. Therefore, Gove's aim is commendable; however, by

proposing to make the curriculum more rigorous, it gives little consideration to why these economically poor students struggle and how they can actually be helped. The changes he is proposing would disadvantage them because they do not have the foundational knowledge to support their learning, and the removal of contemporary (and by extension, multicultural references) adds further disadvantage. While on the surface Gove appears to want to help those disadvantaged students, he is actually motivated – like previous governments have been – by the desire to increase the intellectual capital of the nation and therefore boost opportunities for upwards social mobility (Spohrer, 2015). Whilst boosting social mobility would help the most disadvantaged, Gove’s approach actually widens the gap by making the curriculum less accessible to those who, arguably, need the most support. Additionally, presenting these students as being the most in need of help only emphasises that society is not designed to help these marginalised individuals. The solution instead ‘is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform the structure so they can become “beings for themselves” (Freire, 2017, 47).

Gove goes on to describe what sort of curriculum changes can be expected if his party is to be successful in the next election. He begins with the ambiguous adjective ‘best’ when stating that students should be given the opportunity to study ‘the best that has been thought, and written’ (3) (appendix 1). To whom ‘the best’ is referring, and who will be responsible for deciding ‘the best’ works is unclear but the ambiguity of the word allows Gove to lay out a strong and convincing idea without giving further details or committing to particular texts, authors or concepts. Whilst Gove does not state what he views as ‘the best’, he is quick to point out what he feels is not worthy of study, and shows his dislike of the contemporary or relevant which to him appears to be anathema. He singles out the poet Carol Ann Duffy, and the musical genre drum’n’bass to make his point that students are not being challenged enough but should instead be studying the works of Austen, Eliot, Cicero and Wagner (appendix 1). Through this, Gove is showing his distaste for the study of all things contemporary and making recommendations that students study authors and works which were significant in his own education; this links to his support of Cultural Literacy as the contemporary is not part of our cultural heritage. By contrast, Freire (2005) insists that a liberatory curriculum needs to begin with learners’ lived experiences, needs to begin with what is relevant to learners’ lives, and build on that, arguing that ‘educators need to know

what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skilfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it' (85). For Freire, 'learning is not a quantity of information to be memorised or a package of skills to be transferred to students. Classrooms die as intellectual centers when they become delivery systems for lifeless bodies of knowledge' (Shar, 1992, 24). Therefore, Gove's disdain of relevance is harmful and oppressive because it creates passive learners, and does not allow intellectual curiosity to flourish.

Hands (2015) argues that in the reform which followed this speech, 'Michael Gove shaped a nation's educational future less by understanding its present than by contemplating his own past: his vision was exclusively bound up in his reverence for his own education' (35). There is a clear link between the subsequent curriculum reform in English and the content which first year Oxford undergraduates studied when Gove was a student there (Hands, 2015). Freire (2017) argues that 'many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed' (67). This is particularly true in Gove's case as he had a set idea on what education should look like, imparting his own very narrow experiences on policy change.

Gove's use of the term 'best' in relation to that which has been thought and written is problematic for a number of reasons particularly when viewed in hindsight with curriculum reforms having now been enacted. Students deemed to be disadvantaged are further done so with these Govean curriculum reforms because the changes made meant that a white, middle-class curriculum was put in place; therefore, 'it is evident that class has been redefined for an age when aspiration is discussed ad nauseum, all without any understanding of the way in which many working-class students are still alienated by the perceived need to transform themselves to be successful on someone else's terms' (Nightingale, 2019, 25). Gove was motivated to close the gap but ended up widening it by failing to take into consideration what working-class students could bring to their studies, but rather forcing them to fit into a mould he perceived to be indicative of academic success. With regards to where some students are lacking in comparison to others who perform more successfully, Nightingale (2019) argues that 'for Gove, the lack was curriculum-based, as though only Middlemarch might offer an

appropriate intellectual challenge, the two parts of the dumbing-down argument (expectations and curriculum) brought together' (20). Therefore, in order to address this, 'what emerged was a curriculum with a strong focus on knowledge and a concomitant downgrading of the development of skills. The result is a curriculum that for primary schools in England that has some significant similarities to the elementary traditions that emerged at the acquisition of factual knowledge' (Brundrett, 2015, 51). In contrast to the educational reform brought in by the Labour government, Gove wanted to have a knowledge-based curriculum rather than a skills-based curriculum which, he believed, would lead to more rigour and greater academic success for all.

Giroux (2000) raises the point that Conservatives are quick to claim they give a voice to the disenfranchised and claim that 'cultural politics demeans the oppressed and has nothing to do with their problems. It neither liberates nor informs, but rather contributes to an ongoing decline in standards and civility by prioritising visual culture over print culture, popular culture over high culture' (344). The theory that those things considered 'high culture' have more value than those considered low or popular culture is one that perpetuates, and seems to give little consideration to the make-up of society, the time period, varying cultures, and so on. Gove is intending to do exactly this and remove what he considers to be low culture from the school curriculum, with little regards for the background and/or context of those students studying the curriculum. Freire (2017) argues for 'a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed' (22) because 'no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates' (28). Dictating to the disadvantaged what they *need* to know, rather than working with them and trying to understand them, will only further disenfranchise them. Using the curriculum as a tool to narrow the gap will, in fact, further marginalise and disadvantage those students because the policy makers are not working with the disadvantaged to best support them, but rather working for them in the belief that they (the policy makers and government) know best. Freire (2017) goes on to argue that people need to become masters of their own thinking 'by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly in their own suggestions or those of their comrades' and that this can only be done through dialogue between those who dictate the content of education and those who receive it (97). Therefore, the oppressed must be allowed to

participate in, or at least have their circumstances taken into account, the development of curriculum.

Gove's distaste for relevance is at odds with what is best for students and their academic development. Parry (2014) puts forward the argument that 'by valuing popular culture, teachers can ensure that children do not have to reject their home identities in the classroom. In doing so, connections can be made with the interests of the children so that their literacy learning will be more motivated' (14), going on to say that it is the role of the teacher to 'create spaces in which children can draw on their cultural experiences to formulate the systematic generalisations which lead to further conceptual understandings' (21). Therefore, by suggesting that curriculum reform should return purely to such archaic authors, Gove is disadvantaging learners and preventing them from developing more than just literary analysis skills.

Having romanticised the role of education in society and set out his rather vague plans for improving it, Gove then returns to the idea of education being a commodity. He uses the noun 'inheritance' (3) to describe the shared knowledge all children are entitled to, then goes on to talk about how knowledge can allow citizens to 'draw, and trade' (4) (appendix 1). These verbs, combined with the nouns 'inheritance' and 'investment' (4) show how Gove views education as a product. Education, and this shared stock of knowledge, is a birth-right; however, it also emphasises that education is a form of capital and in order for students to go on to be valuable citizens, they must be able to trade on this knowledge. The noun 'investment' suggests that there will be no quick fixes, and what Gove is doing by the use of this particular word (as both verb and noun), is safeguarding against potential future criticism of education if his government do not fix it right away. Gove continues to use language connected with economic status, such as 'impoverishing' (8), to reinforce the continued hardships the most disadvantaged children face when not being given access to a robust and rigorous education.

In the latter half of the speech, the adjective 'rigorous' is repeated multiple times to show that should Gove be the next Secretary of State for Education, he will ensure the curriculum is robust and worthy of study; he is implying that all children will have access to an education worth pursuing rather than continuing with their current learning which Gove describes

derisively as 'fuzzy' and 'abstract' (14) (appendix 1). Whilst not the focus of this thesis, it is pertinent to briefly outline the changes Gove made to the GCSE English curriculum in a bid to make it more rigorous. The old GCSE English literature curriculum gave students the opportunity to study texts from a variety of cultures; Gove removed these so students were no longer studying such texts as 'Of Mice and Men' by John Steinbeck, 'Flag' by John Agard, or 'At the Border, 1979' by Choman Hardi. He also facilitated the removal of controlled assessments (CATs), and the incorporation of speaking and listening assessments into a student's final grade. Gove wanted to make the GCSE purely exam-based, and not allow students the opportunity to supplement their exam performance, and therefore final grade, with teacher-assessed (and externally moderated) modules. On the surface, making the curriculum more rigorous appears to be an admirable goal but Gove is striving to get more students into higher education to, in turn, boost social mobility which is of benefit to the nation as a whole (whilst also making his government look like a success) even if this is not in the best interest of the student. Spohrer (2015) argues, 'burdening schools with ever more responsibility, while reducing overall spending on education, is likely not to result in the expected boost in social mobility' (106). Therefore, in order to ensure success, Gove would need to ensure that adequate economic support is given to the education sector which, ultimately, did not happen. These changes ended up burdening schools as educators were faced with preparing their students for a highly demanding curriculum. Gove criticised the role of the Labour government for burdening schools with ever more responsibility: 'schools have lost their principal purpose – and been saddled with a host of supplementary roles' (2); yet, his reforms did not ease these burdens, merely changed them. Writing after Gove had been removed as Education Secretary after four years, Hands (2015) argues that:

'The Gove years have been characterised by radical reforms not only of constitution and governance, but also of curriculum, testing and examining. The reforms have been academic, not merely structural. Searching for a sense of coherence, it is difficult to escape noticing that the Govean buzz word 'rigour' has served as something of a personal academic mantra: 'rigour' or 'rigorous' were used seven times when Gove gave the House of Commons his Parliamentary explanation of the proposed changes on 17 September 2012. This term is characterised more by frequency of deployment than incisiveness of definition: it seems to imply issues of standards, content and

method; more generally, and not uncharacteristically, it idealistically connotes a return to the ways and standards of the past'

(40)

Therefore, Gove's driver caused considerable burden on schools due to increased accountability, yet did not have the impact he desired. Making the curriculum more rigorous increased burdens on schools and, more significantly, on students as a high-stakes testing culture was created based on a challenging, non-inclusive curriculum.

Contrasting his use of words such as 'rigour' when postulating the changes he would make to education, Gove's romanticises education as shown in his speech through the use of metaphors such as schools being places where 'horizons are extended' (4) (appendix 1). This metaphor presents schools as places of growth and exposure in a faintly romantic and nostalgic way, but only if students receive an education which Gove deems 'the best'. He goes on to refer to this body of knowledge which he believes makes up our cultural literacy as 'the ties that bind' (4), meaning that the shared knowledge we possess allows us to 'draw, and trade' (4) with others in society (appendix 1). What Gove is suggesting through this metaphor is that education can bring a society together and create cohesion; he is also intimating that this cohesion is lacking under the current government so it further reinforces his ultimate aim of this speech which is to convince his audience to vote for the Conservative party in the upcoming election. This echoes E.D. Hirsch's beliefs that the most disadvantaged in society are excluded because they do not possess this body of knowledge which the well-educated possess (1985). However, Campbell (1988) postulates that 'the question of how children learn is as important as the concern for what they should learn' (85). Therefore, Gove's focus on shared knowledge and the best works that have been produced in the past shows that he is focusing on content rather than the development of skills. This is a myopic view which does not consider how learners learn but instead prioritises knowledge over skill rather than considering how these can be taught side-by-side.

On the Conservatives adopting Hirsch's philosophy upon which to base their model, Yandell (2017) argues that 'it assumes that it is enough to specify a body of knowledge and that the role of the teacher is to communicate this knowledge and that the role of the learner is to receive it' (250). However, this approach does not consider the learners and their ability to

take in and retain such knowledge; 'if success in life is dependent on a certain set of knowledge, then if it is provided in school, the responsibility for the lack of success is implicitly on the shoulders of the child who becomes the adult, rather than the entrenched inequalities in society, or indeed the real social and cultural capital that is used for the reproduction of class and advantage' (Elliott, 2021, 107). By placing responsibility on schools and/or students, the government is able to place the blame on them when perceived failures occur. The government's motivation in doing this, in part, is to create members of society who will be valuable, but also biddable. Freire (2017) argues that 'the educated individual is the adapted person because she or he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquillity rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it' (49). People who have been educated to think a certain way will accept the world in which they live, rather than challenge it and, particularly, the authoritarian forces.

Gove refers to his own ideas for improving the current system of education as 'the pillars' (5); this metaphor suggests that his proposed changes to education have strong foundations and this therefore elevates the status of his argument (appendix 1). He then supports this by remarking that the Labour government have tried to use schools to 'cure every social ill' (6); by presenting schools as hospitals for social injustice, it emphasises how the Labour government have abused them and how, therefore, schools must immediately be restored to their primary purpose of giving young people an education. Gove reinforces his ability to lead on education across the nation by the use of the metaphor 'the educational landscape' (7) which implies that he believes he has a clear picture of education as a whole and therefore makes his ideas and beliefs more trustworthy and robust (appendix 1).

The analysis above indicates how Gove's speech is driven primarily by the desire to influence his audience to acknowledge what a poor job the Labour government have done in valuing education, and what the Conservative government – himself in particular – can do to ensure that education is returned to its former glory. This analysis is of relevance to my first research question (what are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3?) because Gove speaks of education, specifically knowledge, as a commodity to be traded for social gain and this discourse highlights that Gove's primary motivation for

educational reform is not for the students' benefit but for society's.⁹ As students and their learning are not the priority, it hints that any subsequent education reform will not prioritise that which is best for the students. What then followed with education reform is that transition issue between KS2 and KS3 became a more considerable problem.

The speech explored above was selected as it shows Gove's proposals for curriculum reform, should he take up the Education Secretary mantle, and the rationale behind his thinking. The next section explores a second speech given by Michael Gove five years later when he was in position as Secretary of State for Education.

Speech 2 – Speech to Education Reform Summit. Michael Gove

A speech delivered at the first Education Reform Summit by Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove (Gove, 2014)

This speech by Michael Gove was selected because it explores what his Conservative government has so far achieved within education since gaining power in 2010 and outlines plans for educational reform moving forward. It is significant because it presents Gove's drivers and rationale for the proposed educational reform, and hints at the theoretical basis for the impending curriculum reform.

Speaking to the audience at the Education Reform Summit, Gove opens his speech optimistically by stating that 'all of us will be able to learn from each other in order to ensure that we can make a difference for good to the lives of young people' (2) (appendix 2). This shows his confidence in striving for change and hopes for future reform to education; however, what it also highlights is the fact that these changes have not yet happened despite four years of his government having been in power. He continues to emphasise what needs to be done with statements such as 'we have to achieve', 'we... want to do everything' (3) (appendix 2). Gove's use of the future tense does inspire confidence and optimism but also serves as a reminder to his audience that there is much still to be done in order to achieve

⁹ Whilst many of these references post-date Gove's speech, it is clear from his language choices that it was inevitable that many of the proposed changes would not have the positive impact on education he naïvely hoped for.

success. Through the use of the future tense, Gove is also painting a picture of what education should look like. Because this is a vision, he is less accountable as this is what he is striving for, not what he has already achieved. Contrastingly, in 2010 – four years prior to this speech – the coalition government released the White Paper ‘The Importance of Teaching’ which set out their five-year education policy plan (DfE, 2010). It set out its plan for ‘increased autonomy for schools, underpinned by structural changes such as extensive academisation, free schools and teaching schools would be balanced by strong accountability framework and a relentless focus on ‘academic rigour’ (Lightman, 2015, 16). When considering that the education department, spearheaded by Gove, had four years to achieve this yet Gove is talking in his speech about what needs to be done, this suggests that the previous years under his rule had not been as effective or as successful as planned.

Similar to Gove’s 2009 speech, he shows how bleak the educational landscape was because of the previous government’s inadequacies. By stating ‘in the past’ (3), Gove is signalling a time of change and innovation because what happened previously was not good enough. He also reminds his audience of the previous government’s past failings: ‘more than a fifth of children left primary school without reaching a basic level of literacy and numeracy’ (3) (appendix 2). Whilst this serves to remind the audience what a considerable challenge his government have undertaken, it also further highlights how much there is to be done under his leadership. To show what he, and his government have already achieved, Gove uses phrases such as ‘we have built’ and ‘we have studied’ (4) to show that the groundwork has been laid which will be the foundations for future successes (appendix 2). He is reassuring his audience that he has everything under control as evidenced by that which has already been put in place. He then supports these assertions with present tense statements to show that this successful practice – ‘setting the highest standard ... ensuring every child ... giving principals more autonomy’ (4) – has happened and is continuing to happen. This is somewhat ironic given that Gove’s motivation for curriculum reform was to bring it back into the past. As explored in the analysis of Gove’s 2009 speech, he was heavily influenced by his own education – both school and university – in reforming the curriculum (Hands, 2015).

Whilst Gove does set himself apart from the audience at various points throughout his speech, his use of inclusive pronouns positions himself alongside his audience to show that their beliefs, knowledge and values are aligned (Hyatt, 2005). As in his 2009 speech, Gove is

connecting with his audience in order to curry favour with them. As the audience is predominantly made up of educators, Gove is ensuring that they view their role in supporting educational reform (and ultimately benefitting their students) as a pivotal one. Knowing that his audience would be made up of supporters from different political parties, Gove is addressing issues that anyone, regardless of political allegiances, would be eager to support. He is also trying to align himself to educators after having alienated them for much of his term in office.

At the start of this speech Gove talks of 'idealistic' teachers and the 'challenges' they face (2) (appendix 2). The use of the noun 'challenges' acknowledges that educators have a difficult job on their hands, but he avoids using the word failure. Whilst this could be interpreted as Gove striving to remain positive despite the work to be done, his repeated use of the noun could suggest that he is reinforcing just how much there is to be done thus protecting himself from criticism if the outcomes he is striving for are not as successful as hoped. In his 2009 speech, Gove praised 'wonderful teachers' (appendix 1); having worked with the profession for four years, he seems to have changed his views (if his initial views were indeed a genuine reflection of what he felt towards teachers) as at the end of this speech he derides them for taking strike action. He uses this platform to speak directly to another audience – one which is not sat in front of him but who will certainly have a vested interest in what he speaks about. Gove speaks to teachers when he says 'so to those striking today – to those walking out of classrooms to take to the streets' (7) (appendix 2). He is addressing those teachers not present at his speech directly in an attempt to make the peace, but really to make them see sense and conform to what is expected of them. By using this platform as a means to urge teachers to do what he believes is the right thing, he is aiming to undermine their values by contrasting what he is saying about how education needs to be improved for the good of all (but particularly the most disadvantaged young people) with their actions which are ultimately depriving students of this opportunity by their not being present in the classroom on that day. By directly addressing those engaged in strike action, Gove is showing that this speech is intended for more than the present audience, as well as using this as an opportunity to denounce teachers' and unions' actions.

From the beginning of his time as education secretary, Gove caused a divide between himself and educators; 'right from the start, Gove seemed to go out of his way to offend teachers. He

insisted that teaching was a craft that could be learned simply by watching others' (Gillard, 2015, 279). By changing the way teacher training was delivered, Gove not only undermined universities providing teacher education, he also undermined teachers by implying that learning to teach was a simple matter of mimicry. Throughout his time as education secretary, Gove showed his disdain for education professionals by referring to them as 'the blob'; this disparaging term referred to not only teachers and university academics, but also local authorities, teaching unions, and virtually everyone involved in the world of education (Gillard, 2015). Therefore, it is unsurprising in this speech that Gove is denouncing strike action and refusing to speak out in support of what teachers are striking for.

Gove's respect for teachers and their expertise was called into question prior to his giving this speech as one of his first acts upon entering office was announcing a national curriculum reform for both primary and secondary education; however, he was influenced by his own educational experiences and political stance (Coiffait, 2015). By failing to work with those actually delivering the curriculum, and instead overhauling curriculum reform with no working knowledge of delivering a curriculum, Gove's lack of respect (and arguably disdain) for teachers is clear. This is further compounded in this speech when he refuses to offer support to teachers who are on strike action. Not only did Gove fail to utilise the expertise of teachers when planning curriculum reform, he refused to listen to their opinions and work with them to end strike action; he also openly criticised them by 'repeatedly claim[ing] that working-class students were held back by the assumptions and actions of education professionals' (Nightingale, 2019, 19). Rather than working with the profession, Gove chose to undermine educators and bring in curriculum reform heavily influenced by his own education. In his speech, Gove vows to give 'principals more autonomy to ... set curricular policy' (4) but this comes at a cost: 'sharpening accountability through more rigorous, externally set tests' (5) (appendix 2). Autonomy comes at a high price, particularly when he mentions 'more intelligent inspections' (5) showing that schools will be held to account and justifying this by stating that 'when you give schools more autonomy, they collaborate more, not less'. Yet, in the next breath Gove says 'stretching, challenging curricular ... Exams that command respect among universities and employers alike' (7) (appendix 2). Therefore, this curriculum reform, alongside a revised inspection agenda and more challenging exams for students does not allow for teachers or principals to have the vowed level of autonomy; it

also shows a lack of respect for the profession as he dictates what the changes will be rather than collaborating with educators. This approach to education is what Freire (2017) labels 'the banking concept' which is when 'knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing' (45). Within this approach, 'students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher' leading to a system 'which achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture' (53). One of the issues with the current curriculum reform brought about by Gove is that knowledge is given to the students, not cultivated, as there is limited opportunity for self-discovery and self-learning. The issue with the banking approach to education is that it does not allow students to become independent thinkers, but instead biddable recipients of the right kind of knowledge which will then create acquiescent members of society moving into adulthood who take the word of their oppressors – in this case the government – and do not challenge the status quo.

Shortly after giving this speech, as part of a cabinet reshuffle, Gove was positioned elsewhere in the government and no longer served as Secretary of State for Education. Whilst not explicitly stated, it was on the understanding that he was no longer of benefit to the Conservatives in this role. Waters (2015) postulates that 'Gove had become toxic to his party which was in itself a result of his own policy fragmentation in the quest for power through the education agenda' (45). Additionally, it has been argued that 'Michael Gove was removed from education in 2014 because it was felt that he had upset teachers to an unsustainable degree' (Lenon, 2021, 58). Gove's reign as education secretary was divisive with many teachers disagreeing with the curriculum reform, amongst other things. However, they were powerless to prevent it because Gove did not listen to their protests, but rather berated them. Due to the significant amount of curriculum change, and wider changes within education, Brundrett (2015) argues that the lack of resistance from teachers was likely due to 'an ataraxy quite possibly born out of exhaustion from multiple and overlapping processes of innovation and change' (56-7). Had Gove listened to the panel of experts he brought together to help revise the National Curriculum, he could have avoided discord amongst education professionals; however, 'by expressing his personal preferences he alienated teachers who rightly objected to a secretary of state dictating what children should learn' (Lenon, 2021, 50). Throughout his time in post, Gove paid little heed to the expertise of the education

professionals and, somewhat unusually for a Secretary of State for Education, had significant input in curriculum reform; what he chose to implement in the curriculum reform was based on his personal experience of education, and his political views (Lightman, 2015; Coiffait, 2015).

One of the main drivers for Gove's curriculum reform was, admirably, to address social issues, but he was not able to succeed because education is not solely the root cause of these issues. Apple (2013) argues that Gove used his power as an elite member of society – a politician – to further widen the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children despite proclaiming that one of his key aims with education reform was to close the gap between the state and private sector. Gove developed 'education policy as a response to supposedly left-wing concerns such as social mobility and inequality' (Finn, 2015, 6). By uniting himself with audience through the use of third person inclusive pronouns, Gove is showing that it needs to be a collective effort if social mobility and inequality are going to be addressed; yet, he supports this by clearly stating his role in the pursuit of this with the subtle caveat that it depends upon him receiving the support of those who can best implement these changes. This is in spite of him being well placed, as a Conservative MP, to implement more wide-reaching changes to help close this gap in wider society, rather than just in schools. Gove continuing to promote and facilitate a banking concept approach to education showed that he did not truly want to use education as a tool to address social issues because this approach 'regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited within them' (Freire, 2017, 46). Therefore, by endorsing this approach to education, Gove is continuing to increase the gap between those deemed advantaged and disadvantaged, rather than addressing it at its core by creating a curriculum that works with those targeted students who are deemed to be lacking, be it socially, economically, or academically.

At the end of his speech, Gove concludes by speaking of the 'mission' which 'unites' them all (7) (appendix 2). The use of the noun reminds his audience that this is ongoing; it is difficult to achieve success but Gove is personally striving to ensure it happens. The verb 'unites'

makes it difficult to argue with Gove's motivations because by opposing what he is saying, it sounds as though you do not want children to succeed. This verb was, no doubt, deliberately chosen to make those educators currently taking strike action appear to be divisive in the educational reform happening and therefore not working towards what will make education better for their students.

Much like in the previous speech, Gove makes a point to specifically focus on the impact of education on the most disadvantaged students, namely poor children. This marginalised group are identified because of their economic status as they have less to contribute to society upon leaving school if they cannot make economic contributions. Gove states that it is the most deprived schools in the country who often need the most significant intervention because they cater for 'children from the poorest backgrounds' (3) (appendix 2). What Gove is trying to convey here is that education is the way out of poverty for these children, however this is not coming from a noble place but rather an economical one. If these underprivileged children cannot make meaningful contributions to society then they are of no economic benefit; therefore, they need a robust education to give them the qualifications and skillsets to release them from this life of poverty and underachievement. Freire (2017) argues that 'class conflict is another concept which upsets the oppressors, since they do not wish to consider themselves an oppressive class. Unable to deny, try as they may, the existence of social classes, they preach the need for understanding and harmony between those who buy and those who are obliged to sell their labor' (116). Therefore, by acting as though he has the best interests of the disadvantaged at heart, Gove is actually alleviating any discomfort he may feel in ruling over what he considers to be the lower classes. Interestingly, Gove does not address the social issue of the most underperforming schools existing in areas of highest deprivation. Rather than considering why schools in the most deprived areas are often the poorest educational establishments, he instead looks for a way to fix the issue by overhauling the entire education system. He presents education as a panacea when really it is the crutch. The reduction of the attainment gap between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students is a high-profile policy issue (Ellis et al, 2016). However, Gove's curriculum reform does not aid the closing of this gap as it is clearly aimed at those students who already possess a degree of academic success. Given that Gove's own private school education and subsequent Oxford university education heavily influenced the curriculum

reform he implemented (Hands, 2015; Young, 2014b), it is no surprise that it is inaccessible to those disadvantaged students who may already be struggling academically. Exploring Gove's motivations through Freire's (2017) lens, his goal is to keep the most disadvantaged passive through subjugation; 'this approximation, however, does not involve *being with* the people, or require true communication. It is accomplished by the oppressors' depositing myths indispensable to the preservation of the status quo' (112). Education is a key tool to help with this because it reaches all people, particularly when they are young and impressionable. Gove and his government are motivated by a desire to stay in power and the most effective way to do this, is to dictate to the oppressed what they need to do in order to succeed in life, and carefully controlling this through their education.

Gove speaks of narrowing the gap between 'rich and poor' students by using the metaphor 'closing that gap is a personal crusade for me' (3) (appendix 2). This metaphor makes it sound like he is on a challenging mission driven purely by goodwill and determination; a noble endeavour indeed. It also makes Gove sound like the saviour that education has so long needed and he is willing to take on this mantle – despite having been in the role for nearly four years already – to ensure that our disadvantaged youth are given every conceivable opportunity to achieve their potential. However, placing more responsibility on schools to address bigger social issues, whilst reducing the amount of funding available for education, is unlikely to improve the issue of social mobility (Spohrer, 2015; Young 2014b). Gove employs a second metaphor to refer to children who have left school with low or no skills as having their 'horizons narrowed'. The use of this metaphor makes it sound as though children are being restricted, in future, by their inadequate education; it is affecting their whole lives and forever disadvantaging them. What Gove does not address, however, is how society is not set up to support those students who do not excel in the very narrow parameters of mainstream education. The most successful students, Freire (2017) argues, are those who 'discover that in order to achieve some satisfaction they must adapt to the precepts which have been set from above. One of these precepts is not to think' (128). By using Cultural Literacy as a basis for educational reform – which provides a list of what every student should know – and only wanting students to study 'the best' of what has been thought and written, Gove actually narrowed students' horizons, particularly by dismissing incorporation of the contemporary in the curriculum (which Gove is so disdainful of in his 2009 speech).

The final metaphor Gove uses to reinforce how education is failing those most disadvantaged is when he talks of defeating 'the evil of youth unemployment' (3) (appendix 2). By making it sound like a foe to be vanquished, Gove comes back to the idea of him being the saviour on his 'personal crusade' (3) to aid all young people through education (appendix 2). Whilst it is undeniably important that all young people are given the opportunity to find gainful employment after leaving compulsory education, what Gove does not acknowledge is how the education system is failing so many of these young people because it is not set up to work with them but rather forcing them to conform to a set way of learning and developing. Waters (2015) argues that 'we surely want a system that sees young people leaving [school] fuelled with a desire to continue their learning rather than proclaim that they are 'no good' at so much of what they have studied and eventually opt out' (73-4). By making the curriculum more rigorous, Gove alienated those students – who are generally the most disadvantaged – who struggle to follow an academic route through school. By trying to prevent this chasm from deepening, Gove has in fact made the issue significantly worse. However, 'education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression' (Freire, 2017, 51). Therefore, by making the issue worse, Gove has actually succeeded in creating a future generation who are more disposed to follow governance without challenging it and the oppression they face.

Whilst Gove attended Oxford and had some private school education prior to attending university, he originated from rather humbler circumstances; 'though often sneered at by his critics, this in part explains his genuine investment in the idea of social mobility' (Finn, 2015, 104). Gove's aim was a noble one and being driven to close the gap between 'rich and poor' students is something that needs addressing. However, Gove, despite being driven by an admirable and important goal, did not allow himself to be supported by education professionals and therefore failed to execute his aim in the most effective way. Lupton and Thomson (2015) argue that the coalition government's term in office was one of contrast:

'on the one hand, the high profile introduction of a redistributive funding mechanism and increased targeting of effort on individuals from poorer families, and on the other, a set of wider social policies which have had the effect of reducing the incomes of such families and the wider services available to them, along with changes to curriculum and assessment to increase academic content and make examinations harder. It is an

approach which relies heavily on an academic-focused school system to rescue low income students and provide them with improved life chances, rather than one which invests in the foundations of secure childhoods, putting students in a better position to learn and to make choices. It shifts responsibility, in some respects, from the wider welfare state to schools’.

(13)

Gove was somewhat hampered in his aim to close the gap by the actions of the rest of his party as they were failing disadvantaged children across all services, not just in schools. Despite this, Gove still could have achieved a great deal if he had worked with the advice and guidance provided by those working in, and invested in, education.

Referring back to the previous government’s impact on education, he uses the adjectives ‘segregated’ and ‘stratified’ (3) to emphasise just how broken the system was; it was divided and needs reunification (appendix 2). He also talks about the previous education failings as a ‘scandal’ (3) like a dirty secret that the Labour government tried to cover up (appendix 2). The use of these adjectives and this particular noun allows Gove to remind his audience not only of the previous government’s failings, but also how much work there is yet to be done thereby further justifying his proposed curriculum reforms. To reinforce the good work being done by himself and his government, Gove uses the adjectives ‘much richer’ (3), ‘much deeper’ (3), ‘evidence-based’ (4) and, his oft repeated favourite, ‘rigorous’ (3) to show how much further they have come compared to the previous government, and how much more valuable their discoveries are because they are founded on research rather than pseudo-science and ‘faddish’, ‘quack theories’ (3) (appendix 2). He also uses the noun phrase ‘pioneering breakthroughs’ (4) to show how innovative and effective the implementation of teaching schools has been (appendix 2). Supported by verbs such as ‘built’ (4), Gove shows how the Conservative government have worked to create a secure and robust system from very little (appendix 2). The use of the noun ‘renaissance’ to describe what is currently happening in English state education rather grandly highlights the revival spearheaded by Gove and his government; education is changing so dramatically for the better that it is almost unrecognisable from its previous state (appendix 2). Yet, he says there is still some way to go acknowledging that it will take considerable time to undo the damage caused by the Labour

government. Linking back to Gove's 2009 speech, his use of the word 'rigour' continues to be ambiguous but suggests that he is harking back to past approaches to education which he deemed to be more challenging (Hands, 2015). Gove's supposed renaissance is a return to the old ways, and his desire for a rigorous curriculum seems to suggest more challenging content, rather than considering how best to support learners of all abilities. One way in which to challenge this would be to include students in the learning process and give them time and space to consider their own interpretations, and become 'critical co-investigators' alongside the teacher (Freire, 2017, 54). This approach considers the students – their context, interest, growing academic minds – rather than simply dictating knowledge to them. This is particularly pertinent to English where different people have different interpretations of a text due to the aforementioned differences in context, interests, prior knowledge and so forth.

Speaking about curriculum reform to the English curriculum, Nick Gibb (2015), former Minister of State for School Standards who worked closely with Michael Gove, explained that students would study three Shakespeare plays throughout KS3 and 4, as well as have a lengthy list of grammatical terms they would need to learn to aid their development of the English language. It is unclear what Gove means when he refers to rigour in the curriculum, but if Gibb's outline of what the improvements to the English curriculum look like are indicative of, it would suggest that rigour means an archaic, highly technical approach to studying English. Continuing to look specifically at the English curriculum and changes Gove enacted, rigour also appears to indicate a monocultural curriculum which alienates many learners, alongside a high-stakes high-accountability testing system at key stages 2 and 4, with students in year 6 being told when they have not met 'the expected standard'. In 2019, the SATs English reading paper sat by year 6 children had a word count of 2,168 with educators calling for students to be given more than an hour within which to sit the paper. In 2019, 'the proportion of students achieving the government's "expected standard" in reading fell to 73 per cent, prompting concerns about the difficulty of the test' (Whittaker, 2019, para. 4). Rigour in the context of KS2 English appears to lead to lowering of standards especially as the demands of the SATs hinders SEN students and EAL students who are often considered to be disadvantaged students.

Further into the speech, Gove's real reason for wanting to overhaul the curriculum is made clear when he references worldwide systems of monitoring education, namely the OECD's PISA study and data from PIRLS and TIMSS. He states that closing the gap between rich and poor is 'an economic imperative for every developed nation' (3) (appendix 2). Through this, Gove is showing that he is up-to-date with global education performance but is really expressing that the actual drive behind this educational reform is to compete on the world's stage alongside those countries who regularly perform highly in such global performance measures. He supports this when he references the successful education systems in countries such as Poland, the Netherlands and Singapore. By citing countries with a record of high performance in education, Gove is reinforcing how the changes he is proposing are founded in tried and tested models from across the globe. However, most European countries do not have education systems which face governmental or political interference and 'this makes the professional work of teachers more straightforward and on the whole the school systems of such countries are more successful than ours' (Young, 2014b, 69). Therefore, Gove, as a politician with no experience of working in education, is not well-placed to be overhauling and driving curriculum reform. It could be argued that Gove's motivations from the start was to improve Britain's rankings on a global scale and 'boost Britain's standing in the global economy' (Finn, 2015, 6).

With regards to PISA standings, England went from 22nd to 14th from 2015 to 2018 in reading thus showing that 'England following the Gove reforms was doing well' (Lenon, 2021, 57-58). Despite this, 'Gove was often accused of mishandling [qualitative] data – notably ... in his use of a flawed set of PISA statistics' (Finn, 2015, 104). However, the 2018 reading data cited above shows that Gove's reform did impact positively on England's global performance. Nevertheless, the reform caused negative impact on schools and reinforced the high-stakes high-accountability system he had created. Finn (2015) argues that because of 'the existential accountability imposed by Gove's consistent referencing of PISA statistics, schools felt (not unreasonably) under significant pressure' (108). Whether improving England's rating in PISA statistics was worth causing considerable pressure on schools remains to be seen, but with retention figures in teaching painting a dire picture, it would suggest not (Gillard, 2015).

In this speech, Gove once again references E.D. Hirsch when talking about 'solidly grounded research' (3), but in less detail than in his 2009 speech (appendix 2). However, just because

Cultural Literacy works, or appears to work, in some schools in the USA, does not mean that the same approach will work in England. As Dylan Wiliam (2006) says with regards to educational research 'everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere' (11). Gove was heavily influenced by the theory of Cultural Literacy and implemented curriculum reform with a strong knowledge-based approach. However, contrasting to his 2009 speech, Gove makes references to developing 'skills' (3) of young people; in his 2009 speech he stressed that a knowledge-based curriculum was necessary to drive up standards: 'time, and effort, is spent on cultivating abstract thinking skills rather than deepening the knowledge base' (Gove, 2009, 14) (appendix 1). This was in response to the Labour government's focus on skills-based qualifications. However, in this speech five years later, Gove states that 'children who leave school with no skills or low skills will find their employment opportunities limited and their horizons narrowed' (3) (appendix 2). Whilst he still advocates for a heavily knowledge-oriented curriculum, he appears to have realised that students also need to leave school with skills to allow them to access what follows formal education, i.e. employment. However, ultimately, following Gove's curriculum reform, 'what emerged was a curriculum with a strong focus on knowledge and a concomitant downgrading of the development of skills' (Brundrett, 2015, 51). A significant factor in Gove opting for a knowledge-based curriculum was in order to raise standards: 'we need not just to close the gap, but to raise the bar' (3). However, by raising the bar, he widened the gap.

In this speech, Gove gives his vision for moving forwards. He states that he wants 'more and more schools run – more and more decisions made – by teachers, not politicians' (7) (appendix 2). This is ironic given that the level of interference Gove had on curriculum reform, and the lack of attention he paid to his panel of professionals consulted about curriculum reform. When Gove was overhauling the curriculum, he, and his government, 'refused to acknowledge that there was any legitimate alternative to what they proposed and rejected the notion of dialogue and debate' (Brundrett, 2015, 54). Therefore, it is ironic that his self-professed aim was to have teachers make the pivotal decisions within schools, yet did not allow them a degree of autonomy over what was taught and how.

The analysis above indicates how the purpose of this speech is to showcase what Gove and his government have thus far done to improve education. It also hints at future changes that will come as a result of curriculum reform but with the proviso that this is a challenging task

so if it does not come to fruition, it is mostly because the task was too much of challenge following the previous government's inadequacies. Whilst Gove suggests that the need for education reform is to ensure all students are given equal opportunities, what is clear is that a key driver in education reform is the UK's performance on the world's stage and ensuring that all young people are able to make a positive contribution to society when they leave compulsory education, and the best way to achieve this is through introducing a more challenging, archaic curriculum.

Similar to the concluding remarks from the first speech, this analysis also provides something of an answer to my first research question: what are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3? This speech shows that Gove is driven to enact further curriculum reform with the goal of making it more challenging. By increasing the level of challenge within both KS2 and 3 curricula, one would expect the gap that occurs during transition to narrow. However, the primary focus is on increasing challenge in those key stages which end in mandatory testing. KS3 does not end with an externally assessed, nationally reported assessment which is evident from the diminished level of challenge within the curriculum when compared to the KS2 National Curriculum.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed and discussed findings from within two key speeches which showed the rationale and philosophical underpinnings for the curriculum reform enacted by Michael Gove. It has explored the curriculum reform and its inception through the lens of Freire (2017) who argues that education is another tool with which the oppressor – in this case the government – can continue its control over the oppressed. This chapter has also answered the first of my research questions: Where did the latest curriculum reform originate?

The following chapter will closely examine and analyse the curriculum documents which were published as a result of this curriculum reform and look more closely at the issue of transition between KS2 and 3. This chapter has gone some way to helping me answer my second research question: what are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3? In the next chapter, I further my answer to this research question,

and also begin to gain understanding of how a more meaningful transition can occur facilitated by the National Curriculum, thereby considering my fourth research question.

Chapter 5 – Analysis and discussion of The National Curriculum for English Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3

In the previous chapter, I explored two key speeches which set out the rationale for curriculum change as spearheaded by Michael Gove. What followed was a National Curriculum which enacted many of these proposed changes. The National Curriculum was selected for analysis in this chapter as this is a key policy document for all schools. Additionally, exploration of the National Curricula is key to answering my research question: What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3? As well as providing insight into my third research question: What can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful? These curriculum documents were analysed using Hyatt's (2013) Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Throughout the chapter, references will be made to the appendices where the annotated curricula can be found which show the approach to Critical Discourse Analysis taken when exploring and examining these policy documents.

Following the speeches examined in the previous chapter, the National Curriculum was rolled out to schools ready to be implemented from September 2015. Many of Gove's ideas and influences are apparent in the policy document and these will be explored below, alongside an analysis of the discourse, and discussion on the efficacy of the National Curriculum and any strengths and limitations within it.

The National Curriculum was introduced in 1989 to ensure parity in educational provision across schools nationally. As a teacher of English, my view on the National Curriculum is that it should be a guiding document to help teachers plan and develop schemes of work which are broadly in line with what is being taught in other schools. The National Curriculum for English should not be a prescriptive list of what students should learn, but a document which allows teachers to use their expertise, and knowledge of their students, to plan and deliver content that will prepare students for their exams and, more importantly, to become inquisitive individuals with the ability to interpret texts, and have strong written and spoken language skills applicable outside of the classroom context.

The National Curriculum for English KS2

The KS2 National Curriculum opens with a statement entitled the 'purpose of study'. Within this paragraph it outlines why English is such an important subject ending with the statement: 'All the skills of language are essential to participating fully as a member of society; pupils, therefore, those who do not learn to speak, read and write fluently and confidently are effectively disenfranchised' (3) (appendix 3). This makes it clear that one of – if not *the* primary purpose of the curriculum is to create students who will be valuable contributors to society, particularly the workforce, once they leave school so their education is effectively preparing them for that. This links to Gove's aims in the two speeches explored in this chapter. Education has long been used as a tool by governments to boost social mobility as well as creating a 'more economically prosperous nation and increased individual opportunity' (Spohrer, 2015, 102). Students who leave school with 'low levels of competence as readers are more likely to be unemployed and less likely to have good housing and wealth' (Traves, 2017, 71). Therefore, it is vital that the curriculum ensures that all students are given the opportunity to become competent readers. While boosting social mobility for all is an admirable aim, this curriculum does not allow for this; however, many students are marginalised as a result of this curriculum. Elliott (2021) argues that teaching texts not drawing on the white, middle-class students' knowledge would even out attainment, but also ensure a broad cultural literacy for the different types of students at schools across England. On top of there being a lack of opportunity for minority students within the curriculum, there is also no mention in this opening statement of the curriculum of subject enjoyment thereby showing that this is not a significant factor in the teaching and learning of English. This supports Finn's (2015) view that 'education for personal development, for the love of learning itself, has been subordinated to the perceived primary goal of education – the service of the economy' (2). This is evident throughout both KS2 and 3 curricula as enjoyment and passion for the subject is not an aim or a priority. Therefore, from the outset it is clear that the curriculum is driven by more than simply, theoretically, providing a guide for teachers to utilise.

In the following 'Aims' section, it states an aim of the English curriculum as developing '[students'] love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment' (3) (appendix 3). Given that it is in the 'Aims' section, subject enjoyment is a goal of the curriculum, not a

purpose. Therefore, this suggests that success in the subject matter supersedes pleasure in reading. While reading for pleasure 'is not measured through any external examinations, it remains a constant part of the curriculum and vitally important in nurturing well-rounded individuals' (Rudman, 2021, 40). All teachers of English know that getting students to enjoy reading will help their academic progress immeasurably, as well as enrich their experience of the world around them, yet this is at odds with curriculum expectations and, in particular, the rigours of the KS2 SATs. On the one hand, the curriculum wants students to enjoy reading and do it in their own time, however this is a difficult aim to achieve because KS2 is so assessment driven and analytical in nature. Rudman (2021) argues that the questions asked in the KS2 SATs are not a measure of reading for enjoyment, but will, over time, aid students' confidence in exploring a text independently. However, that is only the case if the level of analysis required for the KS2 SATs does not disengage students completely from reading. Traves (2017) notes that in schools, reading often means students answering a series of – typically closed – comprehension questions on a text, arguing that 'it is likely that the learner will greet the task of taking on new information with diminishing enthusiasm' and that students should be 'taught and shown different ways to explore and gain information from a text' (84-85). However, teachers know that their students will be answering these comprehension questions in their SATs so are under pressure to adequately prepare them for this externally measured assessment.

A further problem is presented in this section with the aim that all pupils 'appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage' (3) (appendix 3). This statement is problematic given it is unclear whose literary heritage is being referred to. The aim implies breadth of study and inclusivity, but it is reductive due to the lack of clarity surrounding what counts as *our* literary heritage. There is no consideration as to the many different cultures and ethnicities which make up students in schools in England; therefore, it is unclear whether schools have autonomy in selecting texts from their students' literary heritage or if the focus of study should be on British-born authors (predominantly white and male which is the case in the GCSE English literature curriculum). In reference to E.D. Hirsch's philosophy of Cultural Literacy, which the National Curriculum reform was heavily influenced by, Elliott (2021) points out, 'a different set of authors would have created a different list; there is inherent bias in anyone's choice of list dependent on their own background knowledge' (103). This is evident in the National

Curriculum as the content which has been prioritised is elitist and archaic. This is unsurprising given how heavily Gove influenced the curriculum reform and how his need for 'rigour' seemed to imply a return to standards of the past.

If students are to become literate adults, they should be 'encouraged to follow interesting ideas, characters or themes, and helped to make connections between texts in different forms and genres for different cultural milieux' (Hall, 2015, 69). Therefore, diversity in study of texts is important for students to develop into successful readers. Hall (2015) goes on to argue that reading in schools 'should be about encouraging students to become commentators on their reading, sharing their enthusiasms following trends and research interests' (69). In English, more so than in other subjects, 'knowledge is made by all the people in the classroom together as they develop their own ideas and emotions, and do not simply recall things deposited or drilled into them' (Eaglestone, 2020, 12). Students should be given the opportunity to form their own ideas and opinions in response to a text, but only being exposed to one kind of text – those from 'our literary heritage' will not allow them to broaden their literary horizons. It is also problematic referring to 'our literary heritage' as it leads to questions such as: 'whose culture, and hence whose literacy, is being represented? And whose culture, whose literacy is marginalised or excluded?' (Yandell, 2017, 250). Little consideration is being given by the policy makers – directed by Michael Gove – to how marginalising this term is. This iteration of the National Curriculum, across all key stages, points to Gove's desire to return education back to more archaic times, and 'though the revised National Curriculum predates the Brexit referendum, it shares an impulse to redefine British nationhood' (Gordon, 2018, 21). With the curriculum somewhat ambiguously referring to 'our' literary heritage, there is scope for schools to interpret this to best suit the cultural make-up of their cohort. However, this is at odds with both the KS2 SATs reading paper and the GCSE English literature curriculum, where there is little variety in the culture and ethnicity of the texts being read and assessed on, and Gove's vision for education with a view to restoring British nationhood.

The final aim of the curriculum relates to spoken language and the need for students to be competent in speaking and listening as well as debating (appendix 3). It is not made clear why children of this age (9 to 11) should be prepared for debating; however, it does hark back to an archaic and elitist approach to education which Michael Gove was striving for with his

curriculum reform based upon his own experience of private school education (Hands, 2015). The curriculum does not make mention of EAL students for whom debate could be a challenge when their speaking and listening skills could be in need of development; this could also be the case for students with speech, language and communication difficulties. Although developing spoken language is a key skill for all, debate is not necessarily the most effective way to do this. The lack of assessment of spoken language, compared to the rigorous assessment for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG), and reading, suggests that it is of less significance; however, it could be because it is difficult to assess and/or measure progress over time.

The curriculum moves on to further explore the expectations for the three strands, starting with spoken language. This is a relatively short section which is to be expected given the emphasis placed on reading and writing within the curriculum. However, there is one part of the spoken language section which needs closer examination. The curriculum states that ‘teachers should ensure that pupils build secure foundations by using discussion to probe and remedy their misconceptions’ (3) (appendix 3). This statement is problematic because it implies that misconceptions need to be cured rather than explored and understood which would allow for further growth and development. It also implies that there is a set way of thinking which needs to be adhered to – presumably that which is laid out in the curriculum – and deviation from this should be remedied. Despite writing over a decade ago, Jewitt et al’s (2009) argument that ‘a raft of policy interventions has led to a more strictly stipulated content, and correspondingly more prescribed and standardized styles of teaching and assessment in English’ still rings true today (10). Whilst only a seemingly small, fairly insignificant statement, this curriculum statement is arguably indicative of a bigger problem; namely, the government, through education and the curriculum, seeks to create a populace of like-minded thinkers which will therefore secure their power more firmly. Education reform in the UK is usually driven by ‘the contemporary political economy of education’ (Finn, 2015, 2). Education, specifically schooling, has in recent decades, ‘become a place for politicians to exercise some power in the hope and belief that their actions will convince the electorate to give them more power’ (Waters, 2015, 64). By stating that misconceptions need to be remedied, it is leaving little room for challenge or discussion but rather a presumption

that instead of changing how a concept or skill is approached, it is corrected and then put to one side.

The next section focuses on the purpose and aims of reading within the English curriculum. Whilst many important points are made here, there is some ambiguity such as stating that 'good comprehension draws on linguistic knowledge' (4) (appendix 3). The use of the adjective 'good' is a nebulous term as it is unclear what 'good' actually looks like. It also fails to consider what 'good' looks like with regards to children with varying abilities, are EAL or have SEND. This shows that the curriculum takes a one-size-fits all approach with little to no consideration of the different needs, wants and abilities of the children who will be following it. Hall (2015) argues that 'there is a widespread assumption, reflected in and fuelled by the media, that the business of learning to read should be concluded by the time children move on to secondary school (and preferably earlier)' (61). The danger of this is that a success-fail culture is created and students are at risk of feeling as though they are behind where they should be simply because the one-size-fits-all approach to education is not inclusive or understanding of how children progress at different rates. Hall (2015) goes on to argue that 'children absorb many of these pressures and risk seeing themselves as failures before they have even really got going on their reading careers' and that the concept of learning to read is something that should be achieved in primary school thereby leading to 'remediation and catch-up' further into their school career (62). There is a danger in using words such as 'good' within the National Curriculum because it implies that, conversely, there is a 'bad' which compounds this concept of students failing rather than developing at varying rates. This is particularly difficult within English as, 'while there may be wrong answers in science, this is rarely so in the study of literature, as the National Curriculum implies. An interpretation might be more or less skilful or interesting or pervasive, but a sophisticated appreciation of the 'depth and power' of a literary work, and 'informed personal response' cannot be invalid especially if there is evidence to support it' (Eaglestone, 2020, 26-27). In addition to this, 'teachers are always dealing with learners of varying stages of development, even when they are in the same year group, and it is teachers who are in a position to judge when best to introduce new knowledge, understanding and skills to individuals or to the class as a whole' (Richmond, 2017, 242). Therefore, requiring students to have 'good' comprehension skills is impossible to measure in a subject as subjective as English.

A further point with regards to reading is the objective that ‘all pupils must be encouraged to read widely across both fiction and non-fiction’ (4) (appendix 3). This rather forceful statement contrasts to the ‘should’ statements made in previous areas of the curriculum, and there is no mention of encouraging children to read texts they enjoy or about topics in which they have an interest. At the end of this section, it states that it is ‘essential’ that all students can read fluently by the time they leave primary school (appendix 3). It is unarguably a vital skill that all children learn to read: ‘the ability to read well is vital in our society. It brings with it huge benefits in terms of pleasure, personal enrichment, practical value and power’ (Traves, 2017, 69). However, there is still no consideration of those children who will struggle to achieve this for many reasons. By saying that this is essential, it is excluding those students who will not achieve this therefore showing that the curriculum to follow will not be accessible to them as they move into KS3. Because the ability to read, and level of comprehension are measurable through assessments, this allows for ‘comparisons to be made over time and between different countries, regions, schools and individuals’ which ultimately leads to holding ‘institutions and policy makers accountable for the services, frameworks and support they provide’ (Hall, 2015, 61-62). Hall (2015) goes on to argue that ‘because of the judgements involved, there is a sharp focus on the aspects of reading that are easily measured, both in the political arena, through the media, and in the educational arena, in school’ and that ‘there is a sense of urgency about meeting targets and a corresponding sense of concern when identified standards and results have not been achieved’ (61-62). This harks back to the point made previously that the purpose of this government’s curriculum reform is to ensure all school children can be of benefit to society when they become adults and there is simply no room for underperformance; schools must ensure that students leaving KS2 are fully literate despite the curriculum giving no guidance or support for underperforming or less-able students. Despite this aim, there is still a considerable disconnect between the performance and progress of high and low achievers and ‘there are still too many children and young people who are failing to become competent and confident users of English where there is no valid reason, in terms of their potential why they *should* fail. Those most at risk of failure are learners from socio-economically poorer backgrounds’ (Richmond et al, 2017, 1). One of Michael Gove’s key aims with this curriculum reform was to close this gap yet this has failed, most likely due to a curriculum which does not account for varying abilities and rates of progression.

The Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) section of the curriculum highlights the need for all students to be taught to use (in their writing and speech) Standard English (appendix 3). This does not take into account a child's ethnicity, sociolect or idiolect. Ellis and Smith (2017) argue that 'highly effective [literacy] teachers contextualise [programmes or activities], with clearer purposes and stronger links to pupils' out-of-school lives' (84). Therefore, by teaching only Standard English with no acknowledgement for other forms of speaking English, it is marginalising a huge number of students (as well as making SPaG difficult to learn precisely because it is difficult to contextualise). Additionally, the need for students to be taught to use Standard English does not consider the continual evolution of the English language or teach children how language use may be varied depending on context. This clearly links to Gove's agenda of teaching a monocultural curriculum alluded to in his 2009 'What is Education For?' speech when he said that there needs to be 'a shared appreciation of cultural reference points, a common stock of knowledge on which we can all draw and trade' (4) (appendix 1). However, this marginalises sub-cultures and sub-groups within our diverse nation. The curriculum, which is supposed to be inclusive and beneficial to all, is marginalising those who are not white British. This marginalisation is compounded by the 'inappropriate demands of KS2 testing and a misguided grammar curriculum' (NATE, 2020, 15). The approach to assessing SPaG is at odds with what students need to develop their understanding and usage of some very challenging concepts: 'The testing arrangements at Year 6 dismember the whole, complex activities of reading and writing by testing grammar, punctuation and spelling separately from them' (Richmond et al, 2017, 7). Following discord amongst educators about the invention of a SPaG test, Richmond (2017) argues that 'the fundamental objection to the grammar, punctuation and spelling tests, however, was and is that the splitting up of the holistic and interconnected activities which constitute writing has implicitly sent a malign message to pupils and teachers' (272). Students' development of language is not supported by a single, uncontextualized assessment and this further marginalises students whose first language is not English when the learning of language elements should in fact aid language development.

The above section considered the National Curriculum for English for both key stages 1 and 2 – this is how the document is presented – and shows coherence and continuity across the key stages. There is a further section of the curriculum which focuses solely on upper key stage 2

(years 5 and 6) which will be examined in further detail below as this is the key area, alongside KS3, which is the focus of this research.

This part of the curriculum begins with the statement that ‘by the beginning of year 5, pupils should be able to read aloud a wider range of poetry and books’ (31) (appendix 3). This is reminiscent of decades-old educational practice (which was Gove’s experience during his private school education). What is problematic with this expectation is that no mention is made of students understanding what they are reading out loud, merely parroting what is in front of them. This, therefore, has questionable benefit to their academic development. With regards to reading, according to the curriculum, students ‘should be reading widely and frequently, outside as well as in school’ (31) (appendix 3). It is impossible for schools to truly monitor how and what – if anything – a student reads outside of school so schools must not be held accountable. The government is using the curriculum to try and solve a social issue when in reality there are bigger issues that need to be solved, i.e. library closures and underfunding in schools. The purpose of a national curriculum is to ensure parity of teaching across schools, and ‘should include that which is essential for participation in a modern, democratic society – the fundamentals necessary for progression’ (Oates, 2011, 130). However, ultimately, ‘it is for teachers and schools to construct programmes of learning which will be motivating for their *learners* – it is teachers who understand the specific keys to unlocking the motivation of their learners in respect of their essential bodies of learning’ (Oates, 2011, 130). This is at odds with the National Curriculum which specifies curriculum content with no regard for what is best for learners, i.e., memorising poetry, and no consideration of teacher experience and knowledge of their learners: ‘we have come to the point where teachers of English in primary schools in England are effectively treated as machine operators, given sets of instructions narrowly related to method, and told to follow them’ (Richmond et al, 2017, 5). This could have been avoided; however, Gove did not listen to his expert panel of educators recruited to assist the curriculum reform, which then led to discord and an undermining of the knowledge and expertise of the teaching profession (Lenon, 2021).

In this section of the document, it only once mentions students’ enjoyment of reading being key to their success in English. By saying that ‘teachers should continue to emphasise pupils’ enjoyment and understanding of language ... to support their reading and writing’ (31) is at

odds with the prescriptive nature of the National Curriculum and its focus on the SATs (appendix 3). Although, interestingly, at no point in the document does it make reference to these statutory end of key stage assessments. Following the solo mention of enjoyment in relation to reading, it then moves to point out that a further aim is for students to ‘maintain positive attitudes’ (43) (appendix 3). Therefore, the tone of the document is about getting children to access texts in order to talk and write about them, or pass tests on them, rather than fostering a love of literature. According to the curriculum, being able to recite poetry is of more importance, because it is mentioned more times, than children enjoying reading and studying texts. This links to Gove’s view that rigour and challenge is of paramount importance, thereby suggesting that enjoyment is a secondary – or less important – aim with the learning of English. Once again, Gove’s instance on delivering an education resonant of his past private school education is evident within this curriculum document, with little to no consideration as to the benefits of approaching learning in this way.

With regards to students who have not met age-related expectations in upper key stage 2, the curriculum states that ‘it is essential that pupils whose decoding skills are poor are taught through a rigorous and systematic phonics programme’ as this will allow them to ‘catch up rapidly with their peers’; however, these students should still ‘follow the upper key stage 2 programme of study’ (31) (appendix 3). The curriculum does not address or even acknowledge SEND provision and it does not cater for those students whose learning difficulties make them unable to follow the UKS2 programme. Forcing children to keep up with their peers whilst unable to fully access the curriculum will cause significant problems, mostly to the child’s confidence. It therefore seems futile, and even damaging, to expose these vulnerable students to this curriculum if they will be unable to access it. This once again harks back to an archaic one-size-fits-all approach to education. Oates (2011) argues that the role of the curriculum is to give students ‘access to a common body of essential content’, and that it is ‘vital to distinguish the role of national curricula in specifying conceptual and factual content, and the role of teachers in developing motivating teaching and learning’ (133). This is what Gove was arguing in his 2009 speech. However, there is no consideration of what this means if these two aims are at odds with each other, and teachers are having to teach a curriculum which is not motivating learning, or, more damagingly, is inaccessible to students.

This section of the National Curriculum closes with the statement that students should be able to discuss what they are learning; however, there is no rationale as to why it is necessary for students to be able to articulate this and how it aids their academic progress. Finally, it concludes by stating that ‘pupils’ confidence, enjoyment and mastery of language should be extended through public speaking, performance and debate’ (32) (appendix 3). This would be of benefit to some students’ progress, particularly with regards to spoken language, where schools are able to offer such opportunities; however, due to budget cuts, understaffing and lack of resources, this is not always possible. Additionally, this is a very private-school approach to education. It is trying to create articulate members of society who can make positive contributions; this is not solely about enhancing children’s educational experiences. If it were, then more focus would be given to supporting strategies for SEND, EAL, and underperforming students. Also, high-stakes testing often means that the curriculum is narrowed: ‘NATE hears many tales of narrowing primary English experiences, with reduced scope for creativity, rich literary exploration, extended personal writing, and so on’ (NATE, 2020, 15). Extra-curricular activities are often excluded or reduced on the basis that students need to prepare for the end of key stage SATs for which schools are held to account.

The rest of the National Curriculum outlines the statutory and non-statutory requirements for reading and writing. Within this section, there are several points of notes that need further exploration. In the guidance section of the statutory requirements for reading, it states that ‘it is imperative that pupils are taught to read during their last two years at primary school if they enter year 5 not being able to do so’ (33) (appendix 3). There will be a good reason as to why a child would reach year 5 unable to read therefore it is naïve to assume that this can be taught in the final two years of key stage 2. This does not take into account that some children are not cognitively developed enough to be able to read with fluidity in their final stages of primary education, and there is a perception that those students who perform below average are being denied their ‘entitlement to a fair start in life’ (Hall, 2015, 62). In a study on attitudes to reading in upper key stage 2, Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) discovered that there was a ‘significant relationship between higher attainment and positive attitudes, with more positive responses to questions [such as, ‘I like reading...’] from the higher-attainer groups’ (378). Despite this study being from 2004, the results are still relevant today as students who struggle academically tend to get less enjoyment from school. This is supported by further

research which concluded that ‘when struggling readers are not motivated to read, their opportunities to learn decreases significantly. This can lead to strong negative feelings about reading and create a vicious cycle in which poor readers remain poor readers’ (Clark and Rumbold, 2006, 7). Arguably, the level of challenge in UKS2 could turn students off reading given that the difficulty of the SATs paper is immense, particularly for those readers with lower than chronological reading ages. The level of challenge is compounded by the fact that students are presented with texts previously unseen and containing content potentially unfamiliar to them. Tennent (2021b) argues that this is problematic because ‘every test of reading comprehension requires the reader to engage with written text; and, as such, their understanding of each text will be mediated by what they can bring to it from their knowledge and experiences’ (489). This is especially true for students who struggle with reading as, alongside having to decode the text, it adds an additional level of challenge. Additionally, if a child has reached this stage and is unable to read fluently, it would suggest that the curriculum thus far has failed them; therefore, a change approach is required. Traves (2017) makes the key point that ‘if the medicine did not work by the age of 7, offer more of the same until the age of 9; if it has not worked by then, repeat the prescription until 11’ (99). The curriculum fails to consider how it can best support those students developing at a different rate to their peers.

Once again, in the statutory requirements, it reiterates the need for students to participate in ‘formal presentations and debates’ (34) (appendix 3). Whilst the aim is beneficial – explaining and discussing their ideas and what they have read – there is no suggestion as to why 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds should be giving formal presentations and participating in debates. This approach was part of Gove’s intention to close the gap between state and private schools, yet in the same document it says that children who cannot read must be taught to do so in these two years. There is little understanding of how children learn and instead a focus on creating future members of society who can recite texts verbatim and who can therefore make seemingly positive contributions, particularly to the workforce and by extension the economy, as articulate individuals. It should instead offer guidance in the curriculum as to how formal presentations and debate can enhance aspects of students’ learning but, once again, should not be a blanket approach for all students.

Within the non-statutory guidance, it states that students should have whole books read aloud to them so they can be exposed to books and authors they may be unfamiliar with or reluctant to read independently. This is an important and admirable aim yet there is only so much time in a school day. Also, the SATs reading paper generally gives children extracts from texts so it is important that they are confident and familiar with understanding a text from just a very small section of it if they are to perform to their potential in these end of key stage tests. Whilst many teachers would prefer to read whole texts to, and with, students, this is not always possible as ‘a further consequence of high-stakes testing is for the curriculum to become separated from the assessment process. This impacts upon classroom practice as the curriculum becomes notional; and attention switches to focus on those subjects being tested’ (Tennent, 2021b, 482). Tennent (2021) goes on to argue that because of this, the KS2 SATs ‘have potentially negative personal and emotional consequences for schools, teachers and children; and where teaching to the test is common because of their high-stakes nature’ (482). It would be easy to blame the teachers for what could be perceived as narrowing the curriculum; however, ‘in a high-stakes testing environment, schools must teach children whatever the assessment asks of them’ (Moss, 2017, 62).

Within the statutory guidance for writing, there are many questionable points with the most significant one being that students should be taught to learn ‘the grammar for year 5 and 6 in English Appendix 2’ (38) (appendix 3). It also goes on to list many grammatical devices which students should be familiar with and able to use in their writing; however, at no point does it say that students should have to be able to identify these devices in stand-alone sentences as they have to do in the end-of-key-stage SATs SPaG paper. The validity and purpose of the SPaG test is questionable: ‘the grammar, punctuation and spelling tests divorce those three aspects of language from the contexts in which they should be considered: whole, authentic pieces of writing, read or written’ (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education [CLPE], 2016, 7). If it does not benefit students’ progress in reading and writing then there is no clear reason as to why it needs to be assessed so rigorously. In English Appendix 2 (64-69) (appendix 3), a comprehensive list of statutory SPaG requirements are laid out yet it is not always made clear why children need explicitly to know these terms. Children instinctively may use many of these devices in their speech and writing, and the only reason they need to be able to explicitly know them is in order to pass the SPaG paper. In the

appendix, it states that ‘explicit knowledge of grammar ... is best achieved through a focus on grammar within the teaching of reading, writing and speaking’ (64) yet students are assessed on grammar as stand-alone concepts. The curriculum is at odds with the assessment tool – the SATs – produced by the DfE. The sheer volume of SPaG knowledge required by the students is staggering and it makes little sense as to why children need to know these grammatical requirements to such a degree when, as the curriculum states, it is to enhance their written and spoken English skills. Given that the SPaG test does not ‘take children’s age-specific developmental trajectories into account’ (Moss, 2017, 62) it begs the question as to what benefit these tests have on both the students sitting them, and their schools. The Education Commons Select Committee wrote in its 2017 report that focusing on specific SPaG elements did not improve the overall quality of children’s writing, and subsequently made the suggestion that the SPaG tests become non-statutory. Richmond (2017) concludes that the reason for the SPaG test is that teachers ‘were not trusted to see and judge manner (grammar, punctuation, spelling)’ rather than ‘matter (content)’ which is ‘clearly what matters to those in charge, so it needed to be externally controlled’ (272). The technical elements of language are considered to be more important as opposed to the creative elements which seems ironic in a creative subject. It also implies that teachers could not be trusted to assess their students’ work which links back to Gove’s undermining teachers in his 2014 speech.

As explored above, there are many inconsistencies, points of ambiguity and confusion in the National Curriculum. Many of the requirements for study are stated without justification as to why it is important, or even beneficial, for students to be learning these concepts. The curriculum offers a degree of autonomy for teachers by not commanding what texts are studied, but does not allow for total creative control by dictating what areas must be studied and at times, most alarmingly, how they are taught. Whilst the three strands of the English curriculum – reading, writing, spoken language – are pivotal in a child’s language development, there is virtually no consideration as to how teachers are supposed to cater for students who are not able to access the curriculum. There is very much a one-size-fits-all approach to the curriculum which in itself shows how unfamiliar the writers of this policy are with the range of abilities and individual needs within one class, let alone the entire key stage nationally.

As a teacher of KS2, there is a worrying lack of parity between the UKS2 curriculum and the end of key stage SATs which all students in state education are required to sit. The curriculum suggests that SPaG is taught as integrated into writing and reading; however, it is assessed independently of the two with its own papers (punctuation and grammar, and spelling). With regards to the reading paper, students are generally given extracts of texts which they have to answer questions on whereas the curriculum encourages schools to explore whole books with their students. Whilst the reading of whole books is significant in helping children to better understand texts, and to encourage a love of literature, students also need to be able to explore snapshots of texts in order to be able to confidently and competently do so in their end of key stage test. Writing is no longer assessed as an end of key stage test but rather a body of work is collated for each child, teacher-assessed then internally moderated. Schools are externally moderated for writing every three or four years and internal assessments verified. Therefore, the curriculum requirements for writing are most closely aligned with how it is assessed at the end of the key stage as it considers a body of work rather than a mere snapshot. However, due to the prescriptive nature of the writing, particularly the SPaG elements, it is more often a case of ticking off a checklist to ensure students have met age-related expectations rather than considering the fluidity and creativity of the writing itself. The reason for the difference in assessment expectations for reading and SPaG, and writing are not clear, however there is an argument that cost is the motivating factor in allowing teacher assessment for writing (CLPE, 2016). This is somewhat contradictory as 'standardised tests are prioritised as 'hard data', and other evidence, often characterised as teacher judgement, becomes marginalised, nebulous and ill-defined' (Ellis and Smith, 2017, 91). Teacher judgement is undermined by externally assessed tests such as the SATs as these results are what is used to judge schools, not the expertise of the professionals. It is difficult, therefore, not to be cynical about the value of the writing assessment, and therefore students' writing in general, at the end of KS2 when it is not assessed in the same way, with the only rational argument for teacher assessment being that of funds.

This curriculum marks the end of a child's time in key stage 2 (and in most cases, their time at primary school), as do the end of key stage SATs, therefore it is expected that there is a sense of finality to what children in this age group are learning. As considered above, the curriculum states that it is vital children can read before they finish their primary school

education; this is to ensure that they are able to access the secondary curriculum – KS3 and beyond – that they will face in the next level of their education. Therefore, it is expected that there will be differences between the KS2 and KS3 curricula as the latter is looking ahead to the remainder of the students’ education and, ultimately, their GCSEs. However, there should also be clear parity between the two curricula as the KS3 curriculum should build on those skills developed in KS2 as well as bridging the gap between the two key stages. It is a difficult path to cross as the KS3 curriculum does not want to simply recap that which has been taught at KS2, but equally it does not want to dismiss it entirely, and therefore not give students the opportunity to draw on their prior knowledge. As most teachers do not teach key stages 2 and 3 (middle schools being the obvious exception although they are few in number), it falls upon the curriculum to ensure that the move from KS2 to 3 is handled in a purposeful way, with ample opportunity for students to draw upon, as well as develop, their prior learning. The next section will examine the content of the KS3 English curriculum in much the same way as this section; however, it will also look at how – if at all – the transition between the key stages is catered for to ensure that students progressing on their educational journey are allowed to develop to the best of their ability.

The National Curriculum for English KS3

Similar to the KS2 curriculum, the KS3 document opens with the purpose of study stating that ‘all the skills of language are essential to participating fully as a member of society; pupils, therefore, who do not learn to speak, read and write fluently and confidently are effectively disenfranchised’ (2) (appendix 4). The underlying message here – much like in the KS2 curriculum – is that students will therefore be unable to make positive contributions to society when they leave school if their literacy levels are below the expected standard. Once again, the government agenda is clear in education with significance given to their priorities rather than what is best for the child. Whilst these skills are unarguably of considerable importance to all students, the motivation is questionable: ‘the diverse and multidimensional skill-set literacy represents is understood as the main commodity of exchange that schools create. From a political point of view, it has currency’ (Moss, 2017, 57). The aims of the curriculum echo those of the KS2 curriculum with, once again, the confusing aim to ‘appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage’ (2); there is still no clarification as to who the

possessive pronoun refers to suggesting that teacher autonomy can play a role in selection of texts (appendix 4). This would allow teachers to select texts appropriate for the needs and dynamic of their class which is positive because 'students should interrogate English literary culture, its provenance, maintenance, boundaries and variation in time, and articulate their own experience in relation to it' (Gordon, 2018, 33). Teacher autonomy in text selection is not only beneficial to students in seeing themselves represented in literature, but also helps with literary development. Students who have a choice over what they read 'tend to be more motivated, read more and show greater language and literary development' (Clark and Rumbold, 2006, 21). Therefore, teachers selecting material – influenced by their students – can help readers develop. NATE (2020) argue that 'It is clear that KS3 English could offer a valuable opportunity for humane renewal and inspiration after the stresses of the KS2 tests and prescriptiveness of the KS2 curriculum' (15). Therefore, allowing teacher autonomy over text selection would provide something of an antidote to the high-pressure, high-accountability culture so often created in UKS2.

The reading and writing aims section of the curriculum has two stand-out statements which need further examination. The first of which is 'it is important that pupils learn the correct grammatical terms in English' (3) (appendix 4). This implies that students have not previously learnt this; therefore, KS3 teachers who are unfamiliar with the KS2 curriculum will assume that their lower-KS3 students are starting from scratch. Primary teachers interviewed for a study on teaching grammar when it was first introduced into the curriculum stated that they had 'little preparation or guidance on what grammar to teach, or how it should be taught' (Safford, 2016, 5). Given that this is now compulsory as a result of the inclusion of the SATs SPaG paper since 2013, this is a concern. However, what it highlights is that if primary teachers did not know how to deliver the content, then secondary teachers (for whom it is not a requirement with the same assessment pressure) cannot be expected to deliver this very specific and specialised content. The second statement requiring further examination is that 'teachers should build on the knowledge and skills that pupils have been taught at key stage 2' (3) (appendix 4). In the whole document, this is the only mention of linking up with KS2 and makes the rather considerable assumption that KS3 teachers are familiar with the

content of the KS2 curriculum despite not having to teach it or having been trained on it.¹⁰ Additionally, there is no mention of what knowledge or skills these are, and this degree of ambiguity will not help KS3 teachers in planning their schemes of work to work on developing the KS2 skills. In their 2015 report entitled 'Key Stage 3: the wasted years?' the schools' inspectorate Ofsted found that 'the gains made by pupils at primary school were not embedded and developed at key stage 3' (4). The reason for this was given thusly:

'many secondary schools do not build sufficiently on pupils' prior learning. Many of the senior leaders interviewed said that they do not do this well enough and accepted that some pupils would repeat some of what they had done in KS2. Pupil responses indicate that repeating work is more of an issue in mathematics and English than in foundational subjects'

(Ofsted, 2015, 7).

Whilst it would be easy to point the finger of blame at the teachers and senior leaders in secondary schools, if it was made explicit in the KS3 curriculum what content had been covered in KS2, this would not be an issue. The further comment in the report that year 7 teachers have low expectations as to what their students can achieve and that this often negatively impacts on their progress (Ofsted, 2015) could be mitigated by a clear path leading from the KS2 curriculum to the KS3 curriculum.

This section of the national curriculum ends with 'attainment targets' for the end of KS3 which is outlined as 'pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study' (3) (appendix 4). There is further ambiguity in this statement as it gives no indication as to how this is expected to be shown. This could vary considerably between schools given how nebulous the requirement is and that there is no end of key stage standardised assessment. This contrasts alarmingly with the assessment expectations at the end of key stage 2 where students sit the SATs which, since Gove became Education Secretary, have been much more challenging than before as they were reformed with the goal of 'sharpen[ing] accountability and driv[ing] up standards'

¹⁰ In England, teachers generally train as either primary or secondary practitioners therefore it is unusual for English teachers to have a considerable understanding of the curriculum in the key stages above or below those in which they are trained.

(Gove, 2009, 16). The use of summative assessment is often considered of less value than formative assessment by those within education 'because good formative assessment' throughout the school year 'actually affects future progress, rather than merely offering a snapshot of that moment in progress' (Richmond, 2017, 276). Therefore, the KS3 model as presented in the curriculum could be a more beneficial approach to assessing students rather than a high-accountability assessment at the end of a key stage. The lack of formalised summative assessment at the end of KS3 could account for the dip in progress, particularly in the early stages of KS3 as students are so used to being prepared for high-stakes assessments that they need the driver of external pressure to motivate them.

In the subject content for reading section, it outlines the genres students should study in their three years of KS3 with 'seminal world literature' being an identified genre (4). This is the only time that any reference to world literature appears across all the English national curricula thereby implying that it is not significant enough for students to study throughout their education. Another significant point stated in this section is the expectation that students are 're-reading books encountered earlier' (4) (appendix 4). There is no clarification as to when the 'earlier' is referring to and also confusion as to why re-reading what students have already read is a valuable part of the curriculum. If students – as the same document outlines – are being expected to read widely then expecting them to re-read texts is a contradiction because it keeps their reading narrow by revisiting the same texts. This could link to the KS2 curriculum where it expects students to be able to recite poetry or extracts of texts verbatim although why this is a necessary part of English education remains unclear.

Interestingly, there is only one mention of a key reading skill which is so heavily prioritised in KS2 and it is that of inference. Only one bullet point makes mention of the need for students to 'make inferences' (4) which contrasts significantly with the KS2 expectations (appendix 4). Inferring is a key reading skill, and 'children who have difficulty making inferences are likely to have difficulties in comprehending texts when reading' (Tennent et al, 2008, 432). Therefore, if this key skill – a huge focus in KS2 given how heavily weighted the SATs are towards inference – is not studied to the same extent at KS3, students' comprehension skills will invariably weaken. Citing the National Curriculum from the late 20th Century, Tennent et al (2008) note that with regards to development of inference and deduction skills, 'the National Curriculum appears to assume that children begin to make inferences in reading

when they are about 10 years old and should have inferential skills largely in place by the time they are 13 years old' (434). This is problematic with regards to the current KS2 SATs as they are so heavily assessed on inference. This skill must, therefore, continue to be explicitly taught in KS3 and it must also feature prominently in the KS3 curriculum rather than in a single bullet point sandwiched between other reading skills. If English transition is to be successful and fluid, it 'needs to build on the work completed at primary level and ensure that students go on making progress. This has to start with secondary teachers knowing what is going on in primary in practical terms' (Parker and Robertson, 2020, 46). With a key skill at KS2 featuring so little on the KS3 curriculum, it is natural that teachers of KS3 will not recognise what an important facet of their students' primary education it was, and will therefore not prioritise it as heavily in schemes of work as their students move into KS3.

The subject content for writing then follows which outlines the breadth of writing styles and types which students should be able to produce by the end of the key stage. The only significant point that needs to be explored in this section is the final bullet point which states that students need to be 'applying the spelling patterns and rules set out in English Appendix 1 to the key stage 1 and 2 programmes of study for English' (5) (appendix 4). This is the first of few explicit links to the KS2 curriculum, effectively signposting KS3 teachers as to the expectations for spelling coming up from KS2.

In the grammar and vocabulary section – which is separate from the writing subject content – it opens with the statement that 'pupils should be taught to' (5) (appendix 4). The modal verb, which is also used throughout the subject content section, implies that what is outlined is just a suggestion rather than a prerequisite thereby implying that teachers have a choice whether or not to follow this. There is the second explicit link to KS2 in this grammar and vocabulary section when it states that students should be 'extending and applying the grammatical knowledge set out in English Appendix 2 to the key stage 1 and 2 programmes of study to analyse more challenging texts' (5) (appendix 4). There is no explicit mention of using this grammatical knowledge and skillset within their writing, or an expectation that these skills will be assessed in any way. This lack of emphasis on the application of SPaG skills somewhat undermines the extent to which students in KS2 are taught and rigorously assessed in this area. Safford (2016) argues that the inclusion of the SPaG test 'has contributed to the homogeneity of what and how teachers teach, and what and how pupils learn' (17); yet this

uniformity in teaching abruptly stops in KS3 because it is no longer a requirement and is not assessed externally. Hodgson (2019) argues that ‘the grammar in key stages 1, 2 and 3 is the wrong way round: competence in spoken and written language precedes the ability to perform grammatical analysis. The balance of detailed grammatical learning should shift from primary to secondary years’ (82). In order for students to build up their language skills, the curriculum approach needs to be altered so that students first speak and write using correct grammar, before analysing such technical elements of language.

The final section of the KS3 National Curriculum (it is significantly shorter than the KS2 curriculum) comprises a glossary for the programme of study with the caveat that it is non-statutory (appendix 4). Prior to outlining the key terms, the document clarifies that the glossary is ‘intended as an aid for teachers, not as the body of knowledge that should be learnt by pupils’ (7) (appendix 4). This statement is no doubt in response to potential criticism from those opposed to curriculum change as first proposed by Michael Gove when he cited E.D Hirsch’s ‘Cultural Literacy’ as an effective way to deliver a curriculum; in his book, Hirsch (1985) presents an extensive list of texts and concepts that he believes all American school students should learn about. (This text is explored in depth in the literature review of this thesis.) Referring back to the quotation above, there is the implication that what follows is not an integral part of the study programme for students therefore it is unclear as to why it is necessary to include it.

What then follows is an 18-page list of grammatical terms and definitions. Nick Gibb (2015), former Minister of State for School Reform, proudly boasted about this appendix when promoting the curriculum reform stating that ‘to aid [students’] learning of the English language, there is even an eighteen page appendix of grammatical terms, guidance and examples stretching from ‘active voice’ to ‘word family’ (16-17). This extensive list has significant crossover with the KS2 curriculum; however, this list suggests that students are discovering most of these terms for the first time and does not make mention of their having been tested extensively in KS2. KS3 teachers would assume from this list, therefore, that students are unfamiliar with many of these terms and may teach them as new content rather than building on their prior knowledge. In their study on KS3, Ofsted (2015) measured that 29% of year 7 children surveyed said that in English they were doing ‘the same work as in primary school most or all of the time’ (20). In their study on the primary-secondary transition,

Galton and McLellan (2018) discovered that secondary teachers were unaware of what their students had been taught during their final year of KS2 with 'the result was that there was little by way of curriculum continuity and much of what had been taught during the first weeks in the transfer school merely repeated what had already been covered at primary level, and this gave rise to the dips in attitudes and motivation' (256). If secondary teachers were to use this list as a guide, their students would invariably end up repeating content rather than building on and consolidating prior learning. An additional problem with the list is that there is a danger with providing something so prescriptive (similar to E.D Hirsch in 'Cultural Literacy') as it becomes almost a script to adhere to; however, it also says in the curriculum that this list is an 'aid', so it is not clear how many of these terms need to be taught and to what level of detail.

Comparing the curricula

Having now explored the KS3 curriculum and made some comparisons to the KS2 curriculum, the two programmes of study need to be considered comparatively in more detail. The KS2 curriculum is a far lengthier document – 69 pages compared to the relatively short 25-page KS3 curriculum (including the 18-page glossary). It is combined initially with the KS1 curriculum; however, this aside it is still far more detailed than the KS3 document. In terms of how prescriptive the curricula are, they are similar in terms of content; neither document dictates what texts need to be studied, rather the genres within the literary canon. Additionally, the level of SPaG knowledge required in both key stages is extensive with the most notable exception being that it is a non-statutory list in KS3 whereas in KS2 it is statutory, and students are rigorously tested on it in their end of key stage 2 SATs. There is a natural progression in both reading and writing with students in KS2 expected to focus on comprehension skills in the former, and word and sentence level in the latter; at KS3 reading is focused on criticality and writing is more about length in formal and creative pieces. One final point for consideration is that unlike the KS2 curriculum, the KS3 curriculum makes no mention of students who may be struggling to access the demands of the curriculum. Whilst the KS2 curriculum states that students who cannot read fluently in year 5 need to be able to do so by the end of KS2, there is no reference in the KS3 curriculum to students who may face difficulties. The lack of consideration or provision for students who are not working at age-related expectations – for many reasons, for example, SEND, EAL, learning difficulties,

interrupted education – in either KS2 or 3 is alarming and shows that this truly is a one-size-fits-all curriculum with no consideration to students who struggle to meet these academic demands. Young (2014b) suggests that schools provide additional provision for ‘slow learners’ so they have the same curriculum opportunities as their more academic peers (86). In an ideal world this would be the perfect solution, but continuing budget cuts do not allow schools to cater for this provision. Therefore, the curriculum needs to be accessible – and relevant – to all, yet there is no mention of this within the National Curriculum at either KS2 or 3.

The most significant difference, although this is barely referenced in either document is the assessment expectations. At the end of key stage 3, there is no formal assessment model and it is up to individual schools to decide how to assess their students to ensure that they have met the key stage expectations. In contrast, at the end of key stage 2, students are rigorously assessed with SATs in reading and SPaG, and with a body of work in writing. Whilst these standardised tests are not mentioned in the KS2 curriculum, they are what all students in this age category are working towards. Assessment is ultimately a ‘product control mechanism using the test of children to check on schools’ (Waters, 2015, 71); it could be argued then that the reason behind a KS2 formalised assessment and a lack of one at KS3 is because in a traditional two-tier system, secondary schools can be measured on performance at KS4 (GCSEs) thus rendering KS3 formalised assessments redundant for measurement purposes. Following this line of argument, it explains why the KS3 curriculum is so lacking as the key stages where external – and measurable – assessment is used, are prioritised in terms of a prescriptive and detailed curriculum.

Whilst both documents allow for teacher autonomy, and equally ambiguity, the most alarming finding from this close examination of both curricula is the lack of parity between the two programmes of study. When the National Curriculum was introduced in England in 1989, it was ‘on the understanding that learning would be continuous and the National Curriculum would ensure continuity of curriculum between the two phases, but this did not happen in practice’ (Huat See and Gorard, 2014, 740). A vast majority of students end their KS2 education in primary school and begin their KS3 education in secondary school; therefore, a considerable number of teachers in KS3 will be unfamiliar to any great degree with what their students have learnt in their KS2 journey. The KS3 curriculum has a duty to build on that which has been learnt in KS2 and ensure that students are appropriately able to develop their

knowledge and skills alongside developing new knowledge and skills. Oates (2011) argues that 'deep learning must be a principal goal of the National Curriculum, with learners able to retain and transfer learning' (130), yet this is not the case. The KS3 curriculum does not bridge the gap effectively, particularly with regards to reading and SPaG. Because of this, it is unsurprising that many students struggle to maintain the level they were working at in KS2 at the beginning of their KS3 journey as the lack of parity means that they have little opportunity to draw on what they have previously learnt.

In his 2014 speech, Michael Gove stated that 'More than a fifth of children left primary school without reaching a basic level of literacy and numeracy' (1). Evans et al (2018) also discovered in their study that 'around two in five students fail to reach their expected progress following the transition to secondary education, with around 40% of students making no progress in English and reading ... from Year 6 to Year 7' (1-2). This level of underperformance is unacceptable and needs to be remedied on a national level through the National Curriculum. The rigour of the KS2 SATs means that students are working to a high level by the end of KS2 which is not echoed in the KS3 curriculum, particularly at the start. Ensuring that students are able to continue developing academically as they embark upon KS3 depends upon their teachers being familiar with the demands of the KS2 curriculum and building upon that in KS3; however, the KS3 curriculum itself does not allow for this to happen as effectively or comprehensively as it could. Comparing their findings to a study on transition conducted at the turn of the century, Galton and McLellan (2018) reflect that 'whereas before transfer pupils worried that they wouldn't cope with more difficult work they now objected because it was not sufficiently challenging and was often a repeat of what they had already done in year 6' (258). The National Curriculum is failing students because it does not allow them to develop to their potential as they move from KS2 to KS3.

What is evident within both curricula is how the government are using the curriculum as a tool for addressing social, and ultimately economic problems. However, the reduction in spending in education will not result in the desired enhancement to social mobility (Spohrer, 2015). Gove's aim with reforming the curriculum was to introduce more rigour and hark back to an archaic form of education which paralleled his own private school, then university, experience; his aim was to close the gap between private and state education. However, 'the more we focus on how a reformed curriculum might solve social and economic problems, the

less likely those social and economic problems will be addressed where they originate, which is not in the school' (Young, 2014c, 93). The role of the curriculum should be to guide teachers and ensure parity across schools in England, yet it is 'increasingly becoming a form of accountability' (Young, 2014c, 96). This exploration of both curricula has highlighted the many issues within these key policy documents, and within school education itself as dictated by the current Conservative government. The curriculum should allow for schools to deliver a clear and consistent path of progress for its students which builds on that which they have previously learnt. The KS3 curriculum does not do this effectively which must account for the issues surrounding underperformance in KS3, particularly in year 7. Politics must therefore stop using education as a tool for its own gain and allow the curriculum to do its job which is to aid students in making progress throughout their school journey, and adequately supporting those students who have challenges in accessing the curriculum.

Conclusion

Returning to my second research question – What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3? – it is evident from this analysis that a significant factor is the lack of parity between the two curricula. A clear and consistent path is not laid out in the KS3 curriculum to give students the opportunity to build on the skills honed and developed in KS2. Having first explored the two speeches which set out the curriculum reform and its philosophical underpinnings, then examining the national curricula produced as a result of the proposed reform, it is evident that supporting students to be the best they can be, regardless of their ability, is not the primary goal of the curriculum and those driving it. In order for the issue of academic stagnation or regression from KS2 to KS3 to be addressed, the curriculum needs to be revisited to allow this to happen.

The following chapter will examine the data collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with a number of practitioners with experience of the KS2 and KS3 English curriculum. This data will help with answering all four research questions, but unlike the previous discussion and analysis chapters, will offer school staffs' perception on transition as the policy enactors.

Chapter 6 – Analysis of interview data

The previous chapter looked in-depth at the KS2 and KS3 National Curriculum for English and concluded that the lack of parity between the two curricula was responsible for the academic dip between these two key stages. This chapter will explore staff perception on transition as policy enactors, analysing the interview data collected during this research project. The interview data is analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model. When analysing the interview data, four key themes became apparent: external accountability, curriculum disconnect, existing approaches to transition, and performativity. Each section below will explore the interview data and consider relevant existing literature alongside it. Links will also be made to the national curriculum, and Gove's influences on curriculum reform and the impact this has on everyday practice within the English classroom. Appendix 6 shows the process used in the analysis of the interview data and how the coding took place, which then lead to considering themes present in the data.

External Accountability

The first theme identified within the interview data was that of external accountability. Unsurprisingly, all interviewees referred to the external assessment in year 6 – namely the SATs. A typical response acknowledged that the very fixed end point of an externally marked assessment was what the staff and students were working towards throughout upper KS2, particularly year 6:

"We are very focused on the end goal which comes at the end of year 6. We have a very clear purpose and the children know that specific purpose, and we are continually revising and going over the same skills... and they are constantly updated on this is where you are with inference and this is where you are with vocabulary and they're all very au fait with what the end goal is." (Participant C)

The SATs are a driver for performance; the constant revision of the same skills is indicative of the pressure students and staff are under to attain a clear, set goal. This aligns with the idea that primary schools, year 6 in particular, have become similar to secondary schools in terms of approach to teaching because of the pressure on schools to achieve good SATs results (Galton and McLellan, 2018). Additionally, the curriculum is designed in such a way where the content is so challenging that it needs to be revisited time and again for students to grasp

these difficult concepts and skills. This contrasts with year 7 where the lack of formalised assessment, and therefore external accountability, means the curriculum is approached in a different way: "In year 6 they have to get to a certain point and we are teaching to the test a lot of the time whereas year 7 there isn't that test so there is an ability to maybe be more holistic in your teaching with year 7 and approach things slightly differently" (Participant I). Year 7 gives teachers and students the opportunity to explore the curriculum in a more rounded way rather than focusing solely on preparation for the SATs.

Year 7 lacks focus in a way that year 6 does not because it has no imminent external pressure:

"[Year 7] know that the end goal isn't coming for a very long time. Because their end goal isn't coming for another 5 years there is, naturally, from students, a dip and a sort of relaxation in the way they approach their learning – not for all students, but a good third to half of students take their foot off the pedal ... 5 years to a child is a lifetime."
(Participant C)

Because of the taxing, assessment-driven nature of upper key stage 2, students are almost conditioned to work towards a goal which carries limited significance and meaning outside of their immediate school environment. Moss (2017) argues that 'instead of building up the curriculum and then deciding how it can best be assessed, the assessment tools themselves simply become the curriculum ... In a high-stakes testing environment, schools must teach children whatever the assessment asks of them' (62). Therefore, it is understandable that in year 7, the approach to teaching and learning is different because high-stakes assessment is not driving the curriculum.

To argue that external accountability does not impact on students or staff would be a fallacy. Whilst students in year 7 do not have to sit externally assessed tests, they are still affected by the system; when there is no longer that external accountability, students struggle to motivate themselves as that need to prove their ability and work ethic is no longer there in the way they have been conditioned to strive towards. The GCSEs are not until the end of year 11 and this is not immediate enough for students to recognise the goal at this stage in their education:

"Their endpoint is nowhere near where they are so they're less focused because they've sort of been trained in year 5 and 6 to focus on an endpoint; when they then come to year 7 and don't have an endpoint anywhere near in sight, it's almost half of their life again away. They don't have that focus and we've trained them to work towards that focus." (Participant D)

The demands of the curriculum on schools are such that the SATs have to be a significant focus as the results of these externally assessed tests are used as performance measures for all state primary/middle schools. This shows the impact of Gove's high-accountability high-stakes testing culture which came with his curriculum reform.

The interview data showed that lack of motivation in year 7 was a significant factor in underperformance with many interviewees commenting that students took the opportunity in this first year of key stage 3 to "relax", "take their foot off the pedal", "switch off a bit" and be "more laid back" (Participants C, I, D, M). The primary reason identified for this was the lack of significant external end point to aim towards which carried weight and held meaning outside of school. Given that for Gove, a key component in curriculum reform was to make it more rigorous (although he never defined what he meant by the term) it is interesting that the dip in progress between year 6 and year 7 is still a significant issue identified by so many of the interviewees.

External accountability was a major component of the interview data with every single interviewee making reference to the SATs and how they acted as a driver for performance in year 6 then conversely having almost the opposite effect in year 7. One interviewee warned: "I think that year 7 and 8 becomes a strange, almost transient phase where, if you're not careful, not a lot happens and it almost stagnates after the intense pressure and challenge of year 6" (Participant E). The KS3 National Curriculum does not stipulate the form assessment should take at the end of the key stage, therefore students nationally will be having different assessment experiences yet the progress dip is a well-documented phenomenon. A contrasting argument, with regards to students working towards external goals, was raised by another interviewee:

"We need to not train them to that external level so that they work for the production of good quality work rather than to achieve a good grade so that when they go into

year 7 and 8 and they don't have that good grade to work towards, that external verification, they still know how to work for the sake of doing the work and improving themselves." (Participant D)

This argument states that the need for emphasis is on personal achievement rather than meeting a set of statutory criteria. However, despite schools having a degree of autonomy over what they teach to best suit their students, the high-stakes testing is still in place (Moss, 2017). There is also a danger of getting children to work towards achieving a grade – particularly where these are pass/fail (or ‘expected standard’ and ‘working towards the expected standard’) – not just because of the negative impact this can have on a child in the case of a ‘failure’, but also because it is made to seem as though schools, teachers and the system have failed that child (Hall, 2015). Additionally, the ‘fear of not making the grade’ can be the driver for students, ‘but reliance on such extrinsic motivation is likely to produce learning and behaviours that are short term’ (Hall, 2015, 67) thereby rendering the external assessment and accountability redundant and, arguably, detrimental to a child’s long-term academic progress. Removing the need to achieve a grade and instead focusing on personal achievement would have the effect of ensuring that students worked consistently hard for themselves and not because they were being driven by external accountability measures.

In an independent study conducted by the Education Commons Select Committee (2017), the conclusion was that ‘many teachers reported ‘teaching to the test’, narrowing of the curriculum and increased pressure and workload as a result of statutory assessment and accountability’ (38). Additionally, the study found that the KS2 SATs in themselves were a valid means of assessing students, and that schools still need to be held accountable for the progress their students are making. However, because the KS2 results are used ‘to hold schools to account at a system level, to parents, by Ofsted, and results are linked to teachers’ pay and performance,’ the high-stakes tests themselves do not ‘improve teaching and learning at primary schools’ (Education Committee, 2017, 38). Why these high-stakes tests still continue remains unclear when it is of no discernible benefit to the students and is merely a way of keeping pressure on schools in terms of competing against one another, but also as a way of holding them to account.

Arguably, using the results of the SATs to assess a school's performance undermines the professionalism of the teachers. In their 2017 study, Maksimovic and Vuletic interviewed teachers in twelve primary schools, all of whom insisted that teacher assessment was more important – and more valid – than the official SATs because 'testing children is not the best way of getting insight of pupils' results as well as teachers' work' (191). Teachers should be trusted enough as professionals to provide information about their students' abilities based on more than their performance in a single test. Such high-stakes testing leading to external accountability undermines teachers' professionalism and invariably leads to teaching to the test because there is too much to be lost by not doing so. However, this has no discernible impact on student performance and can, in cases, have a detrimental effect. Hall (2015) recognises the danger of high-stakes testing and argues that 'there is an easy slippage, linguistically and emotionally, between the child's failure to achieve the target set in the test and the perceived failure of the teacher/system/school to provide the child with the tools to be successful' (62). With external accountability driving the year 6 curriculum, it is no wonder that students in year 7 fail to make the expected level of progress given that they have almost been conditioned to work towards external verification.

Curriculum Disconnect

The second theme, and the most prevalent one within the interview data, was that of curriculum disconnect. The lack of parity between the key stage 2 and key stage 3 curricula was identified as being a significant factor in the underperformance of students in year 7 because it is almost as if students are starting again and not building on the skills honed in year 6. It is clear from the KS3 curriculum that little to no consideration has been given to bridging the gap: "[The curricula] don't flow. There's no flow between KS2 and 3. They're completely separate bodies of work and they've just put in a couple of things to try and get them to bridge the difference between the two" (Participant D). It is as though the two curricula have been written as stand-alone policies with little thought given as to how the KS3 curriculum can build on the skills and content from UKS2. However, this is not often recognised by researchers who consider issues in the traditional primary to secondary transition. Mumford and Birchwood (2021) argue that it is the pedagogical changes affecting the students, with students now being taught by a number of different teachers, with different teaching styles when compared to the primary classroom where just one teacher is,

generally, responsible for delivering the curriculum. They go on to say that it is further difference between teaching styles as it 'moves on from a more group centred approach in primary school, to a more individual expectation in secondary, with a linked increase in exams and testing situations' (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021, 378). However, what Mumford and Birchwood do not acknowledge is potential changes to the curriculum and curriculum expectations between primary and secondary. It is invariably true that secondary schools are exam-driven given the pressure of league tables and Ofsted judgements; however, there is still pressure on primary schools with the SATs as they are judged similarly on performance. Simply stating that change in environment and being taught by different teachers can impact on students' academic development (or lack of) is not considering bigger issues such as the curriculum. One interviewee pointed out that there are some points where the two curricula are in complete opposition to one another:

"What we're trying to get them to achieve in year 6 seems to bear very little relation to what we're trying to get them to do once we get them into year 7. The curriculum in year 7 talks about developing a love of reading for enjoyment whereas in year 6 we are very much looking at the grammar and picking the text apart to the point of destruction. It takes the enjoyment out of it when you read a text and you're pulling it apart to the extent when you're looking at all the vocabulary, what the meanings are, the intentions behind it, it takes that enjoyment away." (Participant D)

In UKS2, the focus is on exploration of a text in minute detail with a focus on retrieval of information, summarising, making inferences, explaining, and making comparisons (Rudman, 2021) with the detrimental effect of lessening the enjoyment of reading a text for pleasure. This contrasts with the KS3 curriculum where it now wants students to develop their love of reading: "year 6 is about teaching the children skills to do well in their SATs"; in year 7 it's about "enriching the children's understanding of books in a way that does not happen in year 6" (Participant E). In the KS3 curriculum, the skill of inference is only referenced once yet it is a key component of the UKS2 curriculum and one which is heavily assessed in the end of key stage SATs. This stark contrast in approaches makes it difficult for students to adjust as one year they have been taught to examine the minutiae of a text, how it is constructed, the impact of specific words, on so on, whereas in year 7, this is no longer the case with no mention in the curriculum as to how best to support and guide this significant transition.

Rudman (2021) suggests that students' enjoyment of reading in KS3 might be nurtured through the framing of 'what do you think?' questions. She acknowledges that this moves away from the KS2 SATs-style questions and asks for a more personal response. If this approach is taken in KS3, students must first be trained in how to answer such questions given how dramatic a shift it is from those questions asked in KS2.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG), which is a major component in year 6 and one which is assessed in the end of key stage SATs, is no longer a focus in year 7 which is yet more evidence of curriculum disconnect:

"In the [KS3] curriculum, it states that we need to draw on the new grammatical constructions from their reading and listening so it's very much about taking it from what they use in their reading, to use osmosis almost to absorb their use of grammar ... but in year 6 it's all about the grammar and the punctuation and the vocabulary. So rather than learning how to do those things in the way they're expected to do in year 7, we're teaching it directly and it's completely absent from the KS3 curriculum."

(Participant D)

This lack of focus on SPaG as a separate entity in the KS3 curriculum makes it questionable as to why students need to know this information in the first place. If students are not expected to explicitly build on this considerable body of knowledge in KS3, it undermines their learning it at UKS2. The Education Commons Select Committee (2017) argued that the SPaG assessment should be made non-statutory because there was not enough evidence to 'support the proposition that focusing on specific grammatical techniques improved the overall quality of the writing.' Why SPaG continues to be formally assessed at key stage 2 remains unclear.

In a traditional two-tier system, secondary teachers will likely be unaware of the content of the KS2 curriculum given that they begin teaching from KS3 and above, and SPaG is merely a non-statutory glossary in the KS3 curriculum; therefore, they will not necessarily know the extent to which their students have been taught SPaG. This could work in one of two ways. Firstly, students are at risk of going over the same information again, from a basic level, when they begin high school: "When I've seen it in high school, year 6 to year 7 tends to be oh let's

start again as if they don't know anything" (Participant F). Secondly, they do not get to apply this knowledge from KS2 because there is not an opportunity to use and share it within the KS3 curriculum: "In year 7 the shift changes, the curriculums don't match so the shift changes so there is no longer the expectation for those 50 things in SPaG, for example" (Participant C). Nick Gibb's (2015) proud assertion that the curriculum now contains a 18-page list of grammatical terms which supposedly benefit students' language development show how little those driving policy reform understood how policy in action works; students need to revisit and consolidate information in order for them to retain knowledge, yet the structure of both curricula mean that the SPaG knowledge will either be retaught, or, given that it is merely an appendix to the curriculum, overlooked completely.

Given that all interviewees have experience of working in a middle school, it is natural that many of them commented on how this allows for more flow between the two curricula which lessens the impact on underperformance in year 7 despite this not being the case in the curriculum. One interviewee stated that "KS2 is so fundamentally different to KS3 ... For students who go from year 6 to secondary school, they're starting with a new set of criteria and you're seeing a massive schism between the two" (Participant G) whereas in middle school this can be mitigated:

"Where [the students] had a connected year 6/7, where's there's been no break – like in a middle school here – their progress and achievement is far superior in year 7 to what it would be in an 11 to 16 school where there would be that natural break at the end of primary ... it's at that point of change, that break point where they go backwards a little bit." (Participant A)

Because middle school teachers have working knowledge of the two curricula, they are able to make up for the curriculum disconnect by bridging the gap more effectively; this is not a guarantee at secondary schools because those teachers do not necessarily have this understanding of what their students learnt and achieved in year 6.

One considerable point which was raised with regards to curriculum disconnect by many of the interviewees was that year 7 affords greater opportunity for creativity. The curriculum gives the ability for "broader scope", "more option for individual thought and depth", "more creative flair", and "a lot more fluidity" (Participants G, H, I) because teachers and students

are not hampered by the “more structured and limited year 6” curriculum (Participant G). Because teachers can teach more holistically in year 7, it means that naturally “things slow down a little” as you can spend longer exploring texts and ideas; “you've got much more in-depth opportunities to explore so creativity is good but obviously they've not come across that in prior learning” (Participant G). The other side of this is that students almost need to be trained in creative and individual thought after having followed a more “structured and prescriptive” curriculum in year 6 (Participant H). This idea is reflected in Hall’s (2015) argument that in order for students to become literate adults, they need to be given the opportunity to explore ‘interesting ideas, characters or themes’ and to make links between texts across different genres and of different forms from a variety of cultures (69). The KS3 curriculum allows this to happen because it is significantly less prescriptive, but students are almost deskilled in KS2 because the curriculum is so assessment-driven.

This issue of how to resolve such a curriculum disconnect was raised many times throughout the interviews. A significant point brought up by several interviewees was that secondary school teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of the KS2 curriculum or the rigorous assessment in year 6 to fully appreciate where their students are coming from at the start of year 7. One teacher interviewed stated: “I think year 7 teachers sometime underestimate what [year 6] have done because they haven't seen the level of detail that's gone into the SATs, because it is the SATs that's pushing it” (Participant I) explaining that secondary school teachers significantly underestimate the level reached in year 6:

“I see what peers are writing on social media outlets like Twitter when they suggest books that I know are taught in year 4 because they have a complete ignorance of what is expected of children at the end of year 6 and the kind of texts they are expected to engage with. And certainly, a lot of texts that are chosen in year 7 and 8 in a traditional two-tier model are seen as easy to access when really they are woefully inadequate to stretch children.” (Participant E)

The impact of curriculum disconnect is evident from these comments as students moving up to secondary school are not adequately challenged because their teachers are not informed as to the rigours of the KS2 curriculum due to this not being apparent in the KS3 curriculum. Subsequently, students will struggle to make adequate progress, often making no progress or

even regressing because the work they are doing is easier than what they have done in the preceding years. According to Evans et al (2018), 'around two in five students fail to reach their expected progress following the transition to secondary education, with around 40% of students making no progress in English and reading ... from year 6 to year 7' (2). Another reason as to why students may struggle with the transition from KS2 to 3 is, Withey and Turner (2015) argue, if 'short term "cramming" for examinations' has taken place which 'may have the desired impact on the examination grade but is more likely to be forgotten soon' therefore leading to a perceived underperformance in year 7 for a significant number of students (33). Many interviewees spoke about students in year 6 receiving intensive intervention, even missing non-core lessons in order to help prepare them for the SATs so this could be part of the problem. However, it is unlikely to account for the consistent underperformance of students in year 7 as few schools can offer *all* of their year 6 students intervention. Additionally, interventions tend to run throughout the year (some even starting in year 5), therefore this could not be considered 'cramming' when it is taking place over many months in the run-up to the SATs.

Many of those interviewed offered suggestions as to how the lack of parity between the two curricula could be addressed to ensure that moving between KS2 and 3 does not have such a detrimental impact on students' progress. One suggestion was having primary or middle school teachers develop a scheme of work for secondary teachers to deliver in the first term of year 7 and "having exemplar pieces of writing so that secondary teachers have a very clear starting point" (Participant E). Another suggestion was utilising the gained time many secondary teachers have after their year 11 and 13 classes have left in the summer term to spend some time in primary schools and deliver "some genuine, planned together units of work and some team teaching" (Participant F). Evans et al (2018) suggest that 'schools could teach topics that could be carried on from primary to secondary education to help with the interruption of achievement' (14). On paper, this seems like a good idea but it does not consider the practicalities of the matter: students from the same primary school could go to different secondary schools; no consideration is given to who would plan the unit and moderate the work coming out of it; it requires significant communication between the primary and secondary schools to ensure that this works smoothly and effectively.

From a curriculum level, it was suggested that the curriculum needs to be informed by the expertise and knowledge of those who are delivering it, “ask them where the problems lie and then craft something amended around it” (Participant A). The National Curriculum was introduced in England to ensure more continuous learning and consistency in the curriculum between primary and secondary school, but this is not what has happened (Huat See and Gorard, 2014). Because the curriculum is written by those who are not delivering it, the disconnect between the two curricular is not considered. A teacher-informed curriculum would ensure that the issues surrounding curriculum disconnect are mitigated. However, given that when Gove was reforming the curriculum, he ignored the suggestions put forward by experts in the field who he recruited, this is unlikely to happen. One argument raised in the data was to make the KS3 curriculum more challenging and “more prescriptive” so it is more in line with the KS2 curriculum, but also takes into account the level of challenge in the SATs where students are often given a text within the reading paper that “has got a reading age of 15 or 16” (Participant C). Therefore, in year 7, students need to be given a text in line with their chronological age, and that matches or increases the level of challenge from what they studied in year 6. Further guidance within the KS3 curriculum is necessary to ensure students are suitably challenged: “[The KS3 curriculum] needs to be more prescriptive, I'm not saying it needs to give you the texts but it does need to have like a caveat in there about reading age, or the level of vocabulary, or the level of challenge, or these are the recommended texts for year 7, 8, 9 so that you can at least see the level of book you should be starting with” (Participant C). As explored in previous sections of this chapter, Gove was driven by a desire to make the curriculum more rigorous (an ambiguous term which many critics, and myself, have come to believe means more challenging), yet many participants are arguing that the KS3 curriculum lacks challenge when compared to the KS2 curriculum; therefore, it would appear that, according to those delivering the curriculum, Gove failed in his aim.

Secondary teachers do not usually have a working knowledge of the KS2 SATs so the data that accompanies their year 7 students can be meaningless, “that's not their fault, it's not often something they have to teach. They get given a number that that student is working at but they don't know necessarily what has gone into that because they are teaching to a different format” (Participant F). Because the KS3 curriculum does not build on what the students have

achieved in their end of key stage 2 assessments, year 7 teachers do not always understand what level their students have got to, and what work needs to be done in order to challenge them. One argument about the reason for why students experience such difficulties in the transition between primary and secondary school is that lesson content may be more challenging, and the expectations with regards to 'study, note-taking and performance in tests and assignments' is something students may struggle to meet (Coffey, 2013, 263). The level of independence required at secondary school may cause difficulties for some students; however, expectations surrounding lesson content, study and test performance should be catered for within the curriculum itself.

Another idea suggested by an interviewee about how best to avoid this curriculum disconnect is to have "some form of assessment at the end of year 8 to show that children have consolidated and built upon those skills before moving into their final year of KS3" (Participant C). This brings in further external accountability, which has been cited as a significant motivating factor for students, and could also ensure that there is clear continuity between the curricula. Much of the literature on transition focuses on the social, emotional and environmental changes students experience, but there is little consideration given to the role the curriculum plays in academic underperformance. All those interviewed spoke about how the lack of parity in the curriculum from KS2 to KS3 leads to student underperformance which, in a traditional two-tier system, is difficult to address because the teachers lack understanding of what the KS2 curriculum entails.

Existing approaches to transition

Given that the focus of the interviews was on transition, it was unsurprising that mention was made of existing approaches to transition; however, this was less prevalent a theme than the two previously discussed. One factor that a number of the interviewees mentioned was that because year 7 are not an exam year, they are given less attention than when they are in year 6: "When they are in year 6, they are the sole focus of that school. When they're in year 7, they no longer have this because they are not an exam year group ... they're almost pushed to one side" (Participant M). Schools tend to give priority to year groups which have externally assessed exams as this is what a school's performance is measured and reported in. Therefore, those year groups where external exams are not sat are prioritised less than exam

year groups. Consequently, students go from being a key year group in year 6, to less so in year 7. Not only does this have an academic consequence but also a pastoral one: "I feel like [year 7] are almost the forgotten year because you put so much time and effort into year 5 and 6 to get them to where they need to be" (Participant J). Students in year 6 tend to get a lot of support to help them prepare for their SATs, "every single child, whether they're low ability or high ability, is not forgotten" (Participant L); however, this is not the case in year 7 as attention is often elsewhere.

Much of the focus on transition in a traditional two-tier system is on the pastoral side but this does not help with the academic elements of transition: "I think there needs to be a higher expectation on year 7 and more of a focus on pedagogy and the academic side rather than it all being about the social side of transition. It's always, always been about the social side" (Participant F). Hanewald (2013) argues that students' academic performance can, in part, be helped by extra-curricular activities. Once again, however, this considers how the pastoral and social side of transition can affect academic performance rather than considering the curriculum itself. The pastoral side of transition is prioritised as for most children the move from primary to secondary school is a considerable one; however, this lack of consideration for the academic side of transition can result in academic stagnation or regression. Some studies have explored the effectiveness of summer schools to help students with the transition from primary to secondary school; one such study concluded that summer schools and summer activities (along with other strategies) had little to no effectiveness (Huat See and Gorard, 2014). Many schools deal with the academic underperformance following transition by using intervention programmes; however, 'it appears that intervention programmes to address problems related to primary : secondary transition have hitherto been targeted at the symptoms rather than the source of the problems' (Huat See and Gorard, 2014, 750). Because of this, Huat See and Gorard (2014) suggest that literacy issues need to be addressed in primary school rather than waiting for intervention in secondary school. However, many literacy issues do not become apparent until secondary school because the curriculum itself is focusing on different skills. What is a literacy issue in secondary school may not have been an issue in primary school. As explored in the section above on the national curriculum, the lack of parity between the two curricula means that secondary school teachers have little understanding of the demands of the KS2 curriculum and assessment;

therefore, students may be deemed to have literacy issues whereas in actual fact, they are just learning a new skill which had not previously featured to any degree in their prior educational experience.

One interviewee with experience of teaching in secondary schools commented:

"If you were in a two-tier system, they do transition from a social point-of-view ... but in terms of curriculum, there isn't one. So I know of very few teachers of KS3 who pay attention to the KS2 curriculum. I used to work in the two-tier system and I used to be very blasé about the KS2 curriculum... Because the two don't marry up there is no real need to go and see your year 6s in practice because when they come to you you're starting on a new set of skills and a new curriculum that doesn't really bear much resemblance to what they've done before." (Participant C)

Academic transition is not prioritised because the curricula are so different; there is not much purpose in year 7 teachers observing what happens in a year 6 classroom because the lack of parity means that this would be of little benefit. However, prioritising the social side of transition does not help students navigate the very different curriculum expectations when they reach year 7.

The idea of topics being taught from the end of primary school through to secondary school is one that has been suggested to help with the transfer-related achievement issues (Evans et al, 2018). In an attempt to combat academic issues surrounding transition, bridging units were brought in in the late 1990s with the intention of students spending the six weeks before the summer holidays working on them then finishing them off in the transfer school. However, these were not generally welcomed by teachers because they were not effective in engaging the students and did not consistently prevent teachers in the transfer school from covering previously taught content or skills (Galton and McLellan, 2018). Having looked at a number of studies on transition, Bagnall (2020) argues that whilst many studies suggest that transition anxieties diminish after the first few weeks, other studies show that transfer concerns can persist for up to, and even beyond, the first year. Therefore, more needs to be done in terms of considering existing approaches to transition to combat the prolonged issues students face which have significant effects on their academic performance between KS2 and KS3.

Performativity

The regime of accountability in year 6 is a considerable driver for students, staff and schools. Performance in year 6 SATs is used to measure a school's success, 'driven by Government policy undertaken for the purposes of individual school accountability, and comparison between schools' leading to published league tables (Tennett, 2021b, 481); therefore, performativity plays a considerable role in how the curriculum is delivered. Assessment is more formulaic in year 6, which is in contrast to how students are assessed in year 7:

"[Assessment] is easier in year 7 ... you can look at that child, look at that book and you can see that this child has got flair, this child can write well, this child has an understanding of that text that we read ... I can be more holistic, I can talk about that child and I can use teacher judgement in a way that perhaps I can't in year 6 because it wouldn't be me assessing them essentially; it would be *a test on a day*." (Participant I)

Performativity drives the curriculum in year 6 because it is about preparing the students for one assessment at the end of that key stage. As a result, students feel a sense of pressure to perform particularly as there is a clear pass/fail in KS2 (students either achieve the expected standard or are deemed as working towards the expected standard), and those students who 'struggle or fail tests lose the sense of progress, success and enjoyment that motivates further engagement' (Hall, 2015, 67). However, it is not just students who fail to meet the expected standard who suffer, but 'even students who do well academically consistently report low self-concept and high anxiety when they face high-stakes testing' (Hall, 2015, 67). In 2014, levels were removed from the SATs and instead children were provided with a scaled score for how they had performed; this allows students to be 'judged' against one another and ultimately be placed in rank order (Tennett, 2021b, 482). This move away from levels to the ability to rank-order students is likely to be because of the politically motivated desire to make comparisons both nationally and globally (Tennett, 2021b).

In contrast, in year 7, a holistic view is more feasible due to the lack of pressure on the performance of the students. The "rigorous, summative assessment" at the end of KS2

“means that teachers are constantly challenging and pushing children to reach a high standard” which results in “both children and teachers draw[ing] back a little bit [in year 7] to try and focus more on maybe a broader and more balanced curriculum which doesn't really happen in year 6” (Participant E). The lack of emphasis on performativity in year 7 allows teachers to be more autonomous and deliver a curriculum that is not solely focused on academic attainment.

However, despite assessment in year 7 being less formulaic, it still brings its own challenges. Assessment in KS2 is a “done-to-model” whereas in year 7, and the whole of KS3, it’s “so open-ended that every school will have a different assessment model” (Participant B). Not only is there a lack of parity across KS2 and 3 assessment, but across KS3 nationally.

“There’s a massive difference [between year 6 and year 7] – the expectations in year 7 are far less obvious, I think they're sort of implicit and linked to GCSE outcomes which are quite far removed from year 7. Whereas in year 6 they're broken down into really small, measurable steps therefore it's much easier, in a way, to measure children's progress and what you need them to do.” (Participant I)

The emphasis on performativity in year 6 means that there is a clear assessment model with students knowing exactly what is expected of them. This is not the case in year 7 which can be the cause of some students struggling with the transition as they are unclear as to what they are working towards and how to achieve this having had it made so clear to them in the previous year of their education.

Performativity is a key driver in year 6 which is lacking in year 7; “There are huge demands on year 6 in order to get ready for the SATs and I think there are virtually little to no demands made in year 7. I think that's partly because the children have run out of steam and there's not the same incentive to work so hard in year 7 and partly because I think the teachers see it as a bit of a lull almost before they hit the ground running at KS4” (Participant D). The implication is that both staff and students see year 7 as less pressured so use this as an opportunity to take a more leisurely approach to the curriculum. This does not mean that progress is not a priority, but it takes a different form due to the lack of assessment direction within the curriculum: “It's more difficult to write valid assessment criteria for year 7 because there's no kind of national framework so it tends to be very watered down GCSE-based

requirements" but it is the school's choice as to how they assess so "the teachers have more freedom to teach what they'd like to teach and because it's not as prescriptive as KS2 there's more scope to teach and assess how you'd like to" (Participant H).

The SATs are used as a way to measure school performance therefore schools are driven to achieve a decent standing in league tables. However, this motivator of high-stakes testing needs to be stopped as it has a profound impact on how schools approach education. Rather than relying on league tables and quantitative data, 'other methods should be used to explain to parents how schools are extending pupils' capacities and capabilities through their teaching' (Moss, 2017, 63).

Performativity plays a significant role in the curriculum and its delivery in both year 6 and 7. The lack of assessment criteria and direction within the KS3 curriculum can have a detrimental impact on students' performance, but equally can allow the teacher to look at the students' ability and measure their progress in a more holistic way. However, ultimately, more studies need to be conducted to look at academic study and the continuity from primary school to secondary school (Evans et al, 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the data from the semi-structured interviews of those school practitioners who enact policy. What has become clear during the course of this analysis is that there is a significant issue in the transition between key stage 2 and 3 regardless of whether or not the students move between schools at this stage. In answer to my second research question – how do school staff perceive transition in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3? – it is evident that school staff believe that transition is not catered for within the National Curriculum which supports my conclusions from chapters 4 and 5. The interview participants offered several suggestions as to how transition can be more fluid and meaningful which has aided in my answering of the third research question – what can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful?

In the next chapter, I offer the conclusions on my research findings, suggest potential changes that could be made, and reflect on this study as a whole.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Introduction

This conclusion begins by revisiting the research questions which guided this study. Then, I explore the limitations of the study followed by recommendations for policy and practice. Following this, I explain how this research has made an original contribution to knowledge, and then set out recommendations for future research. Finally, I end the conclusion by reflecting on my research journey.

Addressing the research questions

Throughout this research, my research questions were central to my exploration of the data:

1. Where did the latest curriculum reform originate?
2. What are the causes of the academic dip in progress in English from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3?
3. How do school staff perceive transition in English between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?
4. What can be done to ensure that transition in English from year 6 to year 7 is more fluid and meaningful?

Following analysis of each data set, I now feel confident in answering each of these questions.

1. Having explored both national curricular documents, and the speeches of Michael Gove, the former education secretary's influence on curriculum reform is clear. Gove clearly stated in his speeches that his aims for curriculum reform were to make it more challenging, using that ubiquitous word 'rigorous', in order to drive up standards. Exploring the literature on Gove and his reign as education secretary, it is apparent that he was influenced by his own private school then Oxford University undergraduate education to shape curriculum reform. Therefore, the latest curriculum reform originated from Gove's vision to make education more challenging in order to close the gap between state and private schools. However, what he actually achieved was further widening of this gap by creating a curriculum that was tailored to white, middle-class students who are generally not those classed as 'disadvantaged' students. Gove's aim was admirable, but the execution was lacking in considerable

part due to his refusing to listen to the advice and recommendations suggested by education-based practitioners.

2. The curriculum appears to be at the heart of students struggling to make academic progress from year 6 to year 7. There is little parity between the two curricula which often results in students being unable to build on their skills from KS2, or revisiting learning from their earlier years of education as though they are encountering it for the first time. Because KS3 teachers are generally unfamiliar with the KS2 curriculum, it is to be expected that students are not adequately challenged on the skills and knowledge developed in KS2. Whilst in some contexts, the process of transition invariably plays a role for students' dip in progress, this is not explicable in the middle school context where students do not move to a new school. From close examination of the National Curriculum, and the interview data, it is apparent that the curriculum plays a considerable role in accounting for the dip in progress.

An additional explanation for the issue of progress between the two key stages is the lack of external accountability at the end of KS3. Many interviewees commented that students in year 6 were driven by a desire to perform well in the end of key stage SATs whereas this lack of formal, externally assessed test in year 7 or 8 could account for a lack in motivation for some students. Given the high-stakes high-accountability culture created by Gove, it is to be expected that students who are not working towards an immediate end goal, and their teachers are not being held to account for their performance, progress of students may not be as strong.

3. From the interview data, it is clear that those interviewed perceive transition to be ineffective. Given the middle school context, many of the interviewees considered the transition between year 6 and year 7 to be more fluid than in the traditional two-tier system; however, they still acknowledged that there was a curriculum issue between the two key stages. Interviewees commented on how students in year 6 were often prioritised because of the high-stakes end of key stage tests, whereas students in year 7 did not need as much intervention. The high-stakes high-accountability assessments also means that students in KS2 have a more prescriptive curriculum to follow in contrast to the KS3 curriculum which allows for greater teacher autonomy.

Many interviewees considered the KS2 curriculum to be too prescriptive and not allow students or teachers to explore the creativity that learning English should facilitate.

The KS3 curriculum, however, does allow for more creativity and exploration of texts. The assessment models mean that teacher judgement is not of use or value in KS2; whereas, in KS3 teachers can make a holistic judgement on their students which, many feel, is a better indication of student ability than their performance on one day in one test.

4. In the interviews, many suggestions were given as to how transition can be more fluid and meaningful; however, much of the literature on transition explored in this thesis concludes that approaches such as summer schools, bridging units, shared topics between primary and secondary schools, are not effective for a number of reasons. Having analysed the interview data, and explored the national curriculum in some depth, I feel that there are three options which could be implemented to ensure a more fluid and meaningful transition between year 6 and year 7.

Option 1: bring in an externally assessed test at the end of year 8, or KS3, which measures student progress and motivates students to perform. This external accountability could address the dip in academic progress as students would be more motivated to perform if driven by an external accountability measure. However, given that students already face a considerable pressure to perform throughout their school life, and testing does not always allow students to perform to their potential, this seems like a reductive approach to the issue.

Option 2: eliminate the end of key stage 2 SATs and instead replace them with a teacher-assessment which, like the writing assessment in year 6, is internally moderated annually and externally moderated every three to four years. The SPaG elements could be assessed within the writing (although, having examined the evidence, I feel any assessment of SPaG beyond that necessary for coherence in writing should be removed). This would allow for a more holistic assessment of each student, utilise teacher expertise, and show that teacher judgement is of value.

Option 3: overhaul the KS3 curriculum so that it builds on the KS2 curriculum with KS3 teachers clearly guided as to how they can achieve this. The KS3 curriculum should initially guide teachers to work on developing the KS2 skills but with a greater level of challenge, e.g. through texts with higher reading ages, and producing writing on more challenging topics, then incorporate skills which will benefit students as they move into KS4, e.g. language analysis, evaluation, exploration of whole texts. The KS3

curriculum should equip teachers to deliver content which does not reteach that which has already been learnt, but offer opportunities to extend prior learning.

Additionally, the aims of the KS3 curriculum should be changed so they are not the same as those set out in KS2. By keeping all the aims the same, it implies that students will not meet these aims by the end of KS2 and will therefore need to revisit them in KS3. Whilst this is true of some aims – repetition alongside development is key to progress – the aims are currently the same. I propose that the KS3 aims should include the following:

- read widely across a range of genres, text types and cultures
- continue developing vocabulary, both subject specific and more general, and apply this vocabulary to own writing where applicable
- write for a wider range of purposes and audiences, covering different fiction and non-fiction text types
- develop speaking and listening skills through discussion, debate, and presentation using each as an opportunity to respond to peers and develop questioning skills

Of the options presented above, I think options 3 and 4 would be the most efficacious in going some way to solve the issue of transition between KS2 and KS3. Michael Gove aimed to close the gap between private and state education by implementing a more rigorous curriculum. Whilst he achieved his goal of a curriculum with a greater level of challenge, he did not succeed in closing this gap. The issue of transition is a fairly small one when compared to the many other issues plaguing the education sector; however, by addressing the lack of parity between the two curricula, it could go some way in helping all students – particularly those deemed to be disadvantaged – to navigate the often-challenging transition between key stages 2 and 3.

Limitations of this study

There are three limitations to this study. Firstly, it was a small-scale study in which 13 participants were interviewed. While their contributions were valuable and offered a considerable degree of insight into the current model of transition, and views on the KS2 and 3 curricula, I realise that a wider number of participants would have garnered more data and

perhaps generated other points for consideration on the key foci for this research. My reason for not interviewing more education professionals, as discussed in the methodology, was simply one of access. I set about data collection during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown which meant that practitioners from other schools were less accessible given the demands of providing online schooling, home schooling for their own children, the emotional impact of dealing with a global pandemic, and so on. As a result of this consideration, the second limitation of my study is that all those interviewed were predominantly practitioners in one school – my own. Whilst most of the interviewees had experience of working in other schools, they were either employed by my school at the time of interview, or had very recently worked there. Were I to conduct this study again, I would attempt to interview practitioners from a wider range of schools, either by utilising contacts in my local area, or reaching out to colleagues on social media.

The third limitation of this study is that I only gained the staff perspective on transition and the curriculum, and not the student perspective. Whilst the practitioners I interviewed have experience of implementing the curriculum, or seeing it in action, they are arguably not the ones having policy *done* to them. The students are the ones directly impacted by the policy and it would have been interesting to gain student perspectives on the curriculum and their experiences of the transition between KS2 and 3. This would have been particularly insightful as, unlike previous studies on transition, students in a middle school do not transition between schools at the end of KS2 therefore do not struggle with the issues many students have when moving from primary to secondary school. As explained in my methodology, access to students at the time of data collection would have proven challenging hence my decision to focus on school staff.

One could argue that only exploring two of Michael Gove's speeches could be considered a further limitation of this study; however, each speech clearly shows his rationale and philosophical underpinnings for his subsequent education reform. Therefore, I feel that exploration of any further speeches would not have added much more to my analysis of how the curriculum came into being.

Recommendations for policy and practice

From this study, I have concluded that the National Curriculum for KS3 is unsuitable to effectively facilitate the transition from key stage 2. Students often end up repeating the work they have already done, or are given work which does not challenge them. This is a failing of the National Curriculum; therefore, the key stage 3 National Curriculum needs to be revisited by policy makers to ensure that more consideration is given to how this transition can best be bridged. Some suggestions raised during the participant interviews were including in the KS3 curriculum recommended reads, not as a prescriptive list but so KS3 teachers are aware of the level of challenge students should be facing, particularly as they start on the secondary phase of their education. Another suggestion was including within the KS3 curriculum, examples of student writing at KS2 so KS3 teachers have a better understanding of the expectations and requirements at the end of year 6. The SPaG curriculum is also something that needs revisiting as students in KS2 are expected to have considerable knowledge of SPaG which is not built on or even required at KS3 which makes the KS2 curriculum elements of SPaG seem redundant. The Education Commons Select Committee (2017) found that knowledge of the SPaG requirements as set out in the KS2 curriculum had no discernible impact on students' writing and therefore should be removed as a statutory requirement. Therefore, in order to improve the issue of transition between these two key stages, the curriculum at KS3 should build on that learnt at KS2 with some crossover as to the skills and knowledge gleaned in years 5 and 6, alongside opportunities to develop new skills and learn new knowledge throughout years 7 to 9.

One significant factor which was shown to cause issues in the transition between KS2 and 3 is the end of key stage 2 SATs. Creating a high-stakes, high-accountability testing environment coaches students to work towards an externally verified end goal. Many interviewees commented on students in year 7 lacking motivation because that end of key stage goal was missing. Whilst an obvious solution would be to bring back the year 9 SATs, this perpetuates the issue of a high-stakes, high-accountability culture, and does not teach students to work for their own gain, but rather for external verification. A better solution would be to eliminate the KS2 SATs altogether and instead use teacher judgement on a portfolio of student's work, with these judgements verified periodically by external moderators, much like the process for KS2 writing assessment. This would have numerous benefits: it would lessen the high-

accountability, high-stakes culture; reduce stressor for students and teachers; be a better reflection of student ability as it considers work over time and not just in one test; prevent students being taught to the test and having the curriculum narrowed as a result of these high-stakes assessments.

Ultimately, my recommendations for policy and practice are for policy makers to work *with* educators to ensure a high-quality curriculum is delivered nationally which caters to the needs of all students and does not discriminate against the most disadvantaged. Changing the assessment model would aid this and allow teachers to teach more freely without the constraints of the SATs hampering them. This would also help to ensure more parity between KS2 and 3 because teachers have more freedom in KS3, and students are encouraged to be more creative. This is often a struggle as students have been so conditioned to work towards an assessment that they can face difficulties with a less structured approach.

Original contribution to knowledge

Whilst there has been a considerable body of research conducted on the issue of transition and student underperformance at KS3 (much of which has been explored in the literature review), I have considered this issue from a middle school perspective. Middle schools in England are far fewer in number than primary and/or secondary schools, and most people are often surprised to hear I work in a middle school as they did not know they still existed. Therefore, it is unsurprising that middle schools in England are rarely featured in research. From approaching the study in this way, I have made three original contributions to research.

My first original contribution to research is considering the issue of transition from the perspective of policy enactors – teachers, TAs, and other school staff – who have experience of teaching both the KS2 and KS3 curriculum simultaneously. My study provides some insight into the problems surrounding the attainment dip between, particularly, year 6 and year 7; it explores how curriculum is at the heart of the issue as echoed by all of the research participants in my study. Much of the existing literature which gathered data from interviewing school staff tended to focus on the change in environment between primary and secondary school, and the impact this has on student progress. My study instead posits that whilst there are social, emotional and behavioural issues arising from transition, the

curriculum is a significant factor; exploring this from a middle school perspective has allowed me to present this argument convincingly.

My second original contribution to research is that whilst the National Curriculum has come under much scrutiny since its implementation over 30 years ago, the current KS2 and 3 national curricula have not been explored using critical discourse analysis. Applying this framework to both documents allowed me to examine government influence on the policy and consider the impact of this as a working document. It also allowed me to look for points of comparison, parity and coherence between the two curricula. What this research found out is that there is a significant lack of parity between the two curricula thereby, in some part, resulting in the well-documented academic dip in KS3.

My third original contribution to research is highlighting how the middle school structure can effectively support the KS2 to KS3 transition compared to a traditional two-tier model. With teachers concomitantly teaching both curricular, they have the ability to bridge the gap between the two key stages in a way which traditional primary/secondary teachers cannot. Middle school English teachers have working knowledge of both curricular, and understand the high expectations for the end of key stage 2 SATs. They can use this knowledge and expertise to ensure that students' learning in KS3 builds on that which they have learnt in KS2, whilst giving them the skills and knowledge to access the KS3 curriculum. This research has highlighted the need for teachers to have the knowledge of both curricular in order to effectively manage the transition between key stages. If this transition continues to be overlooked in the National Curriculum, teachers must be given the professional development to bridge this gap within their classroom, and the middle school system is ideally placed to allow this to happen. Given that middle schools have been phased out over the decades, it is unlikely there will be a return to a three-tier system. However, it could feasibly be orchestrated that all trainee English teachers and upper KS2 primary trainees spend part of their trainee year in the middle school to better understand the demands of the KS2 curriculum, and how this can be accommodated and enhanced in key stage 3.

Recommendations for future research

Transition is a key issue for students and teachers, and the underperformance of many students at the start of KS3 is a well-documented issue. It is clear that further research in this area needs to be conducted. A valuable approach to future research would be for it to be child-centred. Including students' perspectives on transition, specifically from year 6 to year 7, would provide a fascinating insight into how students perceive transition and what they would identify as the reason for any dip in academic performance. This would be particularly interesting if conducted with students from a middle school. A larger-scale study would be beneficial, particularly one which involved educators and students as this would build a bigger picture of the key issues as perceived by those most impacted by policy.

Future research on transition could also explore different settings rather than most English studies which focus on the primary-secondary transition. By gathering data from more middle schools, a clearer picture would be formed as to the impact of transition, and whether it is the curriculum, or the end of key stage SATs which have the biggest effect on students' progress dip.

However, no matter how many curriculum changes and education policy changes there are, without a strong infrastructure for our young people, without money being invested into social services, local resources such as libraries and youth centres, without mental health providers being adequately funded, the most disadvantaged will continue to be so.

My research journey

Prior to embarking on this research, I had very set ideas on what I felt the Coalition Government, specifically Michael Gove had done to education. I believed that Gove and his team had embarked on educational reform, and particularly curriculum reform, with less than admirable goals. As a new teacher when Gove was introducing and then implementing these reforms, I saw how they directly impacted on my students, often negatively. It seemed as though these reforms were designed to disadvantage those who were already deemed disadvantaged students (economically, socially, racially). Having now read Gove's speeches in depth and analysed them within CDA, thereby considering the context of these speeches, I have come to realise that his aims were, in fact, admirable. Gove wanted to close the gap

between private and state education so that all students, regardless of economic circumstances, would receive the highest quality of education. In the two speeches examined in this research, it is evident that Gove had a clear plan for reforming education in schools, with a philosophical underpinning driving his alterations. Unlike so many Secretary of States for Education before him (and since), Gove put in the groundwork and appeared to be invested in changing education for the better. However, as this thesis has expostulated, Gove's execution was poor. His arrogance coupled with his disdain for education professionals hampered his goal. Had he worked with those who had first-hand experience of working in education, and listened to their feedback, Gove could have implemented dynamic educational reforms which went some way to achieving his significant, admirable aim.

Throughout this journey, I have come to have a grudging respect for Gove's motivations. Having now worked through the terms of numerous education secretaries, and experienced first-hand how abysmally one in particular failed our young people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I realise that Gove had a genuine investment to improving education, rather than simply using his role as a way to secure his foundations whilst en route to Number 10.

This research journey has also given me a greater understanding as to how the current KS2 and KS3 curricula for English came into being. Exploring the documents validated my professional opinion that students are not being catered for between the two key stages, and whilst it is easy to lay the blame at the door of schools or their teachers, the issue lies within the policy documents. Ball (1997) discusses the issue of 'blame-based' tactics of policy makers where-in policies are always solutions and never part of the problem. 'The problem' is 'in' the school or 'in' the teacher but never 'in' policies' (265). In order for education to provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of the socio-economic status, race, and so on, policy makers must ensure that they work with policy enactors – teachers and other education professionals – for this to happen. Scrutinising the language within the National Curriculum, and exploring the context within which it came into being has made me realise that there is considerable value in having such a document, but that it must be written by (or at the very least, heavily influenced by) those with first-hand experience of enacting it.

As a teacher, and more recently KS3 lead for English, I have been motivated to share my findings with my Head of Department and have subsequently written new schemes of work and assessments for KS3 to ensure that our in-school curriculum more fluidly caters for the transition between key stage 2 and 3, and gives our students ample opportunity to develop those skills honed in years 5 and 6 whilst also adding a level of challenging by incorporating KS3 skills and knowledge.

From a personal perspective, I have learnt that I am so much more resilient than I believed possible. Having gone through several health crises, and a three-month leave of absence during my thesis-writing, I have learnt the power of perseverance. Most of all, however, I have come to realise how passionate I am about education and, particularly, ensuring that my students are given every opportunity to succeed. Whilst this is evident within my classroom, this is not the case nationally. I do not lay the blame at the door of teachers, who are so often easy targets for policy makers and the media, but at the door of those writing policy. My aim with this thesis is to disseminate my research to publications which teachers read and make them aware of the issue of transition between KS2 and 3. The more educators who are aware of how the issue could be solved, the more likely it is that a national solution will be implemented. This research journey has taught me that those in power, who make the big decisions, are often not the most well-informed, and that the voices of those working in education need to be heard more loudly. Most significantly, I now feel a sense of duty to get my voice out there as a teacher-researcher to show that policy could, and should be influenced by those enacting it.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Michael Gove 2009 speech ‘What is Education For?’ – Annotated for Critical Discourse Analysis

 Pronouns	 Adjs., advs., verbs, nouns	 Age, class, disability, gender, race/ethnicity, & sexuality issues
 Tenses	 Audience	
 Modifiers	 Refs. to other texts, individuals, etc.	

WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR?
Speech by Michael Gove MP to the RSA
30 June 2009

Establishing a link w/ a key member of the audience to ingratiate himself w/ the rest of the audience.

INTRODUCTION

Clear to whom this speech is aimed

It's a pleasure to be here at the Royal Society for the Arts – I am grateful to you Matthew for the kind invitation and appreciate the trouble you've taken to provide me with a platform today.

Personal pronoun suggests personal gratitude - connects w/ the audience

2nd person pronoun - giving credit / accountability to acknowledging their work (euphemistic)

I am also appreciative of the work you have done with the RSA since you took over – under your leadership the Society has flourished as never before, and leads debate in social policy, in science policy, and on educational reform.

And talking of leadership changes...

present tense to reinforce how this leadership is still problematic

It is just over two years to the day since Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister. Many of you I know will have chosen to mark the occasion quietly, in your own way with an appropriate private ceremony. And perhaps Matthew you, and your old boss Tony Blair, were among those of us reflecting on what might have been...

And as well as marking the second anniversary of the Prime Minister's accession, this month also marks the second anniversary of the demise of the old Department of Education and the birth of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Now names themselves, especially names of Whitehall departments, are far less important than what goes on in their name –

Separation from the current leadership - creates a barrier & clear distinction

Titles, as Lord Mandelson could tell us, are far less important than the substance of policy.

But the renaming of the old Department was no idle exercise in empty rebranding – it reflected a philosophical shift in how Government sees its role.

Under Gordon Brown and Ed Balls, schools have lost their **principal** purpose – and been saddled with a host of supplementary roles.

As the flagship document of Ed's first year in office – the Children's Plan – indicated, schools are **less** places of teaching and learning and **more** community hubs from which a host of children's services can be delivered.

In that sense education has indeed been **eclipsed** – and the renaming of the Department is genuinely significant – we no longer have a single department of state charged with encouraging learning, supporting teaching and valuing education.

Instead **we** have one department which manages schools – and sees them as **instruments** to advance central government's social agenda.

And we also now have another department – the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills – which manages universities – and sees them as instruments to advance central government's economic agenda.

What **we** do not have – and what **we** desperately need – is a Department at the heart of Government **championing** the cause of education, the value of liberal learning, the wider spread of knowledge as an uncontested good in its own right.

THE DEMOCRATIC INTELLECT – EVERY CITIZEN'S RIGHT TO DRAW ON OUR STOCK OF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

Today I want to argue for just such an approach from the next Government. But such an argument provokes a crucial question – why? What is education for?

I believe that education is **a good** in itself – one of the central hallmarks of a **civilized** society – indeed the means by which societies ensure that everything which is best in **our** society is passed on to succeeding generations.

But the case I want to make today goes beyond that.

pinning the blame on specific individuals
pres. perf. ? implies it wasn't an issue under the previous gov.
adj. - schools the have multiple purposes
1st name only - suggest familiarity (∴ speaking from a place of knowing) but also doesn't acknowledge his title / role
but this is the most imp.
more advs. to highlight
the introduction
as above
adj. emphasises that - like an eclipse - this can go back to normal & shift in focus
pros. tense - current issue
aligns us against the gov.
∴ aligns himself to the masses showing that all of us have been effected by this - he cares as much as we do
non - makes school seem less significant by reducing them ∴ showing the Labour gov's misuse/mis-governance of them
adv. emphasises how necessary this is - unquestionably so
repetition of the personal pronoun emphasises that it is a collective issue
the verb to show how the Cons. gov. will hold up & celebrate schools child supporting them
Prodem. pres. tense to show his current beliefs & issues w/ current system
back to his views & beliefs after establishing that his concerns echoes those of the group
makes UK sound imp. & forward-thinking
reminds voters that he is one of them
has aligned himself & now he is setting himself up as the saviour of education by proclaiming that he will do.

Education has an **emancipatory**, **liberating**, value. I regard education as the means by which individuals can gain access to all the other goods we value – cultural, social and economic – on their terms. I believe education allows individuals to become authors of their own life story.

pres. tense → reinforces power of edu.
 adjs. to show the power of ed. (ironically contrasts to how govs. actually use ed. as a means to make its citizens more valuable to society)

I know from my own experience that the opportunities I have enjoyed are entirely the consequence of the education I have been given. Perhaps I value education so much because it has given me so much – but what it has given me most is the chance to shape my own **destiny**. For generations of **my** family before me, life was a matter of dealing with the choices others made, living by a pattern others set. I, and those members of my generation who were given the gift of knowledge by **wonderful** teachers, have been given the **precious** freedom to follow their own path.

bringing in personal experience like that - normalises

romantic lang. makes ed. almost mythical + suggests that we can get this back

And that relates directly to education's *second* value – as a driver of real social justice. The very best means of helping all realise their potential – of making opportunity more equal – is guaranteeing the best possible education for as many as possible.

adjs. to emphasise the power + value of ed. + educators (to get them on side)

Education, properly understood, also has another value which I believe is much less appreciated, certainly by those guiding education policy today. As **Michael Oakeshott** once argued, every human being is born heir to an inheritance – “an inheritance of human achievements; an inheritance of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, canons, works of arts, books musical compositions and so on...”

English philosopher + political theorist - gives weight to Gov's argument + showcases his knowledge

Education should be a process of granting every individual their rights to that inheritance. Every child should have the chance to be introduced to the **best** that has been thought, and written. To deny children the opportunity to extend their knowledge so they can **appreciate**, **enjoy**, and become **familiar** with the best of our civilization is to perpetuate a very **specific**, and **tragic**, sort of deprivation.

adj. = ambiguous so who decides what is 'the best'?

these should be the cornerstone of curric. reform...

emotive lang. to make the listener understand the value of ed. + ∴ the detrimental effects lack of opportunity can bring

There is a **peculiar**, and to my mind, quite **indefensible** assumption among some that the only cultural experiences to which the young are entitled, or even open, are those which have a **direct**, and **contemporary**, **relevance** to their lives. So **Carol Ann Duffy** and **drum'n'bass** are ok, but **Austen** and **Eliot**, **Cicero** and **Wagner** are out.

equates contemp. + relevant to peculiar + indefensible assumption.

Contemp. vs. classical - undermines contemp. poet

Compares former poet laureate (classical) to a musical genre - not clear why he gives these 2 out

metaphor - presents schools as places of growth & exposure in a faintly romantic & nostalgic way, but only if students receive an education that love deems 'the best' & not buffy or drum & bass.

Schools should be a place where horizons are extended, and eyes opened.

The greatest artists and thinkers are great precisely because their insights and achievements have the capacity to move, and influence, us all. And so

Goes back to arguing himself w/ his audience to show that they all have the same news & want the same thing

we should not deny their influence to any child, on the basis of a lazy assumption about background, or potential.

powerful adj. lazy is one of the deadly sins & is seen as undesirable - shames listeners
without it is making these assumptions

Having grown up in Scotland I identify the principle that all should have access to the best with the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect. It is an ideal which underpins everything I am arguing for

And ensuring every child does have access to the body of knowledge that makes up our intellectual inheritance as a society serves two other, crucial, purposes.

nam - our birthright but also emphasises that education is a form of capital
only educational G. cites

Shared access to the intellectual capital we have built up over the years helps bind society together. The American thinker E.D. Hirsch has highlighted this crucial aspect of educational policy in his work on Cultural Literacy. A society in which there is a widespread understanding of the nation's past, a shared appreciation of cultural reference points, a common stock of knowledge on which all can draw, and trade, is a society in which we all understand each other better, one in which the ties that bind are stronger, and more resilient at times of strain.

adj. = necessary

Educ. can bring a society together & create cohesion - suggests lack of cohesion under current gov.

Will become a significant influence on subsequent policy reform - highly influenced G. & verbs to show how educ. is a commodity

Investment in education, in that sense, is an investment in democracy. Inclusive curriculum - benefits all, including those watching & ∴ no larger recipients of the curric.

As it is in another sense. The more knowledgeable, intellectually self-confident and adept at distinguishing good arguments from bad our children become, the more healthy all our democratic institutions. De Tocqueville pointed out that democracy is stronger when individual citizens have a stock of knowledge on which to draw which allows them to stand out against tides of opinion which are driven by passing fashions and populist rages.

adj. links to the health of the nation

no quick fixes - safeguarding against potential future criticism of educ. Don't fix it, right away

possessive pronoun taking ownership of the education of all chn.

Whether on GM, or MMR, fighting terrorism or fighting climate change, the better informed our citizens, the better the chance of having a public debate which is rooted in fact, testable propositions and good sense.

We all have a sense of duty & ownership

Back to 1st person pronouns to show how he can benefit all. save education & benefit all.

metaphor suggests strong foundations & elevated status of his argument

My case for education doesn't just rest on the pillars I've outlined. It springs, as I mentioned right at the beginning of my remarks, from a deep belief in the value of learning as a good in itself. But at a time when even the most obvious virtues have to defend themselves in an ever more competitive marketplace of ideas I feel it's worth asserting the crucial importance of education when it comes to giving individuals control over their lives, access to their proper inheritance, a more secure place in a more civilized society and the clearest, strongest, voice in the decisions of our time.

And one of the reasons why I feel the need to make that case is because I feel the crucial importance of education – as a good in itself – and as the parent of all these other virtues – is being overlooked and undermined.

THE DRIFT FROM 'EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION' TO 'EVERYTHING ELSE MATTERS'

responsibility of all rather than some (could also show that he's not fully prepared to accept sole responsibility for schools).

I worry that our schools are being asked to do more and more which, while it might appear desirable, dilutes the importance of teaching and learning.

Pres. here shows that these are not past or future concerns & need addressing now

I fear that duties on schools, and teachers, to fulfil a variety of noble purposes - everything from promoting community cohesion to developing relationships with other public bodies, trusts, committees and panels gets in the way of their core purpose – education, *adj. - the heart of schooling*

I am concerned that the focus we need to have, as a society, on spreading knowledge and driving up levels of educational attainment, has been lost recently. When Ofsted – the body which should be concerned with educational standards above all – is given 18 areas on which to judge a school and only a handful of them relate explicitly to educational attainment – then we are clearly not concentrating our energies and resources on education, education, education. *collective issue - concerning to us all*

I am also concerned that our curriculum and examination system is not oriented as it should be – towards asserting the importance of liberal learning and rigorous educational achievement.

not 'the' NC but 'our' - takes possession of it

The body responsible for our national curriculum – the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – the QCA – now rebadged as the QCDA – the Qualification and Curriculum Development Agency – does not make its principal aim a guarantee – entitlement if you prefer – that each pupil will have access to a body of knowledge.

Instead it outlines its hope that schools will produce “successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens” who “are physically competent and confident”, who “sustain and improve the environment locally and globally” and are “willing to try new things”

I am sure all these goals are admirable, in their own way, but they reflect my underlying concern – that in making schools institutions which seek to cure every social ill and inculcate every possible worthwhile virtue – we

presents schools as being the for social justice & emphasises how the language have changed them.

verbs show that this motion has been done to schools rather than by them.

More from 1st to 3rd makes his issues a collective concern - draws the listener in + makes them think along the same lines

are losing sight of the core purpose, and unique value, of education. And that drift away from passing on knowledge, that flight from educational excellence, is also driven by the way our examination system works, and the way our schools are held accountable.

THE TARGET CULTURE DISTORTS

At the moment the central educational accountability mechanism for secondary schools is their performance at GCSE. And the accountability is all one way – up towards the minister – not down towards the parents.

Schools have to clear a very specific hurdle – they have to make sure 30% of their pupils get 5 Cs or better at GCSE, including English and Maths. Those schools which do not clear that hurdle are branded “failing” by the Prime Minister and are faced with closure by the Secretary of State.

dramatic adj. to reinforce how reducing this approach is

This very narrow definition, and particular kind of accountability, has a tragic skewing effect on the education many children enjoy. Weaker schools, desperate to avoid being branded failing, concentrate their efforts on a narrow band of pupils – those on the borderline of a C grade – and they lead those pupils towards the sort of qualifications which may be easier to pass – but which do not serve those pupils interests best.

Placing the blame at the door of 'others' - it's no longer 'our' schools but a clear division as these schools don't operate in a desirable way

Recently a group of headteachers explained to me the popularity of one particular course – called Performing Engineering Operations. This course - which requires just one day's study on day release to college - is worth six good GCSE passes. Get your students to take it, and get them to pass the GCSE maths exam - with a pass mark of 20% - lets remember, and the GCSE English exam, and they become statistical success stories.

Gove shows that he has a clear picture of ed. as a whole.

Across the educational landscape, qualifications which promise easier routes to a pass mark are growing in popularity. Media Studies GCSE entries have increased by 43% in just two years - from 41,027 candidates in 2004/5 to 59,071 in 2006/7.

At A-level the rise over time has also been significant. In 1997 just 8,954 students took media studies A-level. By 2006 the number had risen by 157%.

Despite his contrary tone, Gove is attempting to show that he's reasonable + understanding whilst separating himself from those who do hold a prejudice towards newer subjects

Now I have no particular prejudice against media studies – or any other subject per se - as part of a truly rounded education. But my views aren't the one that matter. The views of admissions tutors at Cambridge University, however, do.

Cambridge has published a list of 20 subjects which don't count as hard A-levels for the purpose of entry - including art and design, dance, film studies and media studies. The Russell Group has also warned that "students must not disadvantage themselves by choosing a combination of subjects at A-level which will not equip them as well as other subjects."

Cites the entry requirements of the most prestigious HE providers to add weight to his argument.

THE WIDENING GAP

And it is striking that while there has been a precipitate increase in the number of students opting for media studies that increase has been almost entirely in state schools.

Last year, just 479 pupils took media studies GCSE in independent schools, compared to 55,060 in comprehensives. Overall, the number of media studies GCSEs taken in comprehensives and secondary moderns accounts for 98% of the total number of entries. While the numbers taking media studies overall have risen by 17,000 in the last three years the

additional number taking the exam in independent schools amounts to just 49 additional candidates.

And at the same time as independent schools are shunning subjects like media studies their students are pursuing the hard academic subjects universities and employers value. Whether it's the individual physics, chemistry and biology GCSEs or Modern Languages at A level, opportunity is certainly not equal.

Only one state school pupil in 20 is entered for GCSEs in physics, chemistry and biology. More than 2,000 comprehensives - 68 per cent of the total - can't offer their students the three science GCSEs

Further support for his point

reinforcing the divide

And, as the Russell Group has pointed out, pupils in independent schools are three times more likely to be doing further Maths A-levels and two and a half times more likely to be doing modern languages A levels than state school pupils who're also sitting A levels.

verb that suggests that the gov. is responsible for not allowing all access to the same standard of edu.

When access to academic excellence is **rationed** so tightly, it is a standing affront to any notion of social justice.

These chr. are given additional economic support ∴ the gov. expect a return on their investment

But wherever one looks at the education system today the denial of poor children's rights to their intellectual inheritance is everywhere apparent.

Of the 75,000 children on free school meals each year (about 1 in 8 of all pupils), four out of ten fail to get even a single 'C' grade GCSE.

that doesn't seem to be happening

Only 189 of these 75,000 go on to get three As at A Level – compared with the 175 three A's pupils produced by just one school, Eton.

Independent schools, which educate just 7% of pupils, produce more pupils who get three A's at A Level than every comprehensive school put together.

continued use of long. connected w/ economic status to reinforce the continued hardships the most disadvantaged chr. face

Moves from blaming 'Ed' to the whole gov. who they are not able to manage the job, as they have shown.

These statistics don't just show the **impoverishing** effect of the Government's target culture on state education, they also underline how restricted is the access our children currently enjoy to the inheritance which is theirs by right – access to the knowledge which previous

generations fought to acquire – the stock of intellectual capital which is their real entitlement.

A CULTURE OF RELATIVISM STARVES THE CURIOUS

And the impoverished nature of the education our children are granted is only underlined by a close attention to the syllabus in each of these areas.

In Science GCSEs students are asked if they sweat through the liver or the skin, if we look at the stars with a synthesiser or a telescope, if battered sausages are healthier than grilled fish and if generating waste or creating jobs is a better argument for nuclear energy.

The new 21st century science curriculum has replaced hard scientific reasoning with discussion of science's impact on society. So students debate the merits of stem cell therapies or climate change mitigation without the deep biological knowledge that allows a profound understanding of how cord blood cells work or the comprehensive knowledge of physics which enables different theses to be properly tested.

*lands weight
to G's
argument
but is it
a relevant
caption given
G's referring
to GCSES.*

The Royal Society of Chemistry has described the changes to the science curriculum as "a catastrophe" and Martin Stephen, the High Master of St Paul's, has argued that the new exams have a "terrifying" absence of real science.

∴ the gov's own are aware/culplicit

*Highly
academic
-
unfair to side him
(selective)
given that the
school is
selective?*

Even the Government's own appointees, such as Kathleen Tattersall, of the exams watchdog Ofqual, have said that revisions to the science criteria have led to a fall in the quality of science assessments.

brings it back to being a collective issue

*Known &
respected
body - lands
further
weight &
support to
his
argument*

In history we fail to give our children a connected sense of the narrative of our islands. Ofsted has reported that "pupils knowledge and understanding of key historical facts is not good enough; their knowledge is fragmented. Young people's knowledge is very often patchy and specific. they are unable to sufficiently link discrete historical events to answer big questions, form overviews and demonstrate strong conceptual understanding. Young people's sense of chronology is relatively weak and they are generally unable to relate a longer narrative of the story of Britain."

*[definition between
school-age chn.
& adults to
reinforce how
much
better - & more
beneficial - our
education was
in comparison]*

A recent survey of students entering a Russell Group university to read history asked them to name the British general at Waterloo, the monarch during the Armada, Brunel's profession, a single 19th century Prime Minister and the location of the Boer War.

The survey found that just over one question in five was answered correctly.

Almost twice as many students thought Nelson was in charge at the Battle of Waterloo as named the Iron Duke, while nine students thought it was Napoleon (or Napolian or Napoliu). Almost 90% of the students could not name a single British prime minister from the nineteenth century.

No name, but the job title alone is enough to lend weight to the argument.
The academic responsible for the survey reported that:

“The students (37% of whom came from fee-paying schools and a further 15% from selective schools) were studying at one of the Russell group of universities, on courses where the entry requirement is an A and two Bs at A level, which probably places them in the top 15% of their generation in terms of educational qualifications. This implies that, all things being equal, 85% of my undergraduates’ age group know even less than they do. In other words, we are looking at a whole generation that knows almost nothing about the history of their (or anyone else’s) country. And this collapse in historical knowledge is a relatively new phenomenon. A recent survey by the BBC found that while 71% of over 65 year olds knew the significance of the battle of the Boyne only 18% of 16-24 year olds did so.”

As that academic has pointed out “history as it is still taught at university today – relatively comprehensive coverage lasting several centuries taken in chronological order - has completely disappeared in our schools. It has been replaced by the study of topics, narrow in subject matter and/or limited in time period - the innovation of the advocates of the so called ‘New History’ which started to gain the upper hand in the 1970s.”

“History teaching by topic now starts in primary school where, typically, 5-11 year olds are taught for example the Romans, the Tudors and either the Victorians or the post-1930 period; but not necessarily in that order. So ‘Britain since 1930’ can be followed by ‘Ancient Egypt’. At 11-14, pupils

can be taught a bewildering array of topics. The National Curriculum website suggests an apparently random series of 22 topics, including titles such as: 'Images of an age what can we learn from portraits 1500-1750?'; or 'Snapshot 1900 what was British middle class life like?' And the topics continue through GCSE. Candidates taking the AQA History A (Schools History Project) option, for example, would study medicine and public health from 10,000BC to the present day, the American West 1840-1895 and do two assignments on multicultural Britain and on local history, and that would be the sum total of their coverage of history in two years' study."

Not clear here who G. is quoting - seems like it's the voice of an entire nation

It's not an approach other countries follow. In America they concluded that a great deal was sacrificed when the historical overview is abandoned.

['Students are left without the historical sense that comes only from a familiarity with the broad sweep of history. Large gaps exist in a student's knowledge of the cultural markers that glue society together and provide a common basis of experience, understanding and communication. Without an "historical frame of reference," we will have lost, in the words of David Lowenthal, the optimism that history is assimilable, "that the story of humanity had a length and a form within which one could find one's bearings. With no such prop, students today are wholly at sea. History has no shape, no pattern, no consensually fixed guideposts ... Pasts scrutinized mainly in terms of fragmentary set topics cannot be viewed in their historical fullness, as many-sided, multifarious, often self-contradictory realms."']

And at the same time as the discipline of chronology has been abandoned, so has the discipline of essay writing. The crucial historical skill of marshalling facts in a coherent argument has been supplanted by a range of other, less rigorous, activities.

As the academic I quoted earlier has pointed out:

["... it's worth noting what has replaced essay writing in history teaching. A typical activity in a GCSE textbook, for example, would be asking the pupils to draw a copy of a bonfire and label the sticks with factors that made the first world war possible. In A level textbooks ..., students are asked to draw up lists, fill in tables, or, as a group, 'brainstorm' ideas to

justify a proposition. In ... *Weimar & Nazi Germany*, students have variously to draw spider diagrams, or draw a 'left wing' caricature of an SA man; while group activities include one based on the radio programme, *Just a Minute*, where pupils are asked to talk for 30 seconds without deviation, hesitation or repetition on, for example, why the Nazis came to power; or they play a board game invented by the authors called 'Germanopoly'; or they have to stage a mock trial on - 'Who killed Weimar democracy?' - and play the roles of judge, defendants, prosecutors and jury."

I have spent some time on science and history because they are the twin neglected giants of subject-based teaching - but the concerns I have apply across the board.

In Modern Language A levels it is possible to secure a top pass without reading any literature in a foreign language. In French that means no Racine, No Zola, no Hugo, not even *Le Petit Nicolas* or *Tintin et Milou*.

Recognisable figures from French Lit. contacted in these do write for them

In English literature at GCSE contemporary authors predominate and even at A level it's possible to answer a majority of questions on authors from after 1900. The tyranny of relevance once again restricts access to the very best of what has been thought and written. *relevance is anathema to Gove. He shows here that if it is 'relevant' it cannot be 'the best' - undermining contemp. lit + that from dif. cultures.*

Faced with this deterioration in standards top private schools are abandoning normal GCSEs. The number of pupils in independent schools taking the, more rigorous, international GCSE more than doubled from 2007 to 2008, from just over 15,000 to over 40,000. 46% of independent schools entered at least one pupil for an iGCSE in 2008 (iGCSE Maths is particularly popular). However, the Government does not allow these exams to count in its league tables, hence about 250 independent schools, including Eton and St. Paul's, came bottom of the Government's official league tables for 5 A*-C grade GCSES (including English and Maths) in 2009.

Top public schools with DC's (his boss) alma mater

Singles him out to reinforce his apparent incompetence

Further, the Government does not let state schools do the iGCSE so there is a growing gap between opportunities for richer children and the rest. Ed Balls recently refused to give state schools funding for the iGCSE, continues to refuse to let the iGCSE count in the league tables, and recently attacked it, extraordinarily, as not being of a "sufficiently high

negative words to emphasise the current gov.'s failure to level the playing field between indep. + state edu.

standard" and claimed private schools are only offering them as a "marketing gimmick"

But, whatever one may say about the existing GCSE and A level syllabuses, at least the subject disciplines help direct the curious, and the fortunate, towards their real inheritance of learning – the knowledge accumulated over generations which makes sense of our world and lends it both beauty and meaning.

One of the other concerns I have about the drift of educational thinking at the moment is the movement away from subject disciplines and towards cross-cutting, thematic, multi-disciplinary learning.

Now I have no worries about using the insights of one subject to illuminate another – of allowing an understanding of Victorian history to help with a reading of Dickens or using an appreciation of the laws of physics to understand why geographical features take the shape they do.

Pres. these (as before)

And I know that many traditional academic subjects are changing. Many subjects are being invaded by evolutionary biology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. Economics is being changed not only by these but also by physics, computer science, and game theory. New subjects are being created and generating extraordinary new ideas, just as new subjects and ideas were born in Renaissance Italy.

(For example, from cell biology to computer science we are re-learning the old lesson that decentralised networks and local decision-making beat centralised hierarchies - a lesson we are incorporating in our school reform plans as I show below.)

Personal concern to convey personal concern... it's coming from a place of true concern

However, these new hybrids depend upon very able students mastering the fundamentals of maths and the natural sciences, of classical economics, of history. I worry when the AQA specification for 2010 says, extraordinarily, that 'the study of mathematics does not easily lend itself to developing the key skill of problem solving,' and this is used as an excuse to introduce things like a new Use of Maths A Level which supposedly teaches 'key skills' better than Maths itself. That is the wrong path. Children should be learning proper maths, not a Bluffer's Guide to Maths, if they are ever to be able to explore the new interdisciplinary fields.

brings it back to these his issues + worries having previously cited how others - academics - those better qualified to comment on these issues. Makes him sound knowledgeable + well-qualified to comment

What specifically concerns me is an approach that denies children access to knowledge because time, and effort, is spent on cultivating abstract thinking skills rather than deepening the knowledge base which is the best foundation for reasoning.

It is through deepening knowledge – through subject disciplines – that real understanding and thinking skills are embedded. Critical engagement with literary texts, for example, works by having as wide a range of reference points, as rich a stock of allusions, as deep a knowledge of other works which will have influenced the author, as possible.

In history, trends, causes and effects are best understood when one has the knowledge to provide context and depth. Knowing how the French revolution began, and ended, helps students understand the dynamics of other revolutions – from the Russian revolution of 1917 to the Velvet Revolution of 1990.

One of the reasons why **we** have such concerns about the Rose review of primary education is because it presages a further abandonment of subject disciplines and a retreat into the **fuzzy** and **abstract** learning we descended into in the past.

Ofsted itself has recently warned that efforts to promote so-called general learning skills in the curriculum, in place of traditional subject disciplines, was leading to, “less rigour and challenge”. In some schools which have adopted this approach standards have plummeted and Ofsted gave warning of the “uneven” teaching quality which marked this approach as well as the creation of “artificial” links between subjects.

In this respect I can do no better than quote from one of the very best teachers in state education today – Sir Michael Wilshaw – who has given Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney some of the very best value added results in the country.

“My concern” he argued recently, “is that the growing abandonment of subject discipline will lead to many of our most disadvantaged children losing out... The Times Educational Supplement... reported that those comprehensive schools which most enthusiastically abandoned specific

The worries do not belong to him alone

demeans the current curric. & makes it sound almost laughable - he's mocking it & its lack of focus

Giving a well-known figure in edu. to garner support from others w/in this sector

subject teaching for a more flexible, porous curriculum have seen their standards drop. My concern is that parents who can afford it can access specific subject teaching earlier rather than later, with the most successful prep schools introducing discrete subjects taught by subject specialists before pupils go on to secondary education.”]

“It is not unreasonable to use the argument that [with] a loosening of the curriculum, where breadth is more important than depth, where skills are seen as a substitute for knowledge, outcomes will deteriorate. As a nation we need to worry about the concern over grade inflation, we need to worry that in the latest PISA studies of advanced economies and their educational performance, we have dropped from fourth to fourteenth place in science, seventh to seventeenth place in literacy and eighth to twenty-fourth in mathematics. This drop is not just a consequence of other countries improving at a faster rate, the absolute performance of our students has also dropped.”]

And Sir Michael went on to warn that he feared an [“educational apartheid – where independent schools, grammar schools and perhaps the top comps treat the whole modular, thematic, non-subject based curriculum with disdain and opt for the IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate.”]

I entirely share Sir Michael's concerns – we cannot make opportunity more equal when access to the stocks of knowledge contained within traditional subject disciplines is blocked, or rendered practically impossible, to so many...

aligning himself to a well-known + well-respected figure in the ed. community to strengthen his own standing

So what is to be done?

INSTANT ACTION TO SECURE RAPID IMPROVEMENT AND A LONG TERM PLAN TO INSTAL COMMON SENSE IN THE CLASSROOM

Firstly we need to ensure that every tool at our disposal is oriented towards educational excellence and promoting rigour.

collective responsibility once again
non-practical solution - suggests this problem can be fixed

And secondly, we need to create a virtuous dynamic in education where parents in the state sector exercise the sort of power and control currently

pure + equal relationship

implicitly implying the audience to vote for his political party hence outlining the Gov. proposed ed. policy changes throughout the speech.

enjoyed by those in the private sector – so all children can have access to the excellence currently restricted to too few...

implies will bear the responsibility w/ humility

If we are fortunate enough to be **entrusted** with public office after the next election we will take a series of steps in our first few weeks to drive rapid improvement in educational standards.

We will give teachers the **powers** they need to keep order in classrooms so teaching and learning can be the centrepiece of every school's life.

rep. of noun - implies teachers are currently powerless so this isn't their fault - incorporating himself w/ them

We will, specifically, give teachers **powers** over exclusion, detention, searching, restraining and disciplining children that this Government has denied them.

regionalised - very impact for ad. for others. - very impact on involvement into schools. Just as they may need removing from mainstream edu. (they don't conform)

And we will ensure **troubled children** are placed in the sort of alternative environments - from boarding academies to reformed pupil referral units - which give them the chance to get back on to a track which will secure them qualifications.

adj. - tough + dependable

We will ensure that the independent exams regulator Ofqual guarantees that exams in Britain are as **rigorous** as the world's best and, unlike the Government, we will give all state schools the right to do the same high quality international exams, such as the iGCSE, that now only private schools have access to.

We will reform our SATs to sharpen accountability and drive up standards by ensuring the risks of teaching to the test and gaming the system are reduced to a minimum. We will replace the Key Stage 1 tests with a simple reading test at the end of the second year of primary so that parents know whether their child has been taught to read properly or not.

We will reform the exam system to reduce the number of modules and the reliance on coursework which has adversely affected standards.

corporate / sales speak - still suggests targets + accountability

We will reform league tables so that positions are fixed by points allocated for every exam pass - giving schools an **incentive** to stretch the brightest and support the weakest - because every pass will count and A stars will count most of all in determining a school's ranking.

Repetition of positive perfect (?) + use of 'will' - definitive - shows Gov's conviction that the issues outlined can & will be addressed by a change in gov.

implies current curric. is not salvageable

We will completely **overhaul** the curriculum - to ensure that the acquisition of knowledge within **rigorous** subject disciplines is properly valued and cherished.

And we will redirect the energies of non-departmental public bodies - from Ofsted to the National College of School Leadership - so they know their aim is the promotion of educational excellence and academic attainment for all.

Crucially these changes will depend on recruiting, and retaining, the very best and most talented professionals. That means raising the esteem of teaching - saying as a society that we value education more.

That's why we've argued that we must give heads much more power over budgets so they can reward great teachers better. Academies already have more freedom over pay and conditions - we should extend such freedoms to all schools. Schools should be able to pay bonuses and attract and keep specialists - especially in maths and science and especially in the poorest areas with the worst problems.

Teachers should be given the opportunity to deepen their subject knowledge and stay abreast of academic developments in their field with proper programmes of rigorous professional development. That's why organisations which celebrate not just the craft of teaching but the joy of deep engagement with subjects - like the Prince's Teaching Institute - are so vital.

And in our efforts to ensure that more talented people join the already hugely impressive cohort of those currently in teaching, we would expand Teach First and pioneer a new Teach Next programme to help those who have already succeeded in one profession transfer their talents to teaching. We have also announced plans to help the very best ex military personnel with a background in training come into education through a UK Troops to Teachers programme. And we would support the expansion of schemes like the Future Leaders programme which helps attract high performing professionals from other fields into teaching with a view to accelerating their progress into senior positions in our schools.

*Money of
promoteable
can make
this happen
outside of
gov. initiative
but it's still
piggish banking
and then*

And we know that many of those schools which have been most successful in attracting new talent and in helping raise the prestige of teaching have been those schools - whether old CTCs or new academies - that have flourished outside both local and central bureaucratic control.

Which is just one of the reasons why we favour a radical programme of long-term school reform to open up the state sector to **more talent, more investment and more innovation.** *corporate speaks again - driven/competent*

*Pres. have
confronted
that they
have
already
done/
achieved
following
on from
their proposals
to reform
the committee
that they
will get
done.*

We have already outlined plans to take the very weakest schools in the state system, where local authorities have failed to improve results, and transform them automatically into academies, handing them over to organisations with a proven track record of educational excellence to **drive** improvements as quickly as possible. *has use implies forward motion & a clear direction*

We have also outlined proposals to allow every secondary school which is good with outstanding features to acquire academy freedoms, provided they team up with another educational institution to ensure their additional freedoms help **drive** up standards more widely.

And we have outlined proposals to allow new organisations - charities, parents and voluntary groups, organisations such as the Steiner and Montessori movements, social entrepreneurs and others to open new schools - as in Sweden - by allowing parents to transfer the money the state currently spends on their children to these new state schools.

These schools would also enjoy full academy freedoms - and they would help drive up standards here - as they have in Sweden.

We have also announced proposals to extend academy freedoms to primary schools - plans which have been welcomed by thinkers across the board - from Tony Blair's former education adviser Conor Ryan to the Lib Dems most influential think tank - CentreForum. *A good idea + has support from other parties - shows this isn't a partisan issue*

*Marginalised
group targeted
to ensure they
have the same
opportunities
on the surface -
this doesn't get to the
root cause because this social
issue.*

And we have made it clear that we would reform school funding - through a pupil premium for poorer children - to ensure new schools and further innovation are most effectively concentrated in the areas of greatest disadvantage.

And shortly we will be going further in outlining how the next stage of our programme of reform will unfold...

Parental choice, pluralism of supply, a diversity of schools with different ways of harnessing talent and resources has helped secure improvements - from Sweden to America. And improvements have not been restricted just to those schools which exercise the new freedoms which have been granted - they have been seen in all schools as they all work to keep pace with the innovations being pioneered in the best.

Of course, with greater freedoms comes experimentation. But one thing stands out in all the most successful schools which are free from bureaucratic control - they opt for an approach towards education which rests on traditional subject disciplines, **rigour**, an expectation that every child, whatever their background can follow a basic academic curriculum and a belief that a college education is the **destiny** of the overwhelming majority.

return to romantic lang. to show that edu. has the power to change lives

Whether it's the schools of the **Harris Academy** chain in South London, **Mossbourne Community Academy**, the **International English Schools of Sweden** or the **Knowledge is Power Programme Schools** of America every group of schools which has made a triumphant success of freedom from bureaucratic control has done so by embracing an approach to education which has been - in the very best sense - traditional.

*proper nouns -
Gove gives
specific exp.
to show
his knowledge
& ∴ competence
to take on this
role.*

considerable use of 'we' in previous statements but now bringing it back to himself +

And it is **my** firm belief that is the education parents want. When they have the resources to, they buy it in the private sector. When they have access to it, they beat a path to its door in the state sector.

*not
he can
do*

One of the central goals of **David Cameron's** Conservative Party is the breaking up of bureaucratic control, and establishment power, when bureaucracies and establishments are thwarting the common sense of the people. And nowhere is common sense more flouted than among the education establishment and by education bureaucracies.

Ownership

And I use the term common sense in the way Tom Paine would have understood - the widely shared and democratically expressed feelings of free citizens. The British people's common sense inclines them towards schools in which the principal activity is teaching and learning, the

principal goal is academic attainment, the principle guiding every action is the wider spread of excellence, the initiation of new generations into the amazing achievements of humankind.


Because that is what education is for....

ENDS

Appendix 2 – Michael Gove 2014 Speech on education reform – Annotated for Critical Discourse Analysis

28/10/2020

Michael Gove speaks about the future of education reform - GOV.UK



1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
2. Education, training and skills (<https://www.gov.uk/education>)
3. School curriculum (<https://www.gov.uk/education/school-curriculum>)

Speech

Michael Gove speaks about the future of education reform

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, speaks to the first Education Reform Summit in London.

Published 10 July 2014

From:
Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>) and The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/michael-gove>)

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Delivered on:
10 July 2014 (Original script, may differ from delivered version)

Handwritten annotations:
- Green box: **Personas**
- Purple box: **Tenses**
- Yellow box: **Adjs., advs., verbs, nouns**
- Blue box: **Metaphor**
- Cyan box: **And/or**
- Red box: **Age, class, disability, gender, race/ethnicity + sexuality issues**
- Red box: **Refs. to other texts, individuals etc.**



It's an enormous pleasure to join the Education Foundation in welcoming everyone today to the first ever global Education Reform Summit held here in London.

Everyone here has a story to tell about the changes that idealistic teachers are making to improve the lives of the next generation.

Everyone here will also have experiences to share about the specific challenges they face in helping children to succeed.

And all of us will be able to learn from each other - about those successes and challenges - in order to ensure that we can all make a difference for good to the lives of young people.

A shared moral purpose

Because everyone here is united by more than just a professional commitment to improving education.

We all share a moral purpose - liberating individuals from ignorance, democratising access to knowledge, making opportunity more equal, giving every child an equal chance to succeed.

And nowhere has the case for reform to drive that moral mission been clearer than in England.

As part of our long-term economic plan to secure a better future for Britain, we want to deliver the best schools and skills for our young people. We want young people and their parents to have the peace of mind that they'll gain the skills they need to get a good job, no matter where they live or how well off they are.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/michael-gove-speaks-about-the-future-of-education-reform>

Handwritten notes:

- adj. - trying to ingratiate himself w/ his audience from the off.
- audience is a group of educational educators: This is their specialism
- adj. - makes those currently on the scene seem less special
- noun - avoids using the word 'failure'
- grouping himself in w/ the rest of the audience - comparing of educationists to show that he identifies as one of them
- future tense - optimistic looking for change but this hasn't yet happened (despite years of this gov. already)
- Collective responsibility + he is ingratiating himself to his group of educators, showing that he's just as invested in the future of education as they are
- adj. for emphasis
- uses opposing nouns to show why knowledge is so imp: it is preferable to an ignorant society
- adj. - hard to switch to a more personable to talk about himself w/ in the gov. rather than as part of the gov
- but it still creates a sense of collectiveness - all in this together
- link to 2009 speech
- Move away from knowledge

When this government was formed in 2010 we inherited one of the most **segregated** and **stratified** education systems in the developed world.

More than a fifth of children **left** primary school without reaching a basic level of literacy and numeracy, two-fifths **finished** full-time education without even the bare minimum qualifications that most employers and universities demand.

And what made this **scandal** more shameful was the inequality it **entrenched**. The poorest students overwhelmingly attended the weakest schools. And as children made their way through the education system in England, the gap between rich and poor widened.

Closing that gap is a **personal** crusade for me.

But it's also an economic imperative for every developed nation.

Because the twin forces of economic globalisation and technological advance are transforming the world we live in.

Our jobs, our lives, our economies and our societies are going through dramatic and irreversible change.

For the next generation to flourish, education systems must equip every child with the knowledge and skills, the qualifications and confidence they need to succeed.

Children who leave school with no skills or low skills will find their employment opportunities limited and their **horizons** narrowed.

If we are to defeat the evil of youth unemployment and give the next generation economic security then many more children need to be educated to a far higher level than we now accept.

We need not just to close the gap, but to raise the bar.

Based on rigorous evidence

And while globalisation and technology make reform imperative, they also allow it to be more collaborative.

We **have** to achieve both greater equity and much higher standards than our predecessors - but we also **have** access to **much richer** data and **much deeper** knowledge about what works.

We now have the networks and mechanisms to assess policies more rigorously than ever before, how to compare innovations and learn from each other.

In the past, great teachers - and indeed education ministers - have operated in isolation from any systematic and **rigorous** analysis of which of their interventions worked. Views on pedagogy or funding had to be taken on trust.

But in the last decade there has been a much more **rigorous** and scientific approach to learning. Instead of a **faddish** adherence to **quack** theories about multiple intelligences or kinaesthetic learners, we have had the solidly grounded research into how children actually learn of leading academics such as **E.D. Hirsch** or **Daniel T. Willingham**.

- by mentioning them, G. is assuring his audience that he is using the works of academics to support his reform

Like to 09

And when it comes to analysing which interventions, approaches and techniques help children to learn more quickly, more deeply and more sustainably we have also had access to a better bank of data than ever before,

by referencing worldwide systems of monitoring edu., G. is showing that his real drive behind edu. reform is to compete on the World's Stage.

The OECD's PISA study, alongside the data from PIRLS, TIMSS and other studies, have transformed our understanding of what works.

PISA

And that data and the data of what happens in individual classrooms with individual practitioners has been analysed by reformers from John Hattie to Sir Michael Barber, so the lessons of what works can be shared more effectively than ever before.

One of the most encouraging trends in English education - which helps the cause of reform worldwide - is the way in which those leading the debate and driving evidence-based change in our schools are teachers.

naming a best-selling author validates his proposals/changes to edu.

We commissioned Dr Ben Goldacre - the author of 'Bad Science', a brilliant debunking of pseudo-scientific myths and fallacies - to help improve the use of evidence in English education.

And the biggest enthusiasts for his work have been teachers.

by listing well-known teachers, G. is showing his connections w/in knowledge of the world of edu.

Teachers such as Andrew Old, Daisy Christodoulou, Robert Peal, Joe Kirby, Kris Boulton and Tom Bennett have used social media and professional networks to drive this move towards a more rigorous and evidence-based approach to helping children learn.

adj. - this can't pseudo-scientific so it hard to argue w/ because it is founded on research. future tense - and but doesn't acknowledge the last 4 yrs

We in the UK government want to do everything to support this move. We believe the evidence base we build here can help children worldwide. We set up a new charity, the Education Endowment Foundation, to trial and evaluate the most effective techniques to narrow the gap in attainment between children from rich and poor backgrounds.

past achievements

We have also set up a network of teaching schools to act as generators of evidence and excellent practice in education in the same way as teaching hospitals generate medical innovation.

new phrase to show just how innovative & effective an implementation they are

These are schools rated outstanding by independent inspectors - and they are pioneering breakthroughs in learning and building evidence from which all professionals can benefit.

As are similar organisations across the globe, from the What Works Clearinghouse, Uncommon Schools and the Knowledge is Power Programme.

verb (used throughout) shows how the Con. Gov. have worked to create a secure & robust system from nothing w/ 'knuth' implying from scratch

Improvements so far

We have built our reform programme in this country on the evidence we have gathered so far of what works in those countries where the gap has been narrowed and the bar has been raised.

We have studied what works in the highest performing and most improved education systems - from Poland and the Netherlands to Singapore and Shanghai - and we have sought to implement the essence of those policies here.

→ citing countries w/ record of high performance in edu. reinforces these changes: in tried & tested models

That has meant: *now - suggests similarities but not carbon copies - acknowledgement that these places operate differently & ∴ we can't produce facsimiles in UK*

Pres. tense both that this successful practice is continuing

- setting the highest standards nationally
- ensuring every child can follow a stretching academic curriculum to the age of 16
- giving principals more autonomy to hire and fire, set curricular policy and shape the school day

but w/ this high accountability through high-achievers

- sharpening accountability through more rigorous, externally set tests and more intelligent inspection
- devoting extra money to helping the poorest students
- celebrating success wherever it's found

We've done all we can to ensure the authority, respect and prestige of teachers is enhanced in and beyond the classroom. We've scrapped **absurd** 'no touch' policies which prevented teachers from keeping control in the classroom as well as keeping children safe; and given teachers back powers to manage pupil behaviour.

adj. belittling previous gov. for their nonsensical policy making it seem as though they didn't have back interests at heart.

By following the evidence - by adhering to the principle that what's right is what works - there has been a **renaissance** in English state education.

Noun - revival - this gov. have dramatically changed ad. for the better - almost unrecognisable from its previous state

- more great schools
- more great teachers
- more pupils studying the subjects they need to get a good job
- record numbers of apprenticeships

[scribble]

Res. perf.? Continuing practical success

Since 2010, the number of children in failing secondary schools has fallen by almost a quarter of a million.

Eight hundred thousand more pupils are now being taught in schools ranked good or outstanding by independent inspectors compared to 2010 - and around 50 of those schools didn't even exist 4 years ago.

In the same period, around 600 of the worst-performing primary schools have been taken over by expert sponsors or headteachers - the majority of which are already leading other schools with a proven track record of success.

This has been an explicit continuation of a policy set in train by 2 of my predecessors, Andrew Adonis and Tony Blair: the academies programme.

Progress on this policy stalled under Gordon Brown but has been massively accelerated under this government.

laying the blame of the former PM's door - personally blaming him

It is giving the very best heads control over many more schools, and thousands of children a better start in life.

Underperforming schools taken into the academies programme and placed under the leadership of great heads are improving more rapidly than those schools which remain in the hands of local politicians.

A stunning example of what's happened under this programme is the progress made by a school in London which used to be called Downhills Primary and which has been reborn as Harris Primary Academy Philip Lane.

Gives specific examples to show how successful the model has been.

When Downhills was under the control of local politicians, it failed its pupils year after year. For almost a decade it drifted in and out of the very lowest category of performance: 'special measures'.

Pupils failed to meet minimum standards in maths and English for 5 years in succession - provoking repeated demands for significant improvement.

When it was proposed that Downhills should become an academy and benefit from the leadership of great headteachers who had brought success elsewhere, local politicians and trade unions fought reform every step of the way.

But 2 years later the evidence is clear. As Ofsted's first inspection of the new Harris Academy Philip Lane reported:

Pupils' progress has improved rapidly since the academy opened in 2012 [...]. Leadership and management, including governance, are outstanding. Leaders have brought about considerable improvements in teaching, behaviour and achievement because of very high expectations [and] worked very closely with parents, who are supportive of the academy.

This transformation is a credit to the hard work and dedication of the school's teachers and leaders - and of the Harris Federation's expert, experienced team.

Harris Primary Academy Philip Lane is now giving hundreds of pupils and parents a better, brighter chance in life. Like all the Harris academies - and particularly through the 2 Harris teaching schools - spreading their best practice and outstanding teaching techniques to many more schools than ever before.

And it's not alone. All over the country, falling schools are being taken over and transformed - and brand new schools are being set up, bringing new choice and high standards.

Now phrase - makes it as though schools are to blame but now phrase - new the DfE are swooping in to help w/ these
transformation is success story!
V. - recognizable

And this renaissance is being driven by teachers

Look at the Greenwood Dale trust, led by the recently and deservedly knighted Sir Barry Day.

minority group who need the most help - edu. is their way out of poverty; however, this isn't
 As a teacher, Barry worked in some of the most deprived schools in the country, helping children from *noble* the poorest backgrounds. As head of Greenwood Dale School, a secondary in an extremely deprived *area but* area of Nottingham, he transformed a failing school into one of the most successful schools in the *place but* country - and one of the first to become an academy sponsor in its own right. *a purely economical one -*
doesn't address social issue of what schools in most deprived areas. They must contribute meaningfully
 Today - overseeing 22 academies and 2 free schools - he's using that proven track record to reach *to society* exponentially more children than ever before. *again, a social issue but edu. being presented as panacea then really it's the*

Right across the East Midlands, working in the most disadvantaged communities, Greenwood Dale Trust academies are achieving fantastic results. Last year, on average, the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more good GCSEs including English and maths rose more than twice as fast in Greenwood Dale Trust academies as in local authority schools across the country.

And there are many, many more examples. Look at Reach Academy in Feltham, a new, innovative, all-through free school founded by dedicated teachers.

Look at the London Academy of Excellence, a fantastic new sixth-form free school, drawing its students from some of the most deprived areas of London and aiming to send them to the top universities in the world.

Look at Sir Michael Wilkins' schools - including a teaching school - in the Outwood Grange Trust. More others than I can mention - teachers leading change in a self-improving system.

Further to go

But that doesn't mean 'job done'. There's still much further to go.

In 10 years' time, children who started school back in September 2010 will be finishing compulsory education at the age of 18 – the first cohort since our reforms began.

So today I'd like to set out what the self-improving system should achieve by that time.

What a world-class education, and education system, will look like - not just today and tomorrow, but next year, and in 2024 and beyond.

More and more schools run - and more and more decisions made - by teachers, not politicians.

Higher standards and higher expectations from every school and every pupil at every stage and every age.

More children from all backgrounds taking core academic subjects at GCSE - the best possible preparation for apprenticeships, places at top universities, and good jobs.

A drastic reduction in levels of illiteracy and innumeracy in our country and in our schools.

A marked and sustained rise in school quality, driven by every school being part of a supportive, collaborative chain or network - because when you give schools more autonomy, they collaborate more, not less.

Calm, orderly classrooms, and stretching, challenging curricula. Exams that command respect among universities and employers alike.

Basically, it means this.

Every child in the country, no matter where they live, what their background, or whatever type of school they attend, gets the sort of education which introduces them to the best that has been thought and said.

The sort of education which equips them to do whatever they want in life - and leaves no opportunity out of reach.

Conclusion

That is the mission which drives me and unites all of us.

This is the goal we are all striving to achieve.

Of course, any change to the status quo is difficult. Of course, people can be more frightened of what might be lost than inspired by what might be gained.

But for years, for decades, our status quo has simply not been good enough. We can't and we mustn't keep going backwards - and failing the poorest above all.

So to those striking today - to those walking out of classrooms to take to the streets - I urge them to reconsider.

The unions, in the past, have claimed to 'stand up for education'. Today they're standing up for their own pay and pensions.

28/10/2020

As Prof La personally supports them + personally understands their
Michael Gove speaks about the future of education reform - GOV.UK
I urge them to join all of us in this hall, all of us who are really standing up for education - putting education first and foremost - and the education of our most deprived children most of all. *Engl*

So thank you again for coming here today.

For your commitment to the future of education - and the futures of every individual child in your care, today, tomorrow and in the years to come.

Thank you, above all, to the Education Foundation for all their hard work to create this event today.

May it be a celebratory, ambitious, inspiring day for all of us - and a turning point in the global movement of education reform.

Thank you.

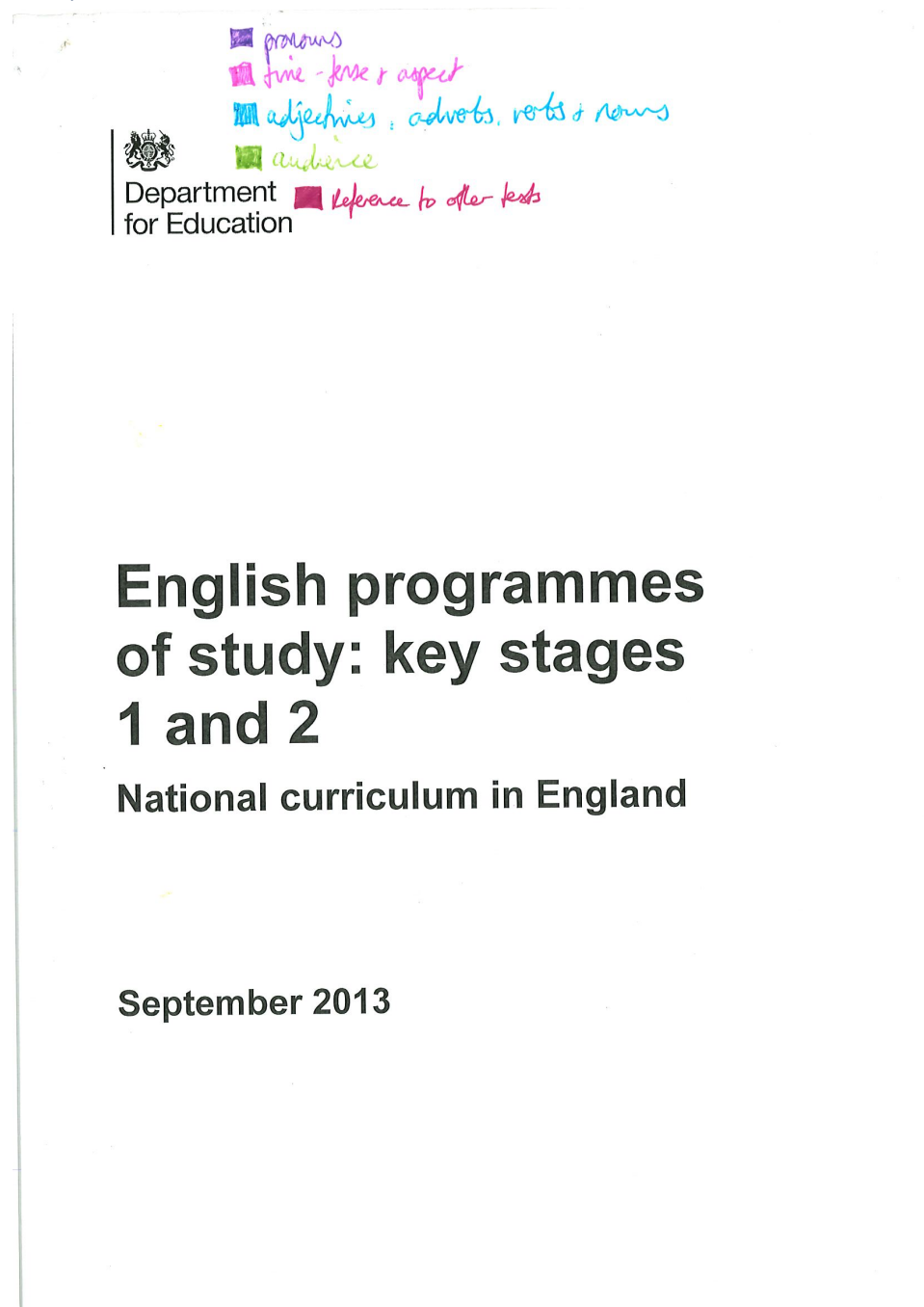
Published 10 July 2014

Explore the topic

- School curriculum (<https://www.gov.uk/education/school-curriculum>)

→ directly addressing those engaged in strike action ∴ stating that this speech is intended for more than the present audience - Gove is using this opportunity as a platform to denounce teachers' / unions' actions.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/michael-gove-speaks-about-the-future-of-education-reform>



news - not just intellectual needs but social too

present tense implying it does, & will continue to do so hence the importance of this policy doc. English - key stages 1 and 2

Purpose of study

Sets them up to be valuable contributors to society who they are older.

English has a pre-eminent place in education and in society. A high-quality education in English will teach pupils to speak and write fluently so that they can communicate their ideas and emotions to others and through their reading and listening, others can communicate with them. Through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Literature, especially, plays a key role in such development. Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know. All the skills of language are essential to participating fully as a member of society; pupils, therefore, who do not learn to speak, read and write fluently and confidently are effectively disenfranchised.

The NC appears to claim that it can address all areas of a child's development. Pres. Jensen makes it sound as though these have already been attained & are. It is brought effectively.

Aims

The overarching aim for English in the national curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment. The national curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils:

- read easily, fluently and with good understanding
- develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information
- acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language
- appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage
- write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences
- use discussion in order to learn; they should be able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas
- are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, making formal presentations, demonstrating to others and participating in debate.

possessive pronoun to show it encompasses all his inclusive yet it's unclear whose lit. heritage it's referred to

Spoken language

The national curriculum for English reflects the importance of spoken language in pupils' development across the whole curriculum - cognitively, socially and linguistically. Spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing. The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are vital for developing their vocabulary and grammar and their understanding for reading and writing. Teachers should therefore ensure the continual development of pupils' confidence and competence in spoken language and listening skills. Pupils should develop a capacity to explain their understanding of books and other reading, and to prepare their ideas before they write. They must be assisted in making their thinking clear to themselves as well as to others and teachers should ensure that pupils build secure foundations by using discussion to probe and remedy their

new phrase - not importance of embedding these skills to aid all further academic development & understand suggests that misconceptions need to be cured rather than explored & understood

English – key stages 1 and 2

misconceptions. Pupils should also be taught to understand and use the conventions for discussion and debate.

All pupils should be enabled to participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama. Pupils should be able to adopt, create and sustain a range of roles, responding appropriately to others in role. They should have opportunities to improvise, devise and script drama for one another and a range of audiences, as well as to rehearse, refine, share and respond thoughtfully to drama and theatre performances.

Statutory requirements which underpin all aspects of spoken language across the six years of primary education form part of the national curriculum. These are reflected and contextualised within the reading and writing domains which follow.

Reading

The programmes of study for reading at key stages 1 and 2 consist of two dimensions:

- word reading
- comprehension (both listening and reading).

repeated
adj. - dictates that must be taught in schools + how
 It is **essential** that teaching focuses on developing pupils' competence in both dimensions; **different kinds of teaching are needed for each.** *as trained professionals, teachers wouldn't be aware of this...*

Skilled word reading involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Underpinning both is the understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words. This is why phonics should be emphasised in the early teaching of reading to beginners (i.e. unskilled readers) when they start school.

adj. - nebulous term - that does
good mean or look like grammar
regards to
n. - diff. outside's, JONS, etc.
 Good comprehension draws from linguistic knowledge (in particular of vocabulary and experience of **high-quality** discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories, poems and non-fiction. All pupils **must be encouraged** to read widely across both fiction and non-fiction to develop their knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live, to establish an appreciation and love of reading, and to gain knowledge across the curriculum. Reading widely and often increases pupils' vocabulary because they encounter words they would rarely hear or use in everyday speech. Reading also feeds pupils' imagination and opens up **a treasure-house of wonder** and joy for curious young minds. *typical, fig. lang. - at odds w/ the rest of the doc.*

careful + contrasts to the 'should' from previous parts
 ↓
no mention of encouraging them to read
lets they enjoy about topics in which they have an interest

perfect thing is a vital will however no consideration of those who will struggle to achieve this
 It is **essential** that, by the end of their primary education, all pupils are able to read fluently, and with confidence, in any subject in their forthcoming secondary education.

high-quality

Writing

The programmes of study for writing at key stages 1 and 2 are constructed similarly to those for reading:

- transcription (spelling and handwriting)
- composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing).

It is essential that teaching develops pupils' competence in these two dimensions. In addition, pupils should be taught how to plan, revise and evaluate their writing. These aspects of writing have been incorporated into the programmes of study for composition.

Writing down ideas fluently depends on effective transcription: that is, on spelling quickly and accurately through knowing the relationship between sounds and letters (phonics) and understanding the morphology (word structure) and orthography (spelling structure) of words. Effective composition involves forming, articulating and communicating ideas, and then organising them coherently for a reader. This requires clarity, awareness of the audience, purpose and context, and an increasingly wide knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Writing also depends on fluent, legible and, eventually, speedy handwriting.

Spelling, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and glossary

The two statutory appendices – on spelling and on vocabulary, grammar and punctuation – give an overview of the specific features that should be included in teaching the programmes of study.

Opportunities for teachers to enhance pupils' vocabulary arise naturally from their reading and writing. As vocabulary increases, teachers should show pupils how to understand the relationships between words, how to understand nuances in meaning, and how to develop their understanding of, and ability to use, figurative language. They should also teach pupils how to work out and clarify the meanings of unknown words and words with more than one meaning. References to developing pupils' vocabulary are also included within the appendices.

Pupils should be taught to control their speaking and writing consciously and to use Standard English. They should be taught to use the elements of spelling, grammar, punctuation and 'language about language' listed. This is not intended to constrain or restrict teachers' creativity, but simply to provide the structure on which they can construct exciting lessons. A non-statutory Glossary is provided for teachers.

Throughout the programmes of study, teachers should teach pupils the vocabulary they need to discuss their reading, writing and spoken language. It is important that pupils learn the correct grammatical terms in English and that these terms are integrated within teaching.

The use of 3rd person pronoun to refer to teachers adds a degree of separation between the policy doc. + those meant to be enacted → suggests a sense of removal between policy + practice regardless of their authenticity

compare to C.D. Hirsch's text

educators not entertain their students

need to provide solid, informative lessons

Throughout the policy, the future tense 'should be able to...' signals that these are the aims of the NC, while underlining that it is the responsibility of the educator to achieve this.

Upper key stage 2 – years 5 and 6

By the beginning of year 5, pupils should be able to read aloud a wider range of poetry and books written at an age-appropriate interest level with accuracy and at a reasonable speaking pace. They should be able to read most words effortlessly and to work out how to pronounce unfamiliar written words with increasing automaticity. If the pronunciation sounds unfamiliar, they should ask for help in determining both the meaning of the word and how to pronounce it correctly.

They should be able to prepare readings, with appropriate intonation to show their understanding, and should be able to summarise and present a familiar story in their own words. They should be reading widely and frequently, outside as well as in school, for pleasure and information. They should be able to read silently, with good understanding, inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words, and then discuss what they have read.

Pupils should be able to write down their ideas quickly. Their grammar and punctuation should be broadly accurate. Pupils' spelling of most words taught so far should be accurate and they should be able to spell words that they have not yet been taught by using what they have learnt about how spelling works in English.

During years 5 and 6, teachers should continue to emphasise pupils' enjoyment and understanding of language, especially vocabulary, to support their reading and writing.

Pupils' knowledge of language, gained from stories, plays, poetry, non-fiction and textbooks, will support their increasing fluency as readers, their facility as writers, and their comprehension. As in years 3 and 4, pupils should be taught to enhance the effectiveness of their writing as well as their competence.

It is essential that pupils whose decoding skills are poor are taught through a rigorous and systematic phonics programme so that they catch up rapidly with their peers in terms of their decoding and spelling. However, as far as possible, these pupils should follow the upper key stage 2 programme of study in terms of listening to books and other writing that they have not come across before, hearing and learning new vocabulary and grammatical structures, and having a chance to talk about all of these.

By the end of year 6, pupils' reading and writing should be sufficiently fluent and effortless for them to manage the general demands of the curriculum in year 7, across all subjects and not just in English, but there will continue to be a need for pupils to learn subject-specific vocabulary. They should be able to reflect their understanding of the audience for and purpose of their writing by selecting appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Teachers should prepare pupils for secondary education by ensuring that they can consciously control sentence structure in their writing and understand why sentences are constructed as they are. Pupils should understand nuances in vocabulary choice and age-appropriate, academic vocabulary. This involves consolidation, practice and discussion of language.

provided these words adhere to the spelling rules they are familiar w/.

yet having to prep. for the SATs somewhat takes away from this

→ reminiscent of decades old educational practice (love's own educational experience)

- ambiguous term

→ Should be given the tools to decode independently rather than encouraging teachers to spoon-feed

their students

→ impossible for schools to truly monitor this so

Schools mustn't be held

at odds w/ the * prescriptive nature of the NC + it's focus on being used

SATS to solve social issues

- unclear what this actually means

SEN provision is weak & does not cater for those who

learning difficulties make them unable to follow the UKS2 programme

pointless to expose them to this if they can't access it

↓ again harks back to an orabatic approach to education

English – key stages 1 and 2

Understand why it is necessary for students to be able to discuss what they're learning - why is this necessary

Specific requirements for pupils to discuss what they are learning and to develop their wider skills in spoken language form part of this programme of study. In years 5 and 6, pupils' confidence, enjoyment and mastery of language should be extended through public speaking, performance and debate.

How does it aid their academic progress?

→ Where schools are able to offer such opportunities, but due to budget cuts, understaffing, lack of resources, etc. this is not always possible

→ v. public school approach to education. Trying to make articulate members of society who can make true contributions. This is not about enhancing child's educational experiences.

* Enjoyment is only mentioned once in relation to reading. It then moves to 'maintain the attitudes' - ∴ the tone of the doc. is about getting children to be able to access texts in order to talk/write about / pass tests on them, rather than fostering a love of literature. Being able to recite poetry is of more importance - ∴ it is mentioned more times - than children actually enjoying studying it. Likes to G's view that 'rigour + challenge' is of paramount importance. Stebbins suggesting that enjoyment is a secondary / less important aim w/ the teaching + learning of English.

Years 5 and 6 programme of study

Reading – word reading

Statutory requirements

Pupils should be taught to:

- apply their growing knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes (morphology and etymology), as listed in English Appendix 1, both to read aloud and to understand the meaning of new words that they meet.

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

At this stage, there should be no need for further direct teaching of word reading skills for almost all pupils. If pupils are struggling or failing in this, the reasons for this should be investigated. It is imperative that pupils are taught to read during their last two years at primary school if they enter year 5 not being able to do so.

Pupils should be encouraged to work out any unfamiliar word. They should focus on all the letters in a word so that they do not, for example, read 'invitation' for 'imitation' simply because they might be more familiar with the first word. Accurate reading of individual words, which might be key to the meaning of a sentence or paragraph, improves comprehension.

When teachers are reading with or to pupils, attention should be paid to new vocabulary – both a word's meaning(s) and its correct pronunciation.

There must be a reason why a child would reach this age being unable to read. It is naive to assume that this can be taught in the final 2 yrs.
 ↓
the curriculum has failed these chn. so they clearly need a diff. approach.

Reading – comprehension

Statutory requirements

Pupils should be taught to:

- maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
 - continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks,
 - reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes
 - increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions.

teachers implicitly expected to programme chn. to feel a certain way whilst reading.
main phrase
problematic as it's unclear whose 'our' lit. heritage is - unclear if it's up to schools to decide depending on their demographic.
KS2 SATs are mono-cultural. reading comp. skills.
References to specific texts are absent, but it is clear that a wide range of lit. is expected to be studied in order to develop

Statutory requirements	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recommending books that they have read to their peers, giving reasons for their choices ▪ identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing ▪ making comparisons within and across books ▪ learning a wider range of poetry by heart ▪ preparing poems and plays to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone and volume so that the meaning is clear to an audience 	<p><i>- no reason as to why/how this will improve their academic progress → archaic + resonant of G's own educ.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ understand what they read by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context ▪ asking questions to improve their understanding ▪ drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence ▪ predicting what might happen from details stated and implied ▪ summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas ▪ identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning ▪ discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader ▪ distinguish between statements of fact and opinion ▪ retrieve, record and present information from non-fiction ▪ participate in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously ▪ explain and discuss their understanding of what they have read, including through formal presentations and debates, maintaining a focus on the topic and using notes where necessary ▪ provide reasoned justifications for their views. 	<p><i>Whilst the aim is beneficial, there is no suggestion as to why 9, 10 + 11 yr olds should be giving formal presentations + participating in debates. This approach was part of G's intention to close the gap between state + private, yet in the same doc. it says that ch. do can't read must be taught to do so in these 2 yrs. There is little understanding of how ch. learn + instead a focus on creating members of society who can recite texts verbatim + fro taught quizes who can make +ve contributions as articulate individuals</i></p>

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Even though pupils can now read independently, reading aloud to them should include whole books so that they meet books and authors that they might not choose to read themselves.

The knowledge and skills that pupils need in order to comprehend are very similar at different ages. Pupils should continue to apply what they have already learnt to more complex writing.

Pupils should be taught to recognise themes in what they read, such as loss or heroism. They should have opportunities to compare characters, consider different accounts of the same event and discuss viewpoints (both of authors and of fictional characters), within a text and across more than one text.

They should continue to learn the conventions of different types of writing, such as the use of the first person in writing diaries and autobiographies.

Pupils should be taught the technical and other terms needed for discussing what they hear and read, such as metaphor, simile, analogy, imagery, style and effect.

In using reference books, pupils need to know what information they need to look for before they begin and need to understand the task. They should be shown how to use contents pages and indexes to locate information.

The skills of information retrieval that are taught should be applied, for example, in reading history, geography and science textbooks, and in contexts where pupils are genuinely motivated to find out information, for example, reading information leaflets before a gallery or museum visit or reading a theatre programme or review. Teachers should consider making use of any library services and expertise to support this.

Pupils should have guidance about and feedback on the quality of their explanations and contributions to discussions.

Pupils should be shown how to compare characters, settings, themes and other aspects of what they read.

An important + admirable aim yet there is only so much time in a school day. Also, the SATs reading paper generally gives ch. extracts so it's imperative they are confident + familiar w/ understanding a text from just a v. small section of it.

yet there are not assessed in Y6 reading or writing.

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say. They should be clear about what standard of handwriting is appropriate for a particular task, for example, quick notes or a final handwritten version. They should also be taught to use an unjoined style, for example, for labelling a diagram or data, writing an email address, or for algebra and capital letters, for example, for filling in a form.

*Yet with
in cursive
a requirement
of achieving
OS of KS1
/ handwriting*

Writing – composition**Statutory requirements**

Pupils should be taught to:

- plan their writing by:
 - identifying the audience for and purpose of the writing, selecting the appropriate form and using other similar writing as models for their own
 - noting and developing initial ideas, drawing on reading and research where necessary
 - in writing narratives, considering how authors have developed characters and settings in what pupils have read, listened to or seen performed *like reading*
- draft and write by:
 - selecting appropriate grammar and vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning
 - in narratives, describing settings, characters and atmosphere and integrating dialogue to convey character and advance the action
 - *precising longer passages - close? He's or other?*
 - using a wide range of devices to build cohesion within and across paragraphs
 - using further organisational and presentational devices to structure text and to guide the reader [for example, headings, bullet points, underlining]
- evaluate and edit by:
 - *assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing* *how? in writing?*
 - *proposing changes* to vocabulary, grammar and punctuation to enhance effects and clarify meaning *- for their work or the work of others? Kees? Authors?*
 - ensuring the consistent and correct use of tense throughout a piece of writing
 - ensuring correct subject and verb agreement when using singular and plural, distinguishing between the language of speech and writing and choosing the appropriate register
- proof-read for spelling and punctuation errors

Statutory requirements

- perform their own compositions, using appropriate intonation, volume, and movement so that meaning is clear.

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Pupils should understand, through being shown, the skills and processes essential for writing: that is, thinking aloud to generate ideas, drafting, and re-reading to check that the meaning is clear.

Writing – vocabulary, grammar and punctuation

Statutory requirements

Pupils should be taught to:

- develop their understanding of the concepts set out in English Appendix 2 by:
 - recognising vocabulary and structures that are **appropriate for formal speech and writing, including subjunctive forms**
 - using **passive verbs to affect the presentation of information in a sentence**
 - using the perfect form of verbs to mark relationships of time and cause
 - using expanded noun phrases to convey complicated information concisely
 - using modal verbs or adverbs to indicate degrees of possibility
 - using relative clauses beginning with who, which, where, when, whose, that or with an implied (i.e. omitted) relative pronoun
 - learning the grammar for years 5 and 6 in English Appendix 2**
- indicate grammatical and other features by:
 - using commas to clarify meaning or avoid ambiguity in writing
 - using hyphens to avoid ambiguity
 - using brackets, dashes or commas to indicate parenthesis
 - using semi-colons, colons or dashes to mark boundaries between independent clauses
 - using a colon to introduce a list
 - punctuating bullet points consistently
- use and understand the grammatical terminology in English Appendix 2 accurately and appropriately in **discussing** their writing and reading.

v. lengthy
not
↓
does not say
about identifying
if as they
have to do
in STA 9
SAT.

not formal speech
little clarification
as to what
& why

No indications to why
if needs learning
what about application
of the grammar not
explicitly stated
above?

clumsily
worded -
why? how?

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Pupils should continue to add to their knowledge of linguistic terms, including those to describe grammar, so that they can **discuss** their writing and reading.

Whom? What sort of audience or
purpose? What is the goal of this?

English Appendix 1: Spelling

Most people read words more accurately than they spell them. The younger pupils are, the truer this is.

By the end of year 1, pupils should be able to read a large number of different words containing the GPCs that they have learnt, whether or not they have seen these words before. Spelling, however, is a very different matter. Once pupils have learnt more than one way of spelling particular sounds, choosing the right letter or letters depends on their either having made a conscious effort to learn the words or having absorbed them less consciously through their reading. Younger pupils have not had enough time to learn or absorb the accurate spelling of all the words that they may want to write.

This appendix provides examples of words embodying each pattern which is taught. Many of the words listed as 'example words' for years 1 and 2, including almost all those listed as 'exception words', are used frequently in pupils' writing, and therefore it is worth pupils learning the correct spelling. The 'exception words' contain GPCs which have not yet been taught as widely applicable, but this may be because they are applicable in very few age-appropriate words rather than because they are rare in English words in general.

Many examples
like this
is not the
case

The word-lists for years 3 and 4 and years 5 and 6 are statutory. The lists are a mixture of words pupils frequently use in their writing and those which they often misspell. Some of the listed words may be thought of as quite challenging, but the 100 words in each list can easily be taught within the four years of key stage 2 alongside other words that teachers consider appropriate.

by whom? acknowledgement from the policy writers that they are challenging for chr. of this age but that doesn't matter.

The rules and guidance are intended to support the teaching of spelling. Phonic knowledge should continue to underpin spelling after key stage 1; teachers should still draw pupils' attention to GPCs that do and do not fit in with what has been taught so far. Increasingly, however, pupils also need to understand the role of morphology and etymology. Although particular GPCs in root words simply have to be learnt, teachers can help pupils to understand relationships between meaning and spelling where these are relevant. For example, understanding the relationship between *medical* and *medicine* may help pupils to spell the /s/ sound in *medicine* with the letter 'c'. Pupils can also be helped to spell words with prefixes and suffixes correctly if they understand some general principles for adding them. Teachers should be familiar with what pupils have been taught about spelling in earlier years, such as which rules pupils have been taught for adding prefixes and suffixes.

In this spelling appendix, the left-hand column is statutory; the middle and right-hand columns are non-statutory guidance.

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is used to represent sounds (phonemes). A table showing the IPA is provided in this document.

English Appendix 2: Vocabulary, grammar and punctuation

Grammar is learnt naturally and implicitly through interactions with other speakers and from reading. Explicit knowledge of grammar is, however, very important, as it gives us more conscious control and choice in our language. Building this knowledge is best achieved through a focus on grammar within the teaching of reading, writing and speaking.

The grammar of our first language is learnt naturally and implicitly through interactions with other speakers and from reading. Explicit knowledge of grammar is, however, very important, as it gives us more conscious control and choice in our language. Building this knowledge is best achieved through a focus on grammar within the teaching of reading, writing and speaking. Once pupils are familiar with a grammatical concept [for example 'modal verb'], they should be encouraged to apply and explore this concept in the grammar of their own speech and writing and to note where it is used by others. Young pupils, in particular, use more complex language in speech than in writing, and teachers should build on this, aiming for a smooth transition to sophisticated writing.

Yet chr. are assessed on grammar as stand-alone concepts

sophisticated writing - not is classed as 'sophisticated' - ambiguous adjective

The table below focuses on Standard English and should be read in conjunction with the programmes of study as it sets out the statutory requirements. The table shows when concepts should be introduced first, not necessarily when they should be completely understood. It is very important, therefore, that the content in earlier years be revisited in subsequent years to consolidate knowledge and build on pupils' understanding. Teachers should also go beyond the content set out here if they feel it is appropriate.

The grammatical terms that pupils should learn are set out in the final column. They should learn to recognise and use the terminology through discussion and practice. All terms in **bold** should be understood with the meanings set out in the Glossary.

Year 5: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
Word	Converting nouns or adjectives into verbs using suffixes [for example, <i>-ate; -ise; -ify</i>] Verb prefixes [for example, <i>dis-, de-, mis-, over- and re-</i>]
Sentence	Relative clauses beginning with <i>who, which, where, when, whose, that</i> , or an omitted relative pronoun Indicating degrees of possibility using adverbs [for example, <i>perhaps, surely</i>] or modal verbs [for example, <i>might, should, will, must</i>]
Text	Devices to build cohesion within a paragraph [for example, <i>then, after that, this, firstly</i>] Linking ideas across paragraphs using adverbials of time [for example, <i>later</i>], place [for example, <i>nearby</i>] and number [for example, <i>secondly</i>] or tense choices [for example, <i>he had seen her before</i>]
Punctuation	Brackets, dashes or commas to indicate parenthesis Use of commas to clarify meaning or avoid ambiguity
Terminology for pupils	modal verb, relative pronoun relative clause parenthesis, bracket, dash cohesion, ambiguity

Year 6: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
Word	The difference between vocabulary typical of informal speech and vocabulary appropriate for formal speech and writing [for example, <i>find out – discover; ask for – request; go in – enter</i>] How words are related by meaning as synonyms and antonyms [for example, <i>big, large, little</i>].
Sentence	Use of the passive to affect the presentation of information in a sentence [for example, <i>I broke the window in the greenhouse</i> versus <i>The window in the greenhouse was broken (by me)</i>]. The difference between structures typical of informal speech and structures appropriate for formal speech and writing [for example, the use of question tags: <i>He's your friend, isn't he?</i> , or the use of subjunctive forms such as <i>If I were</i> or <i>Were they to come</i> in some very formal writing and speech]

what's the difference between formal + very formal?

Year 6: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
Text	<p>Linking ideas across paragraphs using a wider range of cohesive devices: repetition of a word or phrase, grammatical connections [for example, the use of adverbials such as <i>on the other hand</i>, <i>in contrast</i>, or <i>as a consequence</i>], and ellipsis</p> <p>Layout devices [for example, headings, sub-headings, columns, bullets, or tables, to structure text]</p>
Punctuation	<p>Use of the semi-colon, colon and dash to mark the boundary between independent clauses [for example, <i>It's raining; I'm fed up</i>]</p> <p>Use of the colon to introduce a list and use of semi-colons within lists</p> <p>Punctuation of bullet points to list information</p> <p>How hyphens can be used to avoid ambiguity [for example, <i>man eating shark</i> versus <i>man-eating shark</i>, or <i>recover</i> versus <i>re-cover</i>]</p>
Terminology for pupils	<p>subject, object</p> <p>active, passive</p> <p>synonym, antonym</p> <p>ellipsis, hyphen, colon, semi-colon, bullet points</p>

V. comprehensive list + it's not always clear why chn. need to explicitly know these terms. Chn. instinctively use many of these in their speech + writing, + the only reason they need to explicitly know them is in order to pass the SPaG paper.

English – key stage 3

Purpose of study

English has a pre-eminent place in education and in society. A high-quality education in English will teach pupils to speak and write fluently so that they can communicate their ideas and emotions to others and through their reading and listening, others can communicate with them. Through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Literature, especially, plays a key role in such development. Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know. All the skills of language are essential to participating fully as a member of society; pupils, therefore, who do not learn to speak, read and write fluently and confidently are effectively disenfranchised. → ∴ unable to make +ve contributions to society when they leave school

Aims

The overarching aim for English in the national curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment. The national curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils:

- read easily, fluently and with good understanding
- develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information
- acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language
- appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage → No indication as to do the possessive pronoun is referring to
- write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences
- use discussion in order to learn; they should be able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas
- are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, making formal presentations, demonstrating to others and participating in debate.

Spoken language

The national curriculum for English reflects the importance of spoken language in pupils' development across the whole curriculum – cognitively, socially and linguistically. Spoken language continues to underpin the development of pupils' reading and writing during key stage 3 and teachers should therefore ensure pupils' confidence and competence in this area continue to develop. Pupils should be taught to understand and use the conventions for discussion and debate, as well as continuing to develop their skills in working collaboratively with their peers to discuss reading, writing and speech across the curriculum.

Reading and writing

Reading at key stage 3 should be wide, varied and challenging. Pupils should be expected to read whole books, to read in depth and to read for pleasure and information.

Pupils should continue to develop their knowledge of and skills in writing, refining their drafting skills and developing resilience to write at length. They should be taught to write formal and academic essays as well as writing imaginatively. They should be taught to write for a variety of purposes and audiences across a range of contexts. This requires an increasingly wide knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

Opportunities for teachers to enhance pupils' vocabulary will arise naturally from their reading and writing. Teachers should show pupils how to understand the relationships between words, how to understand nuances in meaning, and how to develop their understanding of, and ability to use, figurative language.

Pupils should be taught to control their speaking and writing consciously, understand why sentences are constructed as they are and to use Standard English. They should understand and use age-appropriate vocabulary, including linguistic and literary terminology, for discussing their reading, writing and spoken language. This involves consolidation, practice and discussion of language. **It is important that pupils learn the correct grammatical terms in English** and that these terms are integrated within teaching.

Only mention of linking up w/ KS2

Teachers should **build on the knowledge and skills** that pupils have been taught at key stage 2. Decisions about progression should be based on the security of pupils' linguistic knowledge, skills and understanding and their readiness to progress to the next stage. Pupils whose linguistic development is more advanced should be challenged through being offered opportunities for increased breadth and depth in reading and writing. Those who are less fluent should consolidate their knowledge, understanding and skills, including through additional practice.

no mention of what this knowledge or these skills are

This implies that students have not previously done this: KS3 teachers do are unfamiliar w/ the KS2 curric. will assume these students are starting from scratch

Glossary

A non-statutory Glossary is provided for teachers.

Attainment targets

By the end of key stage 3, **pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.**

*rebutious/ambiguous
↳ how is this expected to be shown? This could vary wildly between schools*

Key stage 3

Subject content

Reading

Pupils should be taught to:

- **develop an appreciation and love of reading**, and read increasingly challenging material **independently** through:
 - reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction, including in particular whole books, short stories, poems and plays with **a wide coverage** of genres, historical periods, forms and authors. The range will include high-quality works from:
 - English literature, both pre-1914 and contemporary, including prose, poetry and drama
 - Shakespeare (two plays)
 - **seminal world literature**
 - choosing and reading books independently for challenge, interest and enjoyment.
 - **re-reading books encountered earlier** to increase familiarity with them and provide a basis for making comparisons.
- understand increasingly challenging texts through:
 - learning new vocabulary, relating it explicitly to known vocabulary and understanding it with the help of context and dictionaries
 - making inferences and referring to evidence in the text
 - knowing the purpose, audience for and context of the writing and drawing on this knowledge to support comprehension
 - checking their understanding to make sure that what they have read makes sense.
- read critically through:
 - knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, presents meaning
 - recognising a range of poetic conventions and understanding how these have been used
 - studying setting, plot, and characterisation, and the effects of these
 - understanding how the work of dramatists is communicated effectively through performance and how alternative staging allows for different interpretations of a play
 - making critical comparisons across texts
 - studying a range of authors, including **at least two authors in depth** each year.

Not clear if this should be evident in the curric. too or if it's just for chn's indep. reading

v. strong word - why must students 'love' reading? but it's not clear why they need such a strong emotional response. Appreciation, yes

Only time this appears in any Eng. NC is in Key Stage 3. It's not significant enough to study throughout their education. → when 'earlier'? Should this be part of the curric. to re-read what they've already read? And if they're being encouraged to read widely, this is contradictory: it keeps their reading narrow by going back to the same books.

difficult to explore a range of authors but also focus on 2 authors per year given how tight curric time is. Also, no explanation as to why 2 authors should be studied in depth. What is the purpose of this?

In reading + writing, there is no mention of building on from skills learned + developed in the KS2 programme of study. This English – key stage 3

Writing

Pupils should be taught to:

implies that students are learning these skills anew rather than revisiting + building on them from their previous years of education.

- write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
 - writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including:
 - well-structured formal expository and narrative essays
 - stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing
 - notes and **polished scripts** for talks and presentations *Echoes of prep. for governing roles*
 - a range of other narrative and non-narrative texts, including arguments, and personal and formal letters
 - summarising and organising material, and supporting ideas and arguments with any necessary factual detail
 - applying their growing knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and text structure to their writing and selecting the appropriate form
 - drawing on knowledge of literary and rhetorical devices from their reading and listening to enhance the impact of their writing
- plan, draft, edit and proof-read through:
 - considering how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended
 - amending the vocabulary, grammar and structure of their writing to improve its coherence and overall effectiveness
 - paying attention to accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling; **applying the spelling patterns and rules set out in English Appendix 1 to the key stage 1 and 2 programmes of study for English.**

Explicit link to KS2

Grammar and vocabulary

Pupils **should** be taught to:

- consolidate and build on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary through:
 - extending and applying the grammatical knowledge set out in English Appendix 2 to the key stage 1 and 2 programmes of study to analyse more challenging texts
 - studying the effectiveness and impact of the grammatical features of the texts they read
 - drawing on new vocabulary and grammatical constructions from their reading and listening, and using these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects
 - knowing and understanding the differences between spoken and written language, including differences associated with formal and informal registers, and between Standard English and **other varieties of English** *- regional speech? Part of SAME communities? Implies that SE is the only acceptable way to communicate*
 - using **Standard English confidently** in their own writing and speech

Explicit link to KS2

model verb in this that this is just a suggestion rather than a prerequisite (this mv is used throughout this section) implying that teachers have a choice whether or not to follow this

English – key stage 3

- discussing reading, writing and spoken language with precise and confident use of linguistic and literary terminology.¹

Spoken English

Pupils should be taught to:

- speak confidently and effectively, including through:
 - *See previous point* using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion
 - giving short speeches and presentations, expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point
 - participating in formal debates and structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said
 - improvising, rehearsing and performing play scripts and poetry in order to generate language and discuss language use and meaning, using role, intonation, tone, volume, mood, silence, stillness and action to add impact.

¹ Teachers should refer to the Glossary that accompanies the programmes of study for English for their own information on the range of terms used within the programmes of study as a whole.

Glossary for the programmes of study for English (non-statutory)

This implies that it is not an integral part of the KS2 programme for students. It is necessary to include it.

The following glossary includes all the technical grammatical terms used in the programmes of study for English, as well as others that might be useful. It is intended as an aid for teachers, not as the body of knowledge that should be learnt by pupils. Apart from a few which are used only in schools (for example, *root word*), the terms below are used with the meanings defined here in most modern books on English grammar. It is recognised that there are different schools of thought on grammar, but the terms defined here clarify those being used in the programmes of study. For further details, teachers should consult the many books that are available.

Terms in definitions

As in any tightly structured area of knowledge, grammar, vocabulary and spelling involve a network of technical concepts that help to define each other. Consequently, the definition of one concept builds on other concepts that are equally technical. Concepts that are defined elsewhere in the glossary are hyperlinked. For some concepts, the technical definition may be slightly different from the meaning that some teachers may have learnt at school or may have been using with their own pupils; in these cases, the more familiar meaning is also discussed.

Extensive list w/ significant crossover to the KS2 curric. This list suggests that students are discovering most of these terms for the first time & not that they have been extremely fed on them at KS2. KS3 teachers would assume from this list that students are unfamiliar w/ many of these terms & may teach them from scratch rather than building on their prior knowledge.

Term	Guidance	Example
active voice	An active <u>verb</u> has its usual pattern of <u>subject</u> and <u>object</u> (in contrast with the <u>passive</u>).	Active: <i>The school arranged a visit.</i> Passive: <i>A visit was arranged by the school.</i>
adjective	<p>The surest way to identify adjectives is by the ways they can be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ before a noun, to make the noun's meaning more specific (i.e. to <u>modify</u> the noun), or ▪ after the verb <i>be</i>, as its <u>complement</u>. <p>Adjectives cannot be modified by other adjectives. This distinguishes them from <u>nouns</u>, which can be.</p> <p>Adjectives are sometimes called 'describing words' because they pick out single characteristics such as size or colour. This is often true, but it doesn't help to distinguish adjectives from other word classes,</p>	<p><i>The pupils did some really <u>good</u> work.</i> [adjective used before a noun, to modify it]</p> <p><i>Their work was <u>good</u>.</i> [adjective used after the verb <i>be</i>, as its complement]</p> <p>Not adjectives: <i>The lamp <u>glowed</u>.</i> [verb] <i>It was such a bright <u>red</u>!</i> [noun] <i>He spoke <u>loudly</u>.</i> [adverb] <i>It was a French <u>grammar</u> book.</i> [noun]</p>

Dangers w/ prescribing a list as prescriptive as this (as does E.O. Hirsch in 'Cult. Lit.') is that it becomes almost a script to stick to; however, it also says that this is an 'aid' so it's not clear how this knowledge is to be taught than much of it & in how much detail?

Appendix 5 – Interview transcripts

Transcription from interview 7 – participant G

Interviewer: First of all, what difference do you notice in performance and/or achievement and/or progress in year 7 English compared to year 6?

Participant G: I think, generally in year 7, you ... well I've seen a bit of a drop-off in er performance. They've been very well focused throughout year 6. You've got a clear expectation and then the year 7 scheme changes completely. The focus changes completely and er, you tend to see that your perhaps high attainers drop-off, lose a little bit of focus. There's a bit of a lag to where they have been and perhaps not the urgency in their progress.

Interviewer: So what do you think, then, is ... the cause of that drop in focus?

Participant G: Well I think that where you've had very clear structure and outcomes set with the focus towards the SATs. You've got a lot more individual opportunity, more creativity but some children need that structure and they don't really know what to do with the ... the more in-depth ideas that they start to develop as they're beginning into, erm, the year 7, kind of, schemes of work. The schemes are different. The focus kind of shifts away from –

Interviewer: How are the schemes different then? Do you think are ... do you think they allow for more creativity?

Participant G: Yeah. I think basically you've got a lot more option of, er, greater individual creativity, thought and depth. You're moving away from that kind of, I don't want to use the word regimented, but that focus on on structure and basic analysis. You've got much more in-depth opportunities to explore so your, your creativity's *good* but obviously they've, they've not come across that perhaps prior to in earlier learning.

Interviewer: Brilliant. Thank you. So the next question is what difference do you notice in curriculum expectations between year 6 and year 7?

Transcription from interview 2 – participant F

Interviewer: So then in terms of curriculum expectations, do you notice any difference between year 6 and year 7?

Participant F: My expectations of them or their expectations of the curriculum?

Interviewer: The curriculum expectations in general. So if you were looking at the national curriculum and what year 6 are expected to do and achieve, and then what year 7 are expected to do and achieve.

Participant F: Well ... going back to the launch of the, when we had the key stage 3 national curriculum, the whole of year 7 almost presumed that they'd done nothing in year 5 and year 6, and I think that that's still the expectation or ... the mindset in high school. Whereas in year 7 in middle school, you're very much aware of what they've done in year 6 *if* the middle school has been sensible enough to make sure that those ... that ... key stage ... that you have a key stage ... an English teacher, that teaches in two and three. I think if you've got, some middle schools have key stage 2 teachers and key stage 3 teachers, you know, some ... some don't want to teach younger ones or struggle to teach younger ones but there's got to be ... you've got to have that, if you've got that experience of both key stages, the children benefit massively from it.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. So in terms of the demands that are placed in children in year 6 and then in year 7, do these differ at all ... in your opinion?

Participant F: I think some ... I think the beginning of year 7 for the children is oft- often a bit of a breather because they've been un-, the demands of the SATs, particularly now they've got the SPaG, are so *huge*, erm, that they almost take ... I think teachers and children mentally take a sigh of relief.

Interviewer: So ... having spoken then about SPaG, erm ... one of my questions is how well do you think the transition between key stage two and key stage 3 is catered for in the national curriculum and, of course, one of the big things is, is SPaG, as you mentioned, so do you think, then, that transition is handled well in the national curriculum for that, sort of, fluidity with ... from key stage two to key stage 3?

Appendix 6 – Spreadsheet of interview data

Code	Key analytical/descriptive point	Note/Quote	Source	Theme
SATs	chn in yr 6 have access to greater resources	"historically, yr 6 chn have had access to intervention groups, nurture groups, tutoring at school"	English teacher	External accountability
SATs	Expectations in yr6 are higher than in yr7 in terms of curriculum	expectations higher in yr6 than in yr7 because of the SATs and also writing because of the chances of external moderation and familiarity with the high expectations of SATs	English teacher	External accountability
SATs	Challenge moving from 6 to 7 because there's a disconnect between expectations from SATs at end of yr6	"There does seem to be a dip from when they've sat their exams in May in yr6 to what they're doing in September/October of yr 7.	English teacher	External accountability
SATs	Clear purpose that chn and teachers are working towards	"We are very focused on the end goal which comes at the end of yr6. We have a very clear purpose and the chn know that specific purpose, and we are continually revising and going over the same skills... and they are constantly updated on this is where you are with inference and this is where you are with vocabulary and they're all very au fait with what the end goal is."	Head of English	External accountability
Teaching to the test	Lack of opportunity for creativity in yr7	"In yr6 they have to get to a certain point and we are teaching to the test a lot of the time whereas yr7 there isn't that test so there is an ability to maybe more holistic in your teaching with yr 7 and approach things slightly differently"	English teacher	External accountability
External accountability	The external pressure means that expectations are higher in yr6 as schools are measured on the performance of their yr6 students	"Expectations are always high but again I think they're higher in yr6 because of the SATs. That's always the focus"	Teaching assistant	External accountability
External accountability/ motivating factors	Because chn aren't assessed at all in KS3, GCSEs are too far away for a lot of students to be motivated by them. There appears to be a need for external accountability following the pressure and rigour of the SATs.	Yr7 "know that the end goal isn't coming for a very long time. Because their end goal isn't coming for another 5 years there is, naturally, from students, a dip and a sort of relaxation in the way they approach their learning - not for all students, but for a good third to half of students take their foot off the peddle... 5 years to a child is a lifetime."	Head of English	External accountability
Motivating factors	Some chn respond well to having a clear end goal	"In terms of performance, you may have a student who performs very very well under pressure - I'm thinking of 1 student I taught in my yr6 class last yr who performed really really well under pressure, knew what the end goal was, did really well. When the pressure's not there, they've relaxed and they haven't done as well as they could do. I think that child will be fine when he realises the pressure is coming later on, but until then he will not perform as well."	Head of English	External accountability
External accountability	Chn perform differently when there is an external driver in play	"We hold them accountable internally but to a child that is not as important as X person externally looking at my work."	Head of English	External accountability

External accountability	Nurture Yr6 because of the pressure of the SATs	"SATs seem to have taken on a life of their own and parents become very fixated with it. Recently, the government have come out and said they're not a measure for the child, they're a measure for the school, still they seem to have this huge expectation on children"	Head of English	External accountability
SATs/External accountability/Pressure	Chn are aware of the pressures and expectations on them but they also know that there is an end goal. Suggests their lack of belief in the curriculum and are results driven	"it's almost like in yr6 they've got in their head they only need to know this in yr6 because they need to pass the SATs and after that it doesn't matter"	English teacher	External accountability
SATs/External accountability/Pressure	Because of the external pressure of the SATs, work is more challenging in KS2 - both teachers and students need to perform to a particular standard	"I think that the work they do in yr6 is often harder"	English teacher	External accountability
SATs/External accountability/Pressure	The school and staff are as much affected by the accountability linked to the SATs as the chn are	"Yr6 demands are huge" because of the SATs "having that kind of external pressure is a driver for us, and them, and the school ... and it's taken off in yr7. If there's not the scrutiny, you're - no-one's going to have that same, kind, push I guess in yr7"	English teacher	External accountability
Pressure	chn in yr 6 have an expectation to meet a certain standard	"There's a very definite pass or fail end mark in yr6 where there isn't really anything like that in yr7"	English teacher	External accountability
Pressure	Teachers aware of yr6 expectations and the aim they need to get to	"we have an aim to get to at the end of yr6 based on what they did 4 yrs prior"	English teacher	External accountability
Pressure	Yr6 is an intense year whereas yr7 is different	Chn go from intense teaching of English in yr6 - with interventions, etc. to this being removed in yr7 and the possible impact this has on their mental health. Yr7 is perceived as a yr to look forward to because the chn can 'sit back a little bit' due to the lack of pressure placed on them, e.g. with SATs, moving sets, etc.	English teacher	External accountability
Pressure	Disparity between expectations in KS2 and 3 which can impact on performance and/or motivation	"Sometimes, at KS2, I think there's a lot of pressure on a lot of small children, young children for, essentially, not a lot of gain. And then when you get to KS3, there isn't that external pressure and because they know it's gone away, some students don't then feel the need to put in that much effort."	Head of English	External accountability
Accountability and pressure	Staff are more autonomous in yr7 due to the lack of scrutiny and perceived accountability	"There isn't as much scrutiny" with planning and assessment in yr7. "It's not as thorough or comprehensive" "There's certainly a lot more freedom in yr7"	English teacher	External accountability
External accountability	Middle school teacher aware of the curric demands but the chn struggle to perform without the external pressure	"I try not to let it [my pedagogy] change from yr6 to yr7" but attitudes of some the chn do change because there is the lack of external pressure driving them	English teacher	External accountability
External accountability	Greater expectations on the chn to perform in	"There's lots more demands in yr6 because of the SATs" regardless of ability	Teaching assistant	External accountability

	yr6 compared to yr7			
Assessment/ External accountability	UKS2 is performance driven with external pressures in the form of the SATs driving the curric	"It's a lot more laid back in yr 7. Yr5 and 6 is based around SATs so it's very much, not pressurised, but it's quite intense. Whereas yr 7 I think it's a lot more laid back."	Teaching assistant	External accountability
External accountability	Pressure on the students to pass the test which is lacking in yr7	"Yr6, you've got to pass your SATs haven't you? It is the pressure of that which is really intense whereas in yr7 you haven't got any big tests to pass so maybe it's not as intense"	Teaching assistant	External accountability
External accountability/ difference in curriculum time and support	The SATs drive yrs 5 and 6 whereas in yr7, this is missing and so the chn get forgotten about/don't receive the same level of support	"I think attitudes change when they're in yr 7. It's almost like because there's no big assessments like SATs or moving onto high schol, so I feel like they're almost the forgotten year because you put so much time and effort into yr5 and 6 to get them to where they need to be that then in yr7 it's almost like the foot is off the pedal and it's a little bit slower paced"	Teaching assistant	External accountability
External accountability/ Curriculum expectations	Attitude to learning alters, regardless of ability, when the external pressure of the SATs is removed. Clear in the curric that there are different expectations	"Generally in yr7, I've seen a bit of a drop off in performance. They've been very well focused throughout yr6; you've got a clear expectation and then in yr7 the scheme changes completely, the focus changes completely and you tend to see that perhaps your higher attainers drop off, lose focus."	English teacher	External accountability
External accountability/ motivating factors	Chn are working towards the SATs which is a key driver for them. Without the external accountability, they lose motivation and/or take a break	"I find that the pupils are very focused in yr6 and that they see the SATs as an endpoint. Once they get to that endpoint they kind of switch off a bit because they've either achieved or not achieved what they were aiming for so in yr7 they seem to have slackened off considerably, they put in less effort and need a lot more motivation than in yr6."	SENDCO	External accountability
External accountability/ motivating factors	Chn are conditioned to work towards a goal and when that goal is distant, they struggle to motivate themselves in the same way	"There are a lot of demands on yr6 ... they know they have this final assessment point coming" Expectations are placed on them by themselves, the curric and their parents. Whereas in yr7 "they've got 5 yrs to achieve something. Their endpoint is nowhere near where they are so they're less focused because they've sort been trained in yr 5 and 6 to focus on a endpoint when they then come to yr7 and don't have an endpoint anywhere near in sight, it's almost half of their life again away they don't have that focus and we've trained them to work towards that focus"	SENDCO	External accountability
Motivating factors	Yr7 struggle with motivation following such a rigorous year, and particularly struggle with reading having been reading and examined on extracts in KS2	"I have to work very much more on motivation in yr7 ... it's very much about trying to inspire them to enjoy books again and motivate them to have some reason to work hard"	SENDCO	External accountability
External accountability	Chn are working towards a fixed goal and when this is no longer there, yr7 students struggle to motivate themselves	"In yr7, it's almost deflating because there's nothing there. It's almost as if they need something to kind of carry it on - whether it's a different kind of assessment or something". In yr7 they've run out of momentum.	Teaching assistant	External accountability

External accountability/ motivating factors	Lack of external pressure in yr7 results in a lack of motivation and therefore progress	"Progress is slower, achievement is not as great ... I think yr6s can achieve more than yr7s ... it's a bit like foot off the pedal."	English teacher	External accountability
Narrow curriculum	yr7 have access to the full breadth of the curriculum whereas yr6 don't due to SATs prep	"chn will be subject to interventions, they'll be in at lunchtime, they'll have extra tutor time, they'll sometimes have collapsed lessons in favour of maths and English"	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Narrow curriculum	Greater opportunity for creativity and autonomy in yr7 compared to yr6	"there's more creative flair potentially from yr7 and I mean that from the teachers as well. When you're planning a yr7 SoW there's a lot more fluidity and there's a lot more scope because you can teach to that group in a way that with yr6 you potentially can't. Planning is more structured and limited in yr6."	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Narrow curriculum	Fewer lessons in yr7 compared to yr6 so more time is spent recapping	"In yr6 you have them everyday, whereas in yr 7 3/4 times a week so you probably spend more at the start of the lesson reminding them of what they've done or questioning them about what they did last lesson."	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Curriculum content	The yr6 curriculum is incredibly challenging and there are many elements that even adults aren't aware of as it wasn't a part of English education in the past.	"Because of the SATs in yr6, what they're expected to learn is an over-expectation of what they should know because even adults aren't aware of what is required of them."	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Curriculum content	Greater volume of content in yr6	Much more content for chn to learn and ultimately be assessed on in yr6 compared to yr7.	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Understanding of curriculum transition	Where teachers are familiar with both curricula expectations, chn make better progress	"Where they've [chn] had a connected yr6/7, where there's been no break (like in a middle school here), their progress and achievement is far superior in yr7 to what it would be in an 11-16 school where there would be that natural break at the end of primary ... it's at that point of change, that break point where they go backwards a little bit"	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect
Understanding of curriculum transition	Chn more challenged when teachers have a greater understanding of the curricula in the proceeding/preceding KS	In middle school, the expectations and progress can be "mapped" more effectively. "The expectations of yr7 in a normal 2-tier system are not as challenging as in a middle school system."	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect
Lack of parity in curriculum	High school treats KS3 as a fresh start	"When I've seen it in high school, yr6 to yr 7 tends to be oh let's start again as if they don't know anything"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Lack of parity in curriculum	Because of the curriculum, teachers in KS3 approach SPaG as though starting from the beginning.	"I think that it's let's teach them all the SPaG again because they've not been taught it properly or not remembered it which is what I think happens in high school whereas in middle school it's well we actually know you've done it so therefore it's just about reminding you, and having higher expectations in the writing that they've gone from just learning about it to employing it"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Lack of parity in curriculum	Noticeable difference between content of KS2 and KS3 curriculum	"In yr7 the shift changes, the curriculums don't match so the shift changes so there is no longer the expectation for those 50 things in SPaG for example."	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect

Disparity between curricula /SPaG	The way in which SPaG is taught in yr6 is not natural or fluid, it's constructed; however in yr7, it's more natural and less explicit - according to the curric it does not need to be explicitly taught"	"Assesment in yr7 focuses mainly on the reading and the writing, less so on the grammar. In the curric it states that we need to draw on the new grammatical constructions from their reading and listening so it's very much about taking it from what they use in their reading, to use osmosis almost to absorb their use of grammar ... but in yr6 it's all about the grammar and the punctuation and the vocabulary so rather than learning how to do those things in the way they're expected to do in yr7, we're teaching it directly and it's completely absent from the KS3 curric"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	The KS3 curric doesn't marry up to the KS2 curric - the strands are very different with completely different foci despite there being attempts for parity	"In the KS3 curric they're clearly tried to establish a link where they've said drawing on their past experience but really it's very very different with the love of reading being a key element of the KS3 curric whilst we've kind of stamped that ut of them in yr6. In the KS3 curric only 1 point out of the 16 points is to do with grammar"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Attempts to connect the two curricula are weak with little parity between the two when it comes to the actual delivery	"They don't flow. There's no flow between the KS2 and 3. They're completely separate bodies of work and they've just put in a couple of things to try and get them to bridge the difference between the two"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula/ Discouragement of reading for pleasure	The curriculum in KS2 seems to actively discourage a love of reading through the expectations for close examination and unpicking - supported by the SATs which breaks down texts into numerous questions - whereas in KS3 it's about examining the whole text and considering it holistically	"What we're trying to get them to achieve in yr6 seems to bear very little relation to what we're trying to get them to do once we get them into yr7. The curric in yr7 talks about developing a love of reading for enjoyment whereas in yr6 we are very much looking at the grammar and picking the text apart to the point of destruction. It takes the enjoyment out of it when you read a text and you're pulling it apart to the extent when you're looking ta all the vocabulary, what the meanings are, the intentions behind it, it takes that enjoyment away."	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	KS2 is very set whereas there is more autonomy and flexibility at KS3	KS2 curriclm is "very prescribed", SPaG must be known, reading skills that will be tested, type of text you get "they will prove increasingly more difficult, they will have a very difficult, or high, reading on them. KS3, there's none of that. It's very open-ended... ad can be taken inso many different ways that they just do not match, there is no marrying up. The skills don't match up."	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	KS3 does not follow on from KS2	"If you were in a 2-tier system, you could almost ditch KS2 and just start off with KS3 and never touch that ever again so they totally don't match at all."	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Knowledge of the key stages either side of the one(s) you teach allow you to better understand what the chn have achieved and they can best be	"Because we know what they [yr6] should know by the end of yr6 inside out because we also teach them and we know what their ability is, we push them on more. Whereas if you don't know the chn and don't know what they're capable of, and if you're not an expert in the previous key stage's curriculum, you can't push them as far as you could"	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect

	challenged moving forwards			
Disparity between curricula	Yr6 is far more detailed in terms of curriculum content whereas it's more nebulous in KS3	"In yr6, you're working to the specific year group national curriculum which is very prescriptive, but when you get into yr7 you've just got your key stage which makes it trickier". The need is to "backtrack" from the GCSE expectations.	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Transition between curricula is lacking	The transition between KS2 and 3 in English is catered for "pretty poorly... it's poor, really poor".	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Middle schools are able to address this area of underperformance more effectively due to a better understanding of the curriculum as well as the child	"I think in the 3-tier system the 6/7 catch-up issue is lesser because we know the children and the previous course content"	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Yr7 not prioritised so they have fewer English lessons which could account for change in attitude and/or progress	"They [yr7] have less English lessons compared to yr6 and it takes away that focus. I wish we had more English lessons with them ... there's no time" to have more lessons with them as the focus is on yr6.	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Chn are conditioned to learn in a set way/to a set structure and struggle with more autonomous learning	"Where you've had very clear structure and outcomes set with the focus towards the SATs, you've got a lot more individual opportunity and creativity but some chn need that structure and they don't really know what to do with the more in-depth ideas they start to develop as they're beginning into the yr7 SoW; the schemes are different and the focus shifts."	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Chn struggle with creativity due to the strictures of the KS2 curric and lack of freedom in prior learning	"I think you've got a lot more option for individual thought and depth; you're moving away from - I don't want to use the word regimented - that focus on structure and basic analysis. You've got much more in-depth opportunities to explore so creativity is good but obviously they've not come across that in prior learning"	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Opportunity to change the pace of lessons and spend longer on ideas than you can do in yr7	"Broader scope to explore in yr7" within the curric. "We find in yr6 that you are limiting in order to achieve the goals you got for that yr". Can go into deeper analysis and read a broader range of texts and therefore be exposed to a broader range of writing styles. Things "slow down" a little as you can spend longer on ideas.	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	More teacher autonomy in yr7 because you have more time to explore texts and writing styles, and aren't constrained by the curric and end point of SATs as you are in yr6	"The opportunities you're given in yr7 allow for greater autonomy from the teacher and you can definitely look at things over a longer period of time and actually look at them deeper than perhaps you have that time in yr6. It's not less rigour but you do have more time."	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect

Disparity between curricula/ External accountability	More superficial development of skills and exploration of texts as it's leading to passing a test	In yr 6, "you're getting through a skill, ticking a box ... skimming the surface of the things you need to."	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	SPaG is explicitly taught in yr6 with the end goal of the SATs/writing moderation, whereas this isn't the case in yr. SPaG is more integrated and therefore holds less weight	"For yr 6s, the sheer content regarding SPaG is huge and the levels of detail and understanding that they've got to go into is much greater than they need to go into later in the school, even beyond middle school." In yr7, this isn't taught "explicitly" but rather integrated into the lessons.	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Chn in yr6 can struggle with the transition because how they approach their learning changes and they have to be more independent	"Some people in yr6 can't be allowed to show their creative flair because it is so prescriptive ... it's a big shift going from yr6" which is very structured and prescriptive.	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disparity between curricula	Transition between curricula is lacking because of the massive difference between the two curricula in terms of marking and content expectations	"KS2 is so fundamentally different to KS3 ... For students who go from yr6 to high school, they're starting with a new set of criteria and you're seeing a massive scism between the two" whereas in middle school this can be mitigated	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
SPaG	Yr7 SPaG requirements are not as rigorous compared with yr6	"Yr7, the SPaG requirements are very very limited and very basic even for the most academic chn in yr7. If you're thinking about the particulars in yr6 we have to get through, particularly those chn who are looking at exceeding within their writing, it's incredible the expectation on them."	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Teacher understanding of curriculum	Greater familiarity with curriculum expectations but also knowledge of the children's prior learning	"If it's a class I've already taught in yr6, it makes transition very smooth both for them and for me"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Teacher understanding of curriculum	Allows for a smoother and more purposeful transition between key stages	"In middle school, it's definitely about building on what they're already done so there's a Much more seamless transition in terms of the curriculum and in your teaching methods."	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	In yr7, students are expected to be more independent	"I expect more independence from them [Yr7 students]" "Probably less guided work in yr7"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	High school has low expectations with regards to what students have learnt in UKS2	The "mindset in high school" is still that chn have done "nothing" in UKS2, which is borne from the introduction of the KS3 NC.	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	Lower expectations on the chn in yr7 compared to yr6	"I think the beginning of yr7 for the chn is often a bit of a breather because the demands of the SATS, particularly now they've got the SPaG are so huge that I think they - trachers and students - mentally take a sigh of relief."	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	Writing expectations in yr6 and 7 are very different	"From working as a Yr6 moderator, I think that the writing tht those chn produce in yr6 is not realistic. It's so heavily structured that it is difficult to replicate that intensity regularly"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect

Difference in expectations	In middle school, no difference in assessment expectations	"I had the same expectations in yr7 as I did in yr6. Just because you haven't got an externally marked test or externally moderated writing at the end of it doesn't mean to say that you can have a slower pace or lower expectations".	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	Yr7 teachers unaware of the rigour of the UKS2 curriculum	"Having worked as a consultant from primary into secondary, seeing chn in yr7 doing work that was so much inferior to the expectations in yr6. I think it's sole destroying for the teachers and boring for the children"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Teacher expectations	Suggestion that because the yr7 curric and expectations are less pressured, homework takes a back seat	With regards to homework, it was more rigorous, challenging and consistent in yr6 whereas this isn't the case in yr7	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations/ Curriculum content	SPaG carries a lot of weigh in yr6 and perhaps due to it being the focus of a test, chn feel that it is no longer important or applicable when they move up a key stage. It could also be that chn find it difficult to consistently apply SPaG to their writing because it is to such a high level and this is unsustainable.	SPaG seems to go "by the board [in yr7]" it's not as important, whereas in yr6" it's a lot more rigorous and prescriptive. "Very few chn actually take that on board and carry that on into yr7, 8 and upwards."	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Teacher expectations	When there is familiarity with the curric of both key stages, it is easier for teachers and Tas to ensure that they are building on the same skills to allow for a more fluid development	"My teaching approach did not change from yr6 to yr7 [in intervention] but the questioning would probably be deeper in yr7"	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	Yr6 is more prescriptive and dictated whereas yr7 is about students gaining academic independence	"Yr 6 is really the SATs external proof of pupil progress. Yr7 is where they're into KS3 and it's a question of emphasis - there's more emphasis on them doing the work without them necessarily being taught every single thing. They're expected to think for themselves in KS3."	Chair of governors	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	If chn did not meet the expected standard in yr6, they have to catch up in yr7. Expectations in yr7 are that students work more independently thereby imply that it is far more spoon-fed in yr6.	"The demands in yr6 are that they've got to get SATs done, but there is a different emphasis when they're in yr7. Yes, some of them will be doing the catch-up - those that didn't really make it - but they are encouraged to catch-up in a different manner to how you'd do it in yr6. Yr 7, they're starting the senior school element so they have to think for themselves and the teachers expect them to think for themselves."	Chair of governors	Curriculum disconnect
Difference in expectations	Performance trajectory is not continued into yr7 because curriculum	"Because the expectations are different in terms of curriculum outcomes there is necessarily a dip in progress and achievement and outcomes [from yr6 to 7]"	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect

	expectations are lower			
Middle school	Can work more closely with colleagues and look at the children's prior work - allows for smoother transition	"you liaise with their previous teacher, and you've got the data, and you should also have a portfolio of work so it's not like high school."	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Middle school	Knowledge of the key 2 curric allows for a more robust KS3 curric because there is a greater awareness and appreciation of how much the chn in KS2 have been challenged therefore the KS3 curric needs to match this.	"We have a luxury in middle schools in that because we can see the standards that have been attained in yr6, we do have a degree of a deeper understanding so we can tailor yr7 and 8 to pull the chn up as we see accordingly which is not a luxury afforded to secondary colleagues."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Middle school	The issues of transition isn't as pronounced in middle school because the children are known, and their achievements are fully understood whereas in the 2-tier system, this isn't necessarily the case	In a middle school, "the teaching can be much more tailored" because the teachers know the students and what they have previously achieved whereas this isn't necessarily the case in the 2-tier system	Chair of governors	Curriculum disconnect
Issues with high school	High schools discount what the chn have been previously taught and want to start the curric from scratch	"Evn where the gov wrote packages of materials for yr6 to 7 transition, or where schools got together to put through as departments transition from yr6 to yr7, it's always very difficult to get high school teachers to buy into it. It's almost as if they're yours and when they come to yr7 they're ours so we'll do things our way and we'll give them what we think they need regardless of what they've already done"	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Issues with high school	SATs results lack validity with secondary school teachers	"Having chaired meetings where you've got yr6 teachers working with yr7 high school teachers, it was always a very much us against them and a feeling of being two opposing teams rather than a team working together... the yr6 teachers feeling as though they were being judged not about what was best for the chn."	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Issues with high school	Lack of familiarity with KS2 curric in secondary school leads to lack of ambition/pushing the students	"If in a traditional 2-tier system you don't know the demands of what they've done ... they come in in yr7 and you treat them a bit like they can't do anything and you start off with very easy texts"	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Issues with high school/disconnect between curricula	Content in yr 6 is considerable compared to yr7. Secondary teachers unaware of this.	"I'm guessing that teachers' expectations in high school are lower, they maybe don't know what to expect out of yr7s." The UKS2 curric is "full-on". Wondering what's left to cover in KS3 given how much content at KS2.	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect

Issues with high school/ Disparity between curricula	KS3 teachers are unfamiliar with the expectations of the KS2 curric therefore can't fully appreciate where their students have got to by the time they reach yr7	"I think yr7 teachers sometime underestimate what they [yr6] have done because they haven't seen the level of detail that's gone into the SATs, because it is the SATs that's pushing it"	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Issues with high school	Lack of understanding of the SATs and KS2 curric means that in KS3, chn are often given texts that will not challenge them given the challenges faced in KS2 and the SATs papers themselves.	"I see what peers are writing on social media outlets like Twitter when they suggest books that I know are taught in yr4 because they have a complete ignorance of what is expected of chn at the end of yr6 and the kind of texts they are expected to engage with. And certainly, a lot of texts that are chosen in yr7 and 8 in a traditional 2 tier model are seen as easy to access when really they are woefully inadequate to stretch chn."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Issues with high school	Secondary teachers do not know what the demands of the KS2 curric and assessment are therefore can't fully engage with the KS2 data.	SATs results and writing moderation results should carry a lot of weight but secondary colleagues do not understand the work and effort that goes into achieving those results "I think they just see raw figures and make assumptions and they don't know what it's taken to get to that point"	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Greater collaboration between KS2 and 3 teachers is needed with KS2 teachers giving their expertise to ensure that yr7 curric is suitably challenging and supports KS3 teachers.	"There would be no harm in having units of work in at least the first term of yr7 which are developed by primary or middle school colleagues that shows just what chn would be capable of accessing in yr7 and having exemplar pieces of writing so that secondary teachers have a very clear starting point"	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Addressing the transition issue through greater communication and work between schools	"Team teaching, when they've got a bit of downtime in high schools when yr11 and 13 have gone, and post-SATs some genuine, planned together units of work and some team teaching."	English consultant	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Ensure that the skills between KS2 and 3 are bridged effectively	"I think there needs to be much of the same strands focusing on all the way through... where we focus a lot in KS2 on vocabulary, the idea of information retrieval, on inference, yes those skills are some used at KS3, it's more analyse and exploration because you're preparing them for what's coming at KS4... You need to have almost like a golden thread going through so if you're learning vocabulary at KS2 and you're learning SPaG at KS2, you need to carry it on"	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	KS3 curriculum would benefit from being more prescriptive, or giving greater guidance which links to and follows on from the KS2 curric.	"I think the KS3 curric needs to be more prescriptive or at least give you, like, these students in yr6 have had an external assessment on texts which have, very often (the 3rd text [in the SATs]) has got a reading age of 15 or 16 so please don't then in yr7 give them a text that's got a reading age of 9. A) because it's not in line with their chronological age and B) it is far easier than what they've done in at least the last 2 years, if not 3. It needs to be more prescriptive, I'm not saying it needs to give you the texts but it does need to have like a caveat in there about reading age, or the level of vocabulary, or the level of challenge, or these are the recommended texts for yr7,8,9 so that you can at least see the level of book you should be starting with."	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Build on KS2 skills	In the middle school, we can build on those skills effectively and ensure that the KS2 and 3 currics are interwoven and drip-fed	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect

Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Better understanding of curriculum and assessment requirements for KS3 practitioners	"I think they [secondary school teachers] need to take a greater and keener interest in that external assessment that every yr6 takes."	Head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Lack of awareness of how the curriculum is delivered at the ground level and a disconnect between the content - particularly with regards to SPaG - between KS2 and 3	"They need to go back to the people who are delivering the curriculum they've designed and actually ask them where the problems lie and then craft something amended around it. SPaG, for example, is so important in yr 6 then it disappears in KS3 to a great extent so what is the point, one would ask."	Deputy Headteacher	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Secondary teachers need to have at least a rudimentary working knowledge of what yr6 have to do	"It would be really useful for high school teachers to go to yr 6 and see for themselves, just become more informed about what they have to do. Maybe sit a SATs paper themselves, maybe produce a piece of writing"	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Chn are so conditioned to being assessed that when that is removed, their motivation can dwindle	"They possibly have to work towards something ... if there is a purpose then they can do it and it could be that at the end of yr7 there's some sort of assessment" which acts as a motivator	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	KS3 teachers need greater familiarity with the process leading to end of KS2 so SATs results carry more meaning	"The yr7 teachers need to know what the yr6 students have done and I don't think they do. That's not their fault, it's not often something they have to teach. They get given a number that that student is working at but they don't know necessarily what has gone into that because they are teaching to a different format."	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity /End points	Chn need to not be tested in such a rigorous and definite way so they learn to perform consistently well and for the purpose of performing well rather than being driven by assessment/external accountability	"We need to not train them to that external level so that they work for the production of good quality work rather than to achieve a good grade so that when they go into yr7 and 8 and they don't have that good grade to work towards, that external verification, they still know how to work for the sake of doing the work and improving themselves"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Disparity could be avoided if there was no clear distinction between the KS2 and 3 curriculum	"It should be a flow-through curriculum; it shouldn't be a separate KS2/KS3 curriculum. Chn should be on a continuous path from start to finish whether they are meeting their age group expectations or not"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	KS2 and 3 curriculum would benefit from being joined rather than separated out	"KS3 shouldn't be a cut-off and we start doing completely different work at this point. It should be a continuous flow of learning"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect

Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Transition unit or steps for teachers to follow to aid transition, also as an aid for chn so they are aware that expectations are the same in KS3 as KS2. Pace can be less intense but skillset is the similar with opportunity for development and progress	"I'm hesitant to say that there needs to be something as prescriptive as in yr6 but I think there needs to be an awareness of what chn are expected to do by the end of yr6 and therefore built upon in yr7 and8 so there's a proper bridging the gap between KS2 and KS4 so I do think there needs to be perhaps a transition scheme or set of steps so that teacher and chn know that the same is expected of them but perhaps where they're given more time to explore certain areas in a way that you can't do in KS2, perhaps."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Resolving the issue of curriculum disparity	Introduce a formalised assessment within KS3 to show consolidation of skills	"I think it would be a useful waypoint to have some form of assessment at the end of yr8 to show that chn have consolidated and built upon those skills before moving onto their final yr of KS3."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Bridging the key stage divide	Ensuring nationwide parity from 6 to 7 to ensure teachers are building on the SATs and into yr7	A module which all children work through that bridges the gap between ks2 and 3 to ensure parity and building on the skills honed by the high yr6 expectations.	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	The two curricula don't make any consideration for transition between the two key stages, either from KS2 up or Ks3 down.	"Transition isn't catered to at all. It's almost ignored"	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Because there is no parity between the curricula, chn can struggle to build on what they learnt in KS2 - there's no opportunity for them to develop these skills thus leading to a regression in ability/progress	"I think it's [transition between curricula] almost regressive. I think yr7 expectations can often be far less demanding than yr6 which is why chn sometimes slip back"	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Continuity of skills is lacking which means that content can be more closely examined in yr7 but that invariable leads to a lack of rigour thereby leading to underperformance	Writing and SPaG aren't brought up at all from KS2 to KS3. "In yr6 you're constantly hammering the same set of objectives and assessment criteria and in yr7 you can afford to go into fewer or them but in greater depth. But that then means that it's slightly less rigorous."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Lack of direction in lower KS3 because it doesn't have the same focus or pressure as yr6.	"I think that yr7 and 8 becomes a strange, almost transient phase where, if you're not careful, not a lot happens and it almost stagnates after the intense pressure and challenge of yr 6."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect

Disconnect between key stages	Yr6 is so prescriptive that a holistic approach is more difficult but yr7 allows for developing an appreciation for, and love of literature, because it is less pressured/prescriptive/intense.	"Yr 6 is about teaching the chn skills to do well in their SATs ..." in yr 7 its about "enriching the chn's understanding of books in a way that does not happen in yr6."	Former head of English	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Priority given to exam year groups	"There's not enough priority given to yr 7, they don't have as many lessons"	English teacher	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	The lessons - and therefore the curriculum - are less stimulating in yr7 compared to UKS2	"I have heard the words 'it's a bit boring'" from a yr7 student	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Implication is that chn are spoonfed/aware of what they need to do in yr6 but have to become more independent learners in yr7 which could account for the perceived underperformance	"It's very prescriptive in yr6 whereas it's more abstract in yr7 ... I think it suits more chn than not [to have rigidity and structure] ... they like the challenges [of the SATs]"	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Secondary teachers do not have the requisite knowledge of the SATs to aid their understanding of the ability of the chn coming up from primary. Additionally, because the curricula are so different, gaps in chn's knowledge are less easily identified following the move to KS3 (in secondary)	"I think in middle school the transition from yr6 to 7 is much more fluid ... it's a very different story from primary to secondary where the staff won't know what the specific gaps are that the chn have in their yr6 learning and the SATs will not give them a clue as to whether they enjoy reading, what motivates them"	SENDCO	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Yr6 receive lots of support but this is not the case in yr7. They have to make the transition from being heavily supported to having no additional support completely independently	"In yr6 they're bombarded with every intervention going so they get this false sense of security that when they then go into yr7 it's all taken away ... I do feel that the progression in yr7 is less."	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect

Disconnect between key stages	SATs are such a key focus in UKS2 and students are given every support available, yet when they start yr7, this routine and support that they're become accustomed to stops entirely.	"Almost from the end of yr5, it's [the SATs] introduced to them then at the end of yr 6 the lessons are changed, their timetables are changed, teachers and interventions are all changed and then they go on to the summer holidays and when they come back, they're left to their own devices"	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Middle schools are able to handle the transition more effectively than in the two tier system because they are more aware of the curricula	"There is some continuity in the curriculum but I think this is more down to the staff I've worked with [in middle school]"	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Yr6 benefit from having interventions to help them prepare for their SATs and this has the benefit of pushing them academically. This is not necessarily the case with yr7 because interventions are prioritised to KS2.	"Chn in yr6 make greater progress because of the interventions. Yr7 don't seem to have as much interventions to keep them going higher and pushing them."	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Yr7 are not the focus because there are no SATs therefore there is less pressure on them but conversely, less focus.	"Yr 7s, I always think they seem to be the forgotten chn because there's not as much going on for that yr as there is for yr 6 ... Yr7s are sort of left alone really"	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Yr6 have a clear goal whereas it's more nebulous in yr7 and students can struggle as a result of this	"Yr6 have been so looked after and the targets" are clear "they know exactly what they need to do" but this isn't the case in yr7.	Teaching assistant	Curriculum disconnect
Disconnect between key stages	Yr7 allows for more autonomy because it is less prescriptive and this in turn means that teachers have the time to more fully support their students compared to yr6 where the curriculum is a lot more demanding	"Because the majority are learning autonomously, it means that the class teachers can spend that extra time to help, to guide, and where necessary to prod" because teachers are under less curriculum pressures.	Chair of governors	Curriculum disconnect

Disconnect between key stages	There is not the content or skillset in yr6 to amply prepare chn for yr7 and equally, not the content, skills, etc in yr7 that echoes the yr6 curriculum. The disconnect means that they have to spend a good portion of their first yr of KS3 making the adjustment.	"The autumn term for me has always been the time of transition for them ... it is really where they are shown where they need to be aiming at and that's where they need to find their feet and move in and by the spring term they should all be running with it."	Chair of governors	Curriculum disconnect
Prioritising exam years	Yr7 are seen to be neglected because they do not sit an externally assessed exam therefore they do not require as much support so academically and pastorally they may struggle in the move to KS3	"When they are in yr6, they are the sole focus of that school. When they're in yr7, they no longer have this because they are not an exam yr group ... they're almost pushed to one side"	Teaching assistant	Existing approaches to transition
Social and emotional side of transition	Focus is too much on the social side of transition - looking at the child, rather than the academic - looking at the child's ability, progress and performance	"I think there needs to be a higher expectations on yr7 and more of a focus on pedagogy and the academic side rather than it all being about the social side of transition. It's always always been about the social side. "	English consultant	Existing approaches to transition
Social and emotional side of transition & Issues with high school	Focus is on the social side of transition. High school teachers are unfamiliar with the KS2 curric so don't take it into account with transition	"If you were in a 2-tier system, they do transition from a social point-of-view ... but in terms of curriculum, there isn't one. So I know of very few teachers of KS3 who pay attention to the KS2 curriculum. I used to work in the 2-tier system and I used to be very blasé about the KS2 curric... Because the 2 don't marry up there is no real need to go and see your yr6s in practice because when they come to you you're starting on a new set of skills and a new curric that doesn't really bear much resemblance to what they've done before"	Head of English	Existing approaches to transition
Pastoral issues	Students in yr7 have a lot to deal with pastorally so considerable changes in curriculum only add to the problem and, in fact, compound the problem	"I think in a 2-tier system, they have to hit the ground running at the start of the autumn term and I suspect a lot of them will struggle simply because they're with completely different teachers, they're in a different environment"	Chair of governors	Existing approaches to transition
Disconnect between key stages	Pastorally, chn are prioritised in yr6 because of the external pressure and expectation surrounding the SATs	"In yr6 the focus is on SATs and they get lots and lots of support. Every single child, whether they're low ability or high ability, is not forgotten. There's masses of support and we [TAs] get to know these children ... but they move onto yr7 and it's just goodbye. There's no real transition"	Teaching assistant	Existing approaches to transition
Assessment/ disparity between curricula	More creativity allowed/expected in yr7 responses whereas in yr6 it's more prescriptive and in-line with a set criteria	Assessment in yr7 requires more detailed responses whereas in yr6 it's been "very much answer it like this" a clear structure approach to answering questions"	English teacher	Performativity

Assessment criteria	More teacher autonomy in yr7 because you look at the chd's work holistically. Allows teacher judgement more in yr7 because there is less of a criteria ehich must be met.	"Easier in yr7 without those strict tick lists because in yr 7 you can look at that child, look at that book and you can see that this child has got flair, this child can write well, this child has an understanding of that text that we read... In yr7 I can be more holistic, I can talk about that child and I can use teacher judgement in a way that perhaps I can't in yr 6 because it wouldn't be me assessing them essentially, it would be a test on a day."	English teacher	Performativity
Assessment criteria	Writing is not given as much significance as SATs in yr6.	More emphasis on SPaG and reading because of the SATs and writing tends to be "more of an add-on unless schools know they're going to be moderatd"	English consultant	Performativity
Assessment/ disparity between curricula	Greater opportunity in yr7 for a more wide-ranging curriculum which is in contrast to yr6 which is very SATs focused. The attention is elsewhere in KS2. Staff and students react to this relentless pursuit of attainment by working more holistically.	"at the end of KS2 you have a rigorous, summative assessment which means that teachers are constantly challenging and pushing chn to reach a high standard and that level of challenge does not exist at yr7 and8, and I do think that both chn and teachers draw back a little bit and try and focus more on maybe a broader and more balanced curriculum which doesn't really happen in yr6"	Former head of English	Performativity
Assessment/ disparity between curricula	Attainment criteria is very specific and narrow in yr6 whereas it's more open in yr7 which is, in part, due to the less prescriptive curriculum but also the lack of external assessment.	"Massive difference - the expectations in yr7 are far less obvious, I think they're sort of implicit and linked to GCSE outcomes which are quite far removed from y7. Whereasin yr6 they're broken down into really small, measureable steps therefore it's much easier, in a way, to measure chn's progress and what you need them to do. And in yr7 it affords you more time to ... take longer to graps certain skills"	Former head of English	Performativity
Assessment/ External accountability	Because there is no formalised external assessment in yr7, chn and teachers can afford to work at a slower pace. The lack of external assessment means that some students - and some staff - aren't as motivated to work in such a fast-paced way. This is the time to enjoy the studying rather than cram everything in.	"There are huge demands on yr6 in order to get ready for the SATs and I think there are virtually little-to-no demands made in yr7. I think that' artly because the chn have run out of steam and there's not the same incentive to work so hard in yr7 and partly because I think the teachers see it as a bit of a lull almost before they hit the ground running at KS4."	Former head of English	Performativity

Assessment/ disparity between curricula/ teacher input	Lack of formalised assessment nationally which allows teachers greater freedom in planning and assessment in KS3 compared to KS2 which is prescribed and a done-to model.	"It's more difficult to write valid assessment criteria for yr7 because there's no kind of national framework so it tends to be ver watered down GCSE-based requirements" but it is the school's choice as to how they assess "the teachers have more freedom to teach what they'd like ot teach and because it's not as prescriptive a KS2 there's more scope to teach and assess how you'd like to.	Former head of English	Performativity
Assessment criteria	Lack of parity in assessment from KS2 to 3, but also across KS3 nationally	"The assessment changes in that iat KS2 it's a done-to mode so we bring that into our KS2, whereas at KS3 it's so open-ended that every school will have a different assessment model"	Head of English	Performativity
Assessment criteria	SATs are not an adequate or fair assessment tool	"I don't think grading a child of 10 on a one-off assessment on one day is fair, at all ... I think you need to have a more holistic view of what the child is doing"	Deputy Headteacher	Performativity
Curriculum	There are still year group/key stage expectations which students are working towards	"Regardless of what key stage or what year, you've still got things [standards] you need to meet"	Teaching assisstant	Performativity



Participant information sheet: school staff

Research Project: Exploring the transition in English from year 6 to year 7

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not you would like to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

The purpose of this project is to explore perceptions of transition in English between years 6 and 7. This will form the basis of my doctoral thesis. The research stage will take place between June and August of this academic year.

1. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have experience of the transition in English between key stage 2 and key stage 3.

2. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not you will take part. If you do decide to give consent, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time* without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact me via email.

**Please note that once the interview has taken place, it will not be possible to withdraw your anonymised data from the research.*

3. What will happen to me if I take part? What do they have to do?

You will be invited to attend a video or telephone interview to discuss your experiences of the transition between year 6 and year 7 with a focus on the English curriculum. Questions will be open and there will be ample opportunity for you to expand on your responses. The interview will be more of a conversation than a question and answer session. The interview will be recorded – audio only – and once this has been transcribed, the audio file deleted. The audio and recordings of your activities

made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

4. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The risks or disadvantages of taking part are negligible. If you have concerns, Jennifer Griffiths will be available at any time to discuss any issues raised by the project.

5. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will highlight any issues surrounding the transition in English between year 6 and year 7. Subsequently, further exploration into the English curriculum can be done with any areas for development identified and solutions provided.

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

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. If you agree to us sharing the information you provide with other researchers (e.g. by making it available in a data archive) then your personal details will not be included unless you explicitly request this.

7. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

8. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

All data collected will be anonymised or pseudonymised; therefore, you will not be identifiable. The results of the research will be included in my doctoral thesis. All data will be kept for the duration of the project (until approximately October 2021) and then it will be destroyed. Audio files from the interview will be deleted after transcription – this will be within a month of the interview taking place. Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

9. Who is organising and funding the research?

Jennifer Griffiths is the lead researcher. No funding has been made available for this project.

10. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

11. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Education department.

Contact for further information:

Lead researcher	Jennifer Griffiths Windsor Park Middle School Springfield Road Uttoxeter ST14 7JX Tel.: 01889 563365 jgriffiths@windsorpark.staffs.sch.uk
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Thank you for your participation.



Participant consent form: school staff

Transition in English between years 6 and 7 consent form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking part in the project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 01.06.2020 or the project has been fully explained to me. [If you will answer no to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.]		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being interviewed one-to-one by the researcher – via video or telephone – to share my views on the year 6 and year 7 curricular. • Being audio recorded for the duration of the interview. 		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw myself from the study before 31.07.2020; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw myself.		
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address, etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data 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.		
I give permission for the interview that I provide to be deposited in The University of Sheffield data repository so it can be used for future research and learning.		
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		

I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		
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Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:

Lead researcher	Jennifer Griffiths Windsor Park Middle School Springfield Road Uttoxeter ST14 7JX Tel.: 01889 563365 jgriffiths@windsorpark.staffs.sch.uk
Supervisor	Dr Darren Webb University of Sheffield School of Education 241 Glossop Road Sheffield S10 2GW Tel.: 0114 222 8142 d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk
Head of department	Professor Elizabeth Wood Head of the School of Education University of Sheffield School of Education 241 Glossop Road Sheffield S10 2GW Tel.: 0114 222 8142 e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 9 – Ethical Approval Letter



Downloaded: 21/07/2022

Approved: 10/06/2020

Jennifer Griffiths

Registration number: 170125046

School of Education

Programme: EdD

Dear Jennifer

PROJECT TITLE: A small-scale study exploring the issues surrounding transition in English from year 6 to 7 in England

APPLICATION: Reference Number 035213

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 10/06/2020 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 035213 (form submission date: 01/06/2020);
- (expected project end date: 01/10/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1079991 version 1 (01/06/2020). Participant consent form 1079992 version 1 (01/06/2020).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu

Ethics Administrator School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>

- The project must abide by the University's Good Research Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file GRIPPpolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Abbreviations

DfE – Department for Education

EAL – English as an Additional Language

KS2 – Key stage 2

KS3 – Key stage 3

LEA – Local Education Authority

MAT – Multi Academy Trust

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SPaG – Spelling, punctuation and grammar

Ofsted – The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills

SATs – Standardised assessment tests

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