From odds-beating to odds-changing: understanding how schools in disadvantaged areas achieve good outcomes

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Abbreviations

CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CIN – Child in Need

CLA – the City Learning Academy (a pseudonym)

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

DfE – Department for Education

EAL – English as an Additional Language

EHCP – Education and Health Care Plan

EPPSE – Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project

FIN – Family in Need

FSM – Free School Meals

GCSE – General Certificate of Education (taken at the end of secondary school at age 16)

KIPP – the Knowledge is Power Program, a network of Charter Schools in the US

LAC – Looked After Child

LSOA – Lower-layer Super Output Area

MAT – Multi-Academy Trust

NEET – young people not in education, employment or training

Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

PE – Physical Education

PP – Pupil Premium

RE – Religious Education

SATs – Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Tests (taken at the end of primary school at age 11)

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SENDCO – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

TA – Teaching Assistant

Abstract

The poorest learners, living in the poorest areas, have through decades and across nations experienced lower levels of educational attainment than their wealthier peers. This project investigates two "odds-beating" schools – schools which secure better-than-expected outcomes for their disadvantaged pupils. It asks three research questions:

1) How do schools which appear odds-beating understand disadvantage in their local contexts and student populations?
2) How do they respond to this?
3) What is it about the nature of their response that supports their success?

I begin this thesis with an overview of ways in which disadvantage ("odds") is understood, or *known,* in scholarship, policy and practice. I challenge functionalist models of odds-beating-ness which rely solely on the redistribution of symbolic and economic capitals without disrupting ingrained systemic equities. Instead, I focus on "lifeworld use value" and the role of relational trust in setting educational agendas and deciding on valuable outcomes, considering opportunities for schools to exercise their agency creatively. I outline a view of socially just schooling based, following Nancy Fraser, on *participatory parity*, combining redistribution of resources with respect for difference. I propose a framework arising from the themes in the literature comprising four pillars – knowing, value, trust and agency – to construct a new version of odds-beating-ness in which subscription to normative or elite values is not the price of schooling success.

Studies of odds-beating schools tend to be quantitative, necessarily imposing pre-ordained criteria about what constitutes disadvantage and what counts as successful outcomes. My qualitative study makes "odds" and "outcomes" – as they are constructed within schools – objects of investigation in themselves. I became an "embedded researcher" in two secondary schools in a large urban area in the north of England, conducting observations, interviews and focus groups. One of these schools was a Research School and the other was a Teaching School.

My findings are organised around three "niches" which act as windows into the broader values and practices of each school: these are school-community relationships, vulnerable pupils, and nurture groups. I use each area to explore how odds and outcomes are formulated and addressed by the schools and elaborate empirically the four pillars from my framework.

This framework is a key contribution made by my study to the odds-beating field. It places odds and outcomes in a chronologically chaotic cycle, departing from the causal or linear approach taken in previous studies. I argue that schools can shape odds rather than (or as well as) achieving in spite of them. I propose that schools which approach disadvantage in a way aligned towards social justice – combining the redistribution of capitals with the recognition of other value systems – are not only odds-beating but odds-*changing*. I demonstrate that schools can exercise their agency to depart from the pervasive paradigm of efficiency – where schools work only as utility-maximisers in the educational marketplace, seeking at all costs to grow their assets (such as examination results). This project paves the way for a more context-responsive, hopeful and generous approach to changing, not only beating, the odds for disadvantaged pupils.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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This thesis is dedicated with all my love to Grandma Pat, who has always been totally committed to education and unwavering in her conviction that all children are wonderful.

Acknowledgements

About the author

After completing an undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature, I trained as a secondary English teacher with Teach First in Blackpool. During my three years there I completed both my PGCE and a part time MA in Education at the University of Manchester before embarking on this PhD in 2019.

In the course of my time at the Manchester Institute of Education I have worked as a research assistant, contributing to a report for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on the quality of regional Further Education and interviewing local headteachers as part of the Reaching Out To All Learners project. I shared my perspectives as an early career teacher in the book *Research on Becoming an English Teacher* (Routledge 2019) and provided research assistance for the book *Great Mistakes in Education Policy* (Policy Press 2021).

As well as completing the usual doctoral methods training, I took (for credit) two modules on the MA in Anthropological Research in the School of Social Sciences, in order to improve my understanding of ethnography.

1 Introduction

It is well documented that the economically poorest learners, living in the poorest areas, have through decades and across nations achieved systematically less well than their wealthier peers (OECD 2017). On average across comparable OECD countries, over two-thirds of the achievement gap observed at age 15 and about two-thirds of the gap among 25-29 year-olds was already seen at the age of 10 (OECD 2018). Despite international attempts to address this "outcome" gap – for example, marketised school systems, area-based strategies, and compensatory measures based on economic disadvantage – it remains a stubborn predicament globally.

The UK is a particularly pertinent instance of this challenge, as it has one of the widest disadvantaged gaps in rich countries internationally (Unicef 2018). This gap persists despite decades of various large-scale interventions of the kind listed above. Given that disadvantage disparities in education are evident across the world, learning from the UK context therefore has the potential for impactful transferability internationally. In the 2019 UK GCSE cohort, 40% of disadvantaged children who achieved the expected level at age 11 achieved good GCSEs in English and maths at the end of secondary school, compared with 60% of their non-disadvantaged peers (Farquharson et al 2022). The disadvantage "gap" has become more acute, and more high profile, as a result of school closures due to the Coronavirus pandemic, with estimates suggesting the discrepancy could widen by as much as 75% (UK Parliament 2020). Successive governments in the UK have committed to tackling this issue, often in line with broader political projects such as the privatisation of public services or the prioritisation of choice and competition (Hogan and Thompson 2020). Recently, there have been high-profile attempts to mitigate area-based disadvantage with Levelling Up, a "moral, social and economic programme for the whole of government" which aims to distribute "opportunity" more equitably across the country, by investing in health, broadband and transport as well as education (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 2022). Yet the gap in academic achievement between disadvantaged children and their peers has in fact stopped closing (Education Policy Institute 2022).

Nevertheless, there are schools which appear to *beat* these odds – where pupil populations achieve better academic outcomes than might be expected given the socioeconomic disadvantages they experience. The term "odds-beating" originated in research from the United States to describe this internationally identifiable phenomenon (e.g. Kropp 1996). The field centres on schools as a unit of analysis, looking at cohort-level odds-beating-ness: this is important because other contemporary policy and research often takes a highly

individualised approach to the odds-beating phenomenon, focussing on personal resilience (e.g. Public Health England 2014) or aspiration (e.g. Department for Education 2014). Odds-beating studies try to unveil the characteristics of odds-beating schools as holistic organisations, rather than viewing their students as a collection of odds-beating individuals who happen to attend the same institution.

In educational research, policy and practice in the UK, the logic of odds-beating is ubiquitous: this can be expressed as a desire to "break the links" (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2016) or "break the cycle" (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2004) between disadvantage and attainment. The Social Mobility Commission, spearheaded by "Britain's strictest headteacher" Katherine Birbalsingh, "exists to create a United Kingdom where the circumstances of birth do not determine outcomes in life" (Social Mobility Commission 2022). This thesis focuses on odds-beating schools, but problematises the basic concept as it is widely presented in research and policy.

In this project, I argue that we need to move the field beyond odds-beating in its current form. Current work on odds-beating-ness measures how efficiently schools achieve for their disadvantaged pupils the educational outcomes prized by the state. However, schools and school systems can beat the odds in ways which perpetuate broader social inequities: by engaging in rivalry for scarce resources, status or capitals; by narrowing curricula to achieve a constricted set of outcomes; by imposing rigid behaviour codes and excluding children who do not comply. This thesis argues that there are schools and systems which recognise that social inequities persist beyond the inequitable distribution of examination grades. Schools can work to change the material conditions which constitute "odds" – disadvantages – as well as the social and cultural structures which ascribe value to "outcomes". They can do this relationally with regard to their specific contexts and the value systems and disadvantages within them. In the context of increasing child poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2022) and increased disadvantage gaps due to the impact of Covid (Education Endowment Foundation 2022), it is particularly timely to contribute to the field an analysis of what schools can do, and already do, to promote positive outcomes for their pupils in a way that is not premised on competition or exceptionalism, but strives towards a more equitable education system for all.

When I use "disadvantage" in this thesis I use it as a shorthand for economic hardship, which then intersects with a wide range of socio-demographic and socio-structural factors, individually and at population level, in ways that impact on pupils' educational experiences (this will be discussed in more detail later).

This PhD project was funded through the ESRC CASE studentship programme. Distinctively, this requires studies to be developed with a partner organisation – in this case, St Bernadette's Teaching School – in order to address the organisation's particular research needs, specifically its aim of exploring successful approaches to mitigating pupil disadvantage and sharing these with other schools to facilitate system improvement. Often researchers are "embedded" in the partner organisation, which facilitates particularly good access to research subjects and involvement in research settings. As well as enhancing the work of the partner organisation, a CASE study aims to make "societal or economic impact through their collaboration with the CASE partner" (UKRI 2022).

St Bernadette's had a free school meal eligibility rate (used as an indicator of low family income) of 15.4%, and this cohort made better academic progress than the average for *all* children nationally, suggesting that it was beating the odds for its disadvantaged pupils in some ways at least. After an initial few months working only with St Bernadette's, I selected a contrasting school, the City Learning Academy (CLA), for in-depth comparative study. CLA was a "Research School" partnered with the local university. This school had a much higher free school meal eligibility rate of 52.4%, but nonetheless succeeded in enabling its pupil population to make progress in line with the national average. Both schools were secondary schools, educating children aged between 11 and 16. A focus on secondary schools specifically was important. The disadvantage gap is at its largest in secondary schools due to the cumulative nature of disadvantage: in 2017 it was found that, on average, disadvantaged pupils fall two months behind their peers for each year they attend secondary school and that, by the end of school, disadvantaged pupils are almost two years behind (Andrews et al 2017).

I applied for the studentship and commenced the project in 2019. Prior, I had trained as a secondary school English teacher through Teach First, which seeks to equip graduates to teach in schools with particularly disadvantaged pupil intakes. I spent three years teaching in such a school in Blackpool, a disadvantaged coastal resort town in the north of England. During this time, I became attuned to the specific challenges of trying to raise attainment in a school with a highly disadvantaged intake. I felt discomfort with some strategies that I felt sought to improve academic outcomes at all costs without considering the broader implications for social justice – for example the narrowing of the curriculum and the imposition of onerous behaviour codes. This project has allowed me to bring this discomfort into dialogue with evidence around odds-beating-ness to interrogate the assumptions made within this field, including my own.

The field

This project was conceived as a study of odds-beating schools. Most studies of the odds-beating phenomenon identify this where schools which attain outcomes for pupils which defy the statistical predictions arising from the disadvantages experienced by their students. These outcomes are usually measured by results on statutory tests, in the UK GCSEs. Odds-beating studies tend to be located in the broader field of School Effectiveness and School Improvement studies (abbreviated to SESI).[1] They aim to inform policy and practice by discovering attributes of schools which seem to ameliorate the impacts of disadvantage successfully with respect to measured academic attainment. Some studies, such as Muijs et al's 2014 evidence review of school improvement in disadvantaged areas, present lists of common factors such as "a focus on teaching and learning" or "creating an information-rich environment" (Muijs et al 2014: 149). This cataloguing of generic, nonspecific improvement factors is not always particularly helpful in advancing policy and practice around educational inequality. For example, they do not fully address the question of what it would mean in different sites or contexts to "focus on teaching and learning": what is being taught? Who is learning? How is this being measured? Other studies, such as Bryk et al's longitudinal study of Chicago elementary schools, make claims that certain attributes – for example "professional capacity", defined partly by reference to the "quality of the undergraduate institution" that teachers attended, as well as their previous experience – are indispensable to any improving school (Bryk et al 2010: 72).

These kinds of studies, often using quantitative or mixed methods, contrast *odds* and *outcomes* – statistical indicators of pupil disadvantage and of pupil achievement – to decide which schools are odds-beating, and whether schools are "improving" or "effective" in this regard. One metric frequently used in the UK for calculating odds is Pupil Premium (PP) eligibility – the proportion of pupils in a given school who attract extra state funding because they are or have recently been eligible for free school meals (this is in turn based on receipt of certain state benefits, itself based on low family income). Whilst recognising the necessity of such proxies of low socioeconomic status for some purposes, the present project suggests that current understandings of pupil disadvantage are often limited. It seeks to contribute an understanding of educational disadvantage as plural and dynamic, moving beyond a view of disadvantage that focuses on economic poverty (or proxies for poverty)

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[1] Reynolds et al (2014) identify a "fourth phase" of school effectiveness research emerging at the turn of the century, which found improvement and effectiveness research in closer "intellectual proximity". The two acronyms SE and SI have even merged into a commonly used one (SESI, e.g. in Reynolds 2007).

alone. Often, schools conceptualise and address disadvantage in ways that move beyond its economic dimensions alone (Carpenter et al 2013), and odds-beating studies must reflect this.

Odds-beating studies tend to use statutory examination grades, or occasionally the judgements of school inspectorates, to measure outcomes. The implicit logic of such studies is that the equitable distribution of grades among pre-categorised social and economic groups constitutes equitable schooling and thus social justice. This version of justice is broadly redistributive. Examination grades constitute symbolic capital – they have exchange value that can be leveraged for other resources and opportunities, such as university entrance or more lucrative employment (Bourdieu 1973). This rationale is highly functionalist, meaning that it takes for granted the intrinsic power of education to facilitate the acquisition of valuable social rewards (Raffo et al 2007). This is divorced from the unique contexts of individual schools and communities. The most disadvantaged must overcome their odds; to demonstrate success they must align themselves with a particular understanding of the good life, one that centres the acquisition of qualifications, economically productive "hard work", a "professional" career. There is no imperative within this logic to reevaluate what is understood by valuable learning and assessment, or even to challenge the *existence* of poverty.

Research on odds-beating schools tends to follow a causal input/output model (espoused for example by Bryk et al 2011). Students are portrayed as arriving at the beginning of their school careers with a fixed set of odds, and leaving at the end with outcomes. However, schools strive for a much broader range of outcomes for their pupils than those recognised in the standardised measures used in odds-beating research, for example students' enjoyment of their education and the elimination of bullying (Vignoles and Meschi 2010). In moving away from the functionalist model of odds-beating-ness which takes the universal prioritisation of certain outcomes for granted, the outcomes schools strive for can themselves become an object of study, to uncover what schools want for their disadvantaged pupils, and how these aims have emerged.

The simple idea that disadvantaged pupils should at all costs attain grades equitably, supposedly equipping them for competition in fulfilling employment, is seductive and seems to provide a satisfying and even attainable solution to problems of social justice. The functionalist policy and research models for odds-beating schooling have viewed education as a "positional good" (Hirsch 1978), meaning that schooling equips pupils to compete for scarce social and economic resources without being oriented towards social equity. The

unequal distribution of resources in society more broadly is accepted so long as the link between "background" and the accrual of these resources is broken. The elision of social *mobility* with social *justice* has been roundly and robustly critiqued (e.g. by Reay 2012). A meritocratic vision of social justice which claims to break the link between socioeconomic background and educational or economic reward – based on some combination of intelligence and hard work – does not challenge systemic social inequities.

This project makes a timely contribution to knowledge because it approaches the odds-beating phenomenon through the epistemological lens of participatory-parity oriented social justice. This paradigm of social justice recognises the appeal of the redistributive element (explained above) yet recognises the need also for the opportunity for all to participate as peers in social and political life (Fraser 1996). This means that "institutionalised cultural patterns of interpretation and evaluation" – for example, assessment of schooling outcomes – should "express equal respect for all participants" (Fraser 1996: 27). The valuing of a wider range of schooling outcomes can promote parity by challenging the social and cultural metric of success which perpetuates longstanding inequalities. Outcomes can be developed with greater sensitivity to the contexts of different schools, communities and individuals' lives. It is also important to construct outcomes which are not premised on scarcity (as, for example, is the distribution of GCSE grades). I will show that disadvantage and its remedies are chaotic and complex and not reducible to the (re)distribution of capitals. I aim to make fewer assumptions about odds and outcomes and to produce findings that are more responsive to the shaping forces of school context.

Research questions

My research questions, then, outline the contextually-responsive nature of my outlook. This means that I approach disadvantage as relative to individual school settings; the way that disadvantage is conceptualised by schools is what gives it meaning. In interrogating the way that understandings of odds and desirable outcomes are generated within and by schools and not just outside them, these questions move the project away from functionalist models of odds-beating-ness to take a broader view of social justice within education.

1. How do schools which appear odds-beating understand disadvantage in their local contexts and student populations?
2. How do they respond to this?
3. What is it about the nature of their response that supports their success?

In generating a new model of odds and outcomes, I will draw out transferable lessons from my empirical work in these two schools to explore ways in which they and other schools can engage with pupil disadvantage.

Context of the empirical research

This research conducted case studies of two secondary schools: St Bernadette's School and the City Learning Academy (CLA). They are both situated in the same large post-industrial metropolitan district in the north of England. It is estimated that over a third of children in the city live in poverty (HMRC 2013). Proportions of children categorised as "disadvantaged" by their eligibility for the Pupil Premium of course vary hugely among schools.

St Bernadette's School is a state funded Catholic school situated in one of its local authority's most deprived wards. The percentage of its pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium, though, was very slightly below the national average of 15.9% – in contrast to the Local Authority average of 41%. The school's GCSE Progress 8 score was rated "well above average" and the score for Pupil Premium eligible pupils was also far above the national average. (Progress 8 is a "value added" measure which aggregates the progress made by pupils at a secondary school by comparing their GCSE results with their scores from tests at the end of primary school.) PP pupils did not make as much progress by the Progress 8 measure as their peers who were not considered "disadvantaged", but did make better progress than the average for all pupils nationally. St Bernadette's was well-regarded in its local area and beyond, and maintained strong links to the local Catholic community. In general, pupils were drawn from a wide geographical area, far beyond the immediate locale of the school. St Bernadette's Teaching School existed because of the sustained success of the main school. It was effectively the outward-facing commercial arm of the school, organising Initial Teacher Training, continued professional development and leadership interventions for other schools in the area. The Teaching School programme, modelled on teaching hospitals, was part of the educational reforms embarked upon in 2010 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in the UK.

Pupil Premium eligibility at the City Learning Academy, on the other hand, was well over double the national average. Its pupil population was highly transitory and included a proportion of students who spoke English as an additional language (EAL) which far exceeded the national average, as well as a high proportion of pupils recently arrived in the UK. Its Progress 8 score was average. Most children lived within a small radius of the

school, in some of the most highly disadvantaged areas in England. CLA was a "Research School"; these schools were part of a national network which aimed to "lead the way in the use of evidence-based practice" (Research Schools Network website). CLA was notable in its strong sense of purpose as a community school. It ran a local "Family Region", convening other schools and agencies to tackle issues such as hunger and homelessness. It had a specialised unit for English language learners, helping to integrate students newly arrived in the UK, including those who had arrived without their parents. It hosted a weekly food bank upon which many families and members of the local community relied.

These schools were chosen as exceptional odds-beaters (albeit in different ways) but also because they were Teaching and Research Schools respectively; they were committed to networking to exchange and transfer knowledge with other schools, and therefore already had a critical awareness of their own contexts and issues of transferability. At St Bernadette's, disadvantaged learners were in a minority, but did better (by the standard measures) than they otherwise would be likely to do in another school in the city or the country. At CLA, the critical mass of students were disadvantaged, and this profoundly shaped the nature of their schooling. CLA's response to disadvantage was holistic, taking in the whole student body. Both schools were included because they seemed to demonstrate achievement along equitable and inclusive practices, for example equity in admissions and low rates of permanent exclusion. This is important at a time when pressures on schools to demonstrate good outcomes increasingly leads to practices such as "off-rolling", where disadvantaged or struggling students are unofficially removed from the school roll so that they do not impact negatively on school performance statistics (YouGov 2019).

The nature of this project as a CASE studentship meant that my stance as a researcher was distinctive. I worked as an "embedded researcher" (McGinity and Salokangas 2014) liaising closely with colleagues at the St Bernadette's Teaching School especially to shape my research around their strategic goals. I had a desk at St Bernadette's and spent a lot of time in both schools. I observed many hours of lessons, participating in the field by positioning myself as a teaching assistant; I interviewed staff and conducted focus groups with students; I hung around at break and lunch times and socialised informally with staff. Covid-19 was a significant shaping force in my research trajectory. The project started in September 2019 (luckily with plenty of time spent in St Bernadette's School), and less than six months later, in March, schools were closed for much of 2020 and 2021 for most pupils. When schools did reopen, for example in the autumn term of 2020, I spent as much time in them as possible. When they were closed, I continued my fieldwork by interviewing members of staff online. Covid made disadvantage much more stark and visible, and forced schools to improvise

remedies and rethink their priorities. I have not treated Covid as an add-on; it has not been allocated its own thematic chapter, but is part of the dynamic backdrop which pervades both case studies completely.

This thesis will begin with a literature review, which surveys the field of odds-beating studies and situates it within a functionalist paradigm. This section will also explore the outcomes of schooling as they are presented in research, policy and practice, and present a version of social justice based on participatory parity. I will go on to look at the role of trust in disadvantage-responsive schooling, before considering ways in which schools exercise their agency to challenge disadvantage. I will then outline my methodology, specifically the use of qualitative nested case studies. The chapters setting out my findings will report ways in which the schools conceptualised disadvantage to think about odds, and then ways that they sought to mitigate it in their pursuit of outcomes they saw as desirable. In my discussion chapter, I explicate my conceptual framework, which brings together the theoretical and empirical outcomes of this thesis. This framework situates odds and outcomes in a chronologically chaotic cycle, rather than a linear sequence. It identifies four pillars which orient schooling towards social justice: *knowing, trust, value* and *agency*.

In this thesis, I seek to move away from a conceptualisation of school improvement and effectiveness – whether on an individual school or systems level – that is concerned only with the redistribution of normative modes of capital. This is a different vision of equity, one which seeks "to base itself on absolute generosity, absolute gift, expenditure without return, a pure propulsion into the future that does not rebound with echoes of an exchange dictated by the past" (Grosz 1999: 11). *Return* here, I think, is used in its sense within the semantics of capital. Equitable schools and school systems can and should expend resources on their students in pursuit of outcomes other than the acquisition of symbolic capital with exchange value "dictated by the past" (such as examination results) – there are different types of return. It is hoped that this research will encourage schools to pursue a vision of success and equity aligned with this spirit of hope and generosity.

2 Understanding disadvantage

The following literature review is divided into four chapters. The first provides an overview of the field of "odds-beating" school studies, looking particularly at ways in which existing research characterises disadvantage. I situate many of these studies within a functionalist paradigm. Functionalism assumes that "if specific (albeit complex) problems in the way education works within society can be overcome, its expected benefits will indeed materialise" (Raffo et al 2007: 5). Education, in this worldview, has by common consensus a clear social function, ensuring the perpetuation of social norms, values and order. The functionalist position insists that if pupils considered to be disadvantaged achieve academically in the current framework, the social benefits of education will be realised. I look at more socially critical alternatives, considering the intersecting and chronological dimensions of disadvantage in a broader political context. I will explore ways in which schools, policymakers and researchers claim to *know* about disadvantage, looking specifically at the Pupil Premium metric alongside other "subjugated" forms of knowledge held by schools (Foucault 1980: 81).

The second chapter of the literature review explores the kinds of outcomes that schools strive for, and considers the kinds of outcomes to which makers of policy (and thus the researchers evaluating it) ascribe worth. I explore odds-beating research and practices which fixate on the redistribution of examination grades and other capitals at the cost of other, broader outcomes. I then consider outcomes more aligned with an approach to social justice premised on "participatory parity" (Fraser 2000): the premise that all members of society should be able to participate as peers in political, cultural and social life, with respect for difference working in concert with redistribution.

In the third chapter, I look at popular models of odds-beating schools, in particular the "no-excuses" schooling trend, centred on a broadly traditionalist "knowledge curriculum" and rigorous behaviour policies. These models are highly functionalist in that they accept unquestioningly the intrinsic value of the official rewards of schooling – namely the efficient acquisition of good examination results. Whilst recognising the importance of redistribution as part of a wider conceptualisation of social justice, I critique this functionalist kind of odds-beating-ness: it manifests a lack of trust in the ability of pupils, families and communities to contribute valuably to schooling. I contemplate more trusting alternatives which are linked to participatory parity, exploring and critiquing the doctrine of efficiency within schooling whereby schools seek primarily to cultivate symbolic capitals with exchange-value in the competitive educational marketplace.

Having identified difficulties with functionalist conceptions of "odds-beating" which seem to seek only to move existing capitals around, the final chapter suggests alternative approaches – ways that schools can and do strive towards a broader conception of social justice. Some schools, it seems, manage to combine redistributive justice (in the form of acquiring qualifications for disadvantaged students) with recognition of, and respect for, difference. This chapter situates the study in its policy context – one of "chaotic centralisation" (Greany and Higham 2018: 12). Over the past decade, state responsibilities have been pared down, for example by the underfunding of social care and cuts to state benefits. This has left a vacuum which schools can deploy their agency to fill in multifarious, often creative, ways. Schools can address students' *odds* directly rather than simply seeking to *beat* them by achieving good outcomes in standardised tests in spite of disadvantages. My conclusion will tie these emerging themes together into a conceptual framework which will inform my investigation. Before embarking on these substantive chapters, however, it will be necessary to outline the theoretical framework which underpins this thesis: Nancy Fraser's "bivalent" concept of social justice.

Nancy Fraser's theoretical framework of social justice

Fraser identified in the 1990s a burgeoning "identity politics" which was "supplant[ing] class interest as the chief medium of political mobilisation". "Cultural domination," she explains, "supplants exploitation as a fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle" (Fraser 1995: 68).

Fraser distinguishes between two types of injustice: the first is "socioeconomic" and the second is "cultural or symbolic". Cultural recognition is not, Fraser argues, enough to remedy injustice on its own; but neither is the "materialist paradigm", which can be "culture blind" (Fraser 1995: 69) – this is a critique which could be applied to the Pupil Premium policy, which is the dominant way in which disadvantage is identified within UK schools (see the discussion on Pupil Premium from page 32).

Defining material and cultural injustice

Fundamentally, material injustice describes the unfair distribution of resources and capital. In an educational context, this can relate to the economic disadvantage faced by students and the subsequent impact on their schooling (OECD 2017, as above.) In this thesis, I will show that schools can and do effect redistribution of material resources and capital in their work with families and communities.

However, I will be broadening the notion of "capital" when discussing this first element of social justice to include symbolic capital such as examination grades. Bourdieu (2002) is therefore important to the application of Fraser's bivalent conception of justice in this thesis. The different types of capital identified by Bourdieu can be encompassed in efforts to redistribute resources: schools aim towards the redistribution of symbolic capitals in the form of GCSE grades, for example. Bourdieu's contribution is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Cultural injustice, on the other hand, is "rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication" (Fraser 1995: 71). Examples from schooling might include inadequate representations of Black culture and history in school curricula (Mansfield 2023), or over-policing of schools with larger proportions of students from ethnic minorities (Runnymede Trust 2023).

Entwining

Fraser sees her task as developing a "*critical* theory of recognition". She assumes that "justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition" (original italics). Economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect, she argues, "are currently entwined with and support one another" (Fraser 1995: 69). "Even the most material economic institutions," according to Fraser, "have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension; they are shot through with significations and norms… far from occupying two airtight separate spheres, economic injustice and cultural injustice are usually interimbricated so as to reinforce one another dialectically" (Fraser 1995: 72).

A good example of this entwining as it is evident in UK education discourse is the term "working class". This is a term which in the UK by no means solely signifies economic disadvantage but also a perceived cultural misalignment with educational success (see for example the 2021 report from the UK Parliament's Education committee titled "The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it"

(Education Committee 2021)). Working-class-ness does not solely or even necessarily indicate poverty, but it is a designation with a "cultural dimension" with attendant "significations and norms".

Educational disadvantage, then, is "bivalent". It contains economic as well as cultural injustice. It is a "hybrid mode" (Fraser 1995: 78): "Bivalent collectivities… may suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition".

Remedies

The remedy for economic injustice, Fraser summarises (albeit recognising varying theoretical accounts from Rawls to Sen), is "political-economic restructuring of some sort" (Fraser 1995: 73). The remedy for cultural injustice is "some sort of cultural or symbolic change… [which] could involve recognizing and positively valorizing cultural diversity". These are "redistributive remedies" and "recognition remedies", respectively.

Both material and cultural injustice are barriers, in Fraser's view, to what she terms "parity of participation". "According to this radical-democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life" (Fraser 2005: 73). The two kinds of institutionalised obstacles outlined above can prevent people from "participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction" (73). Participatory parity is therefore a key goal in working towards social justice.

Understanding disadvantage

To make claims that some schools are odds-beating, and to be able to tackle disadvantage in schools at all, it is necessary to possess some knowledge about what "odds" are – to characterise disadvantage. The central tenet of disadvantage as it is understood in education and in this study is economic disadvantage, though there are plenty of complex interactions and intersections with other types of disadvantage which will be explored.

What are odds-beating schools?

Internationally, there are entrenched and well-documented inequalities in educational attainment relating to socio-economic status, such that socio-economic status is universally the strongest predictor of educational outcomes (Von Stumm et al 2019). Some disadvantaged individuals, and some schools serving disadvantaged cohorts, buck this trend. Such pupils and schools have naturally attracted the interest of scholars and policymakers.

"Success against the odds" is a recurring trope in education policy and research. An influential text in the field of odds-beating school studies is Bryk et al's *Organizing schools for improvement: lessons from Chicago* (2010). It charts a longitudinal study of elementary schools in Chicago during a time of rapid policy reform, specifically decentralisation. At this time, Chicago moved away from centrally directed school reform and towards "democratic localism as a lever for change" (Bryk et al 2010: 12). "Distant institutions," i.e. centralised bureaucracy, were seen as "the source of the problem," and school leaders were charged with "develop[ing] their own plans to improve student learning" (12). "Principals," according to Bryk et al, "gained increased authority over their own buildings and the right to hire teachers of their own choosing" (15). This background is important, because it has parallels with the context of academisation in the UK, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Bryk et al (2010) studied 100 schools in high-poverty contexts in Chicago in which pupils improved substantially in reading and mathematics over a seven year period, and contrasted them with another 100 schools in which pupils did not. They then produced a model (Figure 1) which identified five key supports for schools to improve into odds-beaters: professional capacity, comprised of the "quality" (qualifications and experience) of new teachers and supporting whole-staff learning; school learning climate, ensuring environments where pupils feel safe and are engaged in ambitious learning; relationships with parents; community ties, repairing the disconnect between schools and the communities they serve; and instructional guidance, which concerns schoolwide curricula and pedagogy. Bryk et al (2010) use the metaphor of "baking a cake" to claim that each support is indispensable to improvement, showing that a weakness in any key areas is likely to lead to stagnation – just as a cake needs every key ingredient. The arrows in the model show that the "ingredients" work in synthesis with each other to produce "improvement" towards odds-beating-ness. Bryk et al also attest to the importance of leadership – they liken the school principal to the "head chef" (Bryk et al 2010: 196) – and relational trust is "social energy", or the "oven's heat" (138). However, this *relationality* is broadly interpreted as on-boarding other stakeholders to the existing educational project of the school, as will be discussed in the chapter on trust (Chapter 4).

Figure 1

Relational Trust Across a School Community

Leadership as the Driver for Engagement Change

Professional Capacity

Instructional Guidance

Classroom Instruction

School Learning Climate

Parent, School

Community Ties

Student Outcomes
- Enhanced Engagement
- Expanded Academic Learning

Local Community Context
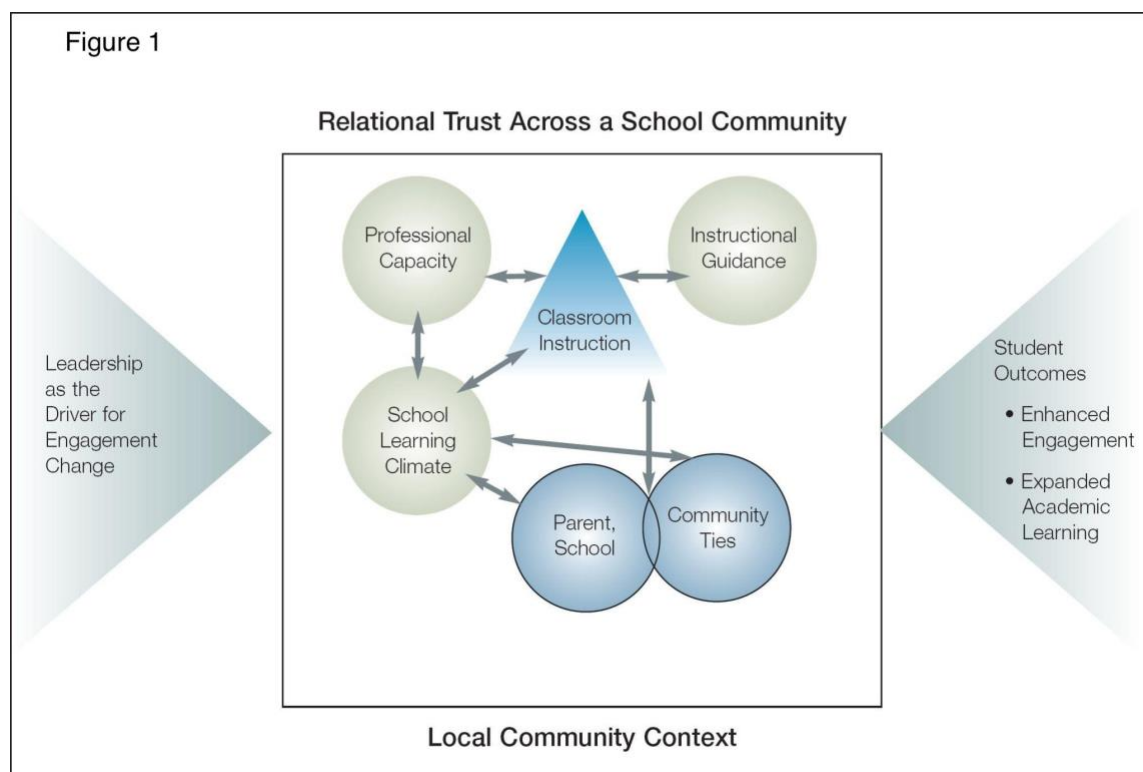
This and other odds-beating projects are firmly rooted in the tradition of "school improvement" research. Schools which improve despite serving a cohort perceived to be disadvantaged are seen as odds-beating. "Improvement" here is usually measured by quantitative summative assessment of students' academic progress – their *outcomes* as tracked over time. Some studies, for example the analysis conducted by Muijs et al (2004), include "effective" schools as well as "improving" schools. (A clear definition of "effectiveness" is absent from Muijs et al's study, but "effectiveness" in this field nearly always refers to high levels of pupil performance in statutory tests, usually on some kind of value-added basis.) In order to say which schools defy statistical predictions of student success, such studies must propose – implicitly or explicitly – their own conceptualisation of disadvantage. This chosen measure of disadvantage – usually, though not always, a proxy for, or in some way connected with, poverty – is used to generate expectations and predictions of student attainment, based on past data emerging from standardised tests (Durand et al 2014). In other words, such studies will identify schools as odds-beating if their students perform better than otherwise might be predicted for pupils sharing their same "disadvantaging" traits. Odds-beating schools in Durand et al's study were those whose students "exceeded performance expectations", making "demonstrable progress… as indicated by their higher-than predicted results… based on the characteristics of their

students". The performance of odds-beating schools "significantly exceeded that expected of schools serving similar populations" (3).

This point about "characteristics" of students is important, as is the metric used to decide which student populations are "similar". Studies of this kind necessarily choose "characteristics" to be considered disadvantaging (examples of which will be explored more thoroughly later, though typically these factors are linked to socioeconomic status). However, where the relationships between economic disadvantage and other factors are not properly recognised or interrogated, a deficit perspective can emerge, locating problems within families and communities without considering the dynamic disadvantaging processes within broader society and the education system itself. For example, it can be problematic to state that children underachieve due to their belonging to a certain ethnic minority group; rather, they are disadvantaged systemically by structural racism, including its links to economic poverty and precarity (The Centre for Social Justice 2020). Correspondingly, remedies which involve recognition of or respect for difference, a full analysis of disadvantag*ing* structures within society, and thus a broader reformulation of desirable outcomes, are not given enough attention in existing odds-beating studies. Therefore, the way in which researchers claim to know about disadvantage – which includes the measures or proxies they adopt – is a crucial and under-explored shaping factor in the epistemology of previous studies.

Odds-beating studies within school improvement and effectiveness literature can appear decontextualised, treating the school as a unit of analysis divorced from the pupils within it and the community and policy context surrounding it. In response to the limitations identified here, this project strives towards a more relational unit of analysis, recognising the entanglements between policy, locality, school, individuals and families; it considers ways in which odds and outcomes are formulated according to a broader scope, acknowledging that odds-beating schools in the functionalist paradigm are labelled as such because they align with broader political and social ideologies about the purposes of schooling.

Odds-beating discourse within its functionalist paradigm

"Odds" as they are conceptualised within odds-beating studies are commonly connected with poverty. Assessing the link between poverty and (even simplistic measures of) educational attainment is important in that it reveals stark systematic inequalities, creating a strong imperative for action to address this from practitioners and policymakers. Poverty is practically universally understood to disadvantage children within education (OECD 2017).

However, intersections must also be considered, such as the impact of race, gender, disability or special need, as well as neighbourhood factors and English language learner status. I argue that the intersections of these other attributes with poverty need to be recognised without assuming a deficit perspective; without participating in the cultural maligning of non-normative modes of being and doing which serve to *create* disadvantage in the first place. This could involve recognising a broader range of outcomes than are traditionally used in odds-beating research, which would in turn have profound implications for curricula and pedagogy.

I locate understandings of disadvantage in studies of the kind outlined above within a broadly functionalist paradigm (Raffo et al 2007, Ungar 2004). Functionalism is based on an assumed social consensus that the rewards of education as they stand are inherently valuable. Functionalism presupposes a desirable set of outcomes and takes a singular view of what constitutes advantaging and disadvantaging characteristics. Research within this paradigm often constructs a binary between the odds a student starts with (their disadvantaging factors linked to poor attainment) and the outcomes they finish with. However, understandings of disadvantage within odds-beating studies can be problematic when they move into social, linguistic and racial domains without considering the complex and dynamic intersections with poverty. As I will explain, this can mean that some disadvantage is constructed simply as a lack of alignment with mainstream values and experiences.

This odds-outcomes binary can also be expressed as one of *risk* and *resilience,* and though this model looks at individuals and not whole schools, it is in many ways discursively parallel to *odds-beating-ness.* Siraj and Mayo (2014), for example, define resilience as the attainment of higher than expected results given early predictions based on "risk" factors, such as family socio-economic background. One of the aims of the large scale Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project was to identify students who succeeded "against the odds" (Sylva et al 2012). It produced a list of factors shared by such students: higher levels of agency, determination and participation; parents who valued learning and had high aspirations and standards of behaviour; experience of high quality preschool; parents who recognised the importance of teachers and school support; friends who offered practical and emotional support with learning. The risk/resilience framework is most often applied to individuals rather than cohorts, whereas the type of odds-beating studies in the field of school effectiveness and improvement look at factors at school level. School studies of the kind discussed above tend nonetheless to define disadvantage at the level of the pupil, which is where ideas about disadvantage from risk/resilience research can

be comparable. In existing odds-beating studies, schools are seen to beat the odds when they enable enough individuals to reduce their "risks" and strengthen their "resilience" in order to achieve within current system arrangements.

Ungar (2004: 342) sees terms such as "risk" and "resilience" as "plagued by cultural hegemony": deviance from dominant cultural norms (in terms of class, race, behaviours or language, for example) is seen as "risky", whereas adherence (for example by having "high aspirations" or evidencing "participation") is seen as "resilient". Similarly, some critics of functionalism argue that a society's definition of advantage and disadvantage is derived from discursive power (Gergen 1994). Mainstream values and hierarchies are used to define outcomes considered successful, and disadvantage is constructed in opposition to these values. Under functionalism, then, the hegemonic values behind disadvantaging structures are never really challenged.

Although, as I have shown, nearly all odds-beating school studies use poverty or a proxy to define odds, there are also constructions of odds which are racial, linguistic or social (as in Durand et al 2014, Podolsky et al 2019, Meyers et al 2016, Partridge and Koon 2017, and Wilcox et al 2017, as above). It is important to identify these types of disadvantage and especially to see how they work in intersection with poverty; it is often at this overlap that disadvantage can be most acute. Experiences of poverty, for example, will be shaped by race and cultural background, and by place; the experience of a child of poor migrant parents living in the inner city will be different to that of a child in a poor White British family in a deprived coastal town. This creates a dilemma for odds-beating studies. By trying to create a generalisable "recipe", recommendations can become too generic to support any specific action.

Studies such as EPPSE present lists of "resilience" factors in what seems like a structural vacuum, erasing the dynamic social forces and power structures that create these "positive" attributes. For example, EPPSE found that a "resilience" factor was having "parents who valued learning" (just as Bryk et al (2010) advocate parental "links" as a key ingredient in their school improvement strategy). Logically, this would mean that *not* having such parents becomes another *disadvantaging* factor. This corresponds directly with Raffo et al's (2007) point that a functionalist view of contemporary education accepts unequivocally its intrinsic good; presumably "parents who valued learning" had aspirations for their child which were aligned with those of the school system. Ungar articulates the circular logic evident here: "We only know that resilient children and youth are characterised by individual, social, and

environmental qualities that we have come to associate with resilience, leaving the construct open to criticisms that it is nothing more than a tautology" (Ungar 2004: 343).

This criticism, made here of odds-beating or risk/resilience studies, can be paralleled with school-level work on odds-beating such as that of Muijs et al (2004) who find that odds-beating schools have "a focus on teaching and learning". The kind of knowledges and practices that constitute "teaching and learning" are not explored, and generally are aligned in this kind of research with pupils' performance in statutory tests (Muijs et al 2004). Again, the functionalist logic leads to a circular argument, where alignment with the normative goals of schooling constitutes *advantage* and other values or experiences are *disadvantaging*. It is problematic to define disadvantage in opposition to the functionalist goals of schooling without interrogating the role of the education system as it stands in perpetuating social and economic inequalities. Where curricula, pedagogy and rewards such as qualifications are centred around white middle-class Anglophone norms, the education system will always *disadvantage* resistance to these norms.

Returning to Bryk et al (2010), the researchers used a range of indicators to define odds and conceptualise disadvantage, including attendance levels, the local crime rate and the percentage of children experiencing abuse or neglect (181). In Durand et al's study, the "disadvantages" were economic disadvantage and English language learner status (2014). They also used "ethnic diversity"; Podolsky et al (2019) used "students of color", and race was also a factor for Meyers et al (2016) and Partridge and Koon (2017). Wilcox et al used "diversity in the student population" as a criterion for identifying schools to be studied (2017: 25). Eligibility for free or reduced price school lunch was used by Bryk et al as well as Meyers et al (2016) and Partridge and Koon (2017). Meyers et al also considered the proportion of students who were English language learners.

As Ainscow et al point out in their review of primary schools' responses to disadvantage, "official categorisations of difference were… never neutral" (2016: 4). Characteristics such as ethnicity, social background, geographical location or gender have a constructed value relative to their facilitation or inhibition of specified outcomes. However, the cultural and social processes which serve to disadvantage those at these intersections are often left uninterrogated (for example in Durand et al 2014), which means that deficit can be located implicitly in non-normative identities and experiences. The criteria for odds-beating-ness used by investigators is a fundamental shaping factor in this kind of research and its outcomes, but as I have shown often relies on uninterrogated assumptions or intuition: they

are overwhelmingly focused on qualities that have *come to be associated* with poor attainment.

Problems can arise, for example, where studies like Durand et al's weight their sample of odds-beating schools towards those serving a population that was both ethnically diverse *and* economically disadvantaged. This seems to assume, without justification, that ethnic diversity (what ethnicities? How diverse?) is another predictor, on its own, of poor outcomes. The same is true for Durand et al's consideration of English language learner status as unilaterally disadvantaging (2014); this idealises "native" English speaking students and their experiences. There is a dangerous elision of the *cultural* status of race and language with their well-documented socio-economic correlates. There should not be anything inherently disadvantaging about race in education, and studies should explore the pertinent intersections between poverty and race without viewing membership of a non-white ethnic group as inherently disadvantaging. In the UK at least, ethnic minority resilience to the impacts of poverty on attainment is well documented, in certain populations (Stokes et al 2015).

Approaches like that of Durand et al can ignore the assets within ethnic minority families and communities. Ainscow et al suggest that this misses the assets that can be found in pupils' diverse experiences: "constructions of difference… tend to overlook the resources to which those differences give children access" (2016: 5). Furthermore, these approaches are open to accusations of "gap-gazing" (Gutiérrez 2008). Odds-beating studies or policy evaluation use an "achievement-gap lens" to compare disadvantaged and "non-disadvantaged" pupils, often also comparing different racial groups in intersection with poverty. Gutiérrez argues that this "perpetuates the myth of greater between-group than within-group variation" (2008: 359). This in turn sustains static ideas about identity – including, as I have discussed, the tendency to locate disadvantage within certain communities without considering injustices relating to their cultural status. This locates deficit in ethnic minority communities without addressing the social ubiquity of racism.

Another example of a more dubious indicator of disadvantage comes from Muijs et al's literature review on "odds-beating" practices (2004), where the search term "urban" is used: this is an inaccurate proxy for poverty, given that Pupil Premium eligible pupils tend to do worse in rural areas than in, say, London (Centre for Education and Youth 2019). Even where "urban" is used more broadly to describe concentrations of poverty, it is limited in the disadvantages and challenges upon which it focuses.

Developing an alternative view of disadvantage

An alternative view of disadvantage is that it is not a static measure but a social process; it is "chaotic, complex, relative, and contextual" (Ungar 2004: 342). As I have explained, it is important not to elide difference and disadvantage when exploring the links between poverty and other (supposedly) disadvantaging experiences. Ainscow et al (2016) thus use terms such as "difference" or "diversity" where we might expect to see "disadvantage". It seems clear that such "differences" will be differently disadvantaging depending on context and intersections: in the UK, being a girl has been shown to be *more* advantaging for English achievement in Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian and Bangladeshi groups than it is for the White UK ethnic group (Siraj-Blatchford 2010). An internal locus of control – the degree to which a person believes that they, rather than external forces, have control over the outcome of events in their lives – has been shown to be beneficial to a white child growing up in poverty in the USA, but not to an African-American child (Ungar 2004: 350). Locating disadvantage in discrete categories does not help to reveal the social dynamics and processes that create these outcomes. Attempts to "index" disadvantage for policy or practice purposes – to decide which disadvantages are more important or urgent (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007) – do not cater well to intersectionalities.

More will be said about the Pupil Premium later, but its distribution – where more or less money is allocated to schools depending on a single disadvantaging factor (a low income indicator) – necessarily ranks disadvantage; its measure, a proxy for low family income, pushes this singular, non-intersectional indicator of disadvantage to the top of the policy priority list. Though the intersection of poverty with other factors is indeed, I argue, the nub of educational disadvantage, the policy inevitably fosters a siloed view of odds. Of course, some kind of proxy is needed to effect broad redistributive justice for schools which have a particularly high number of poorer children, but over-reliance on this metric can again place too much emphasis on between-group rather than within-group differences (Gutiérrez 2008).

I prefer in this thesis to think of disadvantage as "plural" (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007). Raffo et al's conceptualisation of "integrating explanations" for poverty uses a micro-meso-macro model to delineate the individual, the immediate social contexts and broader structures (2007). They describe the augmenting effect of multiple forms of disadvantage across the interlocking layers: "people living in poverty face forms of exclusion which may differ between inner cities, peripheral housing estates and rural locations, or between different ethnic groups, or between the genders. They may be compounded by health inequalities…

transport difficulties, lack of access to financial services, family breakdown, and so on" (2007: 10). Poverty not only correlates with but exacerbates other disadvantaging factors (Kerr et al 2014). These groupings of factors are characterised as "bundles" (Kerr et al) or "clusters" (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007, Ainscow et al 2016). Wolff and De-Shalit, in their exploration of aspects of disadvantage in political theory, argue powerfully that "a society of equals is a society in which disadvantages do not cluster, a society where there is no clear answer to the questions of who is worse off" (9). In our currently *un*equal society, however, disadvantages do correlate and accumulate, creating clusters of material, cultural and social disadvantage (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007). Studies of odds-beating-ness must recognise this without pathologising difference.

Another way that disadvantages accumulate with "interest" is with the affective elements of poverty. Mazzoli Smith and Todd, who aim to conceptualise poverty as a barrier to learning through their review of the UK "Poverty Proofing" scheme, call for the link between material poverty and its emotional or psychosocial facets to be articulated more clearly (2019). The shame and humiliation stemming from poverty can result in isolation with the result of multiplying the original disadvantage. Even where shaming practices do not actually occur, any anticipated stigma can also cause stress, which can become a further disadvantaging factor.

Neighbourhood factors can be yet another way that disadvantage accumulates, with some studies showing effects on GCSE scores to be detectable even after controlling for individual economic background (Sylva et al 2012). Kerr et al (2014) follow Spicker (2001) in suggesting that places are not reducible to the aggregate of the individual circumstances of their residents. In other words, poor children living in poor neighbourhoods will typically, as a whole, do less well than poor children living in more affluent neighbourhoods. This observation does not constitute grounds to pathologise poorer neighbourhoods – rather it reveals social structures which serve to create "clusters" of disadvantage through aligning material and non-material disadvantages. There is plenty of evidence that poverty has a more profound impact on education for pupils at schools with highly disadvantaged demographics versus those in schools serving pupils from a range of economic backgrounds: "when students from disadvantaged families attend disadvantaged schools, they face a double disadvantage" (OECD 2018: 42). (It is important to note, however, that with the increase in emphasis on parental "choice" rather than neighbourhood schools (Harris 2005), it is not always the case that the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods contain the most disadvantaged schools, and vice versa.) The Pupil Premium, which channels all funding towards individual schools (mostly operating independently from a local authority),

necessarily locates disadvantage within "individual circumstances", and thus could be said to ignore accumulative neighbourhood effects (Ainscow et al 2016).

I argue, then, for a multi-dimensional, relational account of disadvantage which takes into account intersections between poverty and other factors, and considers ways in which people and systems within schools and wider society interact to contribute to the process of disadvantag*ing*. Current literature on the odds-beating phenomenon often does not make a clear distinction between static disadvantaging characteristics (such as crime levels, Bryk 2010, or eligibility for free school lunches, Meyers et al 2016), and the dynamic processes by which disadvantage is generated as people with such characteristics, in different combinations, experience the social world. I will go on to explore a dynamic, process-based understanding of disadvantage.

Disadvantage chronologies

Disadvantages, however, do not just interact; they accumulate, with interest. The overall disadvantaging effect is more than just the sum of its parts; disadvantages can be "corrosive" (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007, Ivinson et al 2018). The chronological dimensions of disadvantage must be taken into account. An example from education is the "Matthew effect" in vocabulary acquisition (named after the adage from the Gospel of Matthew: the rich get richer and the poor poorer). The poorest children were found to start school with the narrowest vocabularies, and this put them at a disadvantage in their schooling such that the "gap" kept widening throughout their school careers (Coyne et al 2018).

The age at which disadvantage is encountered, and the degree of its persistence, is important. Bronfenbrenner's "chronosystem", running in parallel to his ecological model, recognises the importance of the timing of events in a child's development (Eriksson et al 2018). Raffo et al (2007) note the importance of advantaging and disadvantaging factors being evaluated within their chronological context. Researchers in the field of resilience are already turning their focus from the characteristics of individuals to developmental *processes* (Ungar 2004). It is therefore vital that an account of disadvantage within a discussion of odds-beating-ness recognises its dynamic dimensions, rather than viewing it as a static input factor with which children do or do not arrive at school. This also allows a consideration of the extent to which schools can mitigate or exacerbate certain odds in their pupils, rather than just facilitating the output of academic "success" in spite of these odds.

Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) add another layer to this chronological argument by suggesting that what matters for the individual is not the level of functioning at a given time but the prospects of sustaining that level. Risk and vulnerability, they argue, is itself a disadvantage, whether or not an anticipated event actually occurs. The evidence shows that advantages occuring at a given moment must be sustainable to produce positive effects. For example, casual employment, while lucrative in the short term, is not "advantaging" in the same way as longer term employment. Arguably, policy has reflected this critical shift, with pupils now eligible for Pupil Premium funding if they have been known to be economically disadvantaged within the past six years, irrespective of whether they currently qualify for free school meals (FSM). It has been suggested that poorer children who are not FSM eligible may not qualify because their circumstances are not persistent. A high proportion of this group have parents who are self-employed, possibly explaining the precarity of their economic status (Taylor 2018). Again, this shows that odds are not static but shaped by a child and family's personal chronology of disadvantage, though there is scant recognition of this in the field currently.

There are limits, then, to the binary odds/outcomes or input/output view of disadvantage, and there is a need for a more relational and dynamic understanding of odds and outcomes as a chronological continuum. Odds and outcomes are in constant iterative interplay as pupils move through their personal "chronosystems" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998).

The Pupil Premium

Although, as I have shown, disadvantage is dynamic and layered, it is often not portrayed as such in policy and practice. Perhaps the most common proxy for pupil poverty in Western countries is eligibility for free or reduced price school lunches. These in turn are based on family eligibility for certain state benefits. Parental income, education and occupation are also frequently-used proxies (Ware 2019). Turning now to England as the location of this study – and as a country with one of the widest disadvantaged gaps in rich countries internationally (Unicef 2018) – I now discuss the Pupil Premium, used both as a proxy measure for disadvantage as well as a way of redressing it. This will demonstrate the limits of a one-dimensional, functionalist approach to odds-beating which does not recognise the multifarious, intersectional and dynamic nature of disadvantage and its redress.

Since its introduction by the UK's Coalition government in 2011, "Pupil Premium" – often applied adjectivally to individual children – has widely been used as a synonym for

"disadvantaged". This premium, paid directly to schools for the stated objective of "raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils", is allocated for children who have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the past six years, and for children adopted from or who have left local authority care (Education and Skills Funding Agency 2019). Figures from 2019-20 show that 2.04 million school-age children were eligible (Foster and Long 2020). PP is intended to effect redistributive justice – the socially just allocation of resources – on an institutional level by allocating more funding to schools with more economically disadvantaged children (as measured by proxy) in their cohort. This method of allocating funding suggests that policymakers are increasingly recognising the longer term effects of poverty on a child's education. It is based on evidence that poorer children perform less well in standardised measures of academic performance (e.g. Goodman and Gregg 2010).

PP is, however, a proxy, perhaps even a proxy of a proxy, as the eligibility for free school meals upon which it is based is in turn connected to the state benefits received by a child's family. Analysis by Taylor (2008) has suggested that PP is a good proxy for socioeconomic disadvantage, but there are nonetheless a significant minority of children living in poverty who are not eligible for the Pupil Premium. Some poorer families do not attract the state benefits which qualify them for free school meals: those losing out may be families with more children, undocumented migrant families, or where parents are in work but are poorly paid – lone adult households are particularly at risk here, with three in ten working single parents living in poverty (Innes 2020). Some families who are eligible do not report this to the school, either because they do not know about the benefits of the Pupil Premium or because of stigma associated with poverty (Ofsted 2012).

With the funding has come increased accountability. Schools are assessed by government and Ofsted on their "attainment gap", and must publish electronically a statement about how they use their funding to make an impact on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. PP as a single-strand intervention has been perceived as a rather blunt tool (Ainscow et al 2016). The allocation within schools of PP funding to support disadvantaged children not eligible for the premium has been found to pose a "moral dilemma" for headteachers (Taylor 2018: 30). Though schools can and do use PP funding to address a range of disadvantages including those experienced by children who are not PP eligible (Carpenter et al 2013), the fact that schools are judged based on the performance of this group compared to others means that schools are often incentivised to direct resources towards these pupils in order to "close the gap". Though theoretically this is a worthy aim, it can make the disadvantage focus very narrow. Disadvantaged pupils who are not labelled as PP perhaps also miss out on the recognition and extra support that schools afford to children who are. There is concern that

PP constrains a school's capacity to address vulnerabilities that are not measured by this indicator – and many countries do use other metrics, such as parental education level or employment type (Ofsted 2016). Problems, then, can occur when it is not distributed, or its efficacy not assessed, in a spirit of flexibility and responsivity.

Alternative knowledges about disadvantage

Schools nonetheless still tend to take a broad view of disadvantage beyond Pupil Premium. As I have argued, the method of allocating and accounting for PP funding can sometimes incentivise schools to focus too specifically and uniformly on the gap between eligible and non-eligible pupils as expressed in statutory attainment measures. However, it has been shown that schools tend also to tackle disadvantage through an in-depth knowledge of the personal circumstances of their students (Carpenter et al 2013). The factors and processes which disadvantage pupils are broader than PP eligibility, and can include difficult family situations, refugee or asylum seeker status, and exclusion from mainstream school; plenty of school staff simply say that their definition of disadvantage is "based on knowledge of pupils and families" (Carpenter et al 2013: 27). This kind of "lived" knowledge, about social and local dynamics and processes, cannot so easily be measured. These knowledges about disadvantage, arguably "subjugated" by the conceptual flattening of disadvantage under the Pupil Premium policy, are what might be described be Foucault as "buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation", made "inadequate to their task… located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault 1980: 81). Foucault characterises these knowledges as "local", "popular", or "regional"; they are knowledges appropriate for the unique "thisness" of each school (Munns et al 2013) but not necessarily rewarded by those in power. Foregrounding these knowledges is essential to the project of recognition, which is one half of Fraser's "bivalent" conception of social justice (discussed above). When the "hierarchy" of knowledges is challenged, this paves the way for the validation and acknowledgement of the identity and contributions of marginalised groups.

Disadvantage chronologies in practice

There are various points during a child's secondary education where disadvantages can manifest or accumulate – where the schooling system further disadvantages already disadvantaged pupils. The first of these is school admission. Before widespread

academisation[2], schools followed their local authority's standard admissions policy (gov.uk 2019). However, academies can now function as their own admissions authority. In the context of increased competition among local schools, this can incentivise and enable the selection of students in order to secure "advantage over competing schools" (Rayner 2017). In 2014, the Fair Admissions Campaign found frequent flouting of the statutory School Admissions Code by academy schools, particularly those selecting on religious grounds. Frequently, schools asked for too much information from applicants (for example parental birth certificates, or first language), or failed to prioritise admitting children in the care of the local authority as stipulated by the statutory Admissions Code. This creates a vicious cycle, where higher-performing schools which have more applications find mechanisms to select students who will add more value in terms of attainment at GCSE, whilst less popular schools absorb pupils more likely to experience disadvantage. This combines with other factors such as existing place-based disadvantage to create a situation where, in the UK, only 18% of children from the least well off quintile of families attend an outstanding school, compared to 43% of children from the wealthiest quintile. 93% of secondary schools in the wealthiest areas are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, compared to 67% of schools in the poorest areas (Gadsby 2017).

If and when disadvantaged pupils are allocated a place at a new school – and this allocation process may not be fair – transition into a new educational environment presents another barrier. The EPPSE study (Evangelou et al 2008) found an association between low socio-economic status and less positive experiences of transition from primary to secondary school. In 2012, the UK Government allocated £10 million to pilot projects aimed at helping disadvantaged pupils transition to secondary schools, in particular summer schools targeting this cohort (Education Endowment Foundation 2012).

Another point in the rhythms of school life which can pose a particular threat to disadvantaged children is school holidays, and in particular the long summer break. For low-income families, summer holidays give rise to financial pressures, food insecurity, poor health and social and cultural exclusion (Rai 2015). Stewart et al (2018) suggest that the prolonged summer break is one of the most fundamental, yet least acknowledged, contributors towards disparities in attainment, accounting for almost two-thirds of this gap by the time children reach the age of 14. During the summer holidays, children's learning does

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[2] "Academisation" in the UK describes the process, begun in 2000, of removing UK schools from the control of their local authorities. Most secondary schools are now academies – they are self-governing, non-profit charitable trusts, often receiving support from corporate "sponsors". They do not have to follow the national curriculum, though must provide a "broad and balanced" curriculum including English and maths.

not just stagnate but regresses – in particular in children with SEN, those from low income families, and those for whom English is a second language. This loss of learning is cumulative: studies from the USA show that low-income children fall further and further behind year after year (Terzian et al 2009).

Though most pupils enter and exit schools at the beginning and end of key stages, a significant minority leave or move school irregularly due to formal or informal exclusions. Disadvantaged groups – specifically pupils with SEND, those living in poverty or with challenging home backgrounds, those with poor lower attainment, or members of certain racial groups (specifically Black Caribbean or Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children) are far more likely to experience this (Graham et al 2019). Only 7% of young people who are permanently excluded go on to achieve good passes in English and maths GCSEs (Marmot et al 2020). As pressure grows on schools to address inequity in exclusions, undocumented exclusions have become more widespread. "Off-rolling", where schools informally (and often secretively) exclude pupils by persuading parents to keep them at home or send them elsewhere, is a common practice. The UK's school inspection office, Ofsted, has calculated that 19,000 Year 10 pupils in 2016 did not progress to Year 11 in 2017 in the same secondary school (YouGov 2019).

Returning to Bryk et al (2010) and their study of Chicago schools, it could be argued that this evidence about the chronological dimensions of disadvantage challenges the rather one-dimensional depiction of "odds" in their model. They place outcomes on the right hand side of the diagram (Figure 1); the model as a whole is clearly intended to be read from left to right as an input-output map with the five supports within a kind of "black box" where the school-improvement magic happens. This belies understandings of disadvantage as "chaotic, complex, relative, and contextual" (Ungar 2004: 342); schools do not receive pre-packaged odds as their students enrol but are dynamic shaping factors in the formulation of these odds.

Conclusion

We may ask whether it is possible or even desirable to formulate a common definition of what is meant by "disadvantage" in an educational context. Ofsted (2016: 11) bemoan the lack of a "shared understanding", but – in the same document – praise a provider for developing definitions of disadvantage in response to local community context. The 2013 evaluation of PP accepts that disadvantage is situational and doesn't advocate for a singular

definition (Carpenter et al 2013). I do argue, however, that the central strand of disadvantage is irrefutably economic. This intersects in complex and situation-sensitive ways with other factors such as race, place, gender and disability or special needs. At these intersections, the processes involved in reproducing cultural values within schooling can be disadvantag*ing*. Ways in which individual schools seem to beat odds can often uphold a social value system which upholds inequities more broadly.

The philosophical framework through which disadvantage or risk is conceptualised has radical consequences for the way that policymakers assess and address issues of equity. The current dominance of functionalism, for example, has stark practical implications. Discourses surrounding educational disadvantage in theory and practice commonly conceptualise disadvantage as a "barrier to learning" (Carpenter et al 2013, Mazzoli Smith and Todd 2019). This forms the functionalist underpinning of PP as a structure; the system does little to support interventions that can't be proven to raise attainment, and this focus does not always promote a broader range of positive outcomes such as personal development or health (Ainscow et al 2016).

There is evidence that FSM is indeed a reliable proxy for disadvantage in that nearly all eligible children are in fact living in poverty; concerningly, however, there appear to be a significant minority of non-FSM or PP-eligible children who are nonetheless disadvantaged (Taylor 2018). A more open view of disadvantage which recognises the way that disadvantages come to be formulated within existing social power structures could ensure that disadvantage in all its forms is recognised and adequately addressed.

Disadvantage, then, is not one-dimensional or static. Disadvantages are not discrete, but overlapping and cumulative. Disadvantage is dynamic; it gathers force as pupils progress through their schooling, especially at points of higher risk such as admission, transition and school holidays. Some disadvantages identified in the review of Pupil Premium (Carpenter et al 2013), including poor prior attainment and some special educational needs, are evidently the result of exacerbated inequalities earlier in a child's life. Odds-beating studies are inherently limited if they frame disadvantage in terms of misalignment with the functionalist goals of education, rather than interrogating the social processes that cause disadvantage. Taking a more open standpoint allows the disadvantage epistemology of schools and policymakers to be more robustly interrogated rather than taken for granted, meaning that ways of knowing about disadvantage can become an object of study in themselves. The next chapter of this literature review will examine educational outcomes as defined by

researchers, policymakers and practitioners, and consider ways in which values are inscribed within them.

3 Constructing outcomes and approaching social justice

Having explored ways in which researchers, policymakers and schools profess to know about odds, it is now necessary to consider ways in which outcomes are measured. The comparison of odds and outcomes is essential to making claims about the odds-beating phenomenon. The construction of these outcomes is a key facet of every odds-beating study's epistemological relationship to social justice. Firstly, I will dispute the assumption implicit in existing odds-beating school studies (e.g. Bryk 2010) that the improved performance of disadvantaged pupils in statutory examinations is a proxy for social justice. I will explain the limits of a vision for justice which is premised on the redistribution of capitals (including grades). This will lead to a discussion of Nancy Fraser's combination of redistribution with *recognition* (2000) – respect for difference – in pursuit of participatory or social/political parity, which is considered alongside Freire's notion of "democratic citizenship" (2017).

Moving past test scores as a proxy for social justice

Social justice in its broadest conception is concerned with the allocation of resources and opportunities within a society. Historically, this sense of *justice* – of individuals taking their rightful or proper position – did not necessarily premise itself on any sense of equity, as can be seen from the kind of "justice" manifested in feudal or caste systems (Thompson 1923, Sankaran et al 2017). Justice, here, is the sense that roles in society are allocated as they should be; in more modern times the notion of justice has been oriented towards *equity*, the idea that distribution of resources or opportunities should not be based on status at birth. In contemporary Western discourse on social justice, it is largely accepted (even if, sometimes, superficially) that social position should not be hereditary or predestined – that social and economic rewards should be achieved and not acquired. In a liberal meritocracy, merit is the combination of supposedly inherent socially useful traits – often intelligence – and personal *effort* (Young 1994). Meritocracy aims to make the accumulation of capitals less predictable: supposedly everyone gets a fair shot at attaining them. Meritocracy supposedly enables "social mobility" (Jin and Ball 2019), which as I have shown seeks to sever the link between socioeconomic background and educational or economic reward.

In a way, a sense of social justice does undergird Bryk et al's longitudinal study of Chicago's elementary schools (2010) and indeed all odds-beating research. Social justice is the implicit

raison d'être of the whole project, which seeks to find out how schools serving highly disadvantaged students and communities can improve to secure better academic outcomes for their students. Beyond this assumption, however, any theory or framework of social justice is conspicuously absent. Social justice, for Bryk et al (2010), is when students who are disadvantaged according to certain indicators – seemingly chosen according to the researchers' judgement, as explained in the previous section – attain well against "national norms" in reading and mathematics tests. Regular school attendance is also considered a successful outcome.

Improving literacy and numeracy levels in children with these profiles is clearly highly desirable. An advantage in Bryk et al's study (2010) is that the "good outcomes" used in their metric are not *scarce*. There is no limit to the number of children in the schools in their study who could attain "good" outcomes because these kinds of tests are "criterion referenced"; all candidates who evidence a set of skills can be awarded the corresponding grade or qualification, much like a driving test (Ofqual 2017). In contrast, the UK's examination regulator Ofqual uses a method called "comparable outcomes" to distribute GCSE grades. The aim is to "ensure that exam results will remain stable at a national level" (Benton 2016: 4) by allocating each grade to roughly the same proportion of students every year. However, "predictions" of performance at national cohort level from the end of Key Stage Two (age 11) are taken into account too; so if a cohort performs particularly well at the end of primary school, the same cohort can expect to be allocated slightly larger proportions of the higher GCSE grades. To the occasional consternation of the Department for Education, Ofsted and teaching unions – all of whom would like to see system and individual school improvement reflected in "improved" GCSE results – Ofqual aims to retain the perceived value of the highest grades by keeping them scarce. It makes less sense, then, to use GCSE outcomes to assess odds-beating-ness in the UK: as the best grades are deliberately scarce, education remains a "positional good" (Hirsch 1978). Acquiring these grades for disadvantaged students, then, constitutes *redistribution* – the reallocation of scarce capital resources on the grounds, supposedly, of merit and not economic advantage. Desirable though this is, there are limits to this redistributive approach, which will be discussed in more detail shortly.

The outcomes in Bryk et al's (2010) study also seem very narrow. "Schools," Bryk et al assert, "are principally about teaching and learning, not solving all the social problems of a community" (2010: 29). It is telling that Bryk et al see a clear cut binary between *education* and broader community social issues. Although Bryk et al do promote connections with

communities, their focus is primarily on "improvement" in line with the criterion-referenced standardised tests they use to measure it.

From the standpoint of this project, socially just schooling has a much wider remit, striving as I will show towards *participatory parity* (Fraser 2000) and *humanisation* (Freire 2017) – concepts missing from the version of social justice hinted at in Bryk et al (2010). The present study will demonstrate that schools oriented towards social justice will be "about teaching and learning" *as well as* addressing "social problems" – and that the two are inextricably linked.

The limits of capitals

As I have shown, analyses of the odds-beating phenomenon, as well as responses in policy and practice, are rooted in functionalism: the kinds of capitals valued and offered by the schooling system are seen as inherently and universally desirable, and therefore the focus is on redistribution of these capitals. Such an approach is aligned with Coleman's functionalist version of social capital. Coleman seeks to combine two "intellectual streams". The first, from sociology, sees "the actor as socialised and action as governed by social norms, rules and obligations" (Coleman 1988: 95). The second, from economics, sees the actor as acting independently, motivated by self-interest, to maximise utility. Social capital, for Coleman, resides in the social structures of people's relationships. He sees social capital as productive, facilitating social mobility by savvy actors (Coleman 1988). Critiques of Coleman's argument have characterised it as tautological or circular (Rogošić and Baranović 2016), a judgement that could also apply to Bryk et al's use of Coleman to argue that social capital "exists in the relations among persons" to "facilitate productive activity" (168). The circular logic here – the claim that capital leads to productivity – is curiously left un-interrogated; presumably the social relations of which Bryk et al approve simply facilitate the production of more capital, which serves to perpetuate the very same hierarchies. The same reasoning is evident in UK social and economic policy. The Government's recent "Build Back Better" plan outlined plans to deliver economic growth after the Coronavirus pandemic with a particular focus on "skills" including education. Inequities in "regional outcomes" are explained here in terms of "differences in levels of 'human capital'" (HM Treasury 2021). The implied solution is to generate more of this "capital" and to distribute it more widely across the country. To beat odds is, according to current conceptualisations, to accrue more capital than might have been expected.

Again, factors used to measure social capital seem to carry implicit assumptions about the value of certain community networks over others; one of the main indicators in Bryk et al 2010, for example, is local religious participation. Likewise, Johnson (2019) cites Coleman as she documents attempts by policymakers to improve schools by increasing their "human capital" – "the sum total of their teachers' qualifications, skills, and professional habits" (3). Values inscribed in "skills" and "professional habits" are not neutral, however; Bryk et al, for example, judged "teacher background" partly by the "quality of the undergraduate institution that they attended" (72) and whether they had experience teaching in private schools, or schools outside Chicago (73). This serves to reproduce existing educational values rather than asking what, for example, teachers with strong historic roots in the local community can contribute.

Although in this project I do not tend to focus on social and human capitals, these functionalist ideas as they manifest in policy and scholarship are useful in illustrating the problems of viewing capital maximisation as a universal good. Absent from these research and policy discourses is a Bourdieusian critique of the values underpinning capital (for example, the use of "capital" in the most recent Ofsted inspection framework, 2019). For Bourdieu, capital is a vehicle which perpetuates social inequality, derived as it is from social stratification and the unequal distribution of power. Education is a vehicle for reproducing dominant value systems (Bourdieu 1973), and institutionalised symbolic capital in the form of examination grades can be cashed in for other resources such as earnings or status (Bourdieu 2002). There are many forms of capital, including economic (financial resources), cultural (knowledge with cultural status), human (knowledge and skills held by individuals) and symbolic (markers of honour, prestige or recognition – in education, most commonly qualifications). The same critical arguments apply broadly across these forms.

Bourdieu (1973) argues that systems of education conceal their roles in reproducing class inequalities "by an apparently neutral attitude" – a naturalisation of dominant values and capital and the resultant "misrecognition" of the arbitrariness of these values. For example, it could be argued that school curricula and examinations revere and reward forms of cultural knowledge that are aligned with white middle-class norms, "naturalising" these "dominant" ways of being and doing – "misrecognising" them (see footnote 3 later in this chapter). As the education system in the UK has taken proactive approaches to addressing disparities in outcomes for poorer children, schools have sought, supposedly benevolently, to distribute these forms of cultural knowledge more widely in attempts to beat the odds. Schools are now explicitly required by Ofsted in their latest framework to imbue pupils with "cultural capital", particularly "disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND" (Ofsted 2019). The

assumption is that symbolic capital can be redistributed in line with the goals of social justice. Bourdieu, though, locates capital within a system of exchange based on scarcity and the production of hierarchies. If the resource of "cultural capital" becomes more widely accessed, its scarcity and thus its exchange value diminishes.

Compensatory policies such as the Pupil Premium, which single out "disadvantaged" groups such as poorer children and those with SEND, could be interpreted as altruistic; they try to dispense "cultural capital" to pupils who are perceived to be in particular need of it. However, the defensive veneration of the orthodox cultural artefacts and practices which constitute "cultural capital" excludes aspects of culture which do not accord with a middle class, white mainstream (García and Guerra 2004). An example is the "restoration" of the canon under Education Secretary Michael Gove in England's English curriculum, with a shift back to the dominance of white, male authors (Nelson-Addy et al 2018). As will be explained in more detail later, this capitals-focus does not *recognise* or value difference (Fraser 2000). The Ofsted framework mentioned above (2019) is a highly functionalist rendering of the inherently structuralist, socially critical thinking tools developed by Bourdieu. Yosso (2005) argues that normative values – which assume cultural heritage to be "the undivided property of the whole society" (Bourdieu 1973: 73) – ignore valuable knowledge and skills developed by communities, families and individuals, often as a means of survival or resistance in the face of oppression. Raffo et al (2007) concord that neighbourhoods and communities can provide social and cultural resources which can obviate the impacts of material deprivation. Academic capital – such as formal qualifications – is a "converted form of cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1973); normative or elite cultural knowledges are converted into the symbolic capital of, for example, GCSE grades. It is therefore important that schooling structures ascribe worth to such communities' existing ways of doing and being by valuing outcomes that correspond with these practices and knowledges. The challenge is to disrupt the link between normative or elite forms of cultural knowledge and the material capital they eventually bestow, so that odds-beating is about more than just alignment with existing norms. Rather than locating disadvantage within individuals, families and communities who do not possess these forms of capital, the *process* of reproduction should be revealed as disadvantag*ing*; disadvantage is a process, a verb, and not a static characteristic.

A new direction for "capital": lifeworld use value

There have been creative attempts to expand the notion of "capital" to include assets held by pupils often considered disadvantaged – for example, the "aspirational" qualities praised in

some migrant communities, or the ability to speak other languages than English. However, this can only take us so far. These capitals *are* capitals because they remain congruent with the normative aims of schooling. A more radical critique comes from Zipin et al (2012), who move towards "thwarting the process of capital exchange within the system" (as described in Black et al 2021: 102). Zipin et al introduce the notion of *lifeworld use value* as a counterpoint to exchange value (itself a key tenet of capital), looking at the kinds of knowledges and practices which are *actually* valued in the day to day lives of pupils, families and communities. Though, for Zipin et al, *lifeworld use value* is connected to pedagogy, the idea can be put to work in characterising educational outcomes. It can help to question the doctrine of scarcity and "capitalisation logics that reproduce 'losing' relative to 'winning'" (Zipin et al 2012: 187). Again, the outcomes of schooling can be broader than a "positional good" (Hirsch 1978) – broader than equipping students to "compete". Schools can, by exploring the assets in pupils' *lifeworlds,* provide things of value to students which do not fall within the confines of the capitals in which the school system typically deals. This broadens the scope of odds-beating-ness.

Of course, lifeworld use value and capital exchange value are not mutually exclusive and can in fact be engaged in a dynamic, productive relationship. Socially just schooling must allow learners to "improve their life chances in the capitalising world as historically received, through redistribution of powerful cultural capitals" (Zipin et al 2012). For most pupils, the symbolic capital of examination grades will have lifeworld use value. The point is that a vision of social justice which focuses only on the redistribution of these capitals – without also reappraising them – is incomplete. I will now turn to the problems with this "redistributive" construction of justice.

Problems with redistributive justice: the limits of compensation

Nancy Fraser identifies two broad schools of thought in claims for social justice. The first is redistributive justice, which aims to share out material resources more equally (though I will argue that this also applies to scarce symbolic resources, such as examination grades). The second she terms the "politics of recognition", which seeks to recognise and value difference, "where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect" (Fraser 1996: 3). I will discuss this distinction by tracing broader schools of thought which lead to the conclusion that redistribution alone is not sufficient for social justice.

Wolff and De-Shalit distinguish their pluralist theory of disadvantage from the "monist" or "resourcist" perspective, which is premised on the assumption that "all advantages and disadvantages can be reduced to a single good or source", namely money; that all goods could in principle be valued on a sliding scale. Rejecting this, Wolff and De-Shalit give the example of someone having to choose on one hand between "a well-paid job which requires relocation, and on the other the companionship of family and friends, which mandates remaining in his or her home town" (2007: 22). Clearly, there are measures of wellbeing, or things such a person has reason to value, which do not carry a cash equivalent. In the same way, there are educational outcomes which cannot be ranked in terms of their capital value. Monism might lead to a version of social justice concerned with compensation, where society's disadvantaged are compensated with cash to "bring them to an appropriate level of preference satisfaction" (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007: 24); having money supposedly facilitates choice so that people can lead lives they personally find valuable and fulfilling. The compensation approach is basically aligned with redistributive justice. While conceding that individuals may have "reason to value" some goods over others, necessitating an element of choice, this approach is premised on the principle that money can buy wellbeing or "the good life".

The logic of redistribution here can be applied to other forms of capital; in education this is primarily the symbolic capital of examination grades. Conventionally, odds-beating schools are those which accrue these capitals for those students statistically less likely to attain them otherwise. A "compensatory" approach to education, rather than addressing the underlying causes of disadvantage, "seeks to 'compensate' children for 'deficits' arising from their family and community circumstances" (Kerr et al 2016: 275). Good examination grades will supposedly compensate students for the socioeconomic disadvantage of their backgrounds by equipping them to exchange these capitals for resources and opportunities. Again, this allocation of resources in the form of qualifications aims to promote *preference satisfaction* – to expand the range of choices available to disadvantaged pupils.

It is here that I would challenge meritocracy's central assertion that "earned" symbolic capital, for example in the form of educational qualifications, allows the holder equitable access to a full range of social and economic rewards (for example health, life satisfaction, economic wellbeing and political parity). There are some rights and freedoms which cannot be bought; the redistribution of educational capitals does not guarantee parity of participation more broadly. For example, Reay et al (2009) document the alienating experience of being a working class student at an elite university in the south of England; Campbell et al (2019)

find that poorer students with good grades are nonetheless less likely to apply for high quality university courses than their wealthier peers who attained similarly at school.

A resourcist approach to redistribution, then, based only on capitals, is not enough to "compensate" disadvantaged students without recognising the relative *status* of social actors. Disadvantage calls for remedy at the levels of liberty and opportunity, and not just income and wealth (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007) – or in this case, not just symbolic educational capitals. The redistributive approach does not agitate for a systematic change towards recognising and accommodating human difference, a gap which Fraser seeks to address with her "status model" (2001).

As will be discussed later, a key goal of education for Freire is the "humanisation" of learners (2017). Michael Fullan, in his 2021 report *The right drivers for whole system success,* argues that *systems* can become more "human" too. He draws a distinction between the "bloodless paradigm" of school systems powered by the "wrong drivers" – "academics obsession" and "machine intelligence", among others – and the "human paradigm" with the "right drivers" – "wellbeing and learning", and "social intelligence". The "academics obsession" is evident in some schools that seem to beat odds – schools which focus mainly on the acquisition of established capitals for their students. These schools display the kind of characteristics mentioned above where "achievement", in line with statutory state measures, is pursued at all costs. Such schools use mechanistic strategies to redistribute capitals, for example by narrowing the curriculum in order that disadvantaged students can spend more time learning how to pass exams in "core subjects". "Academics" thus comes at the expense of other, broader outcomes such as "wellbeing and learning". Further, there are missed opportunities to use *human, social intelligence* to reappraise value systems which perpetuate inequity by failing to recognise, respect and accommodate for human difference.

Parity of participation or "democratic citizenship": an alternative to redistribution

There are versions of social justice which move beyond the reallocation of capitals. Fraser, as indicated above, solidifies these critiques of redistribution into a "bivalent" conception of social justice, marrying redistribution with recognition to enable parity of participation (2005). This has two preconditions: *redistribution,* which is the distribution of material resources to ensure independence and "voice" (an example might be increasing the state benefits payable to poorer families); and *recognition*, whereby "institutionalised cultural patterns of

interpretation and evaluation express equal respect for all participants" (for instance, diversifying the English literature curriculum) (Fraser 2001: 29).[3]

Through the lens of what she calls "perspectival dualism", Fraser treats all spheres concerned with justice – race, gender, disability – as both economic and cultural (1996). Redistribution and recognition "constitute two analytical perspectives that can be assumed with respect to any domain" (Ray and Sayer 1999: 12). No reform, Fraser argues, should just be aimed at redistribution; recognition is an essential dimension, with the goal to "maintain or enhance the standing of claimants as full partners and participants in social interaction" (Fraser 1996: 48-49). In socially just schools, then, there will be *cultural* dimensions to efforts towards equity. Established "institutionalised cultural patterns" (27) – the centring of white middle-class norms, for example – will be challenged in schools' curricula and pedagogies, in order that "equal respect for all participants" might be expressed.

"Participatory parity", then, is a central condition of social justice, aiming to "constitute actors as peers, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life". In her later writing about globalisation, Fraser (2005) characterises this "third way" (or "bivalent" conception) of justice as "political", meaning this term in a "more specific, constitutive sense, which concerns the nature of the state's jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation". These are "issues of membership and procedure" (75); political justice affords participatory parity in the ways in which decisions are made. Crucially, all members of society must be afforded the status of peer. In socially just schooling, this may mean an increased emphasis on pupil and parental voice and trust in the expertise of parents and communities.

"Participatory parity" is made more complicated by the power dynamics within a school due to the respective roles of children and adults. Clearly the extent to which children will be able to participate as "peers" in education agenda-setting is dependent on the "evolving capacities of children at different ages" (Bozalek 2011: 55). If Fraser sees participatory parity as concerned with "issues of membership and procedure" in the ways in which decisions are

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[3] The opposite of "recognition" for Fraser is "misrecognition", but this is distinct from the term as used by Bourdieu (James 2015). For Fraser, "misrecognition" is "*social subordination* in the sense of being prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life" (Fraser 2000); it is the lack of "recognition", a refusal to value attributes which are not consistent with a "dominant culture". For Bourdieu, however, misrecognition is a process of naturalisation, rendering the field invisible. He uses the analogy of a fish in water, which "does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989: 43) . This version of misrecognition is about the false inevitability of social conditions and processes; Fraser's version describes a lack of "respect" more targeted towards individuals or individual groups. For Bourdieu, misrecognition is about the invisibilisation of the *field*; for Fraser it is about the institutional invisibilisation of actors *within* it.

made (75), the age and capacity of children will be relevant in determining the nature of their "membership" and their role in decision-making "procedure".

The goal of participatory parity seems aligned with Freire's notion of democratic citizenship, where agents participate actively in the democratic process. Central to Freire's outlook is the goal of "humanisation", which he considers to be the ultimate human project and the goal of his pedagogy. "Humanisation" is a "process of struggle", a "continuous searching, striving, and learning" pursued by each person uniquely (Roberts 2017). The goal of education, for Freire, is emancipatory, allowing the oppressed to secure their own liberation. "Real generosity," Freire writes, "lies in striving so that those hands… need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human" (2017: 21). Such "supplication" is certainly antithetical to participation as a peer, and so Freire's version of "becoming human" here is in concert with the *participatory parity* Fraser describes.

For Freire, a key tenet of "humanisation" for social justice is the development of critical consciousness. Torres describes Freire's conviction that "transformative social justice learning will take place when people reach a deeper, richer, more textured and nuanced understanding of themselves and their world" (Torres 2019: 20). Freire's pedagogical model "calls on people to develop a process of social and individual conscientisation" – a level of social introspection with which learners can become agents of change (Torres 2008: 7). Fraser tends however to emphasise the social and institutional, rather than the individual or psychological, aspects of misrecognition: it "constitutes a form of institutionalised subordination - and thus, a serious violation of justice" (Fraser 2001: 26). In this project, I consider the school as a collective entity striving towards justice, rather than the individual psychology of pupils, whilst retaining Freire's emphasis on schooling as a condition of emancipation.

Conclusion: An ethics of generosity

Capital depends on scarcity. But the rewards of schooling do not have to be scarce. A consideration of the *use* value of schooling outcomes as well as their *exchange* value of schooling outcomes can help to interrogate the "logic of capital" (Zipin et al 2012). There are some schools, however, which work to adjust the social and cultural structures which ascribe value to schooling *outcomes* in a way that recognises their lifeworld use value. A conceptualisation of social justice which centres this process of becoming fully human

through equitable social and political engagement is central to the present project, and is distinct from views of social justice which focus only on the reallocation of capitals. Social justice is not reducible to distribution.

I have aligned my approach to social justice in this project with Fraser's "bivalent" model (2005), recognising the importance of redistributive justice but incorporating it within the much broader goal of *participatory parity*. This speaks to the need for recognition as a precondition of justice. I use Freire's notion of *humanisation* to explore the role of schooling in this paradigm of social justice. Odds-beating, if construed in a narrow sense, generally redistributive, adhering to the logic of capital and scarcity. The dimension of *generosity* proposed by Freire involves the affordance of equal respect to all participants and the willingness to take risks by departing from normative standards in curriculum and pedagogy. It necessitates interaction on a peer-to-peer basis with parents and communities even when they do not have normative capital to "exchange" with the school. This requires a high level of trust, and trust will be explored fully in the next chapter.

Many schools' efforts towards redistributive justice centre around the allocation of examination grades; schools make sincere attempts to attain this scarce capital for their disadvantaged students. Likewise, studies which take a narrow view of outcomes preoccupy themselves with the *distribution* of (falsely) scarce rewards and not with the system which produces and sustains these forms of capital. Any efforts towards social justice which focus solely on the redistribution of capitals will inevitably uphold normative modes of *valuing*, perpetuating existing power structures. Fraser's account, along with other critiques of resourcism, can be used to show why equity in education cannot be reduced to the redistribution of capitals such as grades, which are given value based on their scarcity. Schooling has rewards which don't have to be scarce, which have use value rather than exchange value.

I return to Zipin quoting Grosz (1999), who writes about the possibility of a culture and value system without temporal goal-orientation or striving towards efficient outcomes: "What would an ethics be like that, instead of seeking a mode of equivalence, a mode of reciprocity or calculation, sought to base itself on absolute generosity, absolute gift, expenditure without return, a pure propulsion into the future that does not rebound with echoes of an exchange dictated by the past?" (Grosz, 1999: 11). This idea of *generosity* is truer to the combining of redistributive and recognitive justice by schools which seek to challenge the odds faced by their pupils instead of just *beating* them, in a more "human" way.

4 Trust

The discussion in the preceding chapter about the outcomes and rewards of schooling, and how these might align with a broader conception of social justice, explored what schools *value* for their disadvantaged pupils.I will now look at existing models of odds-beating schools to examine the level of *trust* that these schools demonstrate. *Value* and *trust* are entwined: Bryk and Schneider (2003) conceptualise relational trust as constituting "effective social relationships", involving the key components of respect, care, competence, integrity and moral commitment. Respect, for them, is the recognition that another person or group has value. However, "effectiveness" (according to a normative view of educational outcomes premised largely on standardised tests) is always the goal of these relationships; this conceptualisation of relational trust does not depart from the functionalist standpoint which I have shown to be typical in odds-beating research, policy and practice.

I propose a version of relational trust oriented towards social justice by considering the dimension of *power*. The key difference in approaches to community and parent relationships which escape the functionalist logic of purely "exogenous" agenda setting (Kerr et al 2016) is the sharing of power. Such approaches have been characterised as "asset-based", ascribing real value to the practices and knowledges of communities and *trusting* them to be equal partners in the setting of educational agendas. Kerr et al ask: who sets the agenda? And, whose interests are being served? I explore ways in which trust might be expressed in more equitable systems, and the ways in which trust as it is oriented towards social justice can transcend the forces of capital and efficiency. I characterise trust as a sharing of power to negotiate goals and priorities for schooling, based on a recognition of the lifeworld use value of assets held within communities.

Low-trust approaches to pupil disadvantage

In both the UK and the USA, there is a trend towards what I would characterise as low-trust, highly functionalist approaches to educating disadvantaged pupil populations (Golann 2015; Ward 2019), which run contrary to the kind of power-sharing described above. In the USA, this turn has been epitomised by the growth of "charter schools", many of which take a "no excuses" or "knowledge is power" approach, and which tend to serve disadvantaged communities, especially African-Americans (Waitoller et al 2019). Such schools are characterised by the imposition of a "knowledge curriculum", the tendency to use "direct

instruction" methods, and the reliance on strict codes for behaviour to ensure maximum time spent "on task" (Sondel 2016). These schools often use the phrase "no excuses" to describe their approach. In the UK, the schools at the forefront of this trend frequently make national headlines – perhaps the best-known school of this type is the Michaela Community School in Brent (Birbalsingh 2016).

As these trends are at an earlier stage in the UK, there is less empirical data to make such claims about "no excuses" schools in the UK (though plenty of public discourse in newspapers, blogs and elsewhere online). It is therefore necessary to exercise caution in making inferences about "no excuses" education in the UK from research conducted in the US. In particular, it has been argued that "no excuses" behaviour regimes in US schools originated in the "zero tolerance" policy concerning threats of violence in the wake of school shootings (Triplett, Allen and Lewis 2014). It has been suggested that "no excuses" mimics methods used by the police, in particular the "broken windows" logic which sees teachers "sweat the small stuff" (Golann 2015). This explicit link to law enforcement and the prevention of serious violence does not apply in the UK. Critiques of "no excuses" schooling in the UK are not specifically racialised to the extent that they are in the US (e.g. Lopez Kershen et al 2018). Nonetheless, some critiques remain relevant.

"Knowledge Organisers", subject specific lists of facts that students are expected to learn by rote, have exploded in popularity (Brunskill and Enser, 2017): statistics from Google Trends show that "Knowledge Organisers" was barely used as a search term until 2016, since which time it has increased hugely. The "knowledge" system works to uphold an established cannon of information and defends it from other forms of knowledge, which it regards with suspicion and distrust. The highly performative "knowledge" curriculum often corresponds with "direct instruction" pedagogy. This is a highly teacher-centred, often scripted style, the proponents of which at the National Institute for Direct Instruction argue that "teacher creativity and autonomy must give way to a willingness to follow certain carefully prescribed instructional practices". Group work or more exploratory approaches do not feature. The approach is justified with the claim that "disadvantaged learners must be taught at a faster rate than typically occurs if they are to catch up to their higher-performing peers" (National Institute for Direct Instruction 2022). The words "catch up" and "higher-performing" cement the functionalist worldview here. It is, again, taken for granted that rapid transmission of the knowledge and skills is the only route towards equity between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Engagement, however, is coerced and not (always) the result of genuine investment from learners. Furthermore, such approaches do not consider the *content* of the "knowledge" and whether it expresses equal respect for all social participants; these issues

of epistemology in the curriculum are however becoming more widely discussed as the decolonisation movement gathers pace.

Direct instruction ensures that students are "on task" but not that they are "in task", a distinction drawn by Munns et al (2013) in their Australian study of effective teachers of students living in poverty. The difference between "small 'e'" and "big 'E'" engagement is that the former is merely "procedural" – or performative – whereas the latter demands substantive involvement in learning experiences, stemming from a psychological investment in the task. Teachers working in charter schools in the US have been shown to characterise their students as passive recipients of superior knowledge, who need strict control and supervision (Lopez Kershen et al 2018), manifesting in a talk-and-chalk pedagogic style. Though, in some ways, direct instruction gives teachers kudos through elevating the status of their subject expertise, teachers are trusted only in their capacity to impart standardised facts and not to innovate or experiment. In line with a burgeoning "audit culture", teaching becomes "defensive" (Munns et al 2013: xi). Teachers are regarded as "compliant and closely monitored producers of standardised performances" (Hargreaves 2003: 5). Mayer and Mills, in their English and Australian study, argued that "these types of performance cultures and standardisation imply a low level of trust in teachers" (2021: 46). There may therefore be a kind of chain of distrust evident in these schools; a lack of professional trust in teachers can work in tandem with a distrustful attitude towards students. This may mean, in Fraser's conception (2000), that neither students nor teachers are trusted to participate as peers in the setting of the educational agenda, but instead participate procedurally or performatively.

Knowledge curricula and direction instruction pedagogies are often found alongside "no excuses" behaviour systems. This describes a strict, uniform application of a rigorous behaviour code to all students and can be seen in the behaviour handbook at Great Yarmouth Charter Academy, UK: "Everyone will sit up extra straight, eyes front, looking at the teacher. You will follow their instructions first time, every time. The same rules apply to all, so are fair to all. No exceptions" (Richardson 2017). Lopez Kershen et al (2018) argue, albeit in the United States context, that "no excuses" systems express uniquely low expectations of how disadvantaged students can learn and behave without adult coercion. These children are seen as "needing" tighter control, and working-class children understand implicitly that "successful learning is about compliance and discipline" (Lupton and Hempel-Jorgensen 2012: 613, a UK based study). Interviews with teachers working in no-excuses charter schools in the US show that students are largely positioned either as "active deviants" or "passive performers" (Lopez Kershen et al 2018: 266). The children are seen as

having either malign agency – they choose to be troublemakers - or no agency at all, which justifies unprecedentedly close control over their cognition and bodies. A culture of performativity, a feature of the UK policy climate (as demonstrated above, e.g. by Mayer and Mills 2021) and taken to extremes by no-excuses type schools, is arguably demonstrative of an erosion of trust. Everything must be shown; pupils are expected to nod and "track" their teachers to demonstrate attentiveness.

Trusting in a person, organisation or community involves a loss of control, and thus a degree of risk and uncertainty. It also involves an implicit acceptance of assets, meaning the relationships, knowledges and practices within a community which can contribute to meaningful lifeworld use value outcomes for their young people. "Deficit thinking" (Gorski 2008) will disrupt trust. The functionalist approach to curriculum, pedagogy, behaviour and community, whilst appealing to normative values and seeking to diminish risk, demonstrates low levels of trust in all of these areas. I argue that the logical conclusion of these approaches is schools and schooling systems low in trust, and specifically the kind of trust oriented towards social justice centred on participatory parity. Schools can seem to beat the odds (for example when this is measured in standardised tests) by using approaches which demonstrate a lack of trust in pupils, parents and teachers. However, this kind of odds-beating-ness retains and reinforces deficit views of the disadvantaged pupil population.

The limits of "engagement"

It is difficult and perhaps undesirable to pinpoint an existing model of schooling which is directly opposite to the one described above, but fruitful contrast can be made with "community" oriented approaches. As I have shown, Bryk et al include family and community relations as a key component of their model (see Figure 1, replicated below), claiming that these relationships are indispensable to school improvement. The investment in these links could be seen as creating a more trusting environment. However, it is arguable that not all community-oriented practices express the kind of trust I describe above – a sharing of power. The "relationality" to which Bryk et al refer tends to consist of seeking to bring other stakeholders (such as parents) around to the aims and values of the school. For example, Bryk et al claim that "parents' shared interest in securing a quality education for their children… would motivate the necessary voluntary associations among parents and community residents to improve their local schools" (158). There is little interrogation here of the dynamics of a "quality" education or how such "voluntary associations" might appear. An

alignment of the values of the "community" with the educational aims of the school is assumed.

Figure 1

Relational Trust Across a School Community

Local Community Context
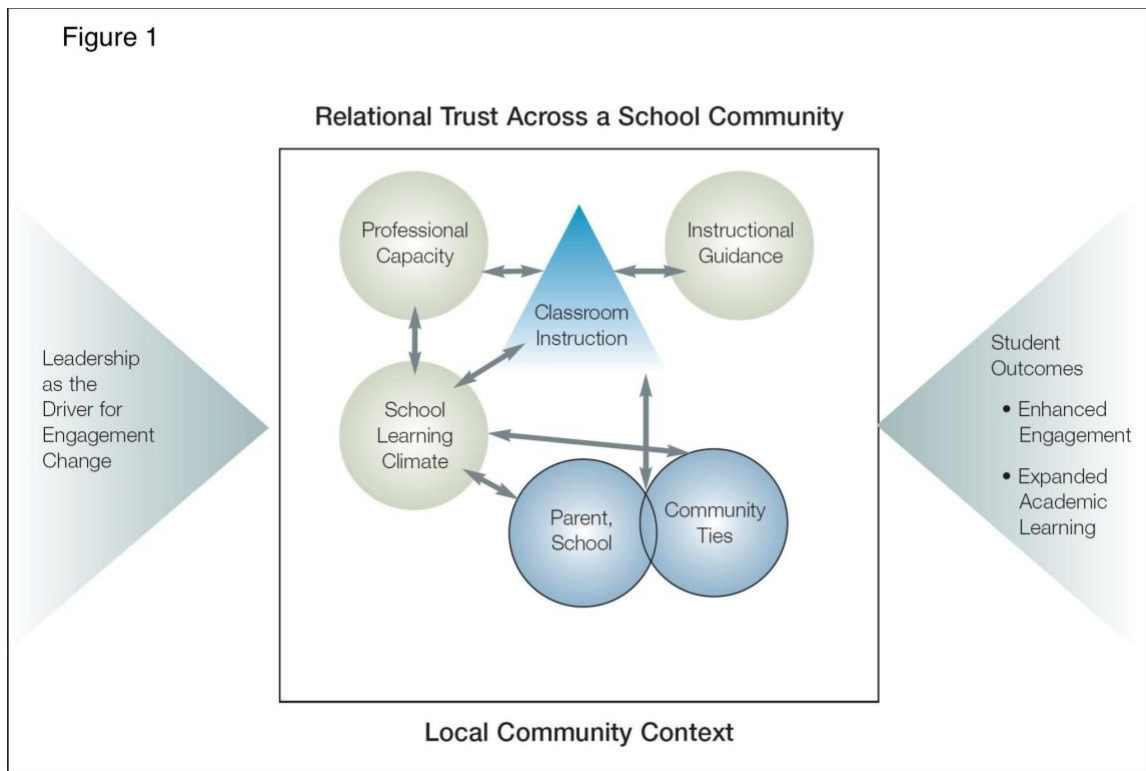
This critique of the literature on such community "engagement" was made by Kerr at el (2016: 276): "The field is dominated by texts which take for granted the leading role of professionals… acting on agendas determined outside communities, and which have a tendency to cast communities in the largely passive role of responding to school-initiated interventions". Efforts at linking schools with communities and families where the "agenda" is still set by schools or policymakers remains within the realms of functionalism: the values of the status quo are left uninterrogated and broader power structures remain unchallenged. Such approaches can "cast communities as characterised only by deficits which schools… need to make good" (Kerr et al 2016: 267). Lawson and van Veen (2016) specifically critique "partnership" designs: they "continue a school-centred tradition of "community engagement" in which educational leaders seek ratification of decisions they have already made, albeit dressed up in the language of partnership" (14).

In keeping with this underlying adherence to the functionalist paradigm, additional services offered by "community" schools were found by Cummings et al (2011) to be concerned primarily with "raising student achievement" and "overcoming what were described as 'barriers to learning'". Uncontroversial though this goal may appear, Cummings et al's

argument is that "achievement" becomes elided with "measured attainment" which in turn becomes "the performance indicators by which the success of the school was measured". Inevitably, then, "the distinction between acting in the best interests of the child and acting in the best interests of the school was… constantly blurred" (53). The researchers go on to ask why the focus must always be on barriers to *learning* and not on barriers to health, wellbeing and relationships. Therefore, some efforts to connect with parents and communities are open to the same critique as more obviously functionalist schooling models. They are likewise low in social justice-oriented trust, which I have characterised as involving a deeper appreciation of community assets as well as a genuine sharing of agenda-setting power.

What would a more trusting schooling model look like?

There are, however, more ambitious models that move beyond mere "engagement" or "partnership" (Lawson and van Veen 2016) to provide more holistic services rooted in the needs of the local community. These types of schools, constructed variously as "community learning centres", "extended service schools", "multi service schools" and so on (Lawson and van Veen 2016) often seek in different ways to build stronger relationships with families and communities, moving beyond the "academics obsession" (Fullan 2021) exemplified by the "no-excuses" type. Models might include the "full service" approach, where the school provides additional services such as health and social care; out of hours provision; multi agency support for families; and adult learning (Cummings et al 2011). Such schools may even be based on entirely new models, such as the building of supportive area-based communities for children, or "children's zones" (Lawson and van Veen 2016).

These schools are often powered by a sense of moral obligation or ethical responsibility (Lawson and van Veen 2016). They are often something like "social experiments", "specifically designed to address place-based social and economic disadvantage" (Lawson and van Veen 2016: 1). They are defined by their working relationships with external bodies such as local leaders, government officials, and health and social care services. Such schools view desirable outcomes once seen as separate as interdependent. The school is no longer only responsible for the student but also to some extent for the family, neighbourhood and community; arguably the student's success is dependent on these factors too. Such schools tend to cultivate trusting relationships with these stakeholders based on shared agenda-setting, premised on the kind of relational trust explored above.

It is difficult to find in the literature robust evaluative accounts of schooling that does deal more holistically with children and families. Broader, open-ended outcomes are far more

difficult to measure in a way that is pleasing to school leaders and policymakers. It must be emphasised that just because accounts of such work are missing from the literature, does not mean that schools do not invest in students' health and wellbeing. Where accounts do exist they tend to be narrative rather than evaluative, and depend on qualitative rather than quantitative data (e.g. Case and Davidson 2018). Schools which wish to build trusting, power-sharing relationships will engage in a "slower and messier family partnership process" (Case and Davidson 2018).

In my discussion of social justice in Chapter 3 above, I explained "humanisation" as a condition of participatory parity. This must involve an acknowledgement of assets within families and communities which fall outside of the modes of capital acknowledged by the mainstream. This often manifests as a change to the paradigm of parental "engagement". Ishimaru (2019) states that odds-beating schools approach parents and communities as "vital collaborators and leaders in efforts to transform our schools and broader educational systems towards educational justice" (2). Too often, schools use a "prescriptive, racialized lens" (4), which comes about because norms of schooling "success" are culturally aligned with middle-class whiteness. This "obscures vital knowledge and expertise possessed by nondominant families and communities" (4). Leo et al (2018: 256) likewise advocate for family members to be treated as "collaborative participants" rather than "clients", and for schools to "forge genuine partnerships" (260), being "sensitive to local norms and priorities" (264). The goal of such approaches can furthermore be concerned with fostering critical understanding of a community's disadvantaged position, and empowering communities to organise for change by building their social and civic capacity. Community members may for example be involved in school governance (Dyson and Kerr 2012). Schools which foster these relationships of *parity* can "function as places where community identities (and particularly those of marginalised communities) can be affirmed" (Kerr et al 2016: 268).

Pedagogy and curricula stemming from more trusting approaches

This kind of approach to community relationships will also manifest through curriculum and pedagogy. Power can be shared by diversifying control of the school's "instructional core" – the *what* and *why* of teaching is never interrogated by Bryk et al, who focus on the *how* and *who*. Lawson and van Veen (2016) point out that in most schools "the instructional core… is controlled almost exclusively by teachers". A "more expansive conception", they argue, "starts with the idea of instruction that is integrated to social and health service interventions and out-of-school time learning" (8). As shown above, the goal of community-oriented

schooling can synthesise outcomes related to health and wellbeing as well as learning; these do not have to be discrete categories.

Schools may strive for the "cultural validation of endogenous perspectives" by developing community responsive curricula and place based pedagogy (Dyson and Kerr 2012: 277). Kerr et al (2016) give the example of schools in African-American communities which focus on a shared moral code and place value on African-American music, history and art. The valuing of "local, indigenous knowledge" (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009: 81) has been shown to be effective in teaching students living in poverty (Munns et al 2013, Hattie 2012). *Valuing* local knowledge and experiences – as well as students' innate creativity and curiosity – expresses *trust* that they can and will make worthwhile contributions. "Lifeworld use value" is in the "learning assets" that can be found in students' lives; to value is to honour these learners' "cultural-historical lives" by incorporating such resources into school curriculum and pedagogy, and is an "ethical imperative" (Zipin et al 2012: 181). For example, in teaching mathematics, pedagogy may be centred around childrens' experiences with money, for example receiving money as a birthday gift (Black et al 2021). Schools which value the knowledges and assets of their pupils and communities are more likely to promote "contributive justice" (Sayer 2011); to allow all members of the school community to contribute something of value. This lends itself to *participatory parity*, which demands the genuine valuing of all social contributions.

Centring curriculum and pedagogy around creativity, rather than rote knowledge and direct instruction, requires trust in learners' capacity. Munns et al advocate for a "movement away from [the] teacher as sole judge and towards students taking more responsibility for evaluation of learning" (2013: 29). Shared ownership and power is valued over compliance, with the focus always on learning rather than behaviour. The authors argue that learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds "need to be highly effective, active and *self-regulated* learners" (21, my emphasis). Hattie posits that "the biggest effects on student learning occur when… students become their own teachers," a method which seems antithetical to the "direct instruction" methods that tend to pair with the knowledge curriculum (2012: 22). Andy Hargreaves argues that schools must foster compassion, community and a cosmopolitan identity to offset the most destructive effects of a profit-driven economy and fragmented society. Teaching for the twenty first century, according to Hargreaves, involves "developing deep cognitive learning, creativity, and ingenuity among students" (2003: 3). In order to generate this ingenuity in their students, teachers need to have experienced creativity and flexibility themselves in the way in which they are treated and developed; trust in teachers fosters trust in students (Hargreaves 2003: 2).

The "no excuses" attitude has been seen as antithetical to school climates which have historically served African American children well, which have focussed on "trusting interpersonal relationships between teachers and children" (Lopez Kershen et al 2018: 268). Alternatives to the no-excuses system include the use of restorative justice, context-sensitive and case-by-case responses to infractions, and an emphasis on relationships between teachers and students as the foundation for behaviour management. Such an approach would involve supportive conversations to resolve conflict, with the focus on repairing the harm done rather than punishment. These strategies, again, require more trust in teacher discretion and autonomy. Trusting, respectful and fair relationships between students and teachers were a predictor of better GCSE and AS level results for disadvantaged pupils (Sammons et al 2015). Again, this encourages engagement as *peers*, a cornerstone of the participatory parity version of social justice, rather than engagement by coercion.

In successful, high-trust educational systems such as Finland's, teachers form a professional "society of experts" and are more likely to feel involved in the running of their school (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009: 96). The empirical research on teacher leadership shows that it is most effective when classroom teaching and leadership are seen as integrated, and when the school culture is empowering and reinforcing of positive relationships; blame, coercion and surveillance – behaviour which demonstrate a lack of trust – are the opposite (Woodhouse and Pedder 2017: 561). Leo et al identify the presence of this kind of trust in the "odds-beating" schools they looked at: "several teachers felt that leaders enabling them to make pedagogical choices was in part a cause of their school's success" (2018: 13).

It must be noted, however, that schools do not tend to espouse all elements of one or the other broad positions on curriculum design, pedagogy and behaviour management. Many, if not most, schools simply don't have a coherent curriculum and pedagogy strategy based on a robust philosophical view of education. They may use elements from the "knowledge" system such as subject knowledge organisers, whilst maintaining a vocational offer and restorative approach to behaviour management. These schools arguably have the *most* capacity for trust, with a broader tolerance for professional autonomy and innovation.

Conclusion: Trust and efficiency

My account of trust centred around power and agenda-setting provides an alternative to the tautological construction of relational trust as describing merely the social conditions which

correspond with "academic productivity" (Bryk and Schneider 2003, as discussed above). In the Chicago study, Bryk et al (2010) describe relational trust as the key factor in determining the efficacy of the five main supports for school improvement in their model: "trust represents the social energy, or the "oven's heat," necessary for transforming these basic ingredients into comprehensive school change" (157). Bryk and Schneider's functionalist view of *trust* is not attuned explicitly with social justice; trust here is cultivated to advance the purpose of capital. The "culture" and "climate" that supposedly underpin this "relational trust" are often premised on participatory *dis*parities. Bryk and Schneider describe trust as constituting "mutual dependencies" without interrogating the currents of capital and power undergirding this supposed mutuality. Likewise, Bryk et al (2010) describe trust as comprising in part "genuine listening", and "in some fashion taking this into account in subsequent actions" (138). This seems to describe a *performance* of listening rather than a genuine attempt to reallocate power in line with participatory parity*.*

This functionalist understanding of trust belongs within the paradigm of *efficiency*, or "the fluid and efficient mechanisms of the market" intrinsic to the "implicit philosophy of the economy" (Bourdieu 2001: 29-30). Efficiency, or "academic productivity", is the core of Bryk's model and indeed a dominant conceptual force of the industrial age (Rittel and Webber 1973). All of the functionalist-aligned approaches outlined above are geared towards efficiency, whether by providing scripts for "direct instruction" in order to minimise teacher variability or insisting on silent corridors to maximise the amount of time pupils spend in lessons.

As mentioned in the preceding section, Fullan (2021) contrasts the "wrong drivers" for system success with the "right drivers". The latter belong to a "bloodless paradigm" and feature an "academics obsession", "machine intelligence" and "austerity". The "human paradigm" replaces these with "wellbeing and learning", "social intelligence" and "equality investments". "Efficiency" is the application of "machine intelligence" – "bloodless" direct instruction technologies and "no excuses" applications of strict behaviour policies – and an "austerity" of curriculum, aligned only with the narrow educational goals of the state. The doctrine of efficiency results in an "academics obsession" divorced from the goals of "wellbeing and learning" more generally. Efficiency is antithetical to "equality investments"; whilst allowing individual people and institutions to "beat the odds", it upholds the social values that perpetuate inequity more broadly.

Efficiency is ubiquitous as an unchallenged good within policymaking and, for Żuk (2020), poses a risk to the utopian imaginary: any value system which "rejects economic or

technological inefficiency as the final criterion for deciding which solution is better", he argues, is itself worthy of being called utopian (1049). Efficiency is, of course, a pervasive feature of educational systems. Trust involves two crucial components on the part of the trustor: a loss of control, and a degree of uncertainty. Productivity and efficiency, geared towards maximising utility and value, do not deal well with these elements; true trust requires a spirit of generosity and optimism, a movement beyond the linear exchange-value structure of capital.

This generosity, manifesting as genuine power-sharing, is central to trusting school systems and in turn to social justice with participatory parity at its core. Kerr et al characterise much of the literature on community schools as "accounts of ameliorative actions taken to alleviate the acute symptoms of underlying disadvantage", in contrast to which "there are very few accounts of actions seeking to transform local circumstances by tackling underlying inequalities" (Kerr et al 2016: 266). This crystallises the difference between functionalist odds-beating approaches and more ambitious, socially critical approaches. The speedy acquisition of knowledge and skills characteristic of less trusting schools may help to redistribute educational capitals: disadvantaged pupils are supported to obtain the qualifications which symbolise learning aligned with state goals for education. It does not however recognise the cultural dimensions of disadvantage which are inscribed in the system, and therefore does not really strive towards participatory parity. Some schools will do both, equipping their students with exchangeable capitals whilst trusting parents and communities to join with them in setting an agenda for a broader range of schooling outcomes.

5 Agency

So far, I have shown the value in schools being able to formulate their own multifaceted, intersectional, context-sensitive interpretations of and responses to disadvantage. Building on this, the previous chapter demonstrated that there are pathways – perhaps not sufficiently documented in existing research – for conceptualising and delivering schooling outside of the doctrines of productivity and efficiency. This reimagining, however, is only possible where there are high levels of relational trust: I have redefined this term as necessitating a sharing of power, with all community members able to contribute to agenda-setting.

This project, though, is about odds-beating *schools*. These schools operate within a policy climate which *is* geared towards productivity and efficiency, as judged on rigid accountability metrics such as the Pupil Premium "gap" and GCSE outcomes. However, the UK's highly competitive, marketized education system affords schools a peculiar kind of agency which allows schools to transcend mainstream functionalist approaches in order to strive towards the broader goals of social justice. This chapter will outline the policy context in more detail, before exploring the kind of agency granted to schools and how it might be used to secure equitable education.

Social mobility: a dominant discourse

Diane Reay argues that the political right since the 1980s have "appropriated" the term "social justice" to refer to their vision of a ruthless meritocracy (Reay 2012). Chiming with Hirsch's description of education as a "positional good" (1978), Reay quotes RH Tawney's description of social mobility as "merely converting into doctors, barristers and professors a certain number of people who would otherwise have been manual workers" (Reay 2012: 590). In the past decade of Conservative dominated government, this vision of a "great meritocracy" (Theresa May 2016) has proven seductive. Of course, it is important that children from all backgrounds have equal access to professions in medicine, law and academia (to use Tawney's examples), but this should work in tandem with education as facilitating "the cultural validation of disadvantaged communities" (Kerr et al 2016: 275). In her (publicly available) supporting statement in application for her role as the new Social Mobility Commissioner, Katharine Birbalsingh, the headteacher of the "no-excuses" Michaela School, asked: "Is it equality we seek by bringing down those who are at the top, or do we instead enable those at the bottom to compete?" (2021). Birbalsingh is implicitly resigned to

(or even in favour of) the presence of a rigid social hierarchy, and also couches her vision for "mobility" as "competition". Equipping less advantaged learners to "compete" for scarce rewards is a discursive cornerstone of contemporary education policy (for example, the CEO of the MAT Star Academies, quoted in a Department for Education press release (2019) stated his desire that his students should "compete on an international stage with young people from more advantaged backgrounds"). Schools' agency is restricted when they are seen, or see themselves, as competitors for scarce resources, rather than as agents for social change.

Autonomy and responsibilisation

However, adherence to this narrow view of social justice as social mobility is not inevitable for schools. The neoliberal, state-shrinking approach which produces the competitive, limited view of social mobility outlined above simultaneously affords schools the agency needed to *resist* narrow notions of odds-beating. I will now explain this paradox of agency in the context of the "decentralisation" of UK schools.

"Academisation" describes the process within UK education started in 2000 under the New Labour government whereby state schools are made into self-governing "academies", outside of local authority control and free from obligation to follow the national curriculum. There is an interesting crossover here with the context of Bryk et al's Chicago study, which documented the process of "decentralisation" in the state's schools, choosing as Bryk et al put it "democratic localism as a lever for change" (2010: 12). Not all accounts of decentralisation are so positive. The process of state school academisation in the UK over the past twenty years is underpinned by a mistrust of state involvement arguably perpetuated by the state itself. Greany and Higham quote the Department for Education's 2010 justification for school-to-school support models in helping to "dismantle the apparatus of central control and bureaucratic compliance" (2018: 10). The state thus abdicates its responsibilities by offering the illusion of freedom, which itself becomes a mode of governance (Rose 1999). The state continues to "steer the system from a distance *and* to increasingly intervene and coerce when and where it deems necessary", a form of "chaotic centralisation" featuring "competing claims to authority" (Greany and Higham 2018: 12). Thompson et al (2020) temper this critique, suggesting that schools experience "indentured" rather than "chaotic" autonomy, supporting this with evidence supposedly showing that schools *want* to academise; this begs questions about the nature of this kind of choice in a system that strongly incentivises movement away from the state. The government's project

of *responsibilisation* inflates a subject's moral agency, rendering them morally responsible for tasks that would hitherto have been the duty of the state, whilst nonetheless burdening them with "new metrics, accountabilities and compliance requirements" (Thompson et al 2020: 220).

One policy example from the project of *responsibilisation* is the development of "self-improving school systems", or SISS. In a report commissioned by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, the stated aim of the policy is for "schools [to] take ownership of problems and reject the notion that the school itself can do little or nothing because it is somebody else's responsibility to provide a solution" (Hargreaves 2010: 9). This is institutional responsibilisation in action; schools are forced to exercise their moral responsibility where the state refuses to do so. The establishment of Teaching Schools was a key component of SISS policy. The website of the Teaching Schools Council stated: "The self-improving school-led system is at the heart of the government's vision for education in England. Simply put, this means that schools are being empowered to make decisions about how to improve and to work collaboratively to support each other to do so." Again, "empowerment" here could equally be interpreted as an abdication of state responsibility, though Greany and Higham (2018) also argue that the SISS agenda has in some ways "intensified hierarchical governance and the state's powers of intervention" (2018: 16). Research schools, likewise, were conceived as a way for schools autonomously to build and strengthen networks (King 2017).

Greany and Higham (2018) furthermore introduce the notion of the "local status hierarchy", with most UK school leaders they surveyed agreeing that "there is a clear local hierarchy of schools in my area, in terms of their status and popularity with parents" (13). Various factors apart from the "school quality" combine to position it relative to others in the area, such as its locality and perceived history, its student demographic (including pupil ethnicity and home language), student attainment and progress according to the results of standardised tests, Ofsted reports, and educational "offer" including extra-curricular activities (53-4). Schools which are "high status" then become "system leaders" within the SISS context (54).

Depictions of staff and school agency within these processes has understandably been somewhat cynical. However, within a critique of decentralisation and the process of "responsibilisation" that goes along with it, it can be recognised that these shifts have created opportunities for schools to deploy their agency creatively in striving towards social justice goals. Rayner and Gunter (2020) suggest a more plural understanding, locating forms of agency in the academisation process on a scale from "enactment" to "resistance", seeing

that "tectonic shifts" in policy have "both limited and enabled the opportunities for local agency" (276). For example, the systemic reduction in the power and funds afforded to local education authorities could be seen as constraining local agency, but at the same time creates opportunities for schools to work in collaborations which they see as most aligned with their goals. This paradox of agency is important to odds-beating-ness: schools have greater agency to work in creative ways to change odds in their local contexts, but also are compelled to do this because of the retreat of the state. It is in these agency gaps that a school is most able to conceptualise and respond to disadvantage in a way that strives towards social justice and, potentially, resists mainstream functionalist narratives about the aims and outcomes of education.
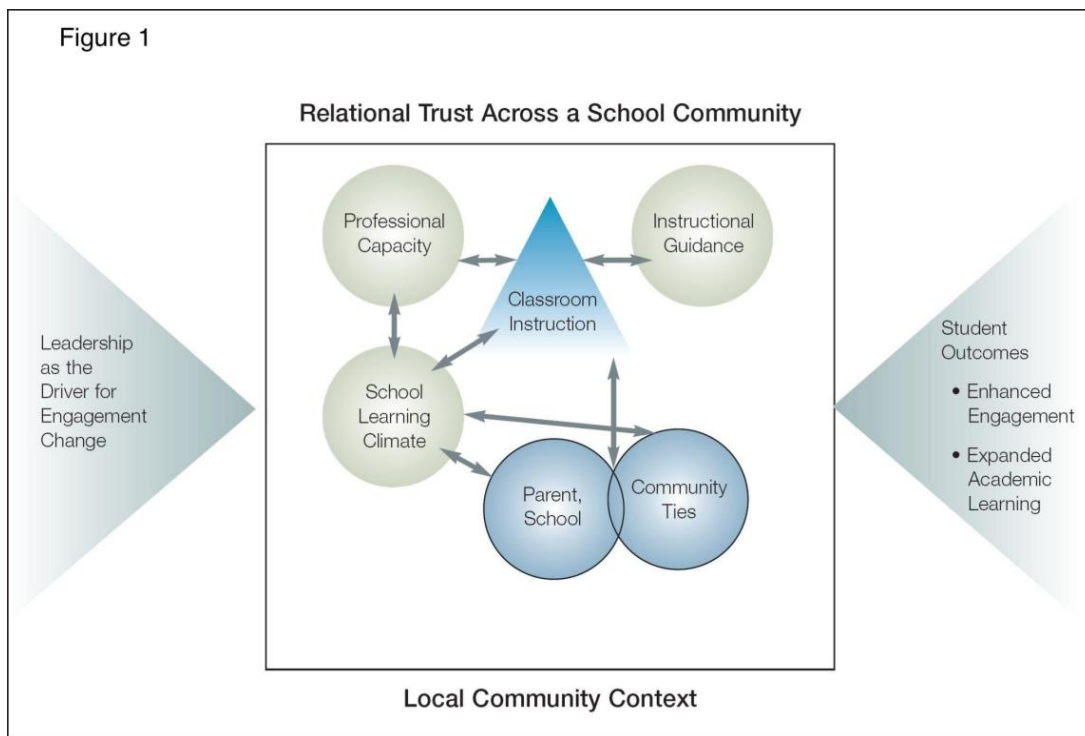
Conceptualising agency

Bourdieu and Wacquant acknowledge the importance of agency: "a materialist science of society must recognise that the consciousness and interpretations of agents are an essential component of the full reality of the social world" (1989: 9). For Giddens (1984), these structures are not inescapably determinant and therefore it is possible to escape from structural inequality. Structures are both rules and resources for social reproduction, and all structures ultimately enable a "knowledgeable" agent to work within them in creative and formative ways. Structure and agency need not be pitted against one another in "antagonistic dualism"; structure can facilitate agency (Sewell 1992). Likewise, Leo et al (2018) use "the lens of agency" (1) to "capture the dynamic interplay between social structures and individual free will" (13), and as a "valuable conceptual alternative to deterministic portrayals of schools as oppressive institutions where teachers and students have little power over the conditions in which they teach and learn" (2). Of course, some schools are more "oppressive" than others and sometimes such "portrayals" may be justified; but as I have explained above, more trusting schools and school systems can foster individual agency and power.

Leo et al describe the relationship between structure and agency as an "iterative process of interaction between intentions and constraints whereby structures pose challenges that are negotiated and remade" (Leo et al 2020: 4). The "structures" of school pose challenges such as the siloing of disadvantage into one dimensional categories (such as PP) rather than complex clusters, and the narrowing down of educational outcomes; *agency* facilitates the negotiation and remaking of these concepts. Where there are "affordances for teachers to assert agency", this can "mitigate the constraining effects of state accountability system

compliance-oriented practices" (Leo et al 2020: 2). This "iterative" lens is useful to capture the workings of agency in the context of the "chaotic centralisation" described above, where responsibilisation combined with the shrinking role of the state opens up new pathways for the exercise of agency by schools. Complex problems must be solved by working across professional boundaries rather than inside pre-set bureaucratic processes; "rather than following established institutional practices, they have to rely on their specialist knowledge and their expertise in working with others while they negotiate the accomplishment of complex tasks" (Edwards 2010: 1). Although Edwards is describing relationships between different services and professionals, a more generally outward-facing approach which seeks input from families and communities could open up opportunities for increased participatory parity at school level, increasing relational trust as it is configured as shared agenda-setting.

"Agency" as a concept is most often associated with individual subjects (as per Bourdieu (1989) and Giddens (1984) above), and Leo (2020) discusses the agency of teachers rather than of schools. However, in line with my socially critical research paradigm (explained in more detail in Chapter 6), my unit of analysis is the institution - the school and the educational policy context - rather than the individual. When I refer to *school* agency, I am not conceptualising this only as "an attribute of singular individuals, aggregated to a collective action" (Abdelnour et al 2017: 1783). In treating the school as a collective agentic entity, I argue that the agency it exercises is "more complex than the simple accretion of individuals and their interests" (Abdelnour et al 2017: 1783, paraphrasing King, Felin and Whetten, 2010). The process of school status-seeking (discussed above), for example, cannot be explained only by the aggregated agency of self-interested members of staff. I do not, then, in describing school leadership, tell a story of "institutional superheroes with the ability to purposefully 'create, alter and destroy institutions' (Abdelnour et al 2017: 1776-7, quoting Bitektine and Haack 2015: 50). Leadership is often contested and distributed, especially in a policy context where there may be a MAT CEO working alongside a headteacher; leaders are appointed and monitored by other actors within the organisation. The forces acting on a school are more than the combined forces of individuals within it.

Figure 1

Relational Trust Across a School Community

Professional Capacity

Instructional Guidance

Classroom Instruction

Leadership as the Driver for Engagement Change

School Learning Climate

Parent, School

Community Ties

Student Outcomes
- Enhanced Engagement
- Expanded Academic Learning

Local Community Context

One problem with the odds/outcomes binary implicit in models such as Bryk et al's, with "beating" practices happening in the chronological between-time, is that odds such as poverty, poor housing and social turbulence are seen as exclusively generated outside of the circumscribed boundaries of the school (see Figure 1, reproduced here). Conventional odds-beating discourse tends to fragment the community and the school, seeing the former as *generating* particular odds and the latter as *beating* them (or, more often, not). Troubling the odds/outcome binary generates productive questions about the school's locus of control. The example I have given from Bryk (2010) plotting academic progress alongside local crime rates to look for schools which improve in spite *of* these "odds" seems to preclude any agency that schools have in *changing* these "odds" – for example by working to alleviate poverty and thus reduce crime in the local community. Some schools are concerned not just with proximal odds but also distal odds (a distinction made in Conway et al 2021) – the "causes of the causes" (Marmot et al 2020). These are the broader issues of social injustice which underpin "proximate" causes of educational underachievement such as poor pupil behaviour or attendance. It is clear that schools exercise their agency to work towards a range of outcomes for their students which are not just those enshrined in policy (Dyson et al 2015). They push at the *purposive boundaries* – the limits of what schools should be and do – which are circumscribed by policy. They can seek to change the material conditions in which their students live which are at the root of social, and thus educational, inequalities.

Conclusion: a new framework

As I have shown, Bryk et al's large longitudinal study contrasted "improving" and "stagnating" schools in Chicago, resulting in a model featuring five key components of school improvement, supported additionally by relational trust and leadership as a driver for change (2010 – see Figure 1 above). This approach is broadly functionalist, with a causal or linear structure. Outcomes appear on the right hand side, and the model is clearly intended to be read left to right as an input-output map with the five supports within a central "black box". The principal element is "classroom instruction". The sampling of schools for Bryk et al's study, as I have shown, took a narrow view of odds and outcomes.

I have formulated an alternative to Bryk et al's model based on emerging themes from the literature not just on the odds-beating phenomenon, but on equitable schooling and social justice more generally. This framework (Figure 2) will facilitate the exploration of my two case study schools, and specifically the extent to which their odds-beating practices may align with a "bivalent" conceptualisation of social justice centred around participatory parity – this conceptualisation is absent in Bryk et al's model.
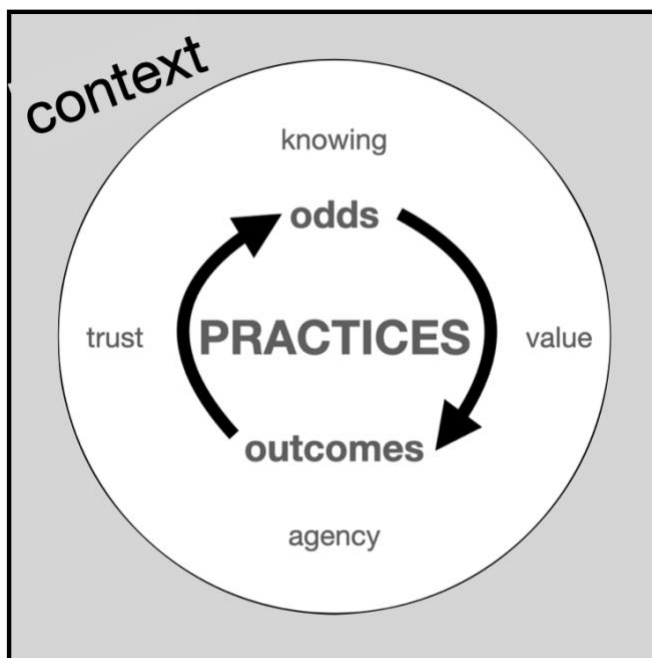
Figure 2

The term "practices", and not "classroom instruction", takes centre stage as a broad designation for the vast range of doings within a school. I view the process of outcomes-formulation as an important object of study in itself; it is a manifestation of schools' justice-orientation and the backbone of their odds-beating work. Educational disadvantage is a "wicked" problem, meaning that its understanding and resolution must be concomitant: "in order to *describe* a wicked-problem in sufficient detail, one has to develop an exhaustive inventory of all conceivable *solutions* ahead of time… The formulation of a wicked problem *is* the problem! The process of formulating the problem and of conceiving a solution (or re-solution) are identical, since every specification of the problem is a specification of the

direction in which a treatment is considered" (Rittel and Webber 1973: 61). The problem of educational disadvantage, then, cannot be solved or even studied using an input-output paradigm that is drawn so clearly from the positivist scientific research tradition developed to deal with "tame" problems. This is why I have arranged odds and outcomes vertically to disrupt the idea of a linear continuum; an odds/outcomes cycle is truer to the characterisation of disadvantage as "chaotic, complex, relative, and contextual" (Ungar 2004: 342); odds and outcomes shape each other in a chronologically chaotic relationship. This also opens up the possibility of school agency in shaping odds as well as outcomes and avoids the tautology evident in some risk/resilience models (Ungar 2004) which is also evident in school-level studies.

The four pillars which interact to orient a school towards a socially just odds/outcomes cycle are *knowing, value, trust,* and *agency.* The odds-outcome cycle, which includes school responses to odds, is shaped by ways in which schools come to *know* about disadvantage. The kind of "outcomes" they seek must be analysed through the lens of value, taking in a critical view of capital. This iterative process of *valuing* is in dialogue with *trust*, a socially-just orientation of which opens up new, radical pathways for conceptualising schooling outside of the doctrines of "productivity" and "efficiency".

The perception of "odds", and the kind of "outcomes" that schools strive for, are dependent on their local contexts. Context-responsiveness here is not an addendum to the model but pervades it; the characteristics encompassed in each of the pillars will (and should) be shaped by the specific circumstances of the school. Context is therefore represented by the grey square in which the model sits.

The very idea of odds-beating-ness is somewhat paradoxical in that it comes from a contextual assessment of the school's intake and outcomes against a national picture. Odds-beating depends on a prediction of inequitable outcomes, based on precedent. Therefore if all schools nationally were odds-beating over a period of time, it would follow that none of them would be, because disadvantageous odds would no longer be disadvantageous in the same way. Some schools instead choose to orientate themselves towards a participatory parity version of social justice, and this literature review has suggested some factors which are important in realising an alternative, more equitable conceptualisation of odds-beating-ness (see my framework above). Odds-beating-ness as it is currently conceptualised arguably reinforces inequities to some extent. But education does not have to be a "positional good" (Hirsch 1978). This project will ask how schools can exercise their agency in expansive ways in an era of "chaotic centralisation" (Greany and Higham 2018: 12) to

improve both odds and outcomes for their pupils, and look for a version of odds-beating-ness that is not premised on scarcity or competition.

6 Methodology

Choosing a qualitative methodology

Research into odds-beating schools aims to make more schools odds-beating. Such research strives, then, towards analytical or probabilistic generalisability. Bryk et al (2010), for example, use their study of schools in Chicago to make broader claims about school improvement for use nationally and internationally. Notable odds-beating studies have tended to use quantitative or mixed methods, mapping, for example, attendance levels alongside reading scores, or the likelihood of school "stagnation" (lack of improvement) against the local crime rate (Bryk 2010). Investigations must necessarily be approached with some pre-existing theory about what narrowed odds might look like (for example, students living in poverty or a high-crime neighbourhood) and what it might mean to beat them (for example, students performing well on standardised reading tests).

Whereas odds-beating research (for example Muijs et al 2004) tends to produce prescriptive lists of factors which improving and effective schools (or schools pre-identified as such) seem to have in common, they lack rich contextual detail. There is scope for qualitative work to interrogate the internal and external forces that construct odds-beating-ness as a meaningful phenomenon within each unique context. This study makes a distinct contribution to the field by moving away from longitudinal, multi-site quantitative research to use two in-depth qualitative case studies, explored using a range of method, primarily observation, staff interviews, and pupil focus groups.

This research is qualitative: its data is less structured; it looks at a pair of "naturally occurring" cases in detail; its analysis is not statistical but verbal (Hammersley 2013). My research environment is naturalistic, and theory is "grounded" in data generated by the study – whilst a framework of themes to be explored and empirically elaborated does emerge from the literature review, theory does not precede the research (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This allows odds-beating-ness as it is constructed within schools to become an object of study in itself. Meanings, such as the substance of disadvantage, are "negotiated" within schools, and in scholarship and policy (Cohen et al 2017: 9).Whereas Bryk et al, for example, approach their study with prior theory about what constitutes disadvantage and successful outcomes, my study takes a wider view. I aim to uncover and understand a broader range of schooling outcomes and notions of disadvantage, together with the dynamic processes through which they iteratively shape and reshape each other.

These aims would be difficult to achieve with the kind of positivistic, quantitative research which characterises most studies of odds-beating-ness. Neither does this project apply a strictly interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm has been accused of "ignoring those objects that should stand at the centre of sociological reflection: institutions". Institutions such as schools are, to an extent at least, "independent of individuals and their choices"; analysis of individual interaction alone is not enough to interrogate the *institutional* phenomenon of odds-beating-ness (Corbetta 2011: 24). This project instead applies a socially critical research paradigm, looking at schools as systems which can perpetuate or mitigate social inequality.

Qualitative research is well-suited to an enquiry about disadvantage, which is by its nature purposeful and values-informed. Critical research can carry a "substantive agenda" (Cohen et al 2017: 52). This research is epistemologically grounded in the belief that educational disadvantage is a problem and should be addressed. It is "value-bound", influenced by the values expressed in the focus of the research (Cohen et al 2017: 289). Facts and observations in this project are therefore theory-laden and value-laden (Feyerabend, 1975; Popper 1980; Reichardt and Rallis 1994). Hammersley (2013) points out that some concepts – such as exploitation, empowerment and justice – are at once evaluative and descriptive. Educational disadvantage, as I explained in the literature review, is a "wicked problem" (Rittell and Webber 1973). As such, "problem understanding and problem resolution are concomitant to each other… The formulation of a wicked problem is the problem". In the day-to-day business of meeting needs, schools address problems while identifying them in ways that are not uniform or easy to predict in policy. "Facts," according to Lynch (2014: 183), "are not devoid of value; when we say that women are oppressed or children are dying from poor nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa, we are not just making empirical statements; the facts stated imply that the phenomenon is undesirable". The intention of critical research is transformative. Lather (1986) defends "ideological" research, pointing out that neither "education" nor "research" is in any way "neutral". Critical theorists, Cohen et al suggest, "argue that the positivist and interpretive paradigms are essentially technicist, seeking to understand and render more efficient an existing situation, rather than to question or transform it" (2017: 52). As discussed in the literature review, this project seeks to move away from efficiency-oriented paradigms and seeks to question and thus to transform constructions of disadvantage as well as the outcomes schools desire and achieve for their pupils.

This project combined inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis and generation of knowledge claims; alternating between these two methods has been characterised as an "abductive" process. In this approach, the research process often starts with "surprising facts" or "puzzles" (Bryman and Bell 2015: 27) - these are perhaps similar to Rittel and Webber's "wicked questions" (1973). These known premises – here, the premise that some schools "beat odds" for their students – are used to generate testable conclusions. My conceptual framework arose out of my literature review, and my data collection further explores the "odds-beating" phenomenon, locating themes and patterns within my framework (Mitchell 2018: 271-2).

In qualitative studies, research questions do not aim to operationalise variables as in the positivist paradigm but are formulated in the field in response to observed situations (Bogdan and Biklen 1992). I view the research questions below as generative questions (Strauss 1987), stimulating my inquiry and determining the areas for data collection, but also accommodating new avenues for research. They were sensitive to emergent issues (Light et al 1990), not least the impact of the school closures during the first part of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020-21. For example, the first question centres around understandings of disadvantage, which shifted significantly as schools dealt with the turmoil of the pandemic.

Research questions

1) How do schools which appear odds-beating understand disadvantage in their local contexts and student populations?
2) How do they respond to this?
3) What is it about the nature of their response that supports their success?

Choosing a case study

Case studies can illuminate complex, unique and particular cases (Burrell and Morgan 1979, Simons 2009) -– in this case, two secondary schools. The use of a case study methodology is based on the principle that human systems – such as schools – have a wholeness or integrity that is more than just a collection of disparate traits, and that this calls for in-depth, holistic investigation (Sturman 1999). The whole is more than the sum of its parts (Nisbet and Watt 1984), though analysis of the "parts" and the dynamics between them is also

important. Furthermore, case studies have a tendency to blend description and analysis (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995), two processes which, as I have already argued, are inextricable in research with "wicked" problems like disadvantage (Rittel and Webber 1973: 61). Case studies are particularly suited to this iterative style of knowledge generation.

Creswell (1994) describes a case study as a single instance of a bounded system, for example a school; however, Yin (2009) argues that the boundary line between a phenomenon and its context is blurred. I would extend this critique to argue that there are various (loosely) bounded systems *within* schools, such as individual classes. Though my unit of analysis is primarily the school as a holistic entity, I recognise multiple units of analysis within these cases. I therefore took a stepped approach to my case study. During Step 1, I sought to understand the ways in which pupil disadvantage was constructed by school staff and the measures the school took to address it. I used interviews as well as informal observations and meetings to canvass the views of teachers, leaders and others. Step 2, the nested case studies, then identified specific instances or parts of the school system – niches – to scrutinise in further depth and use as a window to an understanding of the working of the parts within the whole, and the dynamic interplay between them. This approach is described by Cohen et al (2007: 384) as an "embedded single-case design", in which more than one unit of analysis is incorporated: "for example, a case study of a whole school might also use sub-units of classes, teachers, students, parents". The choice of these niches was informed by the disadvantage-ameliorating school practices uncovered in Step 1, as well as the literature, and provided an opportunity to examine directly comparable practices between the case study schools. (I am using "steps" here as distinct to "phases" which I refer to later, and describe waves of interviews corresponding with the timings of various school closures and re-openings during the Covid pandemic.)

These niches were:

1) The schools' relationships with families and communities. I observed community and parental engagement activities and interviewed members of staff with responsibilities pertinent to this area. Community and family relationships were a key theme emerging from the literature and early research activities, and allowed me to contextualise pupil disadvantage as it manifested in each school setting.
2) Vulnerable pupils. As will be discussed in detail later, the case study schools operated with broad understandings of "disadvantage" which contained many different constructs. This included a notion of "vulnerable" learners as those who were most disadvantaged, though did not necessarily fit a statistical profile (e.g.

Pupil Premium eligibility). I observed classes which featured a high number of these vulnerable pupils and interviewed members of staff particularly involved in their education and care.

3) The nurture groups. The "nurture" groups allowed me to explore transition into secondary school, which can be a particularly pivotal point in the disadvantage chronosystem. These groups catered for children the school considered to be in particular need of additional support and therefore were an appropriate vehicle to explore constructions of disadvantage and intersecting disadvantages. I spent a considerable amount of time working in these groups as a teaching assistant and interviewing teachers and teaching assistants who worked with the groups.

Because schools are themselves "wicked" systems (Andersson et al 2014 – the word is used in a different sense to that in Rittel and Webber, above) in which aspects such as curriculum, resource use, discipline and external influences are dynamically intertwined, these foci allowed me to explore a considerable range of issues. Key contextual elements, such as the status of the schools as Teaching and Research Schools respectively, or the schools' geographic contexts, were not units of study in themselves but were explored as dynamic shaping factors through my niches. Furthermore, each niche was designed to provide a different angle on economic disadvantage, which after all is central to the view of disadvantage in this study. The niches help to explore intersections between poverty and other factors.

These niches arose during the course of Step 1, the initial exploratory step. They provide empirical illustration of the four pillars identified in the conceptual framework from the literature review: how a school comes to *know* about disadvantage or vulnerability; the outcomes it *values* for particularly disadvantaged groups; ways in which *trust* is expressed through family and community relationships; and how a school exercises its *agency* to seek a broad range of outcomes for its pupils.

The particular niches listed above are not "bounded" but are specific instances which facilitate an understanding of the school as a whole organic system. There are illuminating overlaps among these three niches. Choosing these particular windows was also useful because they provided points for comparison between the two schools. Reynolds et al argue that students do not experience a "whole school" but experiences niches within it (2014: 218); nonetheless, each niche can illustrate *instances of the possible* (Bachelard 1949) from which broader knowledge claims about the "whole school" can be drawn.

Sampling the schools

When it came to selecting the two schools for this study, it was clear that sampling on statistics alone would not work. One of the reasons that qualitative studies rule out statistical sampling is that there are no straightforward "boundary markers" (LeCompte and Preissle 1993). It would have been inappropriate, for example, simply to select the two schools with the best value-added GCSE scores; defining concepts such as *disadvantage* and *success* is itself object of this study. My approach was purposive, and could be described as "critical case sampling" or "reputational-case sampling", "where a researcher chooses a sample on the recommendation of experts in the field" (Cohen et al 2007: 307). I sought critical cases of schools that were or could be considered to be odds-beating, using the following criteria:

1) The schools served a disadvantaged area and student population reflecting local disadvantage (the percentage of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium was at or above the national average, and the school was located in an area of high deprivation).
2) The schools displayed sustained student progress and achievement at or above national averages. The gaps between academic achievement for pupils considered "disadvantaged" (by free school meal eligibility) and other pupils, as measured by Progress 8, were smaller within the schools than they were nationally.
3) The schools demonstrated equitable practices in admissions and exclusions (for example, resisting practices such as off-rolling or unnecessarily complex admissions procedures. These disproportionately affect the poorest students, who often have other intersecting vulnerabilities).

I do not claim that either of my case study schools are representative cases – I think that diversity among schools and the uniqueness of each would preclude this claim – and indeed, *critical* cases may "reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (Flyvberg 2006: 229).

The inclusion of one of the schools was inevitable from the genesis of the project; this was a CASE study in which St Bernadette's Teaching School was the partner. It was chosen because it achieves consistently high GCSE results for its Pupil Premium eligible students and is located in an area of high socioeconomic disadvantage. Its status as a Teaching School meant that it was well-placed to share findings and test transferability. The second school, the City Learning Academy, likewise achieves better academic outcomes than one

might expect given the highly disadvantaged demographic of its students, and demonstrated equitable practices with regard to inclusion and admissions – for example, most students came to school on foot from the immediate (highly disadvantaged) local area, and the school provided a specialist unit for recent arrivals to the UK learning English. This school was in part a *reputational* case; it was endorsed by school leaders and other researchers in my local field as a school which was beating or changing odds for its students. In selecting these schools, statistical indicators such as Pupil Premium eligibility or GCSE results were used as part of the overall story or local characterisation of the school, and were not a basis for sampling on their own. There were anyway various ways of measuring "student progress and achievement" in criterion 2 above, for example raw GCSE grade data or "value added" Progress 8 score. One benefit of purposive selection is that it enables analysis of contrasts between settings (Maxwell 2005). This was certainly something I tried to achieve when choosing the second school; CLA was different to St Bernadette's in illuminating ways which will be fully explained later on. Detailed descriptions of both schools will come at the start of the findings section.

Access

Negotiating access is a significant challenge for researchers undertaking studies within schools. My two primary methods were observation and interviews, and both of these required the cooperation and goodwill of staff and students. Agreement is a process and not an event, and research is always in some respect an intrusion or an intervention (Flick 1998). I relied heavily on "gatekeepers" (LeCompte and Preissle 1993) to secure the cooperation of other participants. At St Bernadette's, I quickly became aware that the Teaching School – a provider of Initial Teacher Training and continued professional development, and the CASE partner and initiator of the project – was very much a separate entity from the main school. Staff at the Teaching School could connect me with members of teaching staff and school leaders, but these relationships required cultivation and nurturing in their own right. Informal conversations nearly always preceded formal data collection. I had a desk in a shared office occupied by Teaching School staff – the head of Initial Teacher Training and two administrators. When I was physically present in school, I fashioned a timetable for myself by agreement with relevant members of teaching staff, observing the same classes week after week and participating in them often as a teaching assistant.

At CLA, I was introduced to the school by an assistant headteacher who gave me the timetables of two Year 8 pupils she had identified as being disadvantaged to shadow.

Because of Covid "bubbles", the children remained generally in the same class group for the whole day, so this shadowing was really of the whole class. As time went on, I attached myself particularly to the "bottom set" Year 8 group, in line with the focus on vulnerable children I explained above. I developed good working relationships with this group's main class teacher and their other subject teachers which allowed access to the full range of lessons and activities. I had no desk space at CLA, and spent any time away from lessons transcribing or writing notes in whatever space I could find. The building was generally open-plan, and simply spending time sitting in communal areas was a useful way to get a flavour of the school on a day-to-day basis.

I began researching at St Bernadette's several days per week in September 2019. Accessing schools was impossible from the start of the lockdown in March 2020 until September 2020 – the prohibition came from both the school and the ethics committee of the University, which banned all face-to-face research activities. In September 2020, having submitted a further ethics application, I was permitted to re-enter the field. I continued spending around two days per week at St Bernadette's and two days per week at CLA until schools closed again after the Christmas holidays at the start of 2021. I then went back into the schools when they reopened in the spring of 2021. When schools were closed, I conducted interviews with members of staff on Zoom and observed staff meetings over Zoom.

Positionality and reflexivity

As an "embedded researcher" at the schools, and particularly at St Bernadette's as it was the original CASE partner, I occupied an interesting middle ground between staff member and visitor. Identity is "fluid" or "liquid" (Thomson and Gunter 2011: 17); the researcher can position themselves – or be positioned by others – anywhere on a spectrum from detached observer to complete participant (Cohen et al 2017: 311). I occupied various points on this spectrum at various times and in different settings. Mostly, I would have characterised myself as a "participant as observer" (543), a member of the group who reveals their status as an observer (i.e. does not observe covertly) but may gain insider knowledge due to participating in the activities of the group.

In naturalistic studies, researchers are part of the social world that they are researching and bring their own biographies and values to the situation; participants may behave differently in

the researcher's presence (Atkinson 2006). It is important for the investigator to self-appraise their role in the research process and product (Berger 2015). The preoccupation in school studies, particularly ethnographic studies, with the adult/child binary (even if the aim is to explode it or blur it) can push to the side other salient aspects of positionality and embodiment on the field. I am female, white, and was between the ages of 24 and 26 at the time of researching (so fairly young compared to many adults working in the schools, but not as young as some of the teaching assistants); I grew up and went to school in the metropolitan district in which both schools are located, though not near either of them; I used to be a secondary English teacher (outside of the city). These are all factors which may usurp my adult-ness in salience in facilitating or inhibiting my access to certain perspectives, depending very much on the dynamics in each setting.

Researchers with professional backgrounds in teaching bring knowledge of school culture and language which can be used to establish early credibility and navigate a research site with sensitivity and perspective. I have a thorough, up to date knowledge about the ways that schools work, the demands on teachers, and the various curriculum requirements, policies and acronyms that may not be immediately intelligible to a complete outsider. My experience working in a secondary school was often useful, though initially incidents probably took more than their share of prominence in my field notes if they were simply *different* to what I had experienced in my previous school. I had to "fight familiarity" (Cohen et al 2017: 555). Awareness of this tendency helped to balance it, and it was also useful that I was working part time as a supply teacher in other local schools, which allowed me to reflect on a broader range of practices.

Working with children and young people

Although I was often working with children and I sought to investigate experiences of schooling from their perspective, this was nonetheless a study of the whole school. Therefore, I did not seek to participate as a child-peer in the way that some ethnographers working with children have done (for example Willis 1977 and Evans 2006). In many ways, compulsory administrative practices cemented my position as an adult figure with some authority (even if I did not deliberately or strategically position myself in this way). I had to comply with school safeguarding policies, which meant that I was under an obligation to report any inkling that a child might be at risk. I had to wear a lanyard and identity badge at both schools, which at St Bernadette's also functioned as an electronic key to enter and exit the school building as well as the staff toilets and the lift. I therefore became a (literal)

insider, with access to spaces which were restricted to children. It was therefore unavoidable that I was seen by the children as having authority, or at least being adjacent to authority.

New practices emerging as a result of the Covid crisis also changed how I was able to interact with children in the study. I was able to access an increased number of spaces in the school more freely than the children, who were restricted by their membership of a Covid "bubble". However, the maintenance of a two-metre distance from the pupils was a condition of my access to the field during the pandemic, stipulated both by the schools and the University's ethics committee. The children, however, were under no obligation to keep this distance from one another. This rule made closeness (both literal and metaphorical) with the children as research subjects much more difficult. Masks were another consideration: although they had to be worn by everyone when moving around the schools, children didn't wear them in lessons – though I was required in one of the schools to wear mine full-time. The mask-in-the-classroom thus functioned as a visual marker of adulthood, and also inhibited communication by hiding facial expressions and muting tone.

Researching with other adults

The wordless and watching adult body is not a meaning-free presence for children or for other adults. Silences are full of meaning too, ranging from apathy to complicity. Furthermore, there is a unique precedent for an observing gaze in classrooms which means that the watching adult body is not perceived as a neutral presence the way it might be in other fields. Classroom observation is a key tactic of middle and senior leaders in schools to manage performance and monitor compliance. It is strongly connected with the school inspectorate Ofsted and therefore has the potential to be threatening. One teacher at the City Learning Academy confided in me before the lesson started that she was nervous about being "observed"; I hadn't used this word to describe my research activities, but she immediately interpreted the activity in line with the semantics of performance management.

When I was agreeing my schedule with senior members of staff at both schools, they used – predictably – the vocabulary of watching that is associated with performance management and Ofsted visits: I was conducting "observations" and "shadowing" pupils. I could control some of these semantic resonances, for example by emailing staff asking permission to "visit" rather than "observe", and I could sit at the front, facing and directing my watching gaze to the children, rather than the teacher. These measures, however, weren't always

sufficient to dispel an understandable sense of threat that came with the presence of a watching adult.

Improving trustworthiness by developing relationships

What I found to be most useful, then, was positioning myself as a teaching assistant, and thus aligning myself with an existing precedent for a supportive, non-threatening adult presence. Securing the cooperation and goodwill of teachers was crucial to the success of my study. As well as potential interviewees themselves, they were the gatekeepers, facilitating (or not) access to children as research subjects. Wolcott (2011: 103) suggests that school staff are likely to be more forthcoming "if they recognise you as one of their own – that you speak their language and have served 'in the trenches" where they serve, and understand the problems they face'. Offering meaningful assistance – especially during the extremely challenging period of schooling during a pandemic – was a good step to being "recognised" in this way. Furthermore, taking on a helper role mitigates against the emergence of a problematic hierarchy involving the participants and researcher. I assisted with practical tasks, such as handing out equipment and escorting children to the medical room. I also helped children with their classwork as and when they requested it, offering explanations, supervision and praise as a teaching assistant might. Many children enjoyed the presence of an extra available adult, and chose to sit with me during the lunch breaks, or chat to me before school. Building stronger relationships with pupils meant that they became willing and engaged interviewees. The fact that students and staff alike felt more able to share deeper, more open insights with me in interviews contributes to the trustworthiness of this kind of qualitative data (as discussed in the section on research effectiveness below).

Methods

"Embedded research" such as mine, where the researcher is immersed over a long period of time in an organisation, has been characterised as a particular way of doing ethnography (Baars et al 2014). Though I would not claim that my research is substantively ethnographic, it does share some key commonalities with ethnography: I was intensely engaged in the field, collecting empirical data in a naturalistic setting, and I provide rich descriptive accounts (Cohen et al 2017: 292). I will now outline the key methods within my research: participant observation, and interviews with school staff and students. Figure 3, below, shows a timeline outlining the two-step approach as well as the "phases" of research at each school.

Figure 3

	St Bernadette's	CLA	
Step 1: the whole school **Research question 1:** How did the schools understand disadvantage?	Phase 1 - Interviews: Anita, Beth, Carol, Keira, Rachel, Steve - Broad observations		Autumn 2019
	Phase 2 Interviews: Carol, Keira, Rachel		Spring 2020
		Phase 1 - Interviews: Chrissie, Lola, Sean - Broad observations	Autumn 2020
Step 2: the niches **Research question 2:** How did the schools respond to disadvantage? **Research question 3:** What was it that supported success?	Phase 3 - Interviews: Ben, Gloria, Pablo, Rhiannon, Sally - Observations: Year 7 nurture group and Year 8 ex-nurture group.	Phase 2 Interviews: Carly, Cathy, Lizzie, Mark, Simon	Winter 2020/21
		Phase 3 - Student focus groups - Observations: Year 7 nurture group and Year 8 "bottom set"	Spring/summer 2021
	Phase 4 Student focus groups		Autumn 2021

This research did not explicitly investigate perspectives of parents or individuals from the wider community. A major reason behind this decision was the extreme difficulty of researching during the Covid pandemic. The best interviews in this project were conducted after investments were made in relationships with the participants. There would have been no way of initiating such relationships with parents except over videoconference, and this would have resulted in a less open dialogue with a self-selecting group of interested parents.

Furthermore, the research I undertook with staff and students within my chosen "niches" did give an (albeit limited) sense of parent perspectives. For example, I found out that St Bernadette's was vastly oversubscribed and a far more popular parental choice than other local schools; this gave some indication of parental attitudes, and staff were able to provide more information about what they saw as their parental demographic. Parental perspectives are limited in this study, but the primary focus of the project is evidently the school as an odds-beating institution - and therefore collecting the perspectives of its students and staff was of paramount importance.

Observation

Observation's "unique strength" is its "potential to yield more valid or authentic data than would otherwise be the case with mediated or inferential methods" (Cohen et al 2017: 542).

Observation is crucial to providing an authentic account and analysis of schools in their unique complexity. In this study, which also depended heavily on interviews, observations were hugely important to triangulate insights from staff and students and to provide concrete reference points for these conversations. Observation strengthens the robustness of the data in this study by enabling me to provide an in-depth characterisation of each school that can only really come from being in the thick of day-to-day activity over time. This rich contextual information came from observation of routines and activities that might otherwise be taken for granted (Cooper and Schindler 2001), documenting aspects of *lifeworlds* that are verbal, non-verbal and physical (Clark et al 2009 – see literature review, above, for a fuller definition).

My observation style could be described as "semi-structured". I entered the field with an "agenda of issues" (Cohen et al 2017: 543) – my research questions, which sought to uncover how schools conceptualised and responded to disadvantage – but I did not, for example, count incidences of specific behaviours. In line with my overall approach and research design, observation was hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing. This is in line with my ethnographic or naturalistic approach.

Flick (2009) outlines a three-stage process of naturalistic observation, which I condensed into two broad "steps" as detailed above in Figure 3. *Descriptive* observation, according to Flick, orientates the researcher to the field. This kind of observation fit within Step 1 of my study, when I was uncovering the ways in which the schools conceptualised and responded to disadvantage more generally. I began making informal visits to St Bernadette's in September 2019, which helped me to become a familiar face to staff and pupils and orient myself in the field (I did not record any observation data, however, until I had ethical clearance from the University). At the first observation stage, I observed a wide range of activities and shadowed several pupils identified by the school as being disadvantaged. I recorded more general impressions of the day-to-day running of the school and its broader organisation. Flick's next stages are *focused* observation, narrowing down the field to focus on problems or processes aligned with the research questions, and *selective* observation, which involves finding further evidence for the areas identified in the previous stage. This aligned with Step 2 of my study. I narrowed down the field by focussing on the niches I had specifically identified, specifically by observing nurture groups and classes with higher proportions of children seen to be vulnerable. "Selective" observation involved spending more time with one or two of these groups. I also used observation at this stage to build rapport in anticipation of student interviews. For Flick, interviewing is a part of naturalistic observation, but I have dealt with it separately in this description of my methods.

Field notes tend to blend description and analysis. I made notes about, for example, the space, actors, activities, objects, acts and events in each lesson I observed, along with the goals and feelings of the participants where discernible (Spradley 1980). My field notes inevitably combined these observations with *reflection* (Bogdan and Biklen 1992): on ethical issues, tensions, problems and dilemmas; issues that needed clarification; and possible lines of further inquiry. As I have stated above, observations are theory laden and experience laden (Barrett and Mills 2009). Tacit knowledge is arguably the most important factor in deciding what is worthy of recording. Making notes according to a "salience hierarchy" – writing down the things which seem most interesting – is subjective but also unavoidable; incidences stand out because they are in some way deviant from the norm, though the "norm" can be developed in situ (Wolfinger 2022). For example, I was unlikely to record observations such as "the teacher is standing at the front of the class".

At the *focused* and *selective* observation stages, I was seeking data to progress my understanding of the conceptualisations of and responses to disadvantage that I had begun to uncover during Step 1. This meant that I was recording ways in which teaching staff spoke to children about these issues. For example, I recorded the way in which Mrs Woods described the nurture group to its new students: "you are so lucky to be in it" (quoted at greater length in Chapter 7).

I also recorded instances where there was evidence that curricula or pedagogy had adapted to reflect pupil disadvantage. To illustrate, another extract from my field notes documents efforts to diversify the curriculum by decentring whiteness and colonialism:

She starts by reading an article about Ancient Science – the use of numerical data in the Sumer (now Iraq) around 3500BC, which demonstrated the Pythagoras theory before Pythagoras did. The article is about ancient scientific achievements which are often overlooked in the present – day ancient Egypt, the Middle East.

I observed in the schools for most of the day, two days per week, over periods of several months. In Step 2, I concentrated my observations in specific groups, following the class generally as a unit of analysis rather than individual students. I also observed community events such as St Bernadette's community Christmas party for older people in the area. I

tried to align my recorded observations with my research questions, conceptually; I focused on what I could learn about constructions of disadvantage, how disadvantage was addressed and what people within the school community saw as success.

Interviews

Kvale (1996) regards knowledge as generated *between* humans, and sees research data as socially situated. I interviewed staff (individually) and pupils (mostly in groups) at both schools to accrue data that would deepen my understanding of how disadvantage was conceptualised by staff and students and disadvantage-mitigation strategies and how they were experienced by pupils. Interview data could then be triangulated with my observations. Kvale (1996) states that qualitative interviews should seek to engage with, understand and interpret participants' "lifeworlds"– their subjective constructions of reality. This bears interesting semantic similarity to Zipin et al's notion of "lifeworlds" (see literature review above). I think this crystallises the alignment of my method with my research focus: I wish to explore the plurality of values and knowledges within a school and its community.

Staff interviews

Sampling

This is not a child's-view study, and deliberate disadvantage-ameliorating action within a school is done by adults; therefore, it was important to gain staff perspectives, and interviews were the best way to reveal these in depth. Sampling of interviewees was purposive (Cohen et al 2007), which allowed me to access "knowledgeable" individuals (Ball 1990) – I did not use a random sample of school staff but sought out those who had particular proximity to my areas of focus. For example, I interviewed members of staff who worked closely with the nurture groups, or those who had particular responsibility for developing school-community relationships (see Table 3). I also interviewed staff with whom I had developed a professional relationship whilst conducting observations in their classes over time, which allowed for more in-depth discussion of day-to-day challenges. Participants were themselves key to finding other interviewees – they would often recommend individuals

they thought would be able to provide insights on specific steps the school took to ameliorate disadvantage.

The heads of schools and the CEOs of the Multi Academy Trusts to which the schools belonged were not interviewed. This was not a study of school leadership; the unit of analysis was the school rather than any particular individual within it. Many of my interviewees were instead staff with both teaching and leadership responsibilities. These interviewees provided particularly insightful perspectives, as they were knowledgeable about the values and structures of the school's leadership but could also reflect on ways in which these manifested in day-to-day activities within classrooms. Furthermore, the headteacher and MAT CEO of St Bernadette's, the senior leadership team (including the headteacher) of the St Bernadette's Catholic Collaborative, and senior staff from CLA member-checked my emerging findings (in the form of a presentation). This ensured that their perspectives were considered.

The standard interview schedule

Interviews with members of staff were semi-structured (Bogdan and Biklen 1992). They were largely exploratory rather than hypothesis-testing, seeking interpretation as well as description – though this differed among phases (see Figure 3), with interviews later in the project used to probe emerging ideas and elaborate niches in more detail. Discussing the same themes and using the same general prompts (the "interview guide approach", Morrison 1993) allowed for deeper exploration of ideas and anecdotes that arose naturally during the course of the interview. The research therefore remained open to, for example, new characterisations of disadvantage, or interpretations of successful schooling outcomes, which may have been precluded by a less open interview style. Sometimes discussion patterns deviated from the stated sequence, in particular where I had worked closely with the interviewees in their classes; my conversation with Sean (one of the teachers at CLA), for example, was broadly a reflection on the day we had spent together with his Year 8 class.

Interviews typically lasted between half an hour and an hour, and took place in a quiet location at the schools. All participants gave permission for interviews to be audio recorded. These recordings were then transcribed in full.

After first being asked to describe their job role (the kind of "warm up" encouraged by Robson 2002 to put participants at ease), the discussion was based around three broad areas.

1) Participants were asked to tell me about students at the school who did not do as well as they could, or who experienced "barriers to learning". I sought at this stage to avoid the word "disadvantage". "Barriers to learning" was an imperfect compromise; as I explained in the literature review, Cummings et al (2011) have critiqued the exclusive focus on barriers to "*learning*" rather than, for example, barriers to "health" or "wellbeing". But in many schools and policy settings, "disadvantage" is a synonym for Pupil Premium eligibility. I wanted my participants to have the opportunity to define "disadvantage" more broadly without limiting themselves to an externally imposed government-generated definition, which they might otherwise likely be inclined to do because of monitoring and accountability linked to PP. I wanted my participants to answer the questions more broadly. At some point at this stage in the discussion, I often showed participants a discussion tool used in the Evaluation of Pupil Premium research report (Carpenter et al 2013) as a prompt for thinking about various types of disadvantage (Appendix 1). This in effect gave respondents permission to consider types of disadvantage, such as social turbulence or lack of access to enrichment opportunities, which went beyond Pupil Premium eligibility. Interviewees were invited to give an (anonymous) anecdotal example of a pupil they felt exemplified the kind of disadvantage seen within their school. This encouraged respondents to consider intersecting disadvantages as they manifested in practice, rather than the comparatively siloed characterisation of disadvantage in official school policies or narratives.

2) Participants were asked about the local context of the school and how it related to the kind of disadvantage that the school was working to address. This focus on local context emerged from the literature review, but I sought to avoid the assumption that the most relevant context was the immediate geographical neighbourhood; as demonstrated in the literature review, dynamics of school choice and market forces mean that students do not always attend their nearest school, and a school's pupil population may not reflect the demographics of its immediate local area. Participants were prompted to reflect on how disadvantages experienced by pupils at their school compared to those experienced by pupils at neighbouring schools. They were also asked about the extent and nature of the influence of the immediate neighbourhood on pupils.

3) I asked how the school helped students to overcome barriers. I asked for whom these strategies were effective (again encouraging a reflection on the intersectional, dynamic features of disadvantage as it shapes pupils' lives) and for

whom they were less effective, and how the school came to *know* about effectiveness. This elicited data about ways in which schools beat for their pupils, and how they understood this process to have taken place "successfully".

Interviews during lockdown

I kept researching during the sudden Coronavirus school closures; it was a unique opportunity to see how conceptualisations of and responses to disadvantage shifted at a time of crisis. (By "closures" I am referring to the closures of schools for all but a small number of pupils, mostly the children of "key workers", who carried on attending; I recognise that schools never truly "closed".) I submitted a further application to the University's ethics committee in order to re-interview three participants who I had already interviewed in person in line with the schedule above (see table of interviewees below). My schedule for re-interviewing was as follows:

1) Participants were asked which groups of children would be particularly disadvantaged by the school closures and the Coronavirus crisis in general. This matched up with the first area of discussion in the first schedule, so that responses could be more easily compared. This provided fruitful data about how categorisations or understandings of disadvantage and vulnerability shifted in response to unprecedented events, and what this shift demonstrated about how schools came to know about disadvantage on a more fundamental level.

2) Participants were asked to describe what the school had been doing to support and engage with pupils since they closed, including which children kept coming to school, how they were encouraged to do so, and what the school was doing to ensure the safety, wellbeing and continued learning of disadvantaged children. This area of discussion was broadly aligned with the third area in the above schedule, about action taken by schools to beat odds for their pupils. The drastic reformulation of these odds during the pandemic was crucial in revealing schools' underlying attitudes towards disadvantage and its remedies.

3) Participants were asked to suggest what might be the main challenges that the school would face when children returned. Again, this aimed to reveal a reconfiguration of odds and how the school might beat them.

When interviewing staff after schools reopened after lockdown, I returned to the standard interview schedule rather than asking these Covid specific questions, though this naturally and necessarily involved discussion about the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

Pupil interviews

I wanted to interview pupils because I was interested in comparing their own conceptualisations of disadvantage with the adult or official narratives. I wanted to reveal any actions the school took, or could take, which pupils were aware of and felt ameliorated disadvantage, which might not be obvious to adults working in the school. Group interviews are particularly useful with pupils; children can find them less intimidating (Greig and Taylor 1999) and answering questions in a group can lead to children reaching productive consensus or else challenging each other, creating useful data about issues under contention (Houssart and Evans 2011). Jansen (2015) reports that some children may relish the opportunity to be interviewed; they feel that they are being taken seriously, and that their values, views, experiences and stories are being valued in a non-judgemental way.

Children at CLA were invited to participate via a presentation I made to their class (Appendix 2). My prior knowledge of the students came in useful here: I included information about my own journey through education, which had interested them in the past, and tailored the vocabulary used to the literacy level of the pupils. Children at St Bernadette's were given the same information before proceeding with the interview.

Pupils were grouped according to their preferences, and so groups were mostly composed of pre-existing friendships. This meant that pupils were generally more inclined to challenge each other and express contrasting views, avoiding the problem of "group think" in group interviews (Watts and Ebbutt 1987). The interviews lasted between ten minutes and an hour, depending on the enthusiasm and talkativeness of the members, and how many participants were in the group. They took place in an empty room in school during lesson time.

Sampling

The combination of new ethical restrictions from the University arising from Covid as well as infection-mitigating strategies employed by schools made pupil interviews very difficult to organise. I sought to interview pupils with whom I had formed a good relationship through

my positioning as an assistant in their classes. This was very successful at CLA, where interviews took place at the end of an academic year during which I had been a familiar presence in the "bottom set" Year 8 class from which the interviewees were drawn. Sampling was purposive, and underpinned less by convenience than necessity. All of the CLA pupil respondents had to be from the same class due to "bubble" restrictions. I chose the Year 8 class because it effectively combined what would have been two separate groups in a "normal" year; the children considered to be of "low ability", as well as those in the earlier stages of learning English. There were high levels of Pupil Premium eligibility within the class. The group therefore incorporated various types of disadvantage as identified in the literature review. It was difficult to predict the number of interviewees from CLA because all of the children in the class were given the option of participating. Ten children wanted to be interviewed - a little over half of the pupils I asked.

Sampling at St Bernadette's was purposive, aiming to find a cohort that was comparable with the CLA group. This meant interviewing the children at St Bernadette's at the start of Year 9, and the CLA children at the end of Year 8. There were more interviews and interviewees at CLA. However, I was able to spend more time observing and participating in classes at St Bernadette's than CLA due to the timing of Covid closures, and so was able to accrue a richer sense of pupils' perspectives apart from more formal group interviews. When observing in a classroom, I was able to record pupils' perspectives as they expressed them through their interactions with each other and their teachers, informally with me, and through their written work. It was important to speak with the participants more formally, but valuable perspectives were also uncovered by watching them speak and act with others. The combination of student observation and interview provided a holistic view across both schools, even if the respective proportions were slightly different.

These tables characterise the pupils and, where relevant, the group dynamics. These characterisations come from my sustained engagement with the children as a teaching assistant-positioned observer in many of their classes over several months. This "thick description" (Geertz 2000) contributes to the "comparability" and "translatability" aspects of generalisability (LeCompte and Preissle 1993), allowing meaningful comparisons to be made.

TABLE 1: St Bernadette's pupil interviews – November 2021

Group 1	All three of these pupils were in Year 9. They all received additional support in the Nurture Group in Year 7 and still had many classes together, so knew each other well. I observed and assisted in many of their lessons in Year 7. **Daniel** was a Black boy. He was talkative and sociable. **Chloe** and **Lily** were White British girls. Chloe was articulate and confident, whereas Lily was more reserved and needed more encouragement to engage verbally.
Group 2	These pupils were in Year 9. They were selected by Gloria, my staff gatekeeper and an interviewee, on the basis of their Pupil Premium eligibility status. Both were White British. I had not spent time with their classes, so am less able to sketch their characters. They were **Kane** and **Emily**.

TABLE 2: CLA pupil interviews – June 2021	
Group 1	**Brooklyn** was a White British boy with learning needs. He loved football and *The Simpsons* and enjoyed contributing his ideas verbally in lessons. **Jake** was a White British boy. He was fairly quiet but was one of the keenest to contribute to this research.
Group 2	All five of these boys were Black and they formed a solid, supportive friendship group. Some of the children arrived at school early in the mornings and used the computers to browse sports shoes online, discussing their favourites. As a group, they highly approved of educational success, and were impressed by certificates and other tokens of achievement. **Alexandre** used to live in Portugal and spoke Portuguese at home. He had previously complained that teachers and others used the Anglicised pronunciation of his name, which annoyed him. He was a kind, quietly thoughtful boy and a hard worker. **Moral** was a gregarious, intelligent character, mature for his age, who enjoyed contributing in class and was in the first few years of English language learning. **King** was a fluent English speaker who did not let his speech impediment stop him from

	asking and answering dozens of intriguing questions in lessons. **Worth** struggled with his focus and was extremely easily distracted, which could result in him getting into trouble, which frustrated him very much. **Royal** was in the earlier stages of English language learning, speaking Italian at home, and was more reserved.
Group 3	**Ana** spoke Romanian with her mother at home. She was well behaved in lessons, and was close friends with another girl who is always getting into trouble. **Dylan** was a White British boy who was quiet but disengaged in his lessons. He liked to seem "tough". He enjoyed climbing things and telling stories about his adventures outside of school.
Group 4	**Ariana** used to live in Spain and spoke fluent Spanish. She was Black. She was confident, intelligent and enjoyed reading and studying in her own time. She was meant to be in a focus group with two other pupils but due to absences was interviewed for a short time on her own.

The vignettes

The research tools used with these groups were derived from earlier research with members of staff, which revealed schools' conceptualisations of pupil disadvantage categories. Discussions used a "projection technique" (Cohen et al 2017: 530); they were based around five scenario cards or vignettes, though not every card was used with every group (see Appendix 3). Each scenario described a different fictional child, each of whom displayed some of the disadvantage indicators identified by members of staff – for example experience of domestic conflict, or poverty, or recent arrival in the UK. I read the text from each card to

the group and invited them to consider two broad questions: how the child would get on at their school, and what the school might do to help them. The disadvantages experienced by the fictional children were part of the overall vignette and therefore it was up to children to spot them (or not). For example, with the character of Curtis, "sometimes there's nothing for breakfast in the house" was presented alongside "Curtis is an excellent badminton player". This was useful in considering how children conceptualised disadvantage, and how this compared to adult responses. Asking children to consider what school *did* and *might do* to mitigate disadvantage again provided useful comparison points with the equivalent adult responses, contributing to a broader understanding of odds-beating practices across the schools. The vignettes were broadly successful in inviting, but not requiring, children to speak about their own experiences. Here, King, a pupil at CLA, was discussing a vignette featuring a girl who spoke English as an additional language.

King: … there can be a teacher there who also speaks Portuguese. And then she might like ask for help because she can't read and write that well. So she can take like extra lessons. So we can like speak up for ourselves and stuff like that.

King started by using the third person to refer to the fictional pupil, and slipped into using the plural first person "we"; he naturally connected the story to his own school life.

Sometimes children deviated from the scenarios to discuss other topics. At times, I gently steered us back to the scenario, for example when Dylan wanted to talk about whether I had ever been in a fight in school. On other occasions, it felt right to follow the threads of the pupils' thoughts even if they did not relate directly to the activity. At the very start of the session with Group 2, practically before I had turned my tape recorder on and before I had introduced the scenario or asked any questions, Alexandre began to talk about an incident that had happened when he was in Year 7 and clearly was a shaping experience in his school career to date; he had been mistaken for another pupil and punished for this pupil's actions. The data from this part of the transcript does not fit neatly into the rest of the findings as it resists being coded by the shape of the interview material. However, in some ways it is perhaps the most valuable part of the data because it is a raw expression of the children's views on disadvantage, resisting pre-imposed categories inherent in my research design. From an ethical perspective, Alexandre clearly wanted to get this experience "on the record" and said afterwards how relieved he was to share it. Steering away, rather than listening, would have been inappropriate and contrary to the principles of reciprocally valuable research.

These sessions were recorded and transcribed by me. I decided to do this myself for every pupil interview, as there were nuances in the references the children made to which I was particularly alert having spent plenty of time with them previously.

Research timeline

This timeline was, of course, subject to complete upheaval due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the resultant closure of schools. My status as an "embedded" CASE researcher was extremely useful in this regard. In many traditional three-year projects, planning is undertaken in year one, fieldwork in year two, and writing up in year three. Duggan et al (2014: 17) suggest that "embedded research is likely to be disrupted by policy, personnel or organisational change and should therefore be done differently". The disruption caused by Covid was much more severe than the disruption anticipated here, but the logic holds. Because I became a familiar face at St Bernadette's in the first half of the academic year 2019-20, it was much easier for me to continue fieldwork online. The tables below show how my fieldwork actually unfolded (not how it was planned).

In these tables I have grouped the interviews and observations into phases based on whether they took place before schools were closed to mitigate Covid, during the closures or when they began to re-open. As I became "embedded" at St Bernadette's earlier, and only began research at CLA when the pandemic was well underway, these phases differ between the schools.

TABLE 3: St Bernadette's staff interviews		
	Interviews (each lasting between half an hour and an hour)	**Observations**
Phase 1, autumn 2019 (in person)	Anita – assistant headteacher and a Senior Leader in Education. Coordinated Key Stage 4 achievement, data and assessment, as well as the whole-school Pupil Premium budget. I interviewed Anita because she had responsibility for an important *outcome* – namely the statutory assessments, GCSEs – and oversight of spending on students identified as disadvantaged by the Pupil Premium formula. Beth – a teacher, previously a deputy headteacher at a different school. I interviewed Beth because she was the English teacher for the "bottom set" Year 11 class which I observed particularly closely in my first months at St Bernadette's. Many of these pupils had been in the nurture group earlier on and the group had a higher number of pupils considered to be disadvantaged. Carol – the Associate Pastoral Director, working frequently with children known to Children's Services. She worked with the "vulnerable" cohort, a subsection of the disadvantaged pupil population, as I will explain in more detail later. Keira – senior assistant headteacher, leading on quality of education. Rachel – assistant headteacher with responsibility for research and development. I interviewed Keira and Rachel because they had responsibility for designing the School Improvement Plan, and oversight of areas such as curriculum and continued professional development for staff. They were also able to provide insights about the school's positioning in its local area. Interviewing SLT was appropriate during this first step in order to gain a broader perspective of the school's values and direction of travel.	Step 1 observations, twice a week from the start of September 2019 to school closures in March 2020 (around 20 weeks): staff training day, form time, shadowing of Pupil Premium eligible students, shadowing alongside an assistant headteacher, Year 11 English lessons, informal meetings with senior leaders, initial teacher training at the Teaching School, visits to other schools in the Catholic Collaborative, school community events, staff socials, safeguarding training, informal conversations with support staff. Reading of key documents such as the Pupil Premium policy and the School Improvement Plan. Beginning of Step 2: targeted observation of a "bottom set" Year 11 English class and of the Year 7 nurture group.

	Steve – assistant headteacher in charge of teacher training. Steve was an instrumental figure in the Teaching School, which was an important factor behind St Bernadette's success.	
Phase 2, spring 2020 (via Zoom due to first Covid lockdown)	Carol, Keira, Rachel (see above)	
Phase 3, late 2020 and early 2021 (a mix of in person and online)	Ben – pastoral director. Ben had responsibilities for vulnerable children along with Carol, and also had oversight of careers guidance. This made him a useful counterpart for Chrissie, careers curriculum lead at CLA. Gloria – strategic director of St Bernadette's Teaching School. As stated above, the Teaching School was both a key driver and consequence of St Bernadette's success. Pablo – school SENDCO (special educational needs and disabilities co-ordinator), in the role for around a year at time of interview. I interviewed Pablo because he had some oversight of the nurture group, as well as responsibility for several individuals in the group with Education and Health Care Plans. Rhiannon – school social worker, placed in St Bernadette's as part of a local authority pilot scheme. Rhiannon was able to provide insights about vulnerable children and ways in which St Bernadette's interacted with other local services and the community. Sally – teaching assistant working with the nurture group. Staff like Sally were chosen during step 2 to gain a more detailed insight into the niches.	Step 2 observations: Year 7 nurture group and Year 8 ex-nurture group. Two days per week from school re-opening in September 2020 until they closed again at Christmas (around 14 weeks).
Phase 4, June 2021	Student focus groups (see Table 1)	

Note: Mrs Woods, the teacher of the nurture group at St Bernadette's, declined to be interviewed. However, I spent a lot of time observing her teach, and she often provided me with some commentary about the progress of the lessons, some of which I have reported. For example, in one lesson she came to me and remarked: "You see how none of them have done it right? It's because I haven't modelled it well enough".

TABLE 4: CLA staff interviews		
	Interviews	**Observations**
Phase 1, autumn 2020 (a mix of in person and online)	Chrissie – teacher and head of careers. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, careers provision was a useful window into the kind of outcomes the schools predicted or desired for their pupils and especially their disadvantaged pupils. Lola – PE teacher and head of year. Issues arose in PE lessons that were particularly pertinent to the interface between home and school (for example, matters surrounding health or ability of parents to purchase PE kits and trainers). As head of year, Lola had significant pastoral responsibilities, particularly for disadvantaged or vulnerable children. Sean – newly qualified teacher and Year 8 form tutor. I interviewed Sean because he had responsibility for the "bottom set" group which were a main focus of my observations at CLA. There was a high concentration of different disadvantage factors within the group. Interviewing Sean allowed me to discuss my observations with him and gain his perspectives on my emerging data.	Step 1 observations (limited by Covid "bubbles"): virtual assemblies, form time, shadowing PP eligible pupils, break times, sports, community projects, arts classes. Two days per week from school re-opening in September 2020 until they closed again at Christmas (around 14 weeks). Reading of key documents such as the Pupil Premium policy and the School Improvement Plan.
Phase 2, early 2021 (online)	Carly – school SENDCO. Carly's role was parallel with that of Pablo at St Bernadette's, though unlike him she was not a member of the senior leadership team. Like Pablo, she had some oversight of the nurture group. Cathy – head of English as an additional language (EAL). There was no real equivalent to this role at St Bernadette's, but Cathy worked extensively with families who were newly arrived in the UK including many who were very vulnerable. She	

	therefore had particular insight into school and community links. Lizzie – Family Partnership Team area leader. Again, Lizzie was chosen because she worked specifically with families, the local community and other schools and agencies. Her role was perhaps most closely comparable to that of Carol at St Bernadette's, though there were substantial and important differences. Mark – teacher. I interviewed Mark because as a humanities teacher he delivered parts of the curriculum which were particularly pertinent to issues of *recognition*, which I will explore in more detail subsequently. Furthermore, he had been teaching at CLA for some time, and was cognisant of local circumstances. Simon – nurture group teacher. Simon, who spent most of his time with the nurture group, was an obvious informant for this niche.	
Phase 3, spring/summer 2021 (in person)	Student focus groups (see Table 2)	Step 2 observations: Year 7 nurture group and Year 8 "bottom set". Once or twice a week throughout April and May, when the school re-opened (around 6 weeks).

Ethics

Research ethics are "situated"; they have to be interpreted with regard to specific, localised situations (Simons and Usher 2000). For me, this was particularly important when researching at different stages of the Covid pandemic, as I will explain below. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Manchester's ethics committee. Fresh permission had to be sought for interviews over Zoom during the first lockdown and again to re-start in person in the autumn of 2020.

Informed consent

One of the most important tenets of social research is informed consent. Very broadly, this protects and respects the right to self-determination which is a cornerstone of democratic society (Cohen et al 2017: 122). Informed consent is not "one-shot, once-and-for-all" (Wax 1982: 42) but has to be continuously negotiated. This was especially the case during the first year and a half of the Coronavirus pandemic, when interviews moved online and access to schools became complicated by concerns about infection transmission.

Consent can be an individual, family, institutional or communitarian decision (Cohen et al 2017: 123). Cohen et al identify two stages in seeking consent from minors (124): first, consultation with or seeking permission from adults responsible for them, such as parents or teachers; and second, seeking permission or cooperation from the children themselves. I sought institutional consent by working with senior leaders in both schools to design and implement the research. I also sought parental consent for children I observed (on an opt-out basis) and those I interviewed (on an opt-in basis). Finally, I sought the assent of the children involved too.

Diener and Crandall (1978) identify four components of informed consent: competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension. I judged the children I worked with to be competent to *assent* to the research, if they had their parent's *consent* to participate. Participation was voluntary; I stressed that children were under no obligation to take part and that this was not "normal" schoolwork; they did not have to give me a reason for why they did not want to join in; and they could change their mind at any time. The fact that only about half of the pupils at CLA who were invited decided to join suggests that children did feel able to say no. Full information was given to staff, parents and children in the form of Participant

Information Sheets. These were re-written for children, taking into account the low literacy ages of many of the children in the study. I also prepared a presentation for the classes with which I was working closely, explaining what a researcher is, what the research activities would look like and the nature and limits of confidentiality (discussed below). Members of staff in the school helped by telephoning parents to explain the research where this was deemed more appropriate for their comprehension. Consent was sought by way of a signed form, or, when interactions became possible only on Zoom and as schools excluded paper-based communication in order to mitigate Covid transmission, via a recorded response to the questions on the consent form.

Confidentiality

I promised my respondents confidentiality rather than anonymity. Anonymity was impossible because I was naturally able to identify the participants given the information provided, given that I was interviewing them. It was also broadly known within the school, or the class, who had participated in the study. Confidentiality, in contrast, guarantees that identifiable responses will remain private (i.e. will not be published in any results or reports from the study). This meant that pseudonyms were allocated to all participants and identifying details (for example locations of previous jobs) were changed. The schools are also referred to using pseudonyms.

When interviewing and otherwise interacting with students, confidentiality had to be balanced with requirements of safeguarding: this was indicated in information sheets and explained to the children at the start. In my observations of classes with older children, I was aware that students when chatting with me were choosing to withhold some information that they knew I might have to disclose to the school for safeguarding reasons. I regard this as evidence that I had communicated the limits of confidentiality effectively.

Covid

Drastic changes in the way that my research was conducted during the pandemic meant that I had to make multiple applications to the University's ethics committee and change my methods of providing information and taking consent. Furthermore, infection control became an ethical issue. The central tenet of ethical research is non-maleficence (Cohen et al 2007) so I had to ensure that my participants were not put at increased risk of Covid due to my

presence. This was also situational; I had to follow the protocols of each school, which included at various points wearing a mask, keeping distance, using a screen, and taking regular Covid tests. Inevitably, as I have discussed above, these factors can compromise other aspects of the researcher-participant relationship.

Research effectiveness

The appropriateness of conventional positivist interpretations of reliability and validity for naturalistic, qualitative studies has long been questioned (Mischler 1990, Maxwell 1992). The exact conditions of my study cannot be replicated. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reconfigure validity and reliability as *trustworthiness*, which comprises four main tenets: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility, for Lincoln and Guba, addresses the fit between the respondents' views and the researchers' interpretation of them (Tobin and Begley 2004). The risk of misinterpretation can be addressed firstly through prolonged engagement in the field. I engaged with both schools to varying degrees (often dictated by Covid restrictions) over three different academic years. This included, for St Bernadette's at least, the period before, during and after the Covid lockdowns. I tended to observe whole lessons and whole days rather than fragments. I built and sustained productive relationships with staff and students.

Secondly, I sought to mitigate reactivity. "Reactivity" describes participants changing their behaviour because they know they are being observed (Cohen et al 2017: 278-9). My positioning as a teaching assistant, my long term engagement with selected class groups, and my efforts to take notes as unobtrusively as possible, meant that I was seen mostly as an unremarkable addition to the classroom by the students I was observing. I made efforts to reassure teachers that observations would be kept confidential and were in no way connected to school appraisal processes.

Thirdly, I ensured triangulation within and among my methods. I interviewed staff at all levels: senior leaders, classroom teachers, and teaching assistants. I also interviewed children. I tried to interview people with whom I had built a relationship already through

participant observation, meaning that their interview responses were contextualised within my knowledge of their day-to-day activities. As well as this "methodological triangulation" I also achieved a level of "time triangulation" (Denzin 1970), or "diachronic reliability" (Kirk and Miller 1986), researching as I did over a fairly long time period.

Fourthly, I built respondent validation into my research process. I presented emerging findings (either with the permission of respondents, or taking care to disguise identities) to the schools' senior leadership teams for discussion. I tested emerging knowledge claims by presenting them to the senior leadership teams of other schools which were not otherwise involved in the study. Respondents, argue Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), are not necessarily in a privileged position to appraise their own actions and responses; this kind of "member checking" allowed me to confirm that others found my characterisations of attitudes and actions within the school familiar.

Finally, I considered issues relating to credibility in interviews specifically. Fowler (2009) notes that interviewees may wish to give socially desirable answers. For staff, this might manifest as a wish to toe the institutional line in their responses; in some way this was useful, as I was seeking information about institutional conceptualisations of and responses to disadvantage. Rachel was a good example of this. I noted in my research diary immediately after the interview that: *she spoke the most, but a lot was off-topic, and I suppose I didn't get the impression that she was speaking in the moment – it was almost as if she was giving a presentation or trying to demonstrate a track record.* Children and adults alike in schools are often rewarded in school for giving confident and lengthy responses. Daniel, a pupil at St Bernadette's, talked at length and with gusto about dyslexia, but then concluded: "Yeah Miss, that's pure waffle that innit". This indicates the possibility that he was responding for the sake of it (and aware of this). I was careful to pitch questions for children at an appropriate level, choosing vocabulary that was suited to their age and ability. I knew the "subject matter" of the interview well (Kvale 1996: 148-9) – as a former teacher, I was familiar with the practices, language and policy context of secondary schooling. I was careful to structure the interview appropriately and engage with participants sensitively and empathetically. I produced full transcriptions, whilst recognising that there is an inevitable aspect of "transcriber selectivity"; I did not record intonation or non-verbal behaviour.

Transferability

Transferability arguably corresponds with "generalisability" in the positivist paradigm; it can be configured as "comparability" or "translatability" (LeCompte and Preissle 1993). Strauss and Corbin (1990) replace "generalisability" with "explanatory power": including "thick description" (Geertz 2000) means that future users of the research can make meaningful comparisons with their own contexts (LeCompte and Preissle 1993). Responsibility for generalisation lies, then, in part at least, with the audience. I sought to aid transferability by providing "thick description" in my in-depth characterisation of both schools, both in the initial pen portraits in Chapter 7 but also supported by detail from observations and verbatim quotes in the other findings chapters. This supports transferability by allowing my reader to understand how research subjects understood actions or ideas in relation to a broader organisational structure (Geertz 2000). I use quotations from transcripts extensively in my findings to aid the richness of contextual description. When it came to sampling the schools, I used critical cases, as described above. Case studies arguably have good potential for transferability because each school potentially embraces a large number of the variables in question (Verschuren 2003).

Dependability

"Dependability", for Lincoln and Guba (1985), involves showing that findings are consistent and could be repeated. In holistic qualitative research, this is to be balanced with the need to record multiple interpretations of or meanings given to situations or events. Many of the attributes of dependability in research design correspond with features discussed above, namely member checks, triangulation, and persistent observation. Two additional factors are peer review and reflexivity. I discussed emergent findings and methodological processes with my postgraduate peers and at regular supervision meetings. It is inevitable, because of the interpersonal nature of interviews, that the researcher will inevitably have some influence on the interviewee and therefore the data (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989). I have provided (above) an account of the sustained reflections upon my positionality which persisted throughout my fieldwork. I reflected frequently on my positioning and research role in my field diary.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which findings are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation or interest (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Reflexivity is an important

tool in establishing confirmability and is discussed above and elsewhere in this section. Triangulation is also discussed above.
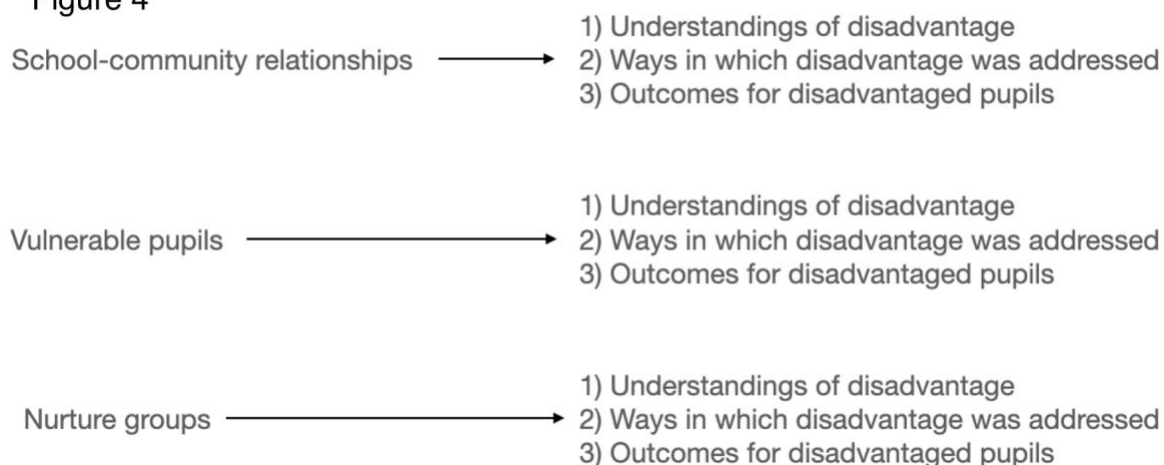
To be biased is to "make errors in the same direction" (Lansing et al 1961: 120-1). It is inevitable that because interviews are interpersonal, the researcher will have some influence on the interviewee and therefore the data (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). I sought to limit bias in my interviewing by establishing a good rapport with interviewees during my observations, and carefully considering and managing support materials such as the scenarios used with the children. I recorded the interviews, produced complete transcripts and used them in their entirety for analysis.

Thematic analysis

I analysed my data thematically. In qualitative research, data analysis is "recursive, non-linear, messy and reflexive" (Cohen et al 2007: 643). Collection and analysis can be a back-and-forth process (Teddie and Tashakkori 2009). The process of analysis *becomes* the data; for example, writing field notes when observing inevitably demands in-the-moment analysis, or at least the making of decisions about the relative salience of the things observed.

Cohen et al propose a distinction between "pre-ordinate" analytical tools – ideas, themes, codes and frameworks which are decided in advance – and methods which are "responsive" to emerging data. My analytical methods are "pre-ordinate" in the loosest sense; I assume that schools and school staff *do* have some kind of conceptualisation of disadvantage, and that the schools seek to mitigate it to produce more equitable outcomes. I therefore coded themes into the three broad areas indicated below for each niche. These areas were decided *ex ante* (in advance), derived from my research questions (Cohen et al 2007: 669). They are populated with *themes* emerging from the data.

Figure 4

School-community relationships ⟶
1) Understandings of disadvantage
2) Ways in which disadvantage was addressed
3) Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

Vulnerable pupils ⟶
1) Understandings of disadvantage
2) Ways in which disadvantage was addressed
3) Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

Nurture groups ⟶
1) Understandings of disadvantage
2) Ways in which disadvantage was addressed
3) Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

I used analytical coding to arrive at these themes. Examples of these codes are given in the table below. The process of formulating and applying the codes required the making of semantic and conceptual links in order to categorise the data: for example, identifying when teachers represented "chaos" in the lives of their disadvantaged students, even though the words used were not always the same.

A *theme*, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set". Themes that emerged within the broad areas which aligned with my research questions were indicative of patterns of responses within and across the two schools. Sometimes a theme emerged strongly from one school and not at all in another, which itself called for discussion and explanation: for example, staff at St Bernadette's often characterised the lives of their disadvantaged pupils as "chaotic" and portrayed their school as a sanctuary, but there was no equivalent representation at CLA.

I coded my data according to the following stages. Steps 2 to 4 were repeated for each "niche".

1) **Preparing the data.** Firstly, I transcribed the data with the aid of an audio recording. I read and re-read the data, noting down initial ideas, as suggested in the first phase of Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis (2006: 87).
2) **Identifying data related to each niche.** For each niche, I read through all relevant data. Many, if not most, data sources were relevant for more than one niche. For example, some interviewees discussed vulnerable pupils as well as

the nurture group; observation notes from time spent in the nurture group also revealed something about school-community relations.

3) **Coding within the themes.** Within each niche, themes which I drew out of the data were separated into three areas deriving from the research questions: understandings of disadvantage; ways in which disadvantage was addressed; and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (these are illustrated in the diagram above). There is an example of the codes used in the "Vulnerable pupils" niche below.

4) **Organising the codes.** Smaller sub-themes, such as "precarity", formed part of bigger themes such as "poverty", which in turn sit within one of the three broader areas.

5) **Reporting my findings.** I structured my findings by niche and then by the three areas guided by the research questions. I tried to select "vivid, compelling" examples to report verbatim (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87), in order to "keep the flavour of the original data" (Cohen et al 2007: 647).

TABLE 5: Vulnerable pupils – an example of codes used

1) Understandings of disadvantage	**Poverty** - Precarity - Poverty as an inhibitor of academic outcomes - Intersections between poverty and other factors **Family circumstances** - Involvement of external agencies - "Chaos" - Parents as a disadvantaging factor **Systematic understandings** - Tracking - "Just knowing"
2) Ways in which disadvantage was addressed	**Responses to poverty** - Food and essentials - Learning resources and uniform **Holistic approaches** - Providing sanctuary - Involving external agencies - Taking a whole-family approach **Systematic responses** - Systematic responses over lockdown - Intuitive responses - Talk and understanding
3) Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils	- Broad view of outcomes - Conflict with statutory measures of success - Different versions of success for each student

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the way in which my methodological approach departed from the positivist paradigm to allow me to take a broader view of disadvantage and the actions schools took to ameliorate it. I favoured in-depth engagement in the field, using my nested case study approach to provide windows into the schools' values and priorities. This contrasted to previous odds-beating studies which brought with them existing presumptions about odds and outcomes. I will now begin my findings section by providing in-depth sketches of both schools.

7 Findings: sketching the schools

I will now provide some "thick description" (Geertz 2000) of the two schools in this study, to give a sense of each field site and to aid transferability. The table below allows for side-by-side comparison of proxies for odds (free school meal eligibility) and outcomes (Progress 8 scores), though of course this study takes a much wider view than these measures on their own.

TABLE 6: The schools		
	St Bernadette's	**CLA**
Number of pupils	930	1207
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals	15.4%	52.4%
Progress 8 score *For PP eligible pupils*	0.55 ("well above average") *0.29*	0.08 ("average") *-0.15*

St Bernadette's Catholic High School

A slogan displayed prominently on the St Bernadette's website is: "Amazing things happen here". St Bernadette's, at the time I was researching, was the only "outstanding" school in its local authority (according to Ofsted) and very much valued its local reputation. Staff tended to be older and more established, though there was a younger, more transient group of teaching assistants, many of whom were in the process of applying for their Initial Teacher Training. Because of the St Bernadette's Teaching School (discussed in more detail below) there were always lots of trainees and visitors around. The atmosphere in the school was largely sedate and orderly.

Location and school building

St Bernadette's is located in a town within a city district, itself part of a much bigger metropolitan area. The area surrounding the school is residential, and there are links to the city centre by tram, train and bus. The school sits just inside a LSOA (lower-layer super output area, a small neighbourhood used to report small area statistics) which is only slightly more deprived than the national average for England, and rather less deprived than the average LSOA in the local authority district. However, just over the border is a ward that is ranked in the top 250 most deprived of 32,844 LSOAs in the whole of England. The next nearest LSOA, however, is again less deprived than the average for the local authority. Overall, the area surrounding the school is rather mixed, with pockets of deprivation along with areas of relative affluence.

St Bernadette's is a fairly new school building built under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). It is light and spacious; entering the school through reception, one comes first to an open-plan, social space used mostly for eating and break times. There is a separate hall for PE, as well as playing fields and a football pitch. There is a large training room on the ground floor used to instruct groups of trainee teachers.

The school's ethos is one of "Catholic excellence". Catholic iconography, including crucifixes and quotations, is visible in nearly every room around the school. The school has its own chapel and students regularly attend Mass and celebrate Christian festivals. At one point I shared an office with a set of life-size Nativity figures. This Catholic identity, as well as the

school's consistently high examination results, are the two main shaping factors of St Bernadette's organisational self-conceptualisation.

Ofsted

St Bernadette's had an "outstanding" Ofsted rating from January 2008 until June 2022 (this rating changed to "good" after the completion of this research). Inspectors observed in this most recent report that "pupils behave in a calm and orderly manner", due to "strong relationships with adults", that classrooms were "positive environments", and that pupils worked well with each other. Ofsted had particular praise for SEND provision, and in particular the "rich information" used "expertly" by teachers to ensure equal access to the curriculum. There was "intensive support for vulnerable pupils", which meant that a range of external agencies were deployed to provide timely and appropriate help.

Pupil demographics and admissions

The percentage of its pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding at St Bernadette's is very slightly below the national average. Its students score well in their GCSE examinations: the school's Progress 8 (value added) score is rated "well above average" and is also far above the average score for Pupil Premium eligible pupils. These "disadvantaged" pupils, though not making as much progress by this measure as their better-off peers in the same school, make better progress than the average o*f* all pupils nationally.

St Bernadette's is heavily oversubscribed, receiving over three applications for every place available at the school. Pupils from the five "feeder" Catholic primary schools are prioritised, and all other students in the last admissions round were baptised Catholics living within a 2.7 mile radius of the school – a radius which, as explained above, will encompass poorer as well as more affluent areas. Most pupils were White British.

The local authority neighbouring that in which St Bernadette's was situated is one of the 36 local authorities in England that still has grammar schools – state funded schools which select children by academic ability, as gauged by the 11+ examination at the end of primary school. Some parents living near St Bernadette's sought places for their children at these grammar schools. There was therefore a sense, as will be explored in the next chapter about

school relationships with parents and the community, that St Bernadette's needed to present an attractive option for these parents so that they wouldn't go "over the border".

The Teaching School

St Bernadette's ran a lucrative Teaching School, offering consultancy, professional development and Initial Teacher Training. The profits were invested back into the school, facilitating smaller class sizes and a highly-qualified, experienced body of staff. The Teaching School was led by a separate executive head and senior leadership team, as well as the executive headteacher of the "soft federation" between St Bernadette's and a partner Catholic school in a different county twenty miles north. There was also a "Catholic collaborative" constituting three additional schools (so five altogether); the other schools paid St Bernadette's Teaching School to be a part of this group.

The Teaching School's cohort of trainee teachers would attend all-day sessions in the training room, on the ground floor of the main school, and then be dispatched to their placement schools later in the year. It also fulfilled the role of "appropriate body" for a cohort of 90 newly qualified teachers, quality assuring their assessments as well as providing guidance, training and advice for in-school mentors. The Teaching School arranged for leaders to be seconded to struggling schools, and also ran specialist SEND consultancy services and training programmes for mathematics as well as a range of other CPD.

Pupil Premium strategy

The total annual Pupil Premium allocation for St Bernadette's was just over £260,000. In the school's "Pupil Premium strategy statement", there was a strong sense that where provision for *all* pupils was improved, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils would become better by default. A typical comment was: "we are committed to meeting the pastoral, social and academic needs of all pupils, but especially those who are most disadvantaged". The school's stated target was that, for measures such as Progress 8, Attainment 8 and English Baccalaureate entry, achievement for disadvantaged pupils within St Bernadette's should exceed that for *non*-disadvantaged pupils nationally. For many of the measures, this had already been achieved in previous years.

The strategy for Pupil Premium spending tended to prioritise quite generic school improvement strategies, notably "consistently high quality… teaching and learning". This included the recruitment and retention of staff, the reduction of class sizes, additional preparation time for teachers, better-quality supply staff, CPD, and mentoring for early-career teachers. None of these strategies, or others mentioned later on such as a whole-school reward system or homework club, explicitly had any connection to disadvantaged pupils as a distinct group; the argument was that whole-school improvement would benefit *all* pupils, including the quarter who were Pupil Premium eligible. More specific "schemes", such as the "Achievement Champion" scheme or literacy and numeracy interventions, were said to be designed to support all pupils but *especially* the most disadvantaged; they did not, however, seem to be targeted in any particular way.

There was some mention of more targeted support to respond to acute economic disadvantage, such as the provision of personal laptops "where applicable" and supplying equipment and uniform to pupils experiencing "family hardship". The strategy suggested an "accessible funding request system" which could provide ad hoc financial support for access to school trips, tickets to the school Prom, music tuition, revision resources or sports equipment.

The City Learning Academy

The City Learning Academy is described on its website as "a mixed, non-selective school serving local children". It had been open for ten years at the time of my research, and had always been rooted in the needs of its local community, which was highly disadvantaged. Staff tended to be younger and more mobile; the school made use of schemes such as Teach First. Non-teaching staff were particularly visible at CLA in the day-to-day running of the school. Pupils entering in the morning could expect to have their bags (cursorily) searched by a member of the "behaviour team". The "behaviour team" was a constant presence throughout the day, stopping by lessons to check that they were orderly and picking up children for conversations or tellings-off. There was a somewhat stronger sense of order being *enforced* at this school. The pastoral team were likewise a highly visible presence on the ground, in contrast to the team at St Bernadette's which was rather smaller and more static.

The curriculum at CLA was noticeably broad, including subjects such as textiles, graphics, interactive media, and child development.

Location and school building

CLA sits at the border of three LSOAs. All three are amongst the 10% most deprived of all neighbourhoods nationally. Two are in the 100 most deprived LSOAs in England. The surrounding area is residential, and only a mile and a half away from the city centre – the school is close to a tram stop, from which it is a few minutes' travel into town. CLA is likewise a fairly new school building. It has a separate PE block and two football pitches, which are used by community groups at weekends and in the evenings. It also has a "forest school" in nearby woodland. The school was designed to be open plan and provide a flexible learning space; in reality, this design often caused frustration for staff and students, as soundproofing was poor. Sometimes, two classes were taught in one space with only a thin screen between them.

Ofsted

At its last Ofsted inspection, CLA was judged to be "good" in all areas. The first point made by the inspectorate was that school leaders realise their vision that social disadvantage should not be a barrier to learning. Personal, social, health and economic education was praised, along with the breadth and balance of the curriculum and the quality of extra-curricular activities. Inspectors described a "strong culture of safeguarding" and a "safe and caring environment". Ofsted noted that pupils' progress in mathematics was not as strong as in other subjects and that, whilst there were early signs of improvement, children with SEND had historically underachieved.

Pupil demographics and admissions

Pupil Premium eligibility at the City Learning Academy was well over double the national average. Its pupil population was highly transitory and included a far above average proportion of students who spoke English as an additional language as well as pupils recently arrived in the UK. The pupil body was ethnically very diverse. Its Progress 8 scores were average. CLA used the local Council's admissions rules, allocating places first to Looked After Children, those with particular needs, or those with siblings at the school, followed by all other children allocated by distance from the school.

CLA was notable in its strong sense of purpose as a community school, serving its immediate area. It ran a local "Family Region", convening other schools and agencies to tackle issues such as hunger and homelessness. It had a specialised unit for English language learners, helping to integrate students newly arrived in the UK, including those who have arrived without their parents. It hosted a weekly food bank on which many families and members of the local community relied. Many of these services depended on voluntary cooperation with local services and schools, and also on funding bids by the school. CLA offered these kinds of partnerships and services in addition to meeting its requirements as an educational institution. For example, it helped migrant parents with visa applications even though there was no statutory obligation for it to do so – in fact, when contemporary government policy had been described as creating a deliberately hostile environment, even attempting "to turn schools into internal border checkpoints" (Gayle 2019).

The Research School

There was a "Research School" based at the City Learning Academy which aimed to provide high-quality evidence based CPD for teachers across the region. It brought together a network of "Evidence Leads", teachers and leaders from CLA and other local schools. The Research School worked closely with the Education Endowment Foundation, a charity "dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement… through better use of evidence" (Education Endowment Foundation website). CLA was part of the Research Schools Network, and as such acted as a local hub for promoting evidence-based teaching. CLA had extensive links with local universities and had over the years been the subject of various studies.

Pupil Premium strategy

CLA received an annual £696,000 of Pupil Premium funding, over two and a half times the amount of Pupil Premium funding than was received by St Bernadette's. Its Pupil Premium strategy set out the school's context in a "highly disadvantaged residential community… with the vast majority of pupils living locally to the school". It provided detailed statistical information using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. There was some description of the more acute material challenges facing pupils and their families, including "experiencing food and fuel poverty, living in unsuitable temporary housing, suffering with chronic ill-health, and being unemployed". The document also stated that the CLA leadership team was "sensitive" to the limits of PP, pointing out that there may be families living in poverty who do not qualify.

Whereas the aims set out by St Bernadette's were of meeting the needs of all pupils "including" or "especially" the disadvantaged, the CLA strategy pointed out that the majority of the school was classed as Pupil Premium therefore there was a requirement to "meet the needs of the critical mass of the school". Disadvantaged pupils were not simply to be swept along by generalised school improvement; CLA had instead "developed a universal offer which aims to mitigate the impact of social disadvantage". The school improvement strategy was *premised* on the disadvantaged "critical mass".

There were nonetheless some parallels with the strategy at St Bernadette's, notably, the "constant focus on the quality of teaching and learning"; however, only £80,000 of the budget was allocated to generalised CPD, and the document stated the importance of looking at "other contextual factors… such as ethnicity and whether students are currently accessing free school meals". Prominence (and £210,000) was given to the "equitable education experience": the universal provision of school uniform, materials and equipment, free music

lessons ("our belief that music education is a right, not a privilege"), school trips and careers events. A further £156,000 was allocated for "bespoke, targeted and tailored interventions" for disadvantaged students in areas such as literacy, EAL, work experience, health, speech and language therapy and mental health. This included the nurture group and the "pastoral tracker" (discussed in the next section). However, the biggest share of the budget – £250,000 – went to the improvement of school attendance for disadvantaged pupils. This was a very wide goal and encompassed a large range of community interventions including home visits, hosting a weekly food bank, maintaining a fuel poverty fund for parents and carers, and supporting EAL families. This point will be elaborated in subsequent chapters, but it is clear that disadvantage for CLA was seen as an important characterising factor of the whole pupil population, and that this informed steps to mitigate it. This contrasted to the position at St Bernadette's, where disadvantaged pupils were seen as a minority, benefitting from the overall success of the school.

8 Findings: the schools' relationships with families and communities

The first niche I examined was school relationships with families and communities. This closely corresponds with one of the pillars in Bryk et al's model (2010) and is an often-explored theme in school improvement and effectiveness studies. The statutory establishment of parental school choice and the marketisation of state schooling means that a school's community is no longer necessarily aligned with its immediate geographical area (Harris 2005), so I take a wide view of community which goes beyond merely *neighbourhood*. *Community* firstly denotes the parents and carers of pupils, however near to or far from the school they live. It includes any schools, or other organisations such as religious institutions or charities – whether immediately local or not – with which the school works to achieve its desired outcomes for its pupils or for the community more broadly. In the case of St Bernadette's in particular, the school (as I shall explain in more depth later) construed *community* as incorporating other Catholic schools in the diocese, which included one school situated in a town in a different county 20 miles away.

This section will be divided into three parts, corresponding with my three research questions. Firstly, I will explore ways in which the schools viewed disadvantage within their communities and families. This necessarily starts with an examination of ways in which community was constructed by each school, before moving to a discussion about school self-perceptions; I will describe the stories that each school told about itself – its history within and connection to its communities. Secondly, I will explain how the schools addressed these disadvantages, including ways in which resources from within the communities and families were seen to mitigate disadvantage. I will conclude by asking what kind of outcomes were shown to be valued by these practices.

Constructions of community, and disadvantage within communities and families

Constructing a community: school creation myths

As I stated above, I do not use *community* as synonymous with *neighbourhood*. The weakening of local authority education powers over the past decade means that schools are no longer automatically connected most closely with other institutions in their immediate proximity, and may not even serve a pupil population drawn primarily from their local area. I thus view community as constructed through each school's external relationships in practice: community is comprised of organisations and individuals who were in some way invested in the school, and in whom the school invested.

At both St Bernadette's and CLA, school leaders in particular perpetuated strong narratives about the respective purposes of the school, and to an extent this underpinned other practices. School practices are historically situated; they are the "achievement of a tradition" (Carr 1987: 170), and it is these "traditions", whether long or short, that were narrated by leaders. Whilst CLA found its purpose in serving its immediate geographic community, St Bernadette's primary loyalty was to its Catholic community (which comprised not just a denominational affiliation, but other social and economic ties). This contrast between the schools was evident in the stories they told about their (re)birth and their journeys through improvement. CLA, only a decade old, was conceived as a community school working in direct response to the disadvantage in its local area.

Chrissie: Because we are an inclusive school. We're not just targeting certain people… we're for everybody.

In general, St Bernadette's seemed to display a greater affinity with its Catholic community – in particular its "feeder" primary schools – rather than the immediate geographical area around the school. Gloria, the Teaching School's Strategic Director, told me, in an almost folkloric retelling, about the rebirth of St Bernadette's when a new headteacher (Patricia) took it on over a decade ago.

Gloria: You know, when Patricia took over this school, it wasn't doing very well at all, and actually children, you know, children in the Catholic sector, the very bright children, were going over the border into [neighbouring local authority], and trying to get into the [neighbouring local authority] grammar schools, because the parents didn't feel that, you know, this school was good enough.

And Patricia, one of the first things she did was take out a big ad in the [local newspaper] to advertise our open day, to try and drum up that interest again. And you know, within two years, she'd made that difference, and she's turned the school around in terms of results. And within two years, it was the most oversubscribed school in [local authority], and those children that were going across the border to [neighbouring local authority] were coming to us.

...I don't think it was necessarily thinking right, I need to attract the brighter children back. But of course, that does have an impact on your ability to hit targets, and, you know, be seen in a certain way, but I think it was more, you know, a deep sense of frustration, that children were having to leave the city to go to schools elsewhere, because the provision wasn't good enough in their parents' eyes. So it was more about being the right provider and providing quality education for our family of schools.

Gloria identified a particular cohort of children here: they were "bright", "in the Catholic sector" (not simply "Catholic"), with well-resourced parents ambitious for their education; they were the coveted high-fliers who might otherwise have ended up in the grammar schools of the neighbouring local authority. St Bernadette's sought to serve its "family" of (generally) high-performing, desirable Catholic primaries in its pursuit of "Catholic excellence"; this was a significant departure from the simple statement made by Chrissie at CLA that "We're not just targeting certain people… we're for everybody". The disadvantaged children at St Bernadette's on whom my study focuses were therefore seen as a minority – albeit a significant one. St Bernadette's' creation myth also suggested the genesis of a virtuous cycle: interest was "drummed up" in tandem with a "turnaround" in student results, which in turn "attracted" the "brighter" children. Thus it is important to reinforce that the Catholic community served by the school was not only a religious network, but was also correlated with a particular (perceived) type of aspirational family, and with schools which shared social values – and, as I will show, contributed economically – to St Bernadette's and its Teaching School. This is congruent to Greany and Higham's claim that the school's "perceived history" was one of several factors that influenced its local "status" (2018: 53). In

the next chapter, I will explain how "attracting" these kinds of families was seen to impact on the disadvantaged minority also served by St Bernadette's.

<u>*The community as a disadvantaging factor: conceptualising the school in its area*</u>

Both CLA and St Bernadette's were located in highly disadvantaged urban areas, though deprivation was perhaps more sustained and widespread in the neighbourhoods around CLA. The views of staff in the two schools on the relationships between the schools and their communities were subtly yet substantially different. Steve, an assistant headteacher at St Bernadette's, expressed the feeling that neighbourhood turbulence occurred on the periphery of the school rather than inside it.

Steve: We have like huge gang issues in some of the parts of [city] that our pupils are aware of. You know, outside of this building they're mixing with pupils who like don't go to school, sometimes whose attendance isn't great.

Steve's colleague Ben spoke in similar terms.

Ben: Not just at St Bernadette's and it's not a problem necessarily in school, but there's an emerging trend in [local area] at the minute with cannabis and cannabis seems to be very normalised at the minute.

Ben perceived cannabis to be a local trend but was not a problem "in school". Disadvantage or turbulence in the pupil population -– poor *odds* -– was the exception rather than the rule. St Bernadette's students were "aware of", not *involved in*, the gang issues. They did not find negative peer influence within the school, but "outside of this building" – they were mixing with children who not only did not attend St Bernadette's, but might not attend school at all.

Lola, a Head of Year and class teacher at the City Learning Academy, made a similar point.

Lola: You've got children that may be involved in gangs outside of school. It's not just the home life, this is their choice outside of school, it's who they hang around with. You've got students that hang around with students that may go to an alternative provision.

Lola's account here does seem similar at a first glance to Steve's. They both worry about their pupils socialising with others who may have been excluded from mainstream schools.

Crucially, however, the children are said to be "involved in", rather than "aware of", gang crime. This indicates again a more porous boundary between CLA and its local community. The community's problems were the school's problems and vice versa (and the same can be said for the school's assets, as explored below). At St Bernadette's, there was a sense that the school was a sanctuary from the dangers within (some) local neighbourhoods; a minority of children were *proximate* to crime or social turbulence. At CLA, children were seen as having the potential to exercise their "choice" to be *actors* in these dangerous situations.

Issues with gang violence troubled the Year 8 pupils I spoke to at CLA. The boys who had arrived in the UK in the previous few years described their neighbourhoods and people in them as "aggressive". The discussion started from a vignette featuring a girl who had recently arrived in the UK.

King: It might be different to her country, to how people act in her country than the UK.

Rebecca: So like cultural differences? What kind of thing?

King: In the UK they're very aggressive. Not like aggressive, but like –

Moral: They are aggressive.

Rebecca: In what way?

Alexandre: They can jump into a fight at anything.

The boys were scared of "roadmen", a term for "gangster" (which could also describe a "wannabe" gangster).

Royal: Roadmen are like gangsters. They have a pistol. They have a shank [knife].

Moral: … Miss, the worst thing that you can ever hear when you're walking… is "Where is he from". You hear that, it means they start coming close to you, and especially when they see something from you that they like, like your jacket or your shoes. They'll come to like take it…

Alexandre: Basically, yeah, if there was a gang here, and you're not from here, you're from another place that has another gang, and you're walking around here, and they ask you

where you're from and you tell them that you're from down there, and they're wearing a black jacket, black everything, black shoes, they're gonna beat you up.

There was no suggestion that the boys had ever been victims of gang violence, but their anxiety was palpable. In this excerpt, it is clear that there were intersections where children could be particularly vulnerable to threats within their communities. For example, pupils may have been, or felt, at higher risk if they had recently arrived in the UK and were therefore unfamiliar with aspects of local culture. It made a difference that the pupils speaking above were boys and that they were black – they were more likely to be victimised. The threat was affective as well as physical, as pupils were fearful and felt unsafe. All of these factors could exacerbate the challenging odds faced by children in complex, interacting ways that could not be measured by looking at local crime levels alone (as in odds-beating studies such as Bryk 2010).

Staff at CLA seemed particularly attuned to the nuances and history of socioeconomic disadvantage in the local area.

Mark: [Part of city] is definitely, I would say, a more deprived area. And then you've got generational unemployment or underemployment, which I think is a big factor… You know, taking the ESA [sic; EMA, Education Maintenance Allowance] away, even that £30 made a big difference staying in education and stuff, all those factors have led it, I think, personally, to demotivation and a lack of confidence in kids, which then impacts, you know, on their attainment at school… And the main factors are the economic levers provided by government, you know, and economic circumstances that they come into.

At CLA, there seemed to be more ownership of pupil and community "odds" by staff. There was a keen awareness of context, specifically the deprivation within the local area – mitigating this was the school's *raison d'être.* At St Bernadette's, there was a distance. The school pursued "Catholic excellence" and the provision of high-quality non-academically-selective education, operating on the premise that disadvantaged children, like all children, would benefit from this.

Families: a disadvantaging factor?

To finish this overview of schools' constructions of disadvantage within communities and families, I will examine ways in which families are perceived as generating odds for pupils.

When members of staff were asked to identify barriers to learning that they perceived in their students, some respondents from both schools suggested that parents could be a disadvantaging factor. Ben, a pastoral director at St Bernadette's, was keen to stress that parents could present a barrier that was distinct from their socioeconomic circumstances.

Ben: I've dealt with families that are fine financially, but the emotional relationship between parent and child, or the sort of, there's other issues within the household other than just finances… pupils are the most disadvantaged when parents aren't necessarily parenting correctly.

The idea expressed by Ben of parental "correctness" – as independent from broader structural issues affecting parents such as poverty or poor housing – was echoed to an extent at the City Learning Academy by Head of Year, Lola.

Lola: You might find that some students don't have parental support or parental guidance to guide them in the right way. So that then can cause a disadvantage with their education because they come in actually lacking goals, if that makes sense. So you'll find that a lot. So they, especially after, do you know what, after a long period of time at home, that's when they come back with with that lack of motivation to succeed.

In both examples here, there is a "correct" or "right" way for parents to "support" or "guide" a child; this is assumed to align with the educational aims promoted by the school, accepting their intrinsic good (as per Raffo et al's discussion of the functionalist view of contemporary education, 2007). The remarks from Lola and Ben above might be considered to demonstrate deficit-focussed thinking about parents and parenting. Deficit thinking, as described by Gorski (2008), is a process of "pathologising", where the denigration of cultural or epistemological deviation from an assumed "normal" is used to govern and marginalise a less powerful group. However, this view was by no means unchallenged within the schools. As I will explore below, some of those working within the pastoral system explicitly stated their resistance of what they called "judging" or "looking down"; often this involved a broader engagement with the serendipitous ("it could happen to anybody") or structural underpinnings of a family's circumstances, with a conscious distancing from the rhetoric of poor choices. This will be covered in more detail in the next section of this chapter, about how the schools responded to perceived disadvantages within families.

Responses to community and family disadvantage

This section addresses my second research question, about ways in which the two schools addressed disadvantage as it manifested in their pupil populations. Firstly, I will contrast the community-responsive curriculum at CLA with the vision of a more traditional "quality education" at St Bernadette's. I will then explore ways in which the schools worked with parents, building on the section above to contrast the schools' attitudes towards parents and specifically the assets held within families and communities, as well as probing ideas around the scope of the schools to deal with issues beyond the school gates. I will then consider work that the schools did at scale in their communities as they constructed them, before finishing with an exploration of the approach to careers guidance in each school.

CLA: a community responsive curriculum

From observing lessons and form time at CLA, it was very clear that the community context had informed curriculum content. In particular, the curriculum reflected that a large proportion of students were from ethnic minority backgrounds, that many spoke English as an additional language and that some were recent arrivals to the UK. I conducted my observations in the academic year 2020-21, so began just after the summer which saw widespread global Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. There was a palpable will to recognise and address racism through the curriculum.

There was at CLA a whole-school literacy initiative where teachers were encouraged to read an article pertinent to a maths or science topic at the start of the lesson, and this was often used to highlight the (often overlooked) achievements of those with marginalised identities. For example, in their science lessons, children read articles about Olive Morris and Katherine Johnson, or about the use of numerical data in the Sumer (now Iraq) around 3500 BC, which demonstrated the Pythagoras theory before Pythagoras did. In form time, the students examined issues such as diversity: the learning outcomes were to "know where our diversity comes from" and "celebrate differences", and pupils studied the history of migration to Britain starting with the Roman empire. An assembly highlighted the campaigning work of Marcus Rashford, who the children were told "overcame the initial "no"" to persuade the government to U-turn on the provision of free school meals.

In English lessons, children read poems dealing with the topic of racism in the USA. The teacher acknowledged that racism was not just historical. She discussed with the students how they should approach the use of the N-word in *Of Mice and Men*, creating space for them to share their own experiences and checking that pupils were ready to move on before changing topic. The students wrote speeches entitled, "We have a long way to go in the fighting of racism" and watched a speech by Martin Luther King. The teacher approached this sensitively: "It's normal to have lots of strong emotions when you're listening to this, don't be embarrassed". There was a particularly powerful speech delivered by a Black Muslim girl that opened: "Looking back now, I miss my ignorance of racism".

Black History Month was particularly prominent at CLA. There was a huge Black History Month poster in the school reception and music by famous Black artists was played loudly at the school entrance in the mornings. Every day during the month there was a related "word of the day" in form time, for example "Equality". Pupils watched relevant video clips, for example an interview with a Black cricketer who discussed racism.

Pupils were encouraged to be critical in challenging common assumptions in, for example, history lessons. For example, in a topic about Native Americans, it was pointed out that Native Americans did not all share a common culture or way of life. The narrative of "discovery" of the Americas was presented but challenged. Children were asked to consider the question: "Why is it important that we acknowledge how a group of people differ and how they are unique from each other?". The teacher paused a film midway through to invite the pupils to critique the presenter's use of the word "Indian". He gave the students an interesting rationale for this area of study: "Our understanding of different cultures allows us to question… racists who try to divide people… it [a cultural practice] may be different, but they do it for a reason. Difference is good". The teacher used the opportunity to present a positive account of migration into the UK. When the pupils were asked to map "exploration" routes and define a "colony", one boy – who was very much struggling with the writing element of the lesson – gave a useful, relevant example about French colonies in Senegal, based on his own heritage. Another boy, a Portuguese speaker, discussed Portuguese control of Angola. Connecting the curriculum to community context at CLA – not just in its content, but in creating a space where criticality was welcomed and alternative perspectives celebrated – meant that best use could be made of students' knowledges and histories.

Naturally, there are critiques that the peppering of diversity into the curriculum in this way is only tokenistic, and there is also a risk of homogenising non-white identities. It can often feel more comfortable for teachers to use historical instances of racism, or examples from across

the Atlantic, rather than grappling with the everyday struggles faced by students. In a debate in the House of Commons about Black history and diversifying the curriculum which took place while I was undertaking this research, a Member of Parliament in the same metropolitan district as CLA and St Bernadette's critiqued a tendency for schools to "depict racism as an historical artefact rather than a current and lived reality" (reference withheld to maintain anonymity). Though there were some links with students' lived experiences, such as the examples above of students of African heritage who grew up speaking European languages, often this attempt at *recognition* (Fraser 2000) could be somewhat abstracted from the current, material constructions of difference affecting students.

CLA also took account of the wide variety of community languages spoken by children and their families. In a drama studio, there were laminated sheets hanging from the ceiling lights displaying keywords such as "narrator", "levels" and "status" in seven different languages, including Spanish, Polish and Arabic. Cathy, head of the EAL department, arranged for tutors to help pupils sit GCSEs in their home language. Foreign languages teachers, many of whom were native speakers of Spanish or French, were timetabled to assist in other lessons by translating for pupils. In one Year 8 science lesson, I observed a languages teacher translate key concepts into Spanish, Portuguese and Italian to reflect the languages spoken by the pupils. Her presence made the language diversity of the class highly visible, and White British children with English as their only language remarked positively on this. For King, one of the pupils from this class who had previously been a pupil in the EAL department, this kind of support helped him to find a voice. He reflected on this when discussing a vignette featuring a pupil whose first language was Portuguese.

King: … there can be a teacher there who also speaks Portuguese. And then she might like ask for help because she can't read and write that well. So she can take like extra lessons. So we can like speak up for ourselves and stuff like that.

Language support, then, addressed EAL status not just as an educational barrier to attainment, but also had positive social or affective outcomes. Cathy described her regular Zoom classes with her EAL new arrivals group over the Covid lockdown.

Cathy: … we're all there. We're all on camera and it's: "Hiya Michelle! Ibrahim, Ibrahim!" Really, for them, I think it worked for them because they're newly arrived to the country, they haven't got their own friends on their own street. And for them, it was their day to day contact. It was a social thing completely.

At its best, the curriculum at CLA, in its dealings with race, migration history and language, took steps towards transformative social justice learning of the kind envisaged by Freire (2017), enabling social introspection and individual conscientisation. There were other ways in which the curriculum sought to reflect perceived disadvantage in the local community. For example, Jake quickly identified one of the characters in a vignette as a young carer because he had learnt about young carers in a drama lesson. I did not observe this lesson myself, but it would have been interesting to see whether it facilitated critique of "institutionalised subordination" (Fraser 2001: 26) rather than (or perhaps as well as) the individual or psychological aspects of having to take on unfair responsibilities at a young age. There were evidently serious efforts to make links between curriculum and community at CLA. Such efforts naturally lay on a spectrum from individualistic or tokenistic to more meaningful opportunities for social critique (this will be explored later).

Likewise, these efforts constituted, to varying extents, efforts towards participatory parity – the goal of social justice according to Fraser (2005). Children were given routes to participation by being invited to shape the school's wellbeing curriculum. Older students at CLA made videos to seek votes from their peers across the school for senior roles on the school council. Although routes for participatory parity naturally varied depending on the ages and abilities of the children involved, there were also less formal ways in which children contributed to shared agenda-setting. As explained above, this could include teachers' willingness to work flexibly on an ad-hoc basis within lessons to make room for discussion of childrens' diverse perspectives. Participatory parity is not an absolute, nor a binary, but a spectrum: the schools in this study work towards it in various ways. It is something that schools strive towards, rather than achieve.

St Bernadette's: "quality education"

At St Bernadette's, there were of course aspects of the curriculum which covered some of the issues described above. However, there was a smaller proportion of ethnic minority students at St Bernadette's and a smaller proportion of EAL learners. Of the EAL students there were very few who were recent arrivals to the UK, because the school was so heavily oversubscribed. There was no specialist EAL unit. In general, issues such as race and representation were handled at more of an arm's length. Instead, St Bernadette's prided itself on providing a perhaps more traditional "quality education" (again to quote Gloria). "Quality" here corresponded strongly to GCSE outcomes. In a way, this *was* responsive to perceived community need. As I showed above, a key community disadvantage as conceptualised by St Bernadette's was the lack of excellent schools in the local area. Of 15

secondary schools in the local authority area, it was the only one rated outstanding by Ofsted. Many of the others were deemed to "require improvement". St Bernadette's School enjoyed a high standing in its local community (geographically) which extended across the broader geographical region, especially within its Catholic diocese. Practically every interviewee mentioned the school's status as an Ofsted-rated "outstanding" provider against a lacklustre local backdrop.

Anita: Our school is unique in [local authority] in the fact that, you know, high expectations for all students, academic success, is strived for and rewarded and celebrated, and attainment is amazing, outcomes [are] amazing. It's in most categories in the top 20% nationally, and therefore PP will be as well. You know, what works for one works [for everyone].

Anita was correct in a sense about PP pupils; by the Progress 8 measure, they did not make as much progress as their peers who are not considered disadvantaged, but they did make better progress than the average for all pupils nationally. This "what works for one" principle was evident in the perspective of several members of staff and also in the school Pupil Premium strategy document, which was introduced in the previous chapter. In the document, there was an overriding argument that improving provision for all pupils was the best way of improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The "everyone" or "all pupils" – the critical mass – was *not* considered to be disadvantaged at St Bernadette's; disadvantaged pupils were considered to form a small but significant minority of the pupil population.

The story of success and exceptionalism translated to (perceived) pupil pride in the school, again attributed to St Bernadette's success as contrasted to other local schools:

Keira: Our children are very proud of belonging to St Bernadette's because it's seen as the local outstanding school… in a context of a lot of very poorly performing schools. [Local authority] is the second worst performing local authority in [metropolitan area], so St Bernadette's stands out.

The narrative of the school as a success story seemed to rest on its identity as an "outstanding" school in a "cold spot" – an area which is disadvantaged and has few, if any, good or outstanding schools (gov.uk 2022). Correspondingly, this was used as leverage by teachers – in the nurture group and beyond – for ensuring compliance from students. The idea that the school was a very good one, and that it had higher standards for behaviour than other schools, was communicated implicitly and explicitly to students: "If you want to

mess about… ask us for a list of different schools", for example, or "You're in the wrong school if you think you can do that!" (these were from two different teachers, both speaking to children in the nurture group). Both of these examples cemented not only the idea that St Bernadette's had high standards, but also that there were other schools locally that *did* permit poor behaviour.

As well as potentially impacting on how students perceived themselves as learners and their place in the school, the high status of the school impacted on its engagement with parents and the local community. One class teacher said:

Beth: Parents fight to get their children in here, and they are the parents that value education in the first place… they support the school, they support the doing homework, they support with extra-curricular stuff, they read to their children at home… I went to a parents' evening last night, Year 9 set 3, and they all came and that's lovely. They were really engaged, they were really interested, they were really positive.

The school's success meant that it attracted resourceful parents who were already invested in their child's education in ways that were seen as productive by the school. The school's proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding was broadly in line with the national average, but lower than the average for its immediate local area. Its catchment area was rather large, given that it was in a densely populated area. Attracting the children of more affluent Catholic parents "back" was, as I have shown, an important point that had significant implications for disadvantaged children attending St Bernadette's. Staff at the school referred to the effects of what they termed "dilution", arguing that disadvantaged children benefited from being "surrounded" by better-off peers.

Beth: What's good about this school, although you've got quite a high Pupil Premium, and there's disadvantage in the area, isn't there... the levels of engagement from the children, it kind of works to raise everybody. So in a class you'll have two or three children from that type of turbulent background, but they're surrounded by children with high work ethic or who are from families that push education and that raises the achievement… I think it's that cyclical thing, I think parents choose here because it's outstanding, so the children who come here are from backgrounds of parents who really value education but also I think because there's so much good behaviour it pulls up everybody else. …The balance is right.

Here, we can see that attracting better-resourced parents to the school was implicitly seen by participants as a key protective factor for the disadvantaged students who did attend.

There were some equivalences here and in Gloria's interview, quoted above, that could be viewed as problematic. Gloria used the word "bright" to denote "children in the Catholic sector" whose parents were savvy navigators of the educational marketplace; Beth seemed to imply that a "turbulent background" precluded a "high work ethic". The metaphor of dilution was used independently by two different participants.

Rachel: I think maybe because we're a Catholic school and I don't know, because I don't have anything to do with sort of like the admissions, but maybe, you know, the criteria means that we do get a more diluted cohort of kids.

As I have shown, this wasn't a straightforward point about more privileged children producing more impressive exam results (which can be expected), but an argument that disadvantaged children at the school did better because of this "dilution".

The fact that the immediate geographical area around the school was highly disadvantaged tended to be used to bolster the school's success story. However, as I have explained, the disadvantage within the pupil population did not necessarily reflect that within the neighbourhood of the school. Providing "quality education", as Gloria put it, was the key strategy in ameliorating what St Bernadette's perceived to be community disadvantage. Contrastingly, for staff at CLA poverty in the immediate geographical context was a far more pressing factor.

St Bernadette's, as I have explained above, was in a different phase of its improvement/effectiveness journey to CLA – and perhaps the ways in which the schools approached this journey were fundamentally different. St Bernadette's was very well-established as a successful school and used this status to support a lucrative Teaching School, which in turn allowed for the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff, and the deployment of extra resources. In a way, St Bernadette's just by *being* St Bernadette's was, according to staff, a way of mitigating community disadvantage for its disadvantaged minority. CLA, on the other hand, *came to be* as a response to community need, constructing itself around its critical mass of disadvantaged pupils.

Working with parents: contrasting attitudes

Having considered the ways in which St Bernadette's and CLA connected the type of education they provided with the needs of their pupil communities, I will now contrast

attitudes held towards parents in each school. Carol, who worked very closely with the parents of the most disadvantaged children at St Bernadette's, expressed the importance of engaging with parents in a non-judgemental way.

Carol: It's just hard work and just trying hard to engage parents, just letting them know that, that we're not here to judge them, we're not here to criticise their parenting or their lifestyle… It's not all about pointing fingers… It's about what we can do to help and try and make it a little bit easier for them.

Carol seemed here to promote a non-punitive perspective based on "engagement" and "help", and an absence of criticism or negative judgement. However, she stopped short of advocating an explicitly asset-focused approach where parents' knowledge and skills are actively sought out; there was a sense that parents' "parenting" or "lifestyle" *could* be open to critique but that this was restrained. Lizzie, the leader of the Family Partnership Team at CLA, made a similar point but took it beyond a lack of negative judgement. Instead, she suggested an approach where the school deliberately sought the assets held by families.

Lizzie: It's not about making anybody feel that –. You know, everybody's on the same level, and it could happen to anybody, anytime, couldn't it, some of these situations and circumstances that people find themselves in… But we're all about ensuring that we, you know, we're on the same level as the parents, there's absolutely no kind of looking down on anyone or anything like that… We know you've got the expertise here on your family, and we've got some expertise around what's in the community and what we can do in school. Let's come together.

Much recent scholarship (for example Peck 2021) has promoted an "asset-focussed" approach to education in contrast to a "deficit" approach; schools or pedagogies which subscribe to the former will avoid attributing academic underachievement to inherent deficits within students, their families and their neighbourhoods, instead looking to build on positive attributes. Lizzie characterised parent conferences as a meeting of experts, viewing the knowledge held by parents as a key resource that could be used for the benefit of the child in school. Lizzie expresses parity through the idea of "levels": "everyone's on the same level… we're on the same level", and this is reinforced in her insistence that "there's absolutely no kind of *looking down* on anyone". This is a very visual manifestation of Fraser's *participatory parity* (Fraser 2000). Lizzie seemed to suggest that parents and school staff came together with mutual regard and respect to make decisions as peers; parents were "vital collaborators" (Ishimaru 2019: 2) or "collaborative participants" in "genuine

partnerships" (Leo et al 2018: 256). It is not possible to say, in the absence of perspectives directly from parents, the extent to which they thought that their participation was "collaborative" or their partnerships "genuine". However, it seemed apparent that the school sought to share power, premised on a valuing of the contributions that could be made by parents. This is a practice aligned with the version of *relational trust* I proposed in the literature review based on shared agenda-setting (Kerr et al 2016).

There were, however, differing attitudes contained within each school. Ben at St Bernadette's favoured a seemingly more didactic approach:

Ben: I think that what we can do as a school is educate parents, which we do in terms of –. I mean very recently, I sent out a document with all the relevant support and information on where parents can turn to if they need more information on various different things.

The idea of "educating" parents here presents a sharp contrast to the mutualistic approach favoured by Lizzie at CLA and to an extent by Carol at St Bernadette's. The "sending out" of a document delineates a clear boundary between home and school, and also a one-sided transmission of knowledge as opposed to the exchange favoured by Lizzie. It is important to view this comment and the attendant analysis in the much broader context of St Bernadette's pastoral system. I do not claim that it exposes a fundamentally didactic or deficit-focused culture, or that information sharing in itself is disempowering (though Ben is certainly not talking about the kind of co-constructed information described by Lizzie at CLA). The (seemingly) contrasting deficit and asset based ways of thinking about parents were evident to an extent in both schools. Sometimes, the two discourses seemed to compete for prominence in one interview.

Lola: When you're dealing with a child, you have all shareholders involved, so those shareholders are student, teacher, parent. And then you can even go as far as governors are shareholders… So when you're lacking one or two, then that is a disadvantage for these students.

In using the metaphor of "shareholders", Lola seems to suggest an equality of *investment* which reflected the tone of her colleague Lizzie. However, Lola then seems to lament a lack of "involvement" from some parents, which she says causes disadvantage. Schools and individuals do not sit neatly on either side of a theoretical asset/deficit binary; these worldviews or discourses assume prominence but rarely dominance. Prominence is nonetheless important, and at CLA there was a sense that the parity-lead approach to

communicating with parents came from a thought-out, critical stance adopted by school leaders in line with their general principles about running a school that aimed to mitigate local disadvantage.

Working with parents: the scope of the school

Both schools, as I will show in the next chapter about work with vulnerable pupils and families, provided a broad range of bespoke support. Children at CLA in particular saw the scope of what their school could do as quite broad. Here, Ana, a Year 8 student at CLA, considered what could be done for a pupil in one of the vignettes who was struggling at school.

Rebecca: What would you do, Ana?

Ana: Erm, I would visit him at home. I would ask if he needs like things to help him… Like, ask his parents if they need anything.

Ana also suggested that the school could provide clothes and food for families that needed them. It was interesting that she thought it would be useful to "ask" the family what they needed, perhaps hinting at the kind of co-created support from CLA described by Lizzie above. When discussing a vignette about a boy whose parents were separated, she suggested that the school could help in improving family relationships.

Rebecca: OK, so how might school help Jayden?

Ana: Probably try and get the dad to get involved with the kid.

Staff at CLA provided a breadth of imaginative support to parents. Cathy, the head of the EAL department, described the support offered to parents newly arrived in the UK.

Cathy: We also run an English class for adults on Thursdays, which has stopped now [due to Covid restrictions], but obviously, as well, we'd invite the parents to come along for that… And we try and see if there's anything at all we can help the family with, for them to settle in… You know, we've helped so many families through different things. You'll know anyway, we go above and beyond at CLA. And we're not just a school, we're a community hub. And that means I've even helped with visa papers for a mother that's been stuck in another

country, I've written to the Minister of Immigration. You know, we just don't stop really, we do everything we can. Not just for the EAL children, for everybody.

Cathy saw CLA as fulfilling purposes beyond those of education: "we're not just a school". There was a sense of pushing at the boundaries of what might normally be done by a school, by reconceptualising CLA as a "community hub", and doing "everything we can". Measures of outcomes by conventional studies of odds-beating schools, as well as by policymakers, necessarily circumscribe these boundaries by focussing on schooling activities which are explicitly aligned with measured outcomes, normally the results of statutory tests. When schools take actions that further not just this narrow conceptualisation of the purpose of schooling, but promote health, wellbeing and non-curricular learning – not just for pupils but for their families – they push at these purposive boundaries. The schools' relationships to these boundaries were shaped by their ideas about what their school was *for* and dictated the breadth of their disadvantage-mitigating activities.

Navigating the boundaries of the school – asserting its purpose and its limits – became more of a challenge over the Coronavirus period. Staff, pupils and parents were involved in ongoing negotiation about what the school should, could and would do. Ben, at St Bernadette's, explained ways in which the boundaries of school responsibility and parental agency had become complicated over the lockdown period, when parents had been tasked with taking on the educational responsibilities normally assigned to the school.

Ben: Ultimately, there's only so much we can do. We can't force parents to act in certain ways. It's not our place to do so ultimately, they're not our responsibility outside of school. And it is more the over reliance, in certain cases, of the school to both teach the child and parent them. We've had parents asking form tutors and heads of year to get their son or daughter out of bed, like literally on the phone, can you speak to such-a-body and get them up out of bed. That's not the school's responsibility.

Ben sought to resist the troubling of the inside/outside school binary and a confluence of the teaching and parenting roles, at a time when the home space became a school space. Ben tried to maintain the conventional boundaries of responsibility. His ideas about agency were echoed to an extent by Keira, a senior leader at St Bernadette's, whom I asked about students and parents who "slip through the net".

Keira: Because people have free will! That's why! Because you can take a horse to water, but you cannot always make it drink.

Here, Ben and Keira at St Bernadette's tried to assert the purposive boundaries of the school, which they conceptualised in tandem with ideas about parental and pupil agency. Keira expressed this almost fatalistically: "people have free will". It seems clear that this "free will" was, in the view of the staff, ideally aligned with the will of the school, with deviation in the exercise of agency seen as problematic. Again, though, the nature of the school/home boundary was conceptualised differently by colleagues in the same school.

Carol: We're here to try the best we can to make things better for the young people in that family and for the younger children that may not be in our school, or for their older siblings that are now in college, and for parents, grandparents, just to improve their quality of life really, and for them to be emotionally secure. If they're not emotionally secure, then they're not going to make academic progress, are they?

At both St Bernadette's and CLA, there was evidence of a broad view of the school's social and moral purpose in supporting a pupil's family. Carol, the Associate Pastoral Director at St Bernadette's, begins here with a statement which seems to articulate a bold moral purpose: "We're here to… make things better". The outcomes she seeks are likewise broad: "improve their quality of life". However, this is eventually justified with a (perhaps inevitable, and perhaps tenuous) link to "academic progress". Carol's account is strikingly similar to that offered by Lizzie at CLA.

Lizzie: We had one dad last year... we put him in touch with a solicitor through one of these organisations, who was providing the free support work for immigration cases. And we took him to those meetings, and we made sure he had the documentation, helped him get the papers and get them copied and things like that. And he kept saying, I can't believe school are doing this for us. But, you know, at the end of the day, if we don't do that for Dad, you know, is that young man going to come out with his GCSE results? Is he going to be able to come to school if he's terrified that he might go home and he's getting deported that night? Or dad's not got the right to work? And so he's being exploited, working under the radar and things like that? Well, you know, that's not good for that student, is it. So if we support Dad to get everything in place, then that's obviously going to impact on his education, isn't it.

This is where a distinction between *proximal* and *distal* odds becomes useful (Conway et al 2021). For the student in Lizzie's example, his proximal odds are impacted by stress and fear, and his distal odds concern a hostile and hard-to-navigate immigration system. Some odds-beating practices would deal only with the proximal odds. Some schools might argue

that this would entail upholding "high expectations" of his behaviour despite stressors at home, and maintaining rigorous discipline and a predictable environment; other engagement with proximal odds could include provision of additional GCSE revision lessons, counselling sessions, or whole-class mindfulness activities to minimise the impact of stress. These approaches have their merits and CLA certainly addressed these proximal causes of disadvantage in various ways. However, the school also engaged with the distal odds experienced by this and other students. School staff addressed the "causes of the causes" (Marmot et al 2020) of the pupil's potential under-achievement by acting as advocates for his father. Again, this indicates a very wide conceptualisation of the school's purposive boundaries.

Some of these distal causes are rather far removed from the quantitatively defined goals of education attainment. I would suspect that there was a moral imperative at play here, and that staff at CLA would have offered support to the family in this example even if there was no conceivable causal relationship with the child's GCSE outcomes. This is an example of the creative use of agency within a post-austerity political landscape of "chaotic centralisation" (Greany and Higham 2018: 12), where the state has abdicated its responsibilities towards the most vulnerable. Academic achievement, and particularly the acquisition of educational capital in the form of qualifications, was of course inseparable from the school's longer term strategy towards "quality of life". However, there was a marked tendency for school staff to be anxious to justify *all* school action with reference to these quantitative outcomes.

Working at scale with communities

Much work with parents was of course highly individualised and responsive to immediate need. I will now examine ways in which St Bernadette's and CLA engaged with their communities – as they perceived them to be – in more strategic and systematic ways. For St Bernadette's, I will examine the role of the Teaching School in promoting "excellence" within the local area and in Catholic schools further afield. Then, I will explore the way that CLA engaged with other schools in its capacity as a Research School, and report on some of the campaigning work undertaken by CLA, along with their attempts to engage other local schools in the pursuit of common goals.

St Bernadette's had a highly successful Teaching School, running its own Initial Teacher Training and Newly Qualified Teacher programmes as well as school improvement consultancy and continued professional development (CPD). Gloria, the Teaching School's strategic leader, described the original motivation for this on the part of Patricia, the erstwhile headteacher.

Gloria: So the reason for taking part in the SPA, the School Provider Arm, and taking a lead in that was, you know, the headteacher's awareness that what she was doing was having an impact on the young people in her care. And she wanted to share that expertise and to share the strategies that St Bernadette's were deploying with other schools in our local area.

This initial engagement, then, seemed spurred by a moral imperative to "have an impact" and share success. Over time – perhaps as the relational landscape among *local* schools shifted as a result of an increasingly competitive educational marketplace – this solidified into a lucrative business model, again a creative exercise of school agency in an environment of "chaotic" autonomy and "competing claims to authority" (Greany and Higham 2018: 12). As discussed in Chapter 5, it is not sufficient to attribute the school's manoeuvring within the local educational marketplace to the exercise of Patricia's agency as a leader (she was no longer the headteacher of the school). The school's institutional agency was a cumulative force arising from the influences of various individuals, policy incentives and local market forces over time.

Much of the Teaching School's work involved its Catholic Collaborative, which constituted five Catholic schools from across the north west of England. All paid the Teaching School for their involvement. The Teaching School was highly commercial in nature, perhaps even verging on occasion towards the mercenary; one trainee teacher I spoke to at CLA was disgruntled that she had been asked to pay to attend a prospective trainee visit day at St Bernadette's. Gloria described the impact of this additional revenue.

Gloria: We're a not-for-profit organisation. But, you know, Teaching School and the money that we bring in pays for additional staff on the ground in St Bernadette's. I think historically, Teaching School has paid for between five and six additional members of staff in St Bernadette's High School, which has a knock on [effect] in terms of smaller class sizes, you know, intervention.

St Bernadette's, Gloria argued, also benefited from being an "outward facing" school. The Teaching School and the High School had a productive symbiotic relationship, with resources accrued by the Teaching School redeployed in the school. This in turn generated the exam results which are essential capital to re-invest into the Teaching School so it had the credibility and status to appeal to its client schools. Furthermore, this income facilitated high-quality, resource-intensive provision such as that in the nurture group.

Gloria did also suggest that an outward-facing moral imperative still remained, but linked this to the school's Catholic values.

Gloria: So I think it's that, that sense of servitude, and service to the system, which we see often in Catholic education, and we're in a privileged position to be a very successful Catholic school that is able to give back more than most.

St Bernadette's was outward facing in a very distinctive way – it traded in a particular kind of expertise, premised on success in an educational "cold spot" and on its distinct Catholic identity. As predicted by Greany and Higham (2018), it was incentivised, as a high-status school, to "package and 'sell' [its] procedural knowledge" (67).

City Learning Academy: the Family Region

The City Learning Academy was a Research School. As explained in the previous chapter, this meant that, like St Bernadette's Teaching School, it was providing traded services to other local schools – examples included briefings about the use of cognitive science in teaching, or training on designing effective professional development. Though the Research School was undoubtedly an important part of the school's infrastructure, it was, perhaps unlike the Teaching School at St Bernadette's, just one vehicle for collaboration with other schools.

The other main way that CLA engaged with other schools was through the area Family Region. This was a collaborative enterprise set up by CLA which involved sixteen other schools and nurseries.

Lizzie: It's a real mixture. We've got two schools that are part of Ocean academies. We've got a Together Academy school in there. We've got some Catholic schools, some Church of

England schools, and some nondenominational schools, community schools as well. So it's a real mixture. It's just all the schools that are working across [the area], we've got about a square mile…

We all share a lot of the same issues, we're working with the same demographic, very often the same families… it was just about, we're all in the same area, very often we have the oldest sibling and you've got the younger one or the nursery's got the little one, and then there's another school there who's got the older ones. It was just about, how can we, you know that the issues that are affecting us all, how can we work together to help to find some solutions to these and just work smarter and pool our resources really… we can do more as a collaboration than we can individually.

There is a clear difference here with the type of cross-school engagement seen at St Bernadette's. All schools which had an involvement with St Bernadette's paid for the privilege through the Teaching School. In contrast, the traded services provided by the Teaching School were only one facet of CLA's work with other institutions. The immediate local area of the school, and the similarities in "demographic", were instead seen as the most important uniting factors. There was no "Family Region" equivalent at St Bernadette's. The cross-school work undertaken by CLA was perhaps aligned, more so that at St Bernadette's, with Hargreaves's original intention that schools in self-improving systems should develop "deep partnerships" on a more equal footing (Hargreaves 2010; Greany and Higham 2018).

Another crucial difference was the lack of financial cost to the participating schools. Resources were "pooled" rather than concentrated towards one "partner".

Lizzie: ...And there was no money involved or anything. We're not saying pay to be a part of it or anything. We're just saying, what can we do if we work together?... And it wasn't done because they're feeder schools.

Lizzie talked me through an example of collaborative working by the schools. Staff from different settings had identified that children missed out on access to green space in the local area. With the help of the local council, the schools created a range of "forest schools" spread across the local area, all of which children at any one of the schools could access. Funding or opportunities from external sources such as grants from charities were shared among the Family Region schools.

Lizzie: There's that recognition that, you know, we live in a community, we work in a community, our school's in a community where there are lots of, you know, external factors that are affecting our students.

This was substantially different to the cross-school engagement seen at St Bernadette's, which was much more transactional, with the Teaching School operating as a business (even if profits were re-invested back into the school). St Bernadette's' Catholic community of feeder Catholic primaries and other Catholic secondaries took precedence over its immediate local area – perhaps because this better reflected its geographically dispersed but denominationally united pupil demographic. CLA, as I have explained, saw itself very much as a local school for local children, so it sought out other nearby schools which were facing similar problems. This sense of local solidarity was not as evident at St Bernadette's.

Because the day-to-day pastoral and pedagogical practices at CLA were conceived as an ameliorating response to local disadvantage, there was a broader engagement with the structural causes of barriers to learning and correspondingly a desire to address these issues with local policymakers. The school led a campaign to highlight to the city's decision makers the problems with "hidden homelessness", and to improve educational provision for homeless children.

Lizzie: And so whilst we might have maybe 10 families who are going through the homelessness system or are in temporary accommodation, or very poor housing, and that's affecting their ability to be able to even get to school… But when you've got 17 schools, who all say, we've got 10 families, you start to think, Well, do you know what, this is big. And this is something that we are in quite a privileged position to understand our families, understand the needs here, and try and one, make things a bit better for them straightaway, certain things we could do. And two, to kind of have a voice and bring this wider. Bring this to the table of the local authority and even wider potentially… we could then take that voice, and we got [the elected mayor of the metropolitan area] to come and meet with us.

Lizzie identified two discrete facets of the school response; the immediate "straightaway" assistance that the school can offer to a homeless family, and the "wider" structural challenge that the school can level at the local authority. Again, the school pushed at its purposive boundaries here to exercise agency in a creative way, using knowledge accrued through the practice of working with other schools. Issues became "big" when they were considered in the local area context, allowing patterns of disadvantage to be diagnosed and addressed. It was not sufficient for CLA to try to "beat" the odds on this systemic issue; there

was activism and awareness-raising to challenge the status quo at a more fundamental level.

Careers

The ways in which both schools approached careers education served as a final window into their conceptualisation of the communities they served, and the outcomes they wanted for their disadvantaged students.

As with other aspects of the curriculum, I saw evidence that pupils at CLA were encouraged to think critically about their own values and futures. When studying the theme of the American Dream in the novel *Of Mice and Men*, a Year 8 class discussed which "dreams" they valued the most – a fast car, a good education, or a big house, for example. The teacher asked whether the children thought it was realistic to say that you can achieve anything if you work hard. Chrissie, the head of careers at CLA, invited ideas during an assembly for ways to shape the "careers curriculum", suggesting again a view towards shared agenda-setting (Kerr et al 2016), valuing contributions made by students.

The careers curriculum highlighted the assets and opportunities in the local area. An assistant headteacher in an assembly (which was not explicitly related to careers) told the children about a well-known author who grew up locally and his message was that it was important to "remember where you come from". The title of one Year 8 careers lesson was "Labour Market Information" and students looked at data about the kind of jobs most available in the local area. The PowerPoint read: "It's very important that you have an awareness of LMI… for your future career… You want to ensure that the careers you have in mind are part of growth industries… that will lead to economic well being for you". Chrissie, who was head of careers at CLA, explained this further.

Chrissie: So lots of them, as you may gather, like to keep local. So it's kind of just to show them what area and what sector and industries are on the up. So that when they come to make the decisions for their post 16 pathways, they're choosing industries and sectors that – there's going to be jobs for them. Which secures their future social and economic wellbeing.

The school actively assisted their pupils to "keep local". This contrasts to other narratives whereby success is equated with movement out of the local area. For example, Anita at St

Bernadette's stated that children should have "aspirations… beyond" the city and the metropolitan area.

A notable feature of the careers curriculum at CLA was that it valued all kinds of work, a kind of "cultural validation" (Dyson and Kerr 2012: 277). When the children in the Year 8 class I observed were asked to guess some common jobs in the city, they suggested cleaners, builders, taxi drivers, teachers, bricklayers, shopkeepers, McDonald's workers, nurses, and restaurant owners. The teacher praised all suggestions. Nonetheless, as with Chrissie's interview quoted above, "economic wellbeing" was also seen as important. The teacher referenced the financial rewards of certain careers: "there's lots of money in coding… there's lots of money in being a good referee".

Chrissie recognised multiple versions of "success" which existed alongside the goal of economic wellbeing.

Chrissie: You are basically teaching them skills so that they can have a purposeful and successful life. That's what it's here for. This whole education system is geared to support them. It's like foundation stepping stones to a successful life. So it's equipping them with the skills so they can access, you know, the type of quality of life that they want after they leave school… everybody has different aspirations. And to compare, say, one child against another, that's totally unfair, because they might be motivated by different kind of, you know, different factors in life.

"Quality of life" is not singular here but plural – there are many ways of achieving it, and "different" aspirations and motivations are recognised and celebrated; this is in line with Wolff and De-Shalit's critique of "monist" or "resourcist" perspectives on disadvantage and social equality (2007). The redistribution of capital is important, but is not the be-all and end-all; human difference is recognised and accommodated (Fraser 2000).

Children at CLA were encouraged to make a "career action plan". Later on, in subsequent years, the Year 8 class would go on "work safaris" and take part in careers fairs.

At St Bernadette's, there wasn't a systematic "careers curriculum" as such. Students met with an external careers advisor. For Ben, who managed much of this provision, intensive intervention needed to be targeted at a small minority of "key pupils" who were at risk of becoming "NEET" (not in education, employment, or training).

Ben: Now like every school we are judged on our population of NEET students… We start the process early on, so at the back end of Year 10, we're already highlighting pupils who could potentially become NEET in 18 months time… And I think that we've been under national and [local authority] averages in terms of NEETs, which is positive… we've got our sort of four or five key pupils that we really want to work with and make sure that they're getting to where they need to go, but we're aware of them. And hopefully we can get them sort of where they want really.

In contrast to the careers curriculum at CLA which encompassed everyone, Ben described a more targeted strategy based on targeting a minority of disadvantaged students. It was interesting that Ben considered the "back end of Year 10" as "early on" to start intervening; in contrast, the careers curriculum at CLA ran from Year 7 all the way through. This is reflective of the schools' contrasting attitudes towards disadvantage – or susceptibility to poorer outcomes -– in its pupil population. CLA viewed its critical mass of students as needing rigorous support and guidance throughout their schooling; staff at St Bernadette's viewed only "four or five" pupils as needing intensive intervention. There was a sense that most students were secure because of the school's history of low NEET percentages and excellent performance in statutory tests.

Negotiating outcomes

To conclude this chapter, I will explain what the above findings signify for the schools' negotiation of *outcomes*.

In general, staff at St Bernadette's conceptualised its community of students and families as comprising parents from the Catholic sector who were ambitious for their children's education, alongside a minority of disadvantaged children from the local area. The school's wider definition of community included other schools locally and in its geographically more disparate "Catholic collaborative", all of whom paid for the services of the St Bernadette's Teaching School. It was important to St Bernadette's that it was *the* outstanding school locally. St Bernadette's managed these community relationships in a way that created a virtuous cycle of desirable outcomes and improved odds. Its excellent examination results and top Ofsted grade attracted well-resourced parents and experienced, talented teachers. The results and reputation of the school also facilitated the functioning of the lucrative Teaching School, which in turn generated more money and prestige for the school, increasing the quality and quantity of employed staff. This had a positive effect on outcomes, completing the cycle. Staff at St Bernadette's argued that these processes, beneficial as they were to everyone involved, served the minority of their cohort who were disadvantaged well.

CLA, on the other hand, saw its community of students and families as experiencing disadvantage disproportionately; as will be elaborated in the following two chapters, its disadvantage-ameliorating work was underpinned by an understanding of disadvantage as very widespread. Its curriculum was catered to the recognition of difference within its community. CLA's stance could be tentatively interpreted as more political or critical: children were encouraged to practise criticality of the curriculum and to contribute knowledge that came from their various backgrounds and experiences. The outcomes valued by CLA when engaging with communities were very broad. CLA was described as a "community hub" aimed at improving the quality of life not just of the students but of their families and other local residents. Engagement with other schools was substantially on a non-profit basis and responsive to perceived need, such as the struggles of homeless families or the lack of local access to green space. Outcomes at CLA were less cyclical; there was perhaps more of a willingness to direct resources in ways that promoted broader community justice – to meet the goals of *redistribution* and *recognition* more broadly (Fraser 2000) rather than only continued academic improvement as aligned with a narrower functionalist focus (Raffo et al

2007). CLA combined more objective goals such as the attainment of good examination grades and economic wellbeing with the recognition of more pluralistic, subjective goals held by their students as individuals.

9 Findings: vulnerable pupils

Vulnerability was the second of the three niches I investigated as part of my nested case study approach. During Phase 1 of my research, when I took a more general overview of the schools, I became aware that staff when asked about disadvantage often talked in terms of "vulnerability". The word "disadvantage" was semantically inextricable from Pupil Premium eligibility; generally, it was used in describing statistical gaps in attainment. I became interested in vulnerability because the concept, as used by staff I interviewed, seemed to reflect more accurately the reality of working day-to-day with children experiencing barriers to learning, health and wellbeing. In both schools, there was a loosely bounded group of children who did not share any kind of demographic profile necessarily but were considered particularly disadvantaged by staff. Nearly always, this was when poverty intersected with other particular challenges – EAL status and turbulent home backgrounds, for example. These challenges were often adjacent to issues of safeguarding and child protection (when children were at risk of – or were experiencing – neglect, abuse or exploitation). A child could be *disadvantaged* without being *vulnerable.* "Vulnerability" denoted a kind of urgency or seriousness that made it distinct as a category within disadvantage more broadly. Vulnerability required intervention of the kind that didn't tend to be featured in the official Pupil Premium strategy – intervention that was generally less (or less obviously) oriented towards measurable academic achievement. Given that this project is about contextual constructions of disadvantage, vulnerability felt like an important niche to explore in more depth.

In line with my three research questions, and to mirror the structure of the preceding chapter, I will separate this chapter into three sections. The first will look at ways in which the two schools understood or constructed vulnerability as a fluid, contextually responsive category. The second will report on schools' responses to vulnerability. The third will present the kinds of success – or *outcomes* – schools valued for their vulnerable students.

Constructions of vulnerability

Thematic analysis of my data led me to identify several important themes around which this discussion about constructions of vulnerability is based. I will begin by exploring poverty, which is, as I have explained previously, integral to disadvantage and also to vulnerability. I will then discuss ways in which the schools located vulnerability within pupils' family circumstances. Finally, I will contrast two ways of assessing vulnerability; the systematised approach favoured at CLA and the sense of "just knowing" evident at both schools but particularly at St Bernadette's.

Poverty

Poverty was a common denominator in most, but not all, cases where children were considered vulnerable. Ben and Steve, teachers at St Bernadette's with responsibilities for pastoral care and Initial Teacher Training respectively, noted that some children at the school experienced poverty.

Ben: Even within a classroom, you've got a diverse set of pupils, you've got pupils from really poor families.

Steve: There is like issues with poverty and there is issues where we know pupils can't afford like food at home.

Steve and Ben are describing here what they considered to be a more extreme and also more unusual form of poverty. At St Bernadette's, as I showed in the preceding chapter, pupils from these "really poor" families were judged to be in a minority among a "diverse" pupil population.

Staff at CLA also characterised more severe poverty by describing some families' inability to afford basics such as food. Simon was the main class teacher of the nurture group at CLA.

Simon: So one of the girls… will, at times, become upset quite early in the morning, sometimes during the first lesson. And more often than not, it's the fact that she's not had anything for breakfast before she's left the house. And that could be because of Mum, or whoever's at home, not being able to afford it…

Lizzie at CLA reported that some families were struggling with housing.

Lizzie: … housing was an issue very often. It was one of the big things which has affected children's education or their ability to come to school. And so... we might have maybe 10 families who are going through the homelessness system or are in temporary accommodation, or very poor housing, and that's affecting their ability to be able to even get to school, or to have, you know, washing facilities and things like that.

Here, Lizzie identified a systemic pattern where the school "often" dealt with families experiencing similar issues connected to poverty. Lizzie was quick to make the connection between this kind of vulnerability and its impact on the education of children affected, particularly their school attendance. The precarity of the position of homeless families, and the potential for their situation to worsen, made their position distinct from families on low incomes more generally. This perhaps explicated the distinction between disadvantage and vulnerability.

Poverty in flux

Poverty is a category in flux. It is very often measured by PP eligibility, but as discussed in the literature review, this is an imperfect measure and often does not reflect a family's most recent circumstances (for example, children in a family who were in receipt of Universal Credit three years ago but have since won the lottery would still be eligible for the Pupil Premium). Sally, a Teaching Assistant at St Bernadette's, explained why the Covid pandemic had made poverty much less predictable.

Sally: Because some parents were thriving but suddenly their job's just gone. They were made redundant and they're saying, but I don't know what I can do. And, of course, it takes so long for benefits to come through, and if you're entitled to benefits, and what they are. And some of the parents had never claimed benefits before and they just didn't know what to do. So I wouldn't say that it was one specific group. It is just different ones. And some of them you would never have thought that that family would struggle. And they did.

Again, precarity was a significant factor in the example given by Sally here; sudden loss of parental employment could render a child or a family vulnerable, even if they were from the majority section of pupils who were not previously considered "disadvantaged". In her

interview, Sally was particularly reluctant to name a specific "group" which experienced vulnerability and emphasised its unpredictable nature. This corresponds with Wolf and De-Shalit's argument that precarity is itself a disadvantage (2007).

Even aside from Covid, Lizzie at CLA recognised the limits of categories such as PP and FSM in giving a true picture of a family's circumstances. Poverty was unpredictable within individual families, but also an attribute in flux in that did not lend itself to easy categorisation.

Lizzie: So obviously, poverty is quite, you know, that's probably the first thing you notice. We've got, I'm not sure about the biggest, but it's, you know, a very high number of students on free school meals or Pupil Premium. But that's not always the best indicator, because we then also have families who are not on free school meals, but you know, on minimum wage and actually worse off sometimes, because they don't get any support with the free school meals and stuff like that.

Lizzie identified poverty as being widespread in the pupil population, and this was supported by the statistical profile of the school. However, not all poor pupils were captured by the Pupil Premium metric. Lizzie's view would be supported by the findings of a 2018 study which showed that some poorer children may not qualify for free school meals because their circumstances are not persistent -– often because they have self-employed parents with unpredictable incomes (Taylor 2018). Vulnerability could also be found in the "gaps" where a family was *not* identified as "disadvantaged" and therefore not eligible for support.

Poverty as inhibiting academic outcomes

Poverty in both schools was often constructed in relation to its effect on students' ability to conform to school expectations of dress and behaviour. As seen above, Lizzie from CLA emphasised that unsuitable housing "affected children's education or their ability to come to school"; the outcomes of more extreme poverty were still framed within the goals of schooling. Poverty, as well as disorganisation and turbulence at home, could mean that children did not eat breakfast before school (as mentioned by Simon, above). Lily, a pupil at St Bernadette's, explored this problem in one of the vignettes and expressed concern about its impact on the fictional student's ability to achieve academic success.

Lily: He might not be able to do as much work as he could because he's not eating the correct things.

It is interesting that Lily framed nutrition in terms of "correctness" here; for her, there was a way of eating which would best equip a child to "work" optimally at school. Poverty was a barrier to dressing and performing "correctly" – in ways which aligned with the agenda of the school – and this could compound its negative effects.

Staff from both schools emphasised uniform, school shoes and equipment when discussing resources that families struggled to afford, but this was particularly prominent at CLA, as Lola explained.

Lola: And then you've got your disadvantaged financially for, for example, PE kit, uniform. So one thing that you'll notice, if ever you do the first day back after summer, is the amount of lack of new uniform. So I know in a lot of other schools, a new year means a new uniform… fresh white shirt, new blazer, new shoes. That's not the case for a lot of our students. It's different. It's the same shirt, same shoes, same tie, same blazer that they may have grown out of, trousers they've grown out of.

Lola implicitly stated here that students at CLA were particularly likely to experience the kind of poverty which made purchasing new uniforms difficult – deprivation was more acute than it was "in a lot of other schools"; CLA was "different". Poverty was seen as widespread; it was highly visible. Though staff at St Bernadette's may have tried to argue that their school is in a "cold spot" of deprivation, no member of staff there could have described their pupil population in these terms.

Shoes were also mentioned by King, a pupil at CLA, when discussing a vignette.

King: Cos in school, yeah, you always wear black shoes. So they might struggle to get black shoes.

In UK schools, uniform can be a hotly contested issue; strict uniform policies are seen as a way of communicating high standards and laying the framework for an orderly atmosphere and good pupil behaviour. Uniform is part of the "symbolic architecture" of the school (Symes and Preston 1997: 47). It is an aspect of "governmentality", through which "the disciplinary regimes of schools are inscribed on students at the level of the body", rendering students "visible bearers of the school's institutional identity" (Saltmarsh 2007: 348). Compliance with

uniform policies is often seen as compliance with other goals of schooling, especially good behaviour and academic achievement. Though uniform was approached sympathetically at CLA, there was still a sense that an incomplete or untidy uniform undermined a student's ability to conform to the standards of the ideal learner.

Intersections

In this project, I have defined disadvantage broadly in terms of intersections: usually, the way in which poverty combines with one or more other pertinent "categories" of disadvantage in ways which compound its effects. This was also true of the more acute category of *vulnerability*. There was a huge range of these intersecting factors. Here, I will give the examples of EAL status, the social stigma associated with poverty, family breakdown, poor health and bereavement.

Where parents or students did not speak English, this could inhibit communication between home and school, which perpetuated some of the problems around poverty – especially around uniform, as discussed above. Support from school could be slower, as explained by the main teacher of the CLA nurture group.

Simon: He didn't have a pair of school shoes. So he was wearing trainers. And it creates issues… And yeah, due to the family being quite hard up they couldn't sort of get him a pair of school shoes. So we had to, it took us a while to get the point across because unfortunately mum and dad have English as an additional language so it took us a while…

Here, the demands of the school – that children must wear a particular kind of shoe – seem to aggravate the issue of poverty and indeed the complicating factor of family EAL status; Simon went on to explain that the pupil in question became "down" about the fact that staff were always telling him off about his shoes. In such cases, where support was not as appropriate or timely as it could have been, practices within the school could *exacerbate* odds such as poverty. As I will show in the next section, intervention in many cases mitigated the kinds of odds faced by a student of EAL parents.

Dylan, a student at CLA, suggested that an inability to afford equipment might be an additional barrier for EAL learners who also experienced poverty.

Dylan: Nah, if she's poor, yeah, she can't get a phone and she can't use a translator.

Poverty could present a range of problems aside from those associated with food and clothes. In addition to poverty interacting with other risk factors as per the traditional meaning of "intersectionality", different *consequences* of poverty could intersect to compound vulnerability – especially the affective consequences of poverty (Mazzoli Smith and Todd, 2019). This concern was most pertinent in the focus groups with pupils. Ana, another student at CLA, reflected on these affective dimensions as well as poverty's practical consequences when discussing a child from one of the vignettes.

Ana: If she was poor? Because she wouldn't eat as much. She'd like cry and be upset about it.

Whilst Ana suggested that poverty was intrinsically upsetting, Chloe, a student at St Bernadette's, seemed to worry about the perceptions of other students. It is pertinent that issues such as bullying connected to poverty were only mentioned at St Bernadette's, where poverty was experienced by a much smaller minority than at CLA. Again, the material consequences of poverty (not having the correct uniform, for example) intersect with the affective and social consequences.

Chloe: She still could like get called nasty names and bullied at school if she looks like she's struggling for money a bit. And she could get a bit like bullied.

Poverty could also correspond chronologically with other vulnerable points in a child's life, such as domestic abuse or family breakdown – another kind of *intersection.*

Carol: But now we know those parents have parted, we know there is a need for maybe some support with benefits or with housing or with, she now needs to move the children because she doesn't have transport to get her youngest child to school.

Carol, at St Bernadette's suggested an *anticipatory* construction of vulnerability; an incident of domestic abuse which led to parental separation created further disadvantages, linked to poverty. The situation Carol described here illustrates a "bundle" (Kerr et al 2014) or "cluster" (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007, Ainscow et al 2016) of vulnerability. These factors do not just intersect with but also compound one another (Kerr et al 2014).

The systemic consequences of long term poverty could also lead to other issues such as poor health, which Lizzie, at CLA, reported lead to higher rates of bereavement.

Lizzie: That's another one, health and bereavement. We have some of the highest levels of heart disease and things like that in the country here… and we've got the highest level of all-age all-cause mortality as well. So more children are affected by losing not just grandparents, but very often parents or siblings.

Lizzie was highly attuned to the demographic challenges in the immediate local area, which were particularly pertinent at CLA because the pupil population tended to be drawn from a smaller radius around the school. This kind of *knowing* made it possible to spot patterns of potential vulnerability. I would distinguish these two types of anticipatory constructions. Carol at St Bernadette's anticipated particular challenges for an individual family based on their unique set of circumstances. At CLA, Lizzie's anticipatory construction of vulnerability applied at cohort level, because disadvantage and vulnerability was more widespread at that school.

Vulnerability without poverty, and disadvantage without vulnerability

Finally, it is important to note that, though poverty was a very common factor in the unique sets of circumstances of each child labelled "vulnerable", it was not seen as essential – this was particularly pertinent at St Bernadette's, where a smaller cohort experienced poverty*.* This argument was made by Ben, the pastoral director at St Bernadette's.

Ben: And I think I would be careful to make a direct causation between sort of money and pastoral issues because I've dealt with families that are fine financially, but the emotional relationship between parent and child, or the sort of, there's other issues within the household other than just finances and I think that we need to be cautious in terms of saying that pupils are disadvantaged strictly because of money.

Ben's comment here need not undermine the strong correlation at population level between other intersecting "issues" and poverty. Schools of course responded to individual vulnerability or need as it arose irrespective of economic circumstances. However, on a cohort level, both schools understood poverty to be an important factor when assessing and responding to vulnerability.

Conversely, though, poverty in itself was not necessarily a predictor of vulnerability.

Carol: I'm pretty sure that there are a large number of young children, young people in our school that are disadvantaged, but they continue to thrive and make good progress.

Carol's comment here underscores the distinction I have made between vulnerability and disadvantage. *Disadvantage* as a category is seen by schools as a risk factor for poorer outcomes on a statistical or population level, but these outcomes are not inevitable; children *can* thrive. *Vulnerability* is a category usually reserved for children whose circumstances *are* affecting them and their education negatively.

Family circumstances

Both schools, then, constructed a category of vulnerability which was premised – albeit loosely, flexibly, and non-exclusively – on poverty. But not *all* children experiencing poverty, and certainly not all children eligible for PP, were considered vulnerable. Vulnerability lay mostly in the intersections between poverty and other circumstances.

Involvement of external agencies

Where there is a safeguarding or child protection concern (a concern that an identified child is suffering or likely to suffer serious harm), schools must interact with other agencies (most often social care) to promote the welfare of the student. At St Bernadette's and CLA, the fact that a child was known to social services was often a key factor in their categorisation as "vulnerable" by the school. Rachel said that the pastoral team at St Bernadette's identified children as vulnerable who "have some kind of interaction with social workers". Carol's "vulnerable list" was largely informed by this designation.

Carol: So I've got all of the Looked Afters, all of the Child in Need. Any children that are on Child Protection, or any children that have a social worker. Some of them weren't at Child in Need, but they still have some social care involvement.

By "Looked Afters", Carol is referring to children in the care of the Local Authority. "Child in Need" is a legal status where children are considered to need Local Authority involvement to promote their health or development. These designations necessarily rank vulnerability, labelling more serious cases as such (for example, "some social care involvement" implied a less serious situation than a "Child in Need" label). Children moved up and down the scale

according to changes in their circumstances. In the upcoming section about school responses to disadvantage, I will explore ways in which the schools negotiated these external categorisations and ways in which this expressed their *knowing* about vulnerability in their particular pupils.

Chaos

At St Bernadette's, other disadvantaging circumstances were notably and consistently characterised as "chaos".

Steve: We also have pupils who have very hectic lives outside of school, who are sort of chaos navigators in their own lives outside of school.

Carol: It could be that it's a noisy house, it could be that there are visitors calling late at night.

For Beth, a classroom teacher at St Bernadette's, familial "chaos" could interact with special needs such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) to produce cumulatively disadvantaging effects. In the example she gave, this is where turbulence at home could mean that a special need was not properly treated.

Beth: In my experience in disadvantaged, chaotic backgrounds… it might be because of the chaos they don't get medicated properly and they're not treated properly…

Staff at St Bernadette's were proud of their school's calm, orderly atmosphere. Students whose home lives did not align with the character of the school in this respect were seen as particularly disadvantaged. The "chaos" of vulnerable children's lives was contrasted to the calm and security of the school, which will be discussed later as a response to disadvantage.

Other circumstances

In both schools, staff mentioned a wide range of circumstances which may cause vulnerability. As mentioned above, some of these corresponded to safeguarding or child protection issues. Circumstances acknowledged in both schools included family ill health or bereavement, especially over the Covid period; students who had to care for younger siblings or other family members; poor mental health; parental substance misuse; and

domestic conflict. These circumstances interact which each other and with poverty to produce a vulnerability profile, as explained by a student at CLA.

Ana: ...some children grow up in a bit different backgrounds, like and their parents might be drunk and stuff… I'm looking at the bigger picture, man… Some people, they have kids, and they just leave them… Like parents get married and then divorce and then separate the kid. And the kid doesn't see his dad…

Ana articulated a "bigger picture'' with a complex web of risk factors, anticipating vulnerability at various points. As with poverty, these circumstances were often conceptualised in relation to their likelihood to inhibit learning – here by a pupil and by a teacher at CLA.

Worth: Maybe it's affecting his work because his mum and dad are fighting.

Lola: And then obviously, you've got the home life…. if something happens at home… You'll have the either anger, you'll have upset. It can vary. And then obviously, these feelings if they've obviously witnessed something at home, or you know, if parents are arguing 24/7, it's having an impact on their learning.

It is also noticeable from Lola's reflections above that vulnerability will present differently for each pupil even in similar circumstances. As discussed in the literature review earlier, the timing of events in a child's development is important (Eriksson et al 2018). Simon, also at CLA, echoed this idea.

Simon: We've got pupils who have got very turbulent backgrounds at home, but they don't show any sort of behavioural issues, they're in line with their peers academically. But more often than not, if there is trouble at home, they will sort of display troublesome issues within school.

Here, there are two outcomes inhibited by "turbulent backgrounds": appropriate school behaviour and academic attainment in line with peers.

Parents

Children could be constructed by the schools as "vulnerable" in connection to a lack of engagement or support from parents. This was a particularly prevalent characterisation at St Bernadette's.

Carol mentioned "issues around parenting and boundaries in the family home"; Keira expressed concerns about a child who had "nearly zero home engagement with his education". Steve said that children were particularly disadvantaged "whose parents won't chase things and who will accept things or not even know there are issues". At times, vulnerability was constructed as a misalignment between parenting and the goals and values of the school. To repeat Ben, the pastoral director at St Bernadette's:

Ben: Pupils are the most disadvantaged when parents aren't necessarily parenting correctly.

The idea expressed by Ben of parental "correctness" is independent from broader structural issues affecting parents such as poverty or poor housing. It is worth remembering the point made earlier, that Ben located his view of disadvantage within the "relationship between parent and child" or "within the household" and resisted a view of disadvantage premised entirely on poverty. A similar view was expressed by Lola at CLA.

Lola: Students… are disadvantaged due to… maybe their lack of parental guidance. So you might find that some students don't have parental support or parental guidance to guide them in the right way. So that then can cause a disadvantage with their education because they come in actually lacking goals, if that makes sense.

Systematising vulnerability

Though statutory systems such as PP were only tangentially used to determine "vulnerable" status, both schools did seek to systematise this categorisation to varying degrees. I use the word "systematise" to denote the schools' attempts to anticipate, identify, record and share information about vulnerability – to take some kind of whole-school approach. Systematic anticipation of vulnerability could involve the obtaining of information from primary schools, as explained by Chrissie at CLA.

Chrissie: Because we do have quite good relations with the primary schools, so when they come in any information is basically forwarded to us. So we do know a lot about these kids before they come, which is to our advantage.

CLA had a linked "Primary Academy" which further facilitated the sharing of information about pupil "odds". *Knowledge* here is portrayed as an *advantaging* factor, on the school level. Another institutionalised opportunity for assessing vulnerability for children who joined the school later on was admissions meetings, especially for new arrivals to the UK.

Cathy: I meet with the family when they're doing their admission meeting. And I try and find out as much as I can about them, you know, what country have they come from, have they come from a conflict? Is there a civil war going on? You know, who are the children's carers, because it's not always their parents that are looking after them, some children are sent to live with grandparents and things like that…. And at that interview, a lot of other stuff comes out, like whether this family need free school meals, lots and lots of different things that we help with before education even starts.

Staff at CLA were on the look out for vulnerability indicators, consciously making opportunities to assess for these kinds of disadvantages – including those that may be missed by statistical indicators. They consciously made space for "other stuff" to come out, demonstrating receptiveness to a wide spectrum of circumstances in which children might be vulnerable. There were some acute pastoral needs which *preceded* "education" in urgency and importance; these barriers to health, wellbeing and relationships were addressed before, and separately to, any barriers to learning, centring the best interest of the child (Cummings et al 2011), though of course eventual educational attainment depended on this too. Staff at St Bernadette's, by contrast, were by their own description more "reactive" (a word used separately by both Keira and Ben).

The "tracker"

It was particularly at CLA that more systematic ways of tracking vulnerability were evident. Lola, a Head of Year, explained how she sought to identify and respond to vulnerability based on ATL (Attitude to Learning) scores.

Lola: Then you look at, actually the three students in yellow, they've got a low ATL based on their attendance. You'd look at how you combat that, and what support would be put in place. This data would then be used to create a support group. It's saying that basically everything we do is data based.

As Lola stated, CLA was a particularly data-rich environment and this was particularly evident in its approaches to disadvantage. CLA had developed a pastoral "tracker" which followed every single student's attainment, attendance and behaviour, as well as their exposure to risk factors such as bereavement, homelessness and chronic health conditions, based on rigorous research into adverse childhood experiences. When a "dip" in a student's attendance or performance at school was combined with concerns about these vulnerability factors, they were said to reach a "tipping point" on the tracker. A holistic programme of support with intensive involvement from the pupil's family would then be put into place.

Lizzie: That's when we'd say right, you've kind of tipped on our tracker and you become one of our… families… So they're like our tracker cohort, which is a bit more refined, a bit more specific. So everybody would get support with all those other things anyway. But when you start to tip on those, it comes a bit more real targeted intervention.

The "tracker" was therefore by its nature both anticipatory and intersectional – it was a highly systemic way of knowing about disadvantage in the pupil population. There was a universal offer of support for "everybody", which probably means the disadvantaged critical mass. Vulnerability was a more "specific" category, though. This corresponded with the view explored above that *disadvantage* became *vulnerability* when children could not thrive in school due to their circumstances. It is interesting to note that Lizzie, like Carol at St Bernadette's, used the first person possessive pronoun here – but she referred to "*our*… families" and not "*my* families", perhaps reflecting the fact that this kind of work at CLA was done more systematically by a broader team, in contrast to Carol working largely alone.

"Just knowing"

There are, then, indicators schools looked for to suggest vulnerability – notably severe poverty and the fact of social care involvement, as well as a range of other factors. However, it was striking in both schools, but particularly at St Bernadette's, that staff relied on a kind of intuition or intangible "knowing" to be able to categorise a child as vulnerable.

Carol described providing support "if the pastoral team feel there is a need" and "on the basis that the heads of houses know the families". Rachel described the way that vulnerable children were identified during the Covid pandemic at St Bernadette's to access provision while school was closed for most pupils.

Rachel: And so right at the start of lockdown, our pastoral team went through all of the pupils on roll that were identified as vulnerable, whether that's because they have some kind of interaction with social workers, or if you've got an Education and Health Care Plan or some other kind of need, and or just through knowing that they are going through a particularly tough time… Yeah, and as the weeks have gone by, you know, the list has changed, more pupils have been added. And as, you know, our pastoral team have contacted parents, some parents who were finding it really challenging. So there's one pupil in particular, who's been coming in for the last sort of four weeks, he wasn't on the original list. He's not identified as vulnerable in the traditional sense on any kind of school platform. However, when we contacted home, mum was really struggling.

Rachel's narrative here crystallises the key feature of this vulnerability category: it is heavily informed by external identifiers such as social care involvement or special needs, but crucially supplemented by just *knowing* based on a child's unique set of circumstances – that they are going through a "tough time". The category of vulnerability thus shifts over time to reflect changing needs: "the list has changed". Even where a child did not show up on the usual "platforms" of statistical disadvantage indicators, they could be considered vulnerable based on their unique set of circumstances.

Likewise, Carol at St Bernadette's said that she did not automatically consider children not to be vulnerable if they were no longer involved with social services.

Carol: So I've kept hold of them because I've got that relationship with the parents, so I've kept them. And that's my group really… Yeah, and some of them since lockdown have come down from social care.

Carol used her discretion to continue considering some children as vulnerable if this seemed appropriate. This was informed by a meaningful dialogue with parents within carefully cultivated relationships; constructions of vulnerability were to an extent co-created with parents, as in the example given by Rachel above. *Relational trust* is at work here, defined as sharing power to set agendas (Kerr et al 2016). Staff sought to place trust in parental accounts of their families' own circumstances and needs, even if these did not align with top-down indicators such as social care status or PP eligibility.

Carol spoke about the kind of "instincts" that she used.

Rebecca: …how do you know if a child is vulnerable? Or if they're differently vulnerable as a result of these changing circumstances?

Carol: I think you've just got to go hand on heart. You've just got to go with your gut instincts on it really, haven't you? I try my best to speak with the parent/carer and to speak with the child as well.

Again, liaison with families and students, and a meaningful, rich knowledge of individual circumstances, enabled Carol to make these decisions. Ben, also at St Bernadette's, stated that there were multiple pathways into identifying vulnerability. Often these involved input from the parent or pupil, perhaps indicating a movement away from purely "exogenous" agenda-setting (Kerr et al 2016).

Ben: It could be a classroom teacher notices something slightly off, and they speak to the form tutor or the head of year about that. And it could be that parent rings in… there is multiple ways that that can happen… a lot of the time it's the pupil themselves confiding in a trusted member of staff and saying, Look, I'm feeling this. I'm not quite feeling my normal self… obviously, a lot of pastoral care is reactive.

This idea of staff just "knowing" when something is "slightly off" was also reflected at CLA.

Lizzie: Sometimes it might just be a demeanour, the child's demeanour, or you know, about the way they're dressed, or they're not in the right shoes or something. And it just picks up and it leads to a conversation.

Schools, then, considered a wide range of indicators to construct a "vulnerable" cohort. At times this was done systematically, especially at CLA. However, staff also relied on an in-depth "lived" knowledge of families' particular circumstances to identify vulnerability where the conventional indicators did not apply. These "subjugated" knowledges – as described by Foucault (1980: 81) – provided a counterpoint to the "functionalist coherence or formal systematisation" of blanket policies such as the Pupil Premium.

Responses to vulnerability

Having outlined the ways in which vulnerability was identified, I will now show what was done to ameliorate vulnerability, and how this differed between the schools. In sections that will elaborate on those above, I will first focus on poverty and ways in which this was addressed. I will then explore the holistic approaches taken in both schools involving work with external agencies and the whole-family approach. Finally, I will contrast more systematic approaches to vulnerability with less tangible, more intuitive responses, corresponding with the idea explored above of "just knowing" when a child is vulnerable.

At St Bernadette's, vulnerable children became "Carol's children", or their families "Carol's families".

Carol: My families are, I've probably got about almost 40 families a week that I'm in contact with.

Carol had general oversight for "her" children and families and served as a bridge between home and school. Carol had broad professional discretion about who "her" group comprised; as I explained above, it was expected that this would include children with social care involvement, but Carol expanded this criterion where appropriate. At the Monday morning briefing at St Bernadette's, all staff were informed of any additions to the "vulnerable" list – for example, children who had been recently bereaved, or who were returning to school after a period of non-attendance.

At CLA, responsibility was more diffuse and the vulnerable category was more systematic. To repeat Lizzie's words (she is quoted at greater length above): "That's when we'd say right, you've kind of tipped on our tracker and you become one of our… families… So they're like our tracker cohort". Interventions were then managed by a permanent specialist department within the school which had strong links to other community organisations: the Kitchen Cupboard Project food bank, local housing associations and the local health authority. Intervention could include, for example, the provision of counselling for parents struggling with bereavement; support for parents to seek more suitable housing for their families; or home visits to drop off food and "check in" with parents. As I have already mentioned, over a third of the total Pupil Premium budget at CLA – by far the biggest share – was allocated to improving school attendance for disadvantaged pupils. CLA operated on the premise that this could not be done without significant interventions into the home lives

of pupils and families, where necessary. Therefore, this section of the budget supported this wide spectrum of activities.

Responding to poverty

I will demonstrate differences in responses to poverty – which as I have shown is one of the key components of vulnerability – by considering how the two schools dealt differently with two categories of resources: general essentials for families such as food and utilities, and resources deemed necessary for participation in schooling such as uniforms and textbooks.

Food and essentials

Schools of course have a duty to provide free school meals for eligible children, but both St Bernadette's and CLA went beyond this obligation when targeting and delivering support for their most vulnerable pupils. In line with the fluid conceptualisations of vulnerability expressed above, support was provided based on perceived need and not purely on proxy indicators.

Carol: Breakfast club, we provide a breakfast for young people who come into school and do homework in the morning, so they can have something to eat… If the pastoral team feel there is a need, then we will kind of guide somebody to go along to that.

Again, Carol emphasises the importance of a less tangible "feeling" of need, and the role of a pastoral team which has close knowledge of individual children and families. However, just as vulnerability was constructed (as above) in conjunction to barriers to performing academically – not eating the "correct things" might stop you from doing the "work" – the breakfast provided at St Bernadette's here was apparently contingent on attendance at the homework club; again, the school sought to align their interventions with the overall goal of academic attainment.

Children at St Bernadette's were aware that school provided food for those who needed it.

Chloe: I remember last year especially with like Covid, they were offering like free like breakfast items like cereals and bagels. And if he's saying there's nothing to eat for breakfast in the house then school like could offer. And also school does free meals so he could get that.

Need was exacerbated over the Covid lockdowns but also shifted in its nature. Free school meals were provided by means of vouchers, which, according to staff at St Bernadette's, created two problems to which they had to find solutions. Firstly, the bureaucracy surrounding the issue of vouchers couldn't keep up with the unpredictability and severity of need.

Keira: We had families who literally didn't have money for food. So we did a call out for staff to donate non perishable food and we were putting food parcels together that members of staff were dropping off at houses. So I think in terms of community and support, we're doing it but we're having to be very reactive to the needs that are immediately put in front of us.

Similarly, Ben reported that staff had stepped in personally at St Bernadette's to assist where need was particularly urgent.

Ben: We had a parent during lockdown who couldn't afford to pay for the electricity, and one of the pupil services staff gave money out of her own pocket to do that. Now, obviously, that's not something that we can be doing really, and obviously that's not sustainable. And that was kind of a spur of the moment thing. But I think that's the kind of culture that we've got here is that if a pupil or a parent does have a genuine issue, that we're not going to let them suffer.

The sudden surge in acute need due to the Covid crisis clearly presented a particular challenge at St Bernadette's. There was no existing infrastructure for assisting poorer parents on a large scale. CLA had existing links with food banks and other community organisations, but St Bernadette's had to rely on the ad hoc generosity of their staff acting in a personal capacity. As Ben pointed out, these measures were not "sustainable". The "culture" of care described here was general goodwill and individualised altruism; there was no existing culture of wraparound support for families as there was at CLA. It fell to the generosity of staff members at St Bernadette's to make up food parcels or pay electricity bills. As Keira noted that this was "reactive"; it was not anticipatory.

Secondly, parents sometimes lacked the technological or administrative capacity to make use of the government support available.

Carol: So I've done quite a lot of work trying to help to make sure the families have got the free school meal vouchers that they're entitled to. Because they've struggled, some of them

struggle to go on to the email and open it and activate it. So a few of my families have been sending the emails to me. And I've been processing them and delivering them to the houses.

Carol used her in-depth, highly personal knowledge of "her" families and their needs to ensure that gaps between bureaucracy and homes were bridged effectively. Again, Carol seemed to be acting as an innovative solo agent here rather than co-ordinating or being part of a broader, more systematic response.

As at St Bernadette's, teachers at CLA did sometimes contribute personally.

Simon: I just sort of keep a regular stock of breakfast biscuits and breakfast bars in the classroom, and try and subtly sort of give them to her.

Lola: There's not just myself that will bring, you know, breakfast type things into school, there are countless other teachers in school who bring in Nutrigrain bars or whatever it may be to sort of help the kids that they know most need it.

Simon and Lola, however, are describing the actions of themselves and others at times *other* than the Covid lockdown; this was "regular" and "countless" members of staff did it. No teacher at St Bernadette's said that they kept food at school to give to hungry pupils. This was indicative of the differing levels and severity of need between the two schools.

The situation at CLA during the Covid lockdown was different in an important way: the school had from its inception provided systematic assistance to poorer families. Most notable was the Kitchen Cupboard Project (a pseudonym), a charity with a branch based at the school, which provided weekly groceries at a very low price.

Chrissie: We do Kitchen Cupboard as well with people at £7 and they get big bags of shopping, you can have like steak and stuff in there. And you know, fruits and things like that, rice, pasta. All good quality stuff.

At CLA, as at St Bernadette's, children when discussing the vignettes showed an awareness that the school was able to help when families were struggling for food.

King: The school can like give them food. So like our school yeah, they give food to the poor… Because this school, yeah, has like food that can go to people that don't have any.

Alexandre: School would give him vouchers for like food and stuff like that.

Again, CLA took a systematic, anticipatory approach, providing affordable food on a permanent, organised basis to a large cohort. Mark, a teacher at CLA, pointed out that the school was well-placed to provide this kind of support during the pandemic, because the infrastructure was already in place.

Mark: Obviously the food packages that they've done consistently, not just now, they've done that forever.

This contrasted to the situation at St Bernadette's during the pandemic, where there was less precedent for organising this kind of support at scale institutionally.

Learning resources and uniform

A final area which is useful for articulating the different approaches to alleviating poverty between the schools is the provision of resources such as stationery and textbooks.

Both schools provided uniform, stationery and textbooks to those in need but this was administered very differently, articulating the schools' differing approaches to alleviating poverty. At St Bernadette's, these items were distributed on a reactive basis, based on insider knowledge. Rhiannon, the social worker attached to St Bernadette's, recalled an instance when the school provided assistance to a vulnerable child at the intersection of poverty and social care involvement.

Rhiannon: We helped one of the Children in Need, we gave her £30 to contribute to a pair of shoes, so she could actually get in. We didn't want her not to be in just because she didn't have a pair of shoes.

Again, the redress of material poverty here is tied explicitly to the outcome of school attendance (and therefore, it is to be assumed, academic attainment). Uniform is a particularly interesting case because it is a demand -– or a potential barrier -– put in place by the school. Interventions like that described by Rhiannon are therefore aimed at assisting the child to conform to the needs of the school's "disciplinary regime" and "institutional identity" (Saltmarsh 2007: 348, as quoted above). Arguably this blurs the "distinction between acting

in the best interests of the child and acting in the best interests of the school" (Cummings 2011: 53).

Kane, a pupil at St Bernadette's, seemed confident that the school would find a solution for children who struggled to pay for the uniform.

Kane: Sometimes, like, if they don't have a lot of money, school could like help her, help her get uniform and things like that.

Chloe, in a separate interview, expressed a similar idea.

Chloe: I also think with like the struggle of buying like school shoes and that, like schools should try and provide –. Because there's like a lost property and stuff in pupil services. I know there's like a cupboard for like spare skirts and that in case anything happens while you're at school. If they could like give her a pair of school shoes or something to help them.

Both staff and pupil responses at St Bernadette's see these responses as largely *incidental*, necessitating recourse to lost property and the occasional £30. Often the distribution of resources depended on communication with Carol as the figurehead for vulnerable children. The below clearly applied to a small vulnerable minority.

Carol: All of the subject teachers know that if any of my children, who are the vulnerable cohort, if they need anything once they go into Year 9 and they start the GCSEs, if there's any textbooks or resources they need for their subject area they know to let me know and I order them and they go directly to the young people.

The approach at St Bernadette's contrasted with that at CLA, where *all* children received a uniform for free from the school when they joined. Blazers, shirts and skirts did not feature the school badge, meaning that items could be bought more cheaply from a much wider range of retailers. The footwear policy was more flexible; black trainers were permitted as well as traditional school shoes, which meant that children could wear the same shoes in the classroom and for PE lessons. In the cooking lessons at CLA, all ingredients were provided by the school, in contrast to St Bernadette's, where pupils had to bring them from home. Stationery was also provided for all students.

Chrissie: But we also kind of know as well that there will be some kids who will be able to get in stationery, not a problem. But there will be others where it could be a problem. And we

don't want to create that divide where it's embarrassing for the kids who can't. It's more inclusive that way and at least then you're not creating that divide or people being made fun of, do you know what I mean?

Their tactics in addressing vulnerability in this respect, then, was less "reactive" than the approach at St Bernadette's, and rather *anticipated* disadvantage in a less affluent pupil population. It also anticipated the potential affective elements of poverty – discussed in more detail above – which had the potential to pose an additional barrier. Chrissie viewed this as a way to promote good relations among pupils from different backgrounds. Nonetheless, reactive approaches were also used when necessary: when I observed a PE lesson, one child told the teacher that he didn't have a PE kit because it was too small. The teacher reassured him and told him that school would sort it out.

Holistic approaches

As I have explained, poverty is just one dimension of vulnerability (albeit an important one). If conceptualisations of vulnerability within the schools were wide and holistic, so too were responses. By "holistic", I mean responses which took into account a broad range of social, emotional, family and community factors, moving beyond an academics-only focus. Staff mentioned providing bereavement counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT); at CLA counselling had not just been provided to children but also to parents and grandparents. These holistic responses – especially CLA's role as a "community hub" – have already been covered in some detail in the previous chapter about families and communities, but here I will look briefly at the schools' work with external agencies, and their attempts at a whole-family approach to vulnerability. First, however, I will look at the counterpoint to "chaos" as a vulnerability factor as constructed at St Bernadette's.

Counteracting "chaos"

As I showed above, staff at St Bernadette's described vulnerability often as an experience of "chaos" outside of the school. Correspondingly, they characterised the school as somewhere orderly and safe where children could experience respite from the vulnerabilities they experienced when not at school.

Keira: … it's a really safe place… our children who maybe don't have structure and routine at home are often our best attenders because they come to school because this is where they know, these are the rules, this is how people will treat me, I will have this provided for… the consistency and continuity and staffing, so we have quite a stable staff here, means that children feel safe in school…

The structures here make these children feel, I know what I'm supposed to do and where I'm supposed to be… for a child whose home life is chaotic, what attraction could [a chaotic] school give? Because it's not then providing them with the respite mentally or physically.

St Bernadette's had an experienced and stable staff, which Keira identified as contributing to this feeling of safety. This feature was closely linked, as I shall explain later, with the school's status as a Teaching School. From my observations, I could see that the school was largely calm and orderly. Rachel also described the school as a "safe place" and a "safe haven"; Carol used the phrase "safe place" too, and Steve contrasted the turbulent lives of vulnerable children outside school with his perception of their experience within it.

Steve: … this is the part of the day which is their calm bit.

It is interesting that this *characteristic* of the school appeared so strongly across the data as a vulnerability-mitigation factor, in contrast to most other responses which were reactive or anticipatory *actions*. This counteraction of chaos was not so much about something that the school *did*, but something that the school *was*. It depended on certain features of the school such as long-term stability of staff and leaders. The consistently high examination results meant that the school was insulated from pressures to reform or to demonstrate innovation for the sake of it. As I shall explore in more detail later, these ideas about calm versus chaos were consistent with a generally held view that the fact of attending St Bernadette's school in itself was a disadvantage-mitigating factor; St Bernadette's was seen as exceptional in its local area, an oasis of serenity and success in a more "chaotic" local context. It was interesting that there was no parallel claim from the data at CLA, perhaps again reflecting the more porous boundary between the school and its community (explored in more detail above). No children at either school expressed this idea.

External agencies

Both schools described partnership with other local agencies aimed at promoting the welfare of vulnerable children and their families. This was explained by Carol at St Bernadette's.

Carol: Lots of external agencies, it could be the police, it could be Children's Services, it could be family support workers, it could be health… And we have a positive parenting team in [local authority], we have family support workers.

Emily, a pupil at St Bernadette's, demonstrated when discussing a vignette an awareness that the school might be able to liaise with other services.

Emily: Technically the school can contact the government and ask for like a social worker to help Letitia and her sisters.

At CLA, the school of course also worked with external agencies, but there was more of a sense that help was available in-house; for example, the school had access to people who could translate into a wide range of community languages, could signpost to The Kitchen Cupboard Project which was based at the school, and on occasion had purchased furniture and white goods for families. There were also strong informal networks to more unusual sources of support. For example, CLA worked closely with a small group of local monks who fixed children's bikes and ran a project where children made and sold blackberry jam over the summer holidays.

A whole-family approach

I have already explored in some detail both schools' approaches to engaging parents (see the preceding chapter), but for the purposes of overviewing both schools' responses to vulnerability it is important to note here that both schools took a whole-family view. Carol explained how this was done at St Bernadette's.

Carol: So look at them as a family. So look at the whole picture of the young person, we would look at school, how they're doing in school, we'd look at health, we'd look at home circumstances… whether it be a mother or father, auntie, uncle, could be grandparents…
I think if you're not supporting the family, the parents, the carers, then they can't support the young people, can they?

Again at St Bernadette's, pupils seemed to appreciate links between home and school, and saw parents as having a strong influence on their education and wellbeing.

Chloe: They could help by just ringing home really… Like, say like me, if something bad's going on with me, I don't find it hard cos I'm close to my mum, but like if my mum's done something wrong I wouldn't want to say to her, cos I'd feel bad saying it. But if someone else said it, it would feel better.

CLA, as described above, had a specialist department to liaise with families and often invited vulnerable families into schools for longer discussions. Ana, a pupil at CLA, was aware of this.

Ana: His mum should be more involved in him out of school… Like, come to like family meetings and stuff.

Ana also recognised that children could benefit if school provided support for struggling parents.

Ana: … like some parents need help because they might have alcoholism or something.

Staff at CLA were proud of the way that the school conducted these parental meetings, expressing that they were often turning points where important information was uncovered and useful plans were made. Staff ensured that the invitation into school extended to the whole family, that they made ample time and that food was provided. These practices were intended to express *regard* for parents, and, as I demonstrated earlier, a conviction that families could and would contribute positively to setting the educational agenda for their child (Kerr et al 2016). As I showed earlier, a lack of parental engagement was constructed as a vulnerability factor. Both schools sought to mitigate this by seeking to create a comfortable, non-judgemental space to support adults in a young person's life. This went some way towards fostering an improvement in "participatory parity" for these adults, with parents and carers treated as far as possible as "peers" (Fraser 2005).

Addressing vulnerability systematically

Having considered responses to vulnerability from the angle of addressing poverty and then from a more holistic perspective, I will now contrast systemic approaches to addressing

vulnerability with more intuitive or reactive responses. These areas correspond with those in the section above, where I discuss differences between systematising vulnerability and "just knowing".

As I suggested above, more systematic responses to vulnerability were likely to be found at CLA, where more children were considered to be vulnerable, or at risk of vulnerability. Again, many of these pertain more closely to the discussion of families and communities which precedes this chapter; for example, staff at CLA led a campaign aimed at improving facilities for families experiencing homelessness.

An important aspect to mention here, however, is the systematic use of information at CLA. This was at once a way of knowing about and a way of responding to vulnerability; as I have shown, CLA made use of information from primary schools as well as knowledge gathered at admissions meetings. Again, the anticipation of vulnerability meant that there were clear channels for sharing information in order to support children and families.

Chrissie: And then she [a student] came in with a letter, basically saying that over the lockdown, both parents were out of work and they couldn't afford much. And they couldn't afford to get her a new tie. So obviously that information is then passed up to our community team who then kind of will ring home and will see if there's anything we can help with.

The child is not just provided with a new tie – the information about the family's circumstances is, according to established school procedure, "passed up"; need is anticipated and a ready-made support offer is available. Ana, a pupil at CLA, seemed to point to a similar process.

Ana: Like, ask his parents if they need anything.

Rebecca: What might his parents need?

Ana: Like, food, and like, essentials.

Here, the school is seen as proactive; they "ask" parents and then make provisions accordingly. Ana suggested that parents were trusted to co-create solutions to family vulnerability.

CLA's efforts to engage and safeguard vulnerable children over the lockdown period also seemed fairly systematic (given the fast-changing situation). Children who did not have access to technology were seen as at increased risk of vulnerability, and so this was addressed.

Chrissie: What would happen is that we would… fill in online registers. And then you'd see where children who didn't have access to, to technology, you'd see, booklet dropped off, and booklet collected. And we were on a rota, marking.

Pastoral needs were also managed systematically by a team.

… So there are those children that are basically on the radar and that through safeguarding, and obviously, we'd be aware of those. And progress leaders would have been as well. And we do have a pastoral team that do regular check ins with them.

This approach over Covid was indicative of the broader strategy of the school; tracking tools were used to monitor a larger cohort of disadvantaged or potentially vulnerable children. The "check ins" were undertaken by a bigger team rather than just one or two people.

Less tangible/ more intuitive responses

In both schools, however, there was evidence of a kind of *intuitive* response to vulnerability which was unsystematic and far less tangible. This corresponded to staff "just knowing" about when children were vulnerable. It was particularly evident over the Covid lockdown periods, when the usefulness and applicability of normal systems was challenged.

These responses at St Bernadette's could include Carol looking after one of "her" children by having a hot drink and a chat with them at the start of the day.

Carol: And generally, if there is a young person I know I'm working with and I know they've not had anything to eat before they come in, I will personally make them a drink.

The purpose of the vulnerable list being shared with staff, according to Carol, is so that the children can have an "extra little bit of an eye on them"; again, a more abstract response but one which was key to the way that St Bernadette's worked with its vulnerable students.

Family support was likewise "subtle":

Carol: It could be that we work with the families just to give that little bit of extra support to them. So there's lots of ways that we do this, and it's probably quite subtly done, but it is there.

These examples from St Bernadette's contrast with the more systematic approaches at CLA. Words like "personally" and "subtly" did not characterise the approach taken at CLA. Of course responses could be bespoke and sensitive, but in general happened on a much broader scale.

Lockdown: keeping in touch

Over lockdown, Carol spent a lot of time keeping in touch with "her" vulnerable cohort.

Carol: I'm phoning every week, I'm speaking to my families at least once a week, probably twice a week, depending on the need. It could be that I speak to a family three or four times. I use emails, I use FaceTime occasionally.

Rachel: On the occasions where parents are saying that they're finding it a struggle for various reasons, we can offer further support… sometimes it might just be a home visit and, you know, seeing a friendly face, or having a conversation with a teacher on the phone to reassure them.

These descriptions can be fruitfully contrasted with the system Chrissie described at CLA, where children who were on the safeguarding "radar" had documented "check ins" with their progress leaders and the pastoral team.

Keeping in touch, for staff at St Bernadette's, was not just a means to an end (for example, to obtain or share information) but was an end in itself; a "friendly face" or a conversation was seen as a vulnerability-mitigating strategy.

Pupils at St Bernadette's expressed that they found it helpful when teachers "understood" or "knew" them. Daniel, a Year 8 pupil who had previously been in the nurture group, drew some parallels between his own experience of school and that of the fictional pupil in the vignette.

Rebecca: If you were in her situation, what kind of thing would you really want school to do to help?

Daniel: Help me!

Rebecca: In what way?

Daniel: Know that I can forget stuff. Know that I forget stuff.

For Chloe, "speaking" more was key to attaining this level of understanding of children in vulnerable situations. She appreciated teachers who did not "assume", or take a deficit view, but sought to "understand".

Chloe: I think that they need to like understand people more. Because some teachers do, some teachers really do understand people who come from different backgrounds, but some people, some teachers don't really take into like consideration what's going on at home… And I feel like they need to understand and like let us speak more about what happens, instead of just like assuming what's wrong, and that we just can't be bothered doing the homework, but there's something else that's happened… Overall, I think that school just needs to understand pupils that [inaudible] and how they're feeling better.

Chloe articulated here something very similar to Nancy Fraser's "politics of recognition" (1996: 3), the second facet of social justice, which seeks to recognise and value difference – what Chloe called "different backgrounds". Chloe wanted pupils to have a voice – to be afforded parity, and trusted, so that when homework was incomplete this wasn't ascribed to some sort of deficit – that they "can't be bothered".

Chloe was also aware of safeguarding procedures in school and saw talk as useful in obtaining help. She had some ideas for how designated members of staff might help the fictional pupil in the vignette.

Chloe: You could speak to someone that you like, someone that he feels closer to. There's like, I think Mr [head of safeguarding] and Mr [other safeguarding staff member]. So they're like for the pupils. They protect safeguarding and stuff like that. And also pupil services. You can talk to them as well.

Chloe saw value in choosing a member of staff whom the pupil "liked" or with whom they had a close relationship, emphasising the familial nature of the pastoral system at St Bernadette's. Rhiannon, the in-school social worker, reinforced the role of talk and listening in dealing with vulnerable children who were finding the day-to-day realities of school difficult.

Rhiannon: So yesterday, there was a couple of children who were really upset… It doesn't necessarily need a lot of intervention. It could just need, you know, someone to listen to and then send them back.

Though, as I have shown, responses at CLA tended to be expressed more systematically, there were elements of this kind of ad-hoc support, with staff building relationships with vulnerable children and supporting them on this basis.

Lola: So support could be, I went up to lessons when I was free and regularly checked on the student. I might even just jump in next to them for 15 minutes… Regular one to one catch ups, which I know if you ever walk around our Academy, you'll see kids out of lessons all the time with a one to one conversation.

Even here, however, Lola suggested that her responses (for example checking up on the student) were part of a bigger picture of staff as a network seeking out children for these "conversations". The behaviour and pastoral teams at CLA often had these kinds of "catch ups" with children. Students valued this kind of "talk" at CLA. Part of this discussion of a character in a vignette has already been quoted above.

Ana: Take him out of class and like get him some water and just sit down and talk to him… I would visit him at home. I would ask if he needs like things to help him.

Ariana: I think that teachers should speak to him, and tell him that what's wrong because maybe we don't know what's going on at home… maybe a teacher can talk to him or can have time to talk to him about what's going on, why's he feeling angry.

Talk was a way of enhancing the kind of *knowledge* the school had about its pupils and their odds. It is harder to systematise "talk", though it is done. In both schools, these deeply interpersonal approaches were part of these less tangible but nonetheless very important responses to student vulnerability. This kind of "talk" was important to students and could, at its best, increase the sense of partnership with pupils and empower them to participate in devising their own solutions to the problems they were experiencing.

Outcomes for vulnerable children

This project's third and final research question is about how responses to disadvantage – such as those detailed above – support success. As this project sets out to expand ideas about outcomes by asking what schools value for their disadvantaged pupils, I will here explore the constructions of success within both schools for children they consider to be vulnerable.

Outcomes were expressed in very broad terms by Carol at St Bernadette's and by Cathy, the EAL coordinator at CLA.

Carol: … to improve their quality of life really, and for them to be emotionally secure.

Cathy: And I don't really care about education, Rebecca, in the beginning. It's about feeling safe. And it's about feeling happy. And if they're safe and happy, then they'll start to learn.

This comment from Cathy pointed to a strikingly broad conceptualisation of outcomes, recalling the earlier discussion about the purposive boundaries of the school. Michael Fullan (2021) might argue that the evidence here is that CLA is aligning its approach with the "human paradigm" of schooling, powered by the "right drivers": wellbeing as well as learning; social as well as machine intelligence. The "academics obsession" is explicitly eschewed by Cathy.

Likewise at St Bernadette's, outcomes were not restricted to those within the classroom, with staff considering that it was within their remit to help vulnerable children develop social skills. For Pablo, the SENDCO, speaking and listening skills were not just important to bolster academic participation, but had broader application.

Pablo: But how are we making sure that what we're doing isn't just about the outcomes being participation in lesson? It's also about how are we developing opportunities for independence. And therefore, that's when you then start drawing in your social interventions.

During the Covid crisis, the limits of the statutory view of outcomes became starker. Keira and Rachel, both senior leaders at St Bernadette's, expressed concern that old accountability structures would make it hard for the school to meet new pastoral need.

Keira: Because if accountability measures don't change in response to this, and we are operating under the same accountability measures, but with an extremely different context, we will have to revert back to exam factories.... if they are still going to measure us in the way that they were, then it will just be impossible for us to do the things like the pastoral care the wider sort of needs that these children are going to have and deliver a curriculum at the same time.

… And if we can have some kind of relaxation over the next few years on being measured against outcomes, not that we won't want to do that, but there's going to be just a much broader need for literacy, numeracy, and social care in a way that we've never had to do before, that means we just need to not be measured on what these kids get in an exam.

What is interesting about Keira's response here is that she clearly saw a tension between the statutory ways of measuring success and the "pastoral care" that children need; if the school is pressured into becoming an "exam factory", she suggested, these wider needs will not be met. She even seemed to suggest that "literacy" and "numeracy" are "broader" concerns somewhat distinct from the examined curriculum. She worried that school agency – to meet the "broader need" – would be constrained by a narrow focus on academic outcomes by policymakers or Ofsted. Likewise, Rachel seemed to suggest that pastoral needs should come before "education".

Rachel: And I think that comes before education, you know, before we start trying to deliver an education to them, we need to make sure that the pastoral systems in place are, you know, going to cope with their needs.

Just as outcomes were situational at St Bernadette's in terms of the shifting impact of the Covid crisis, at CLA they depended on the individual circumstances of the children. CLA took in many students who were recent arrivals to the UK, and as such were particularly vulnerable. Such students often joined the school in the later years, which meant that outcomes had to be re-negotiated, with versions of success different for each student.

Cathy: We've got to be helping them to achieve whatever it is we believe they can do. You know, some of them it's just the fact that they leave school being able to hold a conversation, you know, then that's fantastic. You can't expect a young person to come in Year 11 and be able to sit a science GCSE.

… Last year, I had a boy, come to me, he was 15, an unaccompanied asylum seeker. And he was found in a bus shelter where he'd been sleeping for two days by the police in [name of town]. And he ended up coming to us. And, you know, he's from [Middle Eastern country]. Really, really, really sad story… he got a really good grade in his photography exam. He didn't pass his maths and English, but the thing is, he can speak English now and he can chat away… And you know, he's just doing really, really, really well. It doesn't have to be that you get grade nine in everything.

The school's situated, contextualised *knowing* about each pupil was key to outcome-generation: "whatever it is we believe they can do". Valuable outcomes could be simply the ability to hold a conversation in English. Expectations were set with realism and perspective, creating a more inclusive version of success that is not contingent only on narrow, statutory definitions of academic achievement.

The approach taken at CLA was summed up by Chrissie.

Chrissie: I think we do go above and beyond.

Rebecca: Why do you think that is? What makes a school do that?

Chrissie: Because we love the kids, really.

The motivation described here was love, care and generosity in their purer forms; there was no condition attached relating to attainment.

Conclusion

Vulnerability was a category in flux, particularly in the unpredictable throes of the Coronavirus crisis. Like Ungar's description of social disadvantage, it was "chaotic, complex, relative, and contextual" (2004: 342). *Vulnerability* usually described the intersection of poverty with other disadvantaging factors in a way which meant that there could be concerns about safeguarding or child protection. The range of challenges that students and families could experience to make them vulnerable was huge and both schools were very responsive to the unique needs of their students; the "vulnerable" category was flexible. There were corresponding ways of knowing about and responding to vulnerability: a systematic,

anticipatory approach, using data, trackers and procedures; and a more intuitive, reactive approach, focused on knowing and understanding pupils and "keeping an eye".

Although both schools of course displayed elements from both approaches, the higher levels of pupil disadvantage at CLA meant that their responses tended to be more systematic. In the preceding chapter about school-community relationships, I explained that CLA responded to a critical mass of disadvantage within its pupil population. *Vulnerability* was a higher, and more unusual, category of disadvantage, so it is not clear that it also applied to a critical mass as such at CLA; however, it was certainly widespread. This was reflected in a highly systematised response. Contrastingly, much work with vulnerable children at St Bernadette's was done by Carol for "her" children. Both schools used the agency afforded to them, and in some cases pushed at their purposive boundaries, to construct and deliver a range of outcomes for their students, taking a broad view of "successful" overcoming of vulnerability.

10 Findings: the nurture groups

Nurture groups form the final of my three niches. Each school had one nurture group. This was a smaller class of Year 7 pupils who were identified as needing additional support. At both CLA and St Bernadette's, they followed a routine closer to that typical in a primary school; they spent most of the day in the same room, with the same teacher teaching them a range of subjects, rather than moving around the school for each lesson like the other students.

This was a particularly appropriate niche for the study of disadvantage, because the students in the nurture group were considered to be among the most disadvantaged in the whole school (though not necessarily the most vulnerable in the sense explained in the previous chapter – they were not necessarily suffering or at imminent risk of serious harm outside of school). A higher proportion of children in the nurture groups were PP eligible, though as I will explain they also experienced a range of more particular and intersecting disadvantages. This was perhaps the most obviously physical of my three niches; the nurture groups, in contrast to the vulnerable cohorts, were a more clearly delineated group and occupied a distinct physical space in the school. This chapter, therefore, makes more use of observational data, as I spent a lot of time in each classroom and came to know the children and teachers well.

A parallel study of nurture groups across both schools provided windows into salient aspects of schools' relationships to disadvantage. Mirroring the previous chapters, this chapter on nurture groups will be structured in line with my three research questions. I will explore firstly schools' approaches to identifying disadvantage in assembling the nurture group; secondly, how the nurture group provision responded to these disadvantages; and thirdly, how the schools constructed *outcomes* that were valued for this cohort of children.

I will first start with a pen portrait of each group in order to give a sense of the atmosphere in the room and the class's daily routine.

St Bernadette's

The teacher of the nurture group at St Bernadette's was called Mrs Woods (she was not interviewed). This was the way she described the group to the children in their first few days at the school.

"The nurture group is a small class. Every school has one. You are so lucky to be in it – you don't just have me, you have other adults here to help you too. You are here based on what your primary school teachers have told us – that you'd be better off in a smaller group. I have some good news: yesterday, the new Head Girl was chosen, and she was from the nurture group. It shows that you don't need to be in the top set for English and Maths to be successful. We're here to help you so that when you go into Year 8 – you're fine."

The St Bernadette's nurture group was based in a classroom next to the sports hall. The pupils had about half of their lessons for the week – English, RE, languages, drama – with Mrs Woods, who had been teaching at the school for many years. There were thirteen students in the group and normally two teaching assistants with them. One of these TAs was very experienced, and in addition delivered CBT and speech and language sessions to small groups. The pupils had a wide range of needs. Some struggled with processing and working memory – for example, when asked what comes after autumn term, a student might say "maths". Some had sensory issues or struggled with changes in routine, and could cry when they'd had a haircut, or run out of the room when the loud school bell was about to ring. Others found it hard to regulate their emotions, and had angry outbursts when they lost a game.

There was a high degree of flexibility in this class. Mrs Woods could make lessons shorter or longer as she felt the need, or spend lesson time discussing issues as they arose, such as problems with name-calling or use of mobile phones. She sometimes sent the children to run around the sports hall or the yard between lessons if she saw that they were becoming restless or needed a break.

City Learning Academy

The City Learning Academy's nurture group was in its first couple of years of establishment and felt a little more experimental than the long-established class at St Bernadette's. It was based in a dedicated classroom in the middle of the school. There were eleven children in the group. Their teacher was Simon, who covered maths, English, geography, history and RE with the children, as well as serving as their form tutor. Simon was trained as a primary school teacher. He was also present for some of the lessons taught by other teachers, such as science.

In the autumn term when I observed, Simon would meet the children downstairs near the entrance to the school. He would stand for the best part of half an hour, greeting and chatting quietly with the pupils whilst they waited for the others to arrive. The class would then walk up to their room together. The classroom was bright, with a class noticeboard, a "calm corner" and a reading area. Later in the term the children decorated it beautifully for Christmas.

As in the St Bernadette's group, there was a high degree of flexibility in terms of the day's schedule. Simon used mindfulness sessions or physical exercises to break up the day. The flow of lessons was influenced by the mood and inclinations of the children and external happenings – for example, when a particularly interesting rainbow became visible from the window of the classroom, the lesson paused for the children to look at and discuss it.

Assembling the nurture group: identifying disadvantage

As with the "vulnerable" category already discussed, decisions about which children should be in the "nurture" group were based on a case-by-case knowledge of circumstances rather than statistical indicators such as PP or primary school test scores alone. Both schools saw transition as a particularly vulnerable point in a child's educational career, and that this chronological point could serve to compound existing disadvantages. This is supported by studies which show a link between low socioeconomic status and less positive experiences of transition to secondary school (Evangelou et al 2008).

Pablo, the SENDCO at St Bernadette's, stated: "we know that transition is more difficult for SEND learners". Most learners in both of the nurture groups were considered to have some kind of special educational need, though only a minority had an EHCP and some were not diagnosed. Furthermore, the nurture groups in both schools had a higher than average proportion of children eligible for the Pupil Premium. Though neither SEND nor experience of poverty were essential for membership of the nurture group, the kind of disadvantage envisaged and addressed was located at this intersection. Children from low-income families are more likely to be born with inherited SEND, or develop some forms of SEND; children with SEND are more likely to be born into, and to experience, poverty (Shaw et al 2016).

The intensive intervention offered by the nurture groups was viewed as timely, ensuring that pupils made a smooth start to secondary school. At CLA, where the nurture group was relatively new, Simon and the school's SENDCO, Carly, suggested that this was in response to perceived changes in need within the pupil population.

Simon: So even just the last three years that I've been at CLA, the needs of the children have changed, and have become different in a variety of ways.

Carly elaborated these changes.

Carly: We seem to have more students now where the main barrier is the actual environment… More sensory than anxiety, yeah, so that SEMH [social, emotional, and mental health needs] and sensory seems to be on the increase again.

Formulaic constructions of disadvantage, such as PP or FSM eligibility or low attainment by standardised test scores, were not particularly useful in informing nurture group

membership. It was important to use a different kind of *knowing*, a more "local" or situated knowledge based appropriate for the unique "thisness" of the school, the students and the circumstances (Munns et al 2013). This kind of knowledge was co-generated with colleagues from the primary schools.

These processes were described by Pablo, the SENDCO at St Bernadette's, as well as CLA's Simon.

Pablo: So we don't apply a formula that means if X, Y and Z a pupil has, then they go into the nurture group. That's not what we do.

Simon: The nurture group was was sort of hand picked because of turbulent backgrounds or previous, not necessarily trouble at primary school, but difficulties at primary school with one thing or another.

The idea of "hand picking" children, expressed in semantic opposition to any kind of statistical mechanisation, chimes with Pablo's resistance to "formula". Because the nurture group was so small, schools relied on a highly personal assessment of pupil disadvantage. It was not enough that children possess poor odds on a statistical level, even if in the end most of the children did have some kind of indicator of SEND.

Furthermore, the nurture groups in both schools were fluid in their membership. Some children at St Bernadette's, for example, moved out into mainstream within a few months, with a full handover emailed to all teachers by the nurture group's teacher, Mrs Woods. The children that remained for the entire year then benefited from increasingly small pupil to staff ratios.

Interacting with primary schools

The "hand picking" of children for the nurture group was done with the aid of conversations with feeder primary schools, who also involved parents in the decision. Pablo described a trusting relationship with his primary colleagues, with discussions about individual children taking precedence over data.

Pablo: The way we do it is through consultation with the feeder primary schools… We have to trust in the Year 6 and SENDCOs from the primary schools and that they know those

pupils, and it's an opportunity for us to kind of have discussions which I will do with all of them.

Mrs Woods (who was also the St Bernadette's literacy coordinator) and Sally, the nurture group TA, visited local primary schools to assess pupils' literacy, and used recommendations from primary class teachers to help determine the make-up of the nurture group.

Sally: We inform the schools and the primary schools inform the parents that there is this nurture group, and that if they are struggling they get extra support.

Carly, the CLA SENDCO, also described the decision as being made with the primary schools.

We do that in collaboration with the primary schools… we make them aware of our provision. And a lot of Simon's group, they were in sort of equivalent at their primary school for lot of the time. Or they were at times getting support in the mainstream classroom. So those are children that through transition, the primary schools feel that they will struggle in mainstream full time.

Trusting and *knowing* worked in tandem here to facilitate an accurate appraisal of pupil odds based on best use of context and experience.

Intersecting disadvantages

Students in the nurture groups were more likely to experience poverty. The teachers in both groups recognised this; Mrs Woods ensured that the group had first access to the free breakfast items that the school distributed to pupils, for example. However, poverty in itself was, naturally, not a factor that the schools explicitly took into account when assembling the nurture groups; rather, it was correlated with other needs such as SEND or pastoral issues.

The nurture group selection process was highly sensitive to intersecting or compounding disadvantages. As explained above, there were some traits that cropped up often in the nurture groups, first and foremost special educational needs. Pablo said that one of his starting points when identifying a group was the special needs registers of the feeder primary schools. The initial gathering of information to support *knowing* about these pupils,

then, was systematic. However, the way in which this information was used depended on a more situated, intuitive knowledge and not one single indicator. Only three children in the St Bernadette's nurture group had Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs); there were children with EHCPs or with diagnosed special needs who did not access the nurture group (children with, for example, physical disabilities also have EHCPs). There were additionally children in the nurture groups who received significant educational support at primary school, or for whom special needs were suspected but not diagnosed.

Other traits often related to social turbulence and mental health needs. In the St Bernadette's nurture group especially, pastoral as well as academic need was considered as a qualifying factor. This spoke to a particularly interesting formulation of odds and outcomes, where pastoral outcomes, such as improved mental health and better social skills, were given serious consideration. This was the case even though social and familial turbulence are not quantified in any way that could be used to make cross-school outcome comparisons for claims about school "success" in beating the odds (in the way that such comparisons can be made, for example, by PP eligibility). Barriers to health and wellbeing were considered alongside barriers to learning (Cummings et al 2011: 53).

Pablo suggested that Looked After Children as well as PP eligible children tended to be well represented in the St Bernadette's nurture group. He spoke about the compounding nature of disadvantage as an odds-generating process.

Pablo: There may be a long period of absence due to medical reasons, or there may be non-attendance issues. Again, it's quite likely that lower social economic group, typically, statistically speaking, more likely that those groups are going to have lower attendance as well. Or difficult kind of external family situations, [they] may be working with multi agencies as well.

Pablo seems here to describe a "bundle" (Kerr et al 2014) or "cluster" (Wolff and De-Shalit 2007) of disadvantages, which he seems to suggest that the nurture group is particularly well equipped to address. Simon at CLA gave a similar account. He also pointed out that the data primary schools normally handed to secondary schools was missing because of the students' long absence from school over the Covid lockdowns.

Simon: We've got a lot of children in the nurture group who were either socially very far behind their sort of age group, or ability wise, very far behind, or are simply not where their

peers are due to unfortunate circumstances in home life, that have then affected their sort of mental health… a lot of them had medical needs that had impacted on their education.

So we looked at their ability levels, obviously, we couldn't look at exam results, because SATs didn't happen. We looked at the general level at which their primary teachers felt that they were working at and we also looked at other circumstances. We've got two or three children who are in the group who have, as I mentioned, have got mental health problems. We've got two or three that have got medical needs and have therefore a) missed a lot of education previously but b) could have done with being in a group where those needs are more taken into account.

Simon described a consideration of academic underachievement in dialogue with pastoral need. By implication, he suggests that participation in mainstream schooling required a level of (academic) "ability" as well as social skills. The range of circumstances considered at CLA was broad. Simon described the impact that "unfortunate circumstances in home life" could have on "mental health". Carly, the SENDCO at CLA, was also attuned to this "bundling" or "clustering" of disadvantage. She considered the intersecting impacts of EAL status and special educational need, stating that both the SEND department, the EAL department and the nurture group worked together to support a child who was experiencing multiple barriers.

Knowledge as a resource and as a practice

For Pablo, the SENDCO at St Bernadette's, part of the purpose of the nurture group was a kind of extended triage.

Pablo: We can kind of get to know those learners, but also get to know those learners in the context of the secondary school, as opposed to just the information that we've had from primary school… So that all the plans that we have can reflect the learner, the performance, their potential, and then the right support can be put in place as they transition… [this] can influence plans to then support future teachers and groups.

Knowing the pupils was important both to scope out the odds they faced and to work to mitigate these to produce valuable outcomes. It started before the pupils arrived at the school, in terms of trusting primary schools' assessments of their odds of coping with secondary school without additional support. When pupils were in a much smaller group and spent a high proportion of time with one teacher, this knowledge was seen to be a powerful

tool that could improve pupil odds as they moved through the school. Crucially, this knowledge did not disappear when the children's time in the nurture group came to an end, but was shared effectively among other school staff. This is illustrated in the example above of Mrs Woods providing a child's new teachers with detailed information, and being available as a first point of contact as someone who knew the pupil well.

Similarly at CLA, the teacher had detailed knowledge of each member of the group due to his full-time role in the nurture group, and was attuned to their interests, histories, struggles and even their hunger levels. Other teachers who worked with the group were also able to get to know them better than they otherwise might, due to the size of the group. Ensuring that students were ready for Year 8 was a key goal in both provisions, as will be explored subsequently.

In conceptualising disadvantage for the purpose of nurture group membership, then, schools were responsive to individual student needs as assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking in many intersections of disadvantage, as well as shifting needs in the pupil population more broadly. Information was gleaned from primary schools, but this was a starting point in the process of really getting to know a student; the nurture groups facilitated this which was part of their strategy.

Mitigating disadvantage in the nurture group

Increased resources

The nurture group provision in both schools represented a significant investment of resources in a small group of children. The groups benefited from significant staff hours. They were a full time job for Simon, and took up nearly all of Mrs Woods' part time timetable. At St Bernadette's there were often multiple TAs with the group, and Simon often helped out in lessons at CLA where another teacher was also employed. The small size of the group and the capacity for increased individual attention were seen as central strategies for mitigating disadvantage, as explained by Sally at St Bernadette's.

Sally: … it's always got two, three TAs in there. It's a smaller group, and they get more one to one, or it might be one to three… it's less noisy, it's not as fast. So for those children who do have difficulties, whether it be reading, writing, comprehension, processing, we will accommodate them. So then that child is an individual, that's not just lost into the sea of high school… And with there only being thirteen, it really does help.

The plucking of the "individual" from the "sea" was seen to be a unique distinguishing factor in the nurture group's provision. This phrase recalls Carol's comment in the preceding chapter that the "vulnerable list" helped staff keep an "extra little bit of an eye on" children experiencing difficulties. It is suggested that an important odds-beating practice at St Bernadette's was to distinguish the more disadvantaged children, and make them and their needs more visible to staff. This, in a way, effected *redistributive* justice, one half of Fraser's "bivalent" construction of social justice (Fraser 1996: 3); staff time and attention were scarce resources which were distributed by the schools so that the children in the nurture group got more, with increased "one to one" tuition and "more small group work".

Simon likewise described his class at CLA as "a smaller, more nurturing environment". As I explained above, in the nurture groups at both schools there was a high degree of flexibility, with the school day shaped around the inclinations and moods of the pupils to a much higher degree than it could be in the mainstream. This could demonstrate a kind of "relationality" as I have defined it in the literature review; it is a sharing of power (Kerr et al 2016), with the children given the opportunity to set an agenda for their own education. This valuing of the individual as an individual, and respect for their difference in learning needs, could also be

considered to contribute the other half of Fraser's construction of social justice – *recognition*, ensuring that "assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect" (Fraser 1996: 3).

The small class size also meant that extra time could be taken to form more fruitful relationships with families. Sally described this in mutualistic terms:

Sally: When we've got the support from the parent, that helps us, in the nurture group. We can work closely.

Both Simon and Mrs Woods had frequent conversations with the children's parents and carers on the phone, and close knowledge of their circumstances and resources at home. Often, Mrs Woods had had previous involvement with families, for example having taught parents, aunts or uncles of the children years ago, or having more recent involvement with siblings further up in the school. Of course, the schools' normal ways of engaging with families (see the preceding chapter) also applied to children in the nurture groups.

Deploying expert staff

Mrs Woods was one of the longest-serving members of staff at St Bernadette's School, and the impact of her experience was clear from observations of her teaching. Primarily, she was extremely skilled at predicting the needs of the children – something that came from a long career teaching similar groups. She anticipated points in the lesson that might have proven challenging and modelled them: these might be social, such as finding a partner, or literacy-oriented, such as the spelling of "spaghetti" or the use of a capital R for Rome. When modelling work on the board, she would draw a margin to mimic an exercise book so that children would set out the work correctly. The students' wellbeing was monitored assiduously by Mrs Woods who predicted and was attuned to their sensory needs: "Remember, you're in your PE kits today, so you might feel cold at lunch time." Her long experience and track record of success meant that she was trusted to run the nurture group largely as she saw fit. In her role as literacy coordinator, Mrs Woods delivered training on approaches to teaching literacy at St Bernadette's Teaching School, both to trainee and practising teachers. She thus used the expertise gleaned from long-term involvement with the nurture group to build the professional capacity of others within the school and wider community.

Similarly, the main teaching assistant attached to the class, Sally, was skilled and experienced. She was able to deliver CBT and speech and language interventions. She said in an interview, "the school's seen my strength is with the Year 7s, so that's where I stay". (A similar approach could be evident in the deployment of the school's most experienced English teacher to the nurture group, when she could equally be using her expertise with GCSE classes.) Other TAs tended to be recent graduates who obtained a one-year position at St Bernadette's, often before applying to teacher training at the Teaching School. It seems clear here that the Teaching School was key to recruiting, retaining and making best use of capable staff.

Gloria, the strategic director of St Bernadette's Teaching School, suggested that the nurture group and other provision was facilitated by the school's Ofsted "outstanding" and Teaching School status. The school's formidable local reputation, as well as the financial benefits accrued by the training and consultancy services offered by the Teaching School, had significant benefits for recruitment and resourcing. Pablo concurred. He also suggested that St Bernadette's was able to use its agency in a particular way in the nurture group. It had the confidence, arising out of its status as a "school leader", to take risks and innovate. This agency was afforded to the school as the result of its institutional status, rather than invested in any specific individual.

Pablo: A lot of the things that we're able to put in place for inclusion and SEND needs are on the back of the fact that we are an outstanding school. We're seen as a school leader. And we support other schools, which attracts additional funding.

St Bernadette's School and St Bernadette's Teaching School enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. The success of the Teaching School in being able credibly to offer services depended on the excellent examination results and Ofsted rating of the school. The school's status as an outward-facing sector leader, and the provision of an abundance of professional development and career progression opportunities by the Teaching School, made it attractive to talented and highly-qualified staff like Mrs Woods. The Teaching School was also lucrative enough that these skilled staff could be retained and that student to staff ratios were kept low. It was interesting that the children in the resource-intensive nurture group were perhaps least likely to "add value" to the school, and in turn the Teaching School. By this I mean that the school's status was premised on symbolic educational capital: the cohort-level achievement of exam results above the national average. It was not likely that the biggest gains in this area would be made in the nurture group. (It could be argued, though, that there was pressure from Ofsted, the schools inspectorate, to maintain good

provision for SEND children, and this could have been a motivating factor.) There was clearly, though, a moral purpose at play here in investing significant economic capital into a group least likely to provide "returns" by way of symbolic capital. It was with a spirit of care and generosity – "expenditure without return" (Grosz, 1999: 11) -– and not along the lines of efficiency or utility-maximisation that the benefits accrued by the Teaching School were directed towards the nurture group.

In the same way, CLA deployed highly skilled and experienced teachers with the nurture group. Simon had trained as a primary school teacher and had extensive experience with SEND. He and the SENDCO, Carly, were undergoing ongoing training about nurture groups. He suggested that in other subjects as well, the school's best staff were being deployed to teach this particularly vulnerable group of children.

Simon: I don't mean this to be disrespectful to the teachers who are teaching the highest sets, but you more often than not find some of our best teachers in the lower sets. And the job that some of them do is just incredible. I've observed some of our English teachers with the lowest ability kids and the way that they're bring lessons to life and get the best out of those kids is is impressive. So I think that is an area again that I think we're quite strong in really.

This was perhaps noteworthy to Simon because of the often-lamented phenomenon in secondary schools of "bottom sets" or "sink groups" being taught by the least experienced members of staff. It could be speculated that the move from A*-C grades to Progress 8 as overall effectiveness measures has disincentivised this practice. Again, though, it seems that there is also a strong moral imperative behind this; the children in the nurture group were seen as *worthy* of the most precious resource a school has to offer – the time of an excellent teacher. As above, this corresponds with Fraser's bivalent conception of social justice (2000).

Meeting pastoral needs and teaching skills for life

At St Bernadette's

As explained above, many children in the nurture groups had complex pastoral needs, intersecting often with poverty and SEND. At St Bernadette's, Mrs Woods went to great

lengths to reassure the children about aspects of secondary school life that could worry them. The small size of the nurture group meant that staff could be much more responsive to individual needs. For example, one child was particularly sensitive to loud noises, and Mrs Woods would ensure he was wearing ear defenders when the school bell rang. She allowed the children to sit in classroom over lunchtime when it was raining, and often arranged for toast to be brought to the classroom for a morning snack.

Mrs Woods devoted significant time to a non-academic curriculum. Often this was based on pupil needs as they arose. For example, games played in drama classes taught children skills such as differentiating between clockwise and anti-clockwise, reading body language, controlling impulses and using visualisation to aid memory. She explained the importance of carrying tissues at school during the Covid pandemic and the dangers of using TikTok without the appropriate privacy settings.

These "lessons" arose in response to events in the class, school or wider society and as such were always timely. On one occasion Mrs Woods sent the boys for a jog around the yard whilst she talked about periods with the girls, after two girls started theirs in one week. She was very reassuring: "You are not alone, you are never ever ever alone". A member of the pastoral team came into the classroom and reinforced this message, saying that there were plenty of sanitary supplies, changes of clothes, and painkillers in the office, and advising the girls to carry their own supplies too. Mrs Woods commented to me that she was supposed to cover the topic later in the year but it felt necessary at this particular point. As above, the educational agenda was set by the needs of the children.

Mrs Woods explicitly taught the "administrative" aspects of being a pupil, for example modelling how a child might find a partner to work with. She could spend a whole lesson discussing the use of Google Classroom, ensuring that the pupils had their logins written into their planners. These taken-for-granted tasks often required significant literacy skills and working memory, which could present a challenge. She modelled good study habits, narrating the process of using the school's Knowledge Organiser to study: "Oh, I'm not sure I've done that right, I'll have to go back to it".

Where there were issues with name-calling and falling out within the group, she asked all of the children to make and share a "pledge" about their behaviour and relationships with other pupils. She told the children that individuality should be celebrated, and explained that being called names could hurt inside, just as physical violence hurt outside. The unofficial breaks that Mrs Woods gave to the children also facilitated social learning; she commented to me

during one of these that it was tempting to intervene while the children were socialising, but they were in fact learning teamwork.

Likewise at CLA, the smaller group size meant that teachers could get to know pupils more thoroughly and engage with them meaningfully on an individual basis. For example, when the science teacher took the register, she asked each child if they had had a nice half term break. She knew them well, asking: "did you see your auntie? It was her birthday, wasn't it?". There was more physical space in the classroom for the children to move around, so they could do daily exercises. Simon was on hand in lessons he didn't teach to make sure the children were happy and comfortable; he brought them cups of water, spoke to them sympathetically if they felt unwell, and escorted them to the toilet if they needed it.

Again as at St Bernadette's – though perhaps to a lesser extent because the nurture group was in its infancy – some teaching focused on practical skills aimed at preparing students for subsequent school years and life beyond school. For example, Simon modelled how to place a booklet into a plastic wallet. As mentioned above, the students at the start of the academic year were met near the school entrance by Simon and taken up to the classroom together, but they were building up to making their way to the classroom independently.

The curriculum followed in the nurture group at CLA was, as at St Bernadette's, focused around skills for life as well as academic learning. In general, though, *all* children at CLA followed this broader, more practical curriculum, and so where the nurture group participated in lessons within the main school, there was an alignment of learning goals. Some practical subjects, such as cooking, were restricted due to the Covid measures, but a food technology lesson (in which children from the nurture group participated as part of a bigger class with other Year 7 students) still taught valuable skills: the students used statistics to discuss obesity; they tried to guess the amount of sugar in bottles of fizzy pop, and the teacher explained how to check this; they learnt about the different types of fat in food. When children did have practical cookery lessons, the aim was to teach them how to make affordable and nutritious meals, with the recipes carefully selected to reflect the children's preferences.

Curriculum

The nurture groups, then, as would be expected, followed bespoke curricula tailored to their pupils' needs (often immediately as they arose), which was made possible by the small group size and devoted attention of one teacher. There was, however, some ambivalence within the schools and even on the part of individual staff members about how far the nurture group should be expected to "keep up" with the academic curriculum in the mainstream.

Pablo, the SENDCO at St Bernadette's, expressed this kind of ambivalence, acknowledging the separateness of the nurture group whilst seeming to insist that the outcomes shouldn't differ to those in the mainstream.

Pablo: Because we've got small group sizes, we have the ability to slow down the pace, we have the ability to chunk activities, but the measures are the same…

You're going to want someone [as a nurture group teacher] who's still got the values of the main [school], the wider achievement expectations of the school… still in line with the targets of the high performance and achievement of what is our standard expectations of performance come year 11… the expectations of a high performing school.

The children in the nurture group at St Bernadette's did indeed follow the same schemes of work and complete the same assessments as all of the other children in Year 7. This could be a difficult area to navigate; outcomes were purportedly the same, but they didn't always align with the odds-beating practices that manifest in the nurture group. For example, a time-consuming pastoral and social curriculum necessarily restricted the time that the children spend on the knowledge-rich curriculum deployed in the rest of the school. The children in the nurture group were given a generic "knowledge organiser", on which their homework and end of term assessments were based. Mrs Woods explained the "knowledge organiser" to the pupils in the nurture group:

"The whole of the year gets the same knowledge organiser, the whole of the year does the same assessments. The only thing is that some people will spend longer learning it."

It was true that the learning resources were the same, and the nurture group read the same book in their English lessons as all the other children in the year. Mrs Woods' comment that the nurture group children would simply "spend longer learning it", however, whilst obviously

said for reassurance, did hint at the broader balancing act in making use of the time available. The nurture group had the same school day as everyone else and there was no suggestion that they should spend more time studying outside of school than the other children. There were, after all, only so many hours in the day. In Sally's words: "the time isn't there. An hour isn't long enough".

Resources from the main English faculty were constantly abridged and adjusted by Mrs Woods and Sally in the nurture group to make them manageable for pupils. Sally saw a conflict between these kinds of practices, intended to mitigate disadvantage such as SEND, and generic school outcomes.

Sally: For some of them, it's too much information. I've already spoken to Mrs Woods about when we give it to 7X, can we photocopy that bit, stick it in their book, because then they don't have to worry. Because you look at that and you go – I don't know what I'm doing.

Staff struck a delicate balance between following enough of the mainstream curriculum and using their own expertise and experience to meet the needs of the children in their group.

At CLA, the curriculum in the wider school was somewhat broader and included a greater emphasis on and choice of practical subjects, such as caring and construction. As a result, there seemed to be less concern that the academic learning in the nurture group should at all costs be aligned with that in the main school; there was perhaps a broader range of pathways which meant that transition into mainstream after the nurture group could potentially be smoother.

Which *outcomes* were valued for the nurture group?

Studying the nurture groups became a window into understanding the wide range of outcomes construed as successful by the schools. Just as the schools wanted more than only academic success for their vulnerable pupils, they valued a broad range of social and pastoral outcomes for the children in the nurture groups (and there was crossover between these two groups). It was interesting to consider outcomes in the case of the nurture groups, because at the end of their time in the nurture groups the pupils still had (at least) four more years of schooling ahead of them. This niche is therefore particularly useful to explore the cycle of odds and outcomes within the school journey; improved outcomes at the end of Year 7 meant better odds for the rest of the children's time at the school.

Balancing academic and other outcomes

As shown above with regard to the curricula followed by the nurture groups, there were differing levels of tension between more traditional academic outcomes as measured by performance in standardised tests, and other versions of success.

Rebecca: So what would be for you a good outcome… a real success story?

Sally: There's a couple from last year's 7X, who made friends… they've stayed friends, and they will be life friends… that did them well. They found each other… Academia you can do any time. It's easier and better if you do it earlier, but if you fail your GCSEs, resit. Not the end of the world. And for a lot of kids, we push push push push push push. Get these exams, get these exams, get this work, cram your head full of it. But then the nurture group, it's not just about that… if they can turn into a human being that is socially and emotionally stable, that is a good member of society, that doesn't name call, that doesn't go out and have an anger issue or whatever, that is success. They might only walk out with one, if that, GCSE. But if they can walk out of this building being a stable human being, we've done our job…. And I know that certain teachers in this building would be like, No! They've got to get their exams!

Sally, from St Bernadette's, told a success story that involved two pupils finding social and emotional resources in friendships. The nurture group is portrayed here as preventative; it is an intensive intervention for children who may otherwise struggle with "stability" or find it

hard to manage negative emotions. Sally was aware of diversity of opinion within the school ("certain teachers") on the importance of academic achievement compared with other types of achievement. The fact that the school deployed someone with *her* views and priorities in the nurture group could indicate that the school valued different things for different groups of children, based on needs. Sally tacitly expressed this sense of separateness: "But then the nurture group, it's not about that".

As Sally suggests, there were competing pressures from other areas of the school. Pablo, the SENDCO at St Bernadette's, suggested a possible way of bridging these viewpoints.

Pablo: Everything we're doing in school is about them accessing the curriculum to a point, and then it's about, Okay, well, how is our curriculum providing them with the opportunities that they're going to need in the future? Where is that taking them? Where is it giving them the best opportunities for achievement, but also what are their opportunities for progression into adulthood, into employment, into leading in a happy life?

Here, Pablo resisted seeing the pastoral outcomes and the curriculum as diametrically opposed, as Sally tended to do. Perhaps because as an SLT member he had more influence over curriculum development, he saw the curriculum as a vehicle for "progression… into leading a happy life", whereas Sally saw it as something to be navigated whilst one pursues these more holistic outcomes.

In a similar way, observations at CLA made it clear that less traditional outcomes were being prioritised for the nurture group students. As well as the example above of the children finding their way around the school, the pupils were rewarded for good attendance and were taught basic IT skills such as copying and making new folders. These kinds of successful outcomes are based on a highly situated form of knowledge which eludes easy measurement. Teachers and other staff knew that previous pupils with similar needs had struggled to find their way around the school independently, and this had caused them problems. Outcomes were thus re-generated in line with this kind of knowledge – which, as I have shown, was responsive to the changing needs of the school's pupils. Odds and outcomes were in chronologically chaotic dialogue with one another. They formed a continuous cycle as a child progressed through their schooling; pupils do not enter with odds and leave with outcomes, as might be suggested in some models of odds-beating-ness (for example Bryk et al 2010).

As at St Bernadette's, however, there was at CLA an anxiety to align learning with the goals of educational "progress" as manifested in grades and levels. This was the case even in very creative or practical subjects; progress had to be documented and demonstrated. For example, in a dance lesson the children were asked to self- and peer-assess their dances based on which moves they were able to do; a trainee textiles teacher told the pupils they would get a grade for their sewing, and they had to produce a written reflection on the sewing for their exercise books. Interestingly, these examples both come from lessons where the nurture group were in the "mainstream". This tendency was less evident in the core curriculum subjects taught by Simon. This could indicate that the nurture group was a space where these pressures were somewhat minimised.

School readiness

As suggested above, a desired outcome for children in the nurture group was a changing of their odds as they embarked on the rest of their school journey. In Mrs Woods' words: "We're here to help you so that when you go into Year 8 – you're fine". As I have described, a lot of the teaching in the nurture group involved preparing children for independent study and social situations, for example instruction on how to use a weekly planner, organise homework and find a work partner. Similarly at CLA, (literally) navigating secondary school independently was a key learning goal. Being able to find classrooms themselves was an outcome that had been formulated with explicit reference to the children's unique odds – in this case, social and learning needs which meant that finding their way to the classroom punctually and independently was a challenge for them. As I have explained above, a positive outcome here – increased within-school independence – improved the children's odds as they progressed through their schooling. Odds and outcomes were iterative.

The knowledge that the nurture group teachers, and other adults who worked with them, acquired about the children was as I have shown a significant resource. It enabled this key outcome of school readiness.

Pablo: Mrs Woods knows these learners when they're at the, you know, beginning their journey. But she follows that academic performance throughout their whole St. Bernadette's journey, and identifies them as previous nurture group pupils, opens up avenues for additional catch up right through their journey.

At CLA, the pathway for nurture group pupils was still being decided, but Simon was optimistic that they could benefit from further support as they got older.

Simon: Going forward, there is a possibility that they will go back into the main body of school, but they could come out for certain lessons… Still even in Year 8, Year 9, whatever year group they're in, come to me as a sort of friendly face and just check in for an hour a week and have a mindfulness lesson or, I don't know, could use it as like a little pick me up for another lesson. If some of them are struggling. But there is the scope with the nurture group going forward, hopefully to continue to support them throughout their entire five years at CLA.

The formulation of odds when designing and implementing the nurture groups took into account the chronology of schooling. The schools identified transition as a key point when disadvantage could accumulate. The thinking about odds persisted beyond Year 7 and ideas were constantly being formulated and reformulated about what odds-beating practices for these children might look like higher up the school.

Continued staff and school improvement

A final outcome constructed for the nurture group was slightly different – it was about the improvement of nurture group provision. This is connected to ideas about responsibility and accountability. For example, Pablo, who as well as being SENDCO was the nurture group's art teacher, explained the principles of baseline assessment to the children: "it's about what you *don't* know… You can only learn something new if you don't know it already". Assessment was framed as a way for staff to improve their knowledge of the pupils and what they needed. In the nurture group, it was largely teachers, and not pupils, who had responsibility for outcomes. Mrs Woods explained this to the children to reassure them:

"There's no such thing as a bad score. You're helping me. Maybe I'm reading too fast. Maybe the questions are too hard… nothing is your fault".

When several of the children set out the work incorrectly in one lesson, she remarked to me: "You see how none of them have done it right? It's because I haven't modelled it well enough". Though children were of course encouraged to do their best to achieve, fault was not located within the students; rather teaching and learning practices were constantly evaluated and tweaked, with the teachers positioned as learners as well. Again, the children

set the agenda. Teaching was not rigid or slavish to an exogenous schedule (Kerr et al 2016) but was responsive to the needs of the students.

Conclusion

Two threads run clearly through these three sections (identifying disadvantage, responding to it and constructing outcomes -– each corresponding to a research question). The first thread is the broad conceptualisation of odds and outcomes. As with vulnerability, any kind of "formula" was resisted when identifying children in need of particular support; this was done based on in-depth, context-specific knowledge of individual children and families. Correspondingly, the action taken to ameliorate disadvantage was very broad, focusing on *outcomes* beyond those measured in statutory academic tests. Often these outcomes were in dialogue with odds; an outcome of successful nurture group provision is improved odds for pupils as they progress through the school.

The second thread is knowledge. Knowledge was not just important at the start of the process when deciding on the composition of the nurture group, but was also an odds-beating practice, with staff becoming increasingly attuned to individuals' needs. It was an outcome too; better knowledge of pupils improved their odds as they transitioned to Year 8, and also assisted in continuing improvement of provision.

The nurture groups are interesting because they represent a particularly intensive investment of resources in a small group of children who add least "value" to the schools in ways which are aligned with the school's status in the competitive educational marketplace. They therefore reveal ways in which the schools are motivated by generosity and care rather than the cyclical investment in and exploitation of capitals.

11 Findings: conclusion

I showed in the first of my three findings chapters that the schools responded to disadvantage very differently based on whether they conceptualised it as affecting a significant minority or a critical mass of their students. For St Bernadette's, being the only outstanding school in their local "cold spot" area meant that they could exercise their agency within the local educational marketplace, especially through the Teaching School, to create a virtuous odds/outcomes cycle which, in Beth's words, "raised" the minority of the pupil population which was considered to be disadvantaged. CLA, on the other hand, as a *critical mass* school, addressed disadvantage in a way that was more premised on "recognition" of disadvantaged pupils as a focal group (Fraser 2000) and based upon a broader view of outcomes. In the second part of my findings, exploring the schools' work with vulnerable pupils, I considered in more depth the nature of disadvantage as "chaotic, complex, relative, and contextual" (Ungar 2004: 342), and particularly the importance of intersecting odds. I contrasted ways of thinking about and responding to disadvantage which were systematic with those which were intuitive, as well as approaches which were anticipatory versus those which were reactive. I also suggested that the schools used their agency in creative ways to push at the "purposive boundaries" of their roles as educational institutions; they exceeded their circumscribed statutory duties, moving into the vacuum left by the retreating state, providing services for children and families neglected by the politics of austerity. Finally, in my investigation of the nurture groups I explained the value of context-specific knowledge of both schools, and showed that the changing of a pupil's "odds" as they move up through the school can itself be an "outcome". I showed that the distribution of resources towards the nurture groups can demonstrate that schools have motivations other than maximising capitals, and that an ethic of generosity can be a powerful driving force.

St Bernadette's School was perhaps more aligned with the conventional conceptualisation of odds-beating; its disadvantaged pupils achieved, according to GCSE measures, far beyond what might have been expected of them given their statistical profiles. To an extent, this was achieved by following a traditional, "quality" curriculum (to quote Gloria) in step with normative schooling goals. However, I have also shown that St Bernadette's did flex its agency to promote a wider range of outcomes, for example for children in the nurture group, in a way that was aligned with the broader aims of social justice; St Bernadette's recognised difference alongside redistributing capitals. This was premised on the school's utilisation of its position in the educational marketplace and, to an extent, on its maintenance of a non-disadvantaged critical mass of pupils from the aspirational "Catholic sector".

Equally, a degree of conventional odds-beating-ness was important at CLA, as indicated by their 2022 GCSE results which were the best in the school's history. Even the announcement of this achievement on the school website, however, was accompanied by a message from the headteacher which spelt out the school's broader conceptualisation of the social and relational outcomes of schooling: "It doesn't matter what your results are. These grades do not define you. Just as important is the kindness, compassion and character you have developed whilst with us here at the Academy" (paraphrased for anonymity). Both schools played the game of odds-beating but in a way that was inclusive of everyone including the most vulnerable, and in a spirit of generosity which allowed all pupils to take part and succeed on their own terms; of course, this often meant supporting pupils to attain the scarce capitals of GCSE grades.

12 Discussion

My review of the existing literature on odds-beating schools at the beginning of this thesis lead me to understand that schools which seem to beat the odds do not always do this in a way which is aligned with social justice (in its meaning as "participatory parity", Fraser 2000). The exploratory framework arising from my literature review (see Figure 2, reproduced below) suggested the four key pillars of knowing, trust, value and agency to support a more socially just version of odds-beating-ness. My findings have explored how practices within my case study schools relate to these pillars. This empirical elaboration of my initial framework now allows me to propose a new way of conceptualising odds-beating.

This study took a holistic, "whole school" approach. Not only did it focus on the school and its community as a broad object of study, but in gathering and analysing data it did not seek artificially to segment the school into constituent components (for example curriculum, community, leadership and so on). I took the view that schools are more than the sum of their parts, as these parts are in constant and dynamic interplay with one another. Just as much can be gleaned about "assessment", for example, from children's informal discussions about class tests in the corridors as from an examination of the school's published policy. This method – holism in miniature, or the "nested case study" – allowed the schools to be explored pragmatically and authentically.

I will start by outlining odds-*changing* as my conceptual alternative to odds-beating as it is currently formulated within school effectiveness and improvement studies. I argue that odds-changing schools recognise and ascribe value to a broader range of priorities and perspectives, demonstrating relational trust in their sharing of power. They use their agency to go beyond odds-beating to change the odds for their disadvantaged pupils. These schools nevertheless recognise that scarce symbolic capitals such as examination grades do have lifeworld use value for their students, so seek to beat the odds at the same time as changing them. I thus locate odds-beating-ness within odds-changing-ness, though odds-beating on its own is not enough for socially just schooling.

I will go on to reestablish my elaborated conceptual framework and outline the ways in which it contributes a useful alternative to existing models of "odds-beating-ness" in the field. I will then take each of the four main pillars of the model in turn, and explain ways in which they elucidate odds-changing-ness.

From odds-beating to odds-changing

Not all "successful" schools (by conventional, statutory measures) are odds-changers, though they may in some respects be odds-beaters. The difference between odds-changing and odds-beating corresponds with two contrasting visions of social justice. Odds-beating alone is inclined towards a functionalist vision of social mobility as opposed to broader societal parity. It affirms the "logic of capital" (Zipin et al 2012). It is concerned with the redistribution of scarce rewards along meritocratic lines. It is reformist rather than transformative; it adheres to a backward-looking "mode of equivalence", of "reciprocity" (Grosz 1999: 11). It chases efficiency.

An "odds-changing" vision, however, follows Fraser's account of social justice as bivalent; redistribution must be combined with a "politics of recognition" to constitute "participatory parity" (Fraser 1996). It is very important to note that some aspects of odds-beating-ness are contained within odds-changing-ness. Some of the capitals with which odds-beating-ness is preoccupied – most notably GCSE grades and other educational qualifications – will have lifeworld use value for students. It is of course important that disadvantaged pupils can accrue these in line with their better-off peers, and therefore this kind of capital redistribution is an important aim of odds-changing schooling. As I have demonstrated, the schools in this study still traded proudly in the currency of GCSE grades. Successfully odds-changing schools will also allow children to beat the odds – to attain scarce capitals with lifeworld use value for themselves. However, in both schools this was combined with recognition of difference. I reiterate that odds-beating alone, however, is not sufficient for socially just schooling.

The odds-changing conceptualisation of social justice is utopian and not reformist in character. As such, it defies "the entire logic of the power game" and expects "more comprehensive change" (Zuk 2020, using rhetoric strikingly similar to that of Zipin et al 2012). Zuk distinguishes true utopian politics as "fighting to change the rules of the game", contrasted to the making of "cosmetic corrections in the cultural sphere" (2020). A utopian is "not interested in the 'better', but constantly asks about the 'good'" (Szacki 1980, quoted in translation by Zuk). "The core of utopia," according to Ruth Levitas, "is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively". Utopian thinking explores the "potential contents and contexts of human flourishing" (Levitas 2013: xi). The schools in this study not only seek a better "quality of life" (to quote Carol at St Bernadette's and Chrissie at CLA) for *all* of their students – rather than only those who have earned it through their acquisition of the

symbolic capital of qualifications – but recognise that "quality of life" will be defined differently within different communities. Rather than affirming a prevailing order, a system oriented towards true social justice will seek "to base itself on absolute generosity, absolute gift, expenditure without return, a pure propulsion into the future that does not rebound with echoes of an exchange dictated by the past" (Grosz 1999: 11). Such a vision rejects the doctrine of efficiency, focusing on non-scarce lifeworld value (Zipin 2012) rather than (or more likely, as well as) the redistribution and generation of capital.

Both of the schools in this study are particularly entrepreneurial, with a strong sense of identity and the courage of their (albeit slightly differing) convictions. Rather than manipulating existing rules within the narrow functionalist game of scarce symbolic capitals (which can sometimes involve unethical practices such as off-rolling, where underperforming students are unofficially removed from the school roll so that they do not damage overall achievement statistics), these schools play a broader game altogether, adding their own rules to achieve a wider set of outcomes in a more inclusive way. This demonstrates a more generous, hopeful view of schooling for social justice.

A new framework

This conceptual shift from odds-beating to odds-changing meant that existing models of school improvement and effectiveness were no longer appropriate. I wanted to move beyond a model that splintered the school into the discrete categories of "professional capacity" or "instructional guidance" (e.g. in Bryk et al 2010). I sought to uncover attributes so intrinsic to the character of the school as a whole that they could be discoverable through any given niche. The framework I developed is also aligned with the themes that emerged from the literature review. To summarise: the term "practices", and not "classroom instruction", takes centre stage as a broad designation for the vast range of "doings" within a school; "odds" and "outcomes" are arranged cyclically to recognise their chronologically chaotic relationship

and mutual influence; and the four "pillars" which interact to orient a school towards a socially just odds/outcomes cycle are value, trust, knowing and agency.
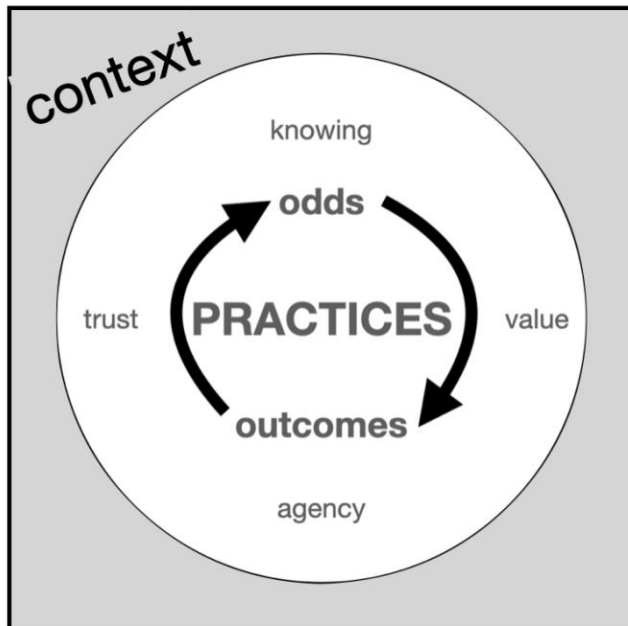

Figure 2

My framework also makes claims about social justice that Bryk et al's, for example, does not. Bryk et al (2010) assume implicitly that the goals of social justice are met when schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods attain higher grades for their students. This is more understandable when measures are objective and not competitive, but GCSE grades are allocated on a basis of competitiveness and scarcity, making them particularly problematic for these purposes. Models used in school effectiveness and improvement research often take a linear view of outcomes based largely on statutory assessments, whereas I view the process of outcomes-formulation as an important object of study in itself; it is a manifestation of schools' justice-orientation and the backbone of their odds-beating work. This means that the odds-outcomes cycle is context dependent, rather than a linear formulation which demands adherence to a statutory norm. Context-responsiveness here is not an addendum to my framework but pervades it; the characteristics encompassed in each of the pillars will (and should) be shaped by the specific circumstances of the school. Thus the particular cases used as objects of study here are not to be universalised (though the learning from them is transferable). This study, and the resultant framework, aims instead to "reveal the invariant properties that hide themselves under the appearance of singularity" (Ercikan and Roth 2014: 11). These attributes or values will manifest in different ways across different settings – and they should; for example, as demonstrated in my findings, schools will respond to disadvantage in ways that are more or less systematised depending on whether their disadvantaged students are a "critical mass" or a "significant minority". However, schools which are successful odds-changers – which mitigate disadvantage in a way oriented towards social justice – will embody the same broad values which can be illuminated using the elements in my framework.

Context-responsiveness is also a key way in which this project seeks to move on from the tautology of functionalism within odds-beating school studies, and this is reflected in Figure 2 above. I do not seek to reiterate circular claims that "a focus on teaching and learning" makes for an "effective" school (Muijs et al 2004). As I have shown, functionalism tends to construct advantage and disadvantage along the lines of normative schooling goals, and therefore has the potential to reproduce social inequalities. I turn away from a version of social justice which is premised only on social mobility or indeed solely on the redistribution of capitals. I instead take a socially critical view; my framework moves away from the assumption made in previous odds-beating studies that the benefits of education "can be realised simply by overcoming specific problems in its contribution to current social arrangements" (Raffo et al 2007: 5). Instead, I argue that some schools see that existing social arrangements are inherently inequitable and then flex their agency to do something to change this.

Value

Current formulations of trust and value in school improvement and effectiveness literature are firmly situated within the "drearily familiar… sublimely omnipotent and omnipresent" logic of capital (Zuk 2020, quoting Eagleton 1995: 23). Successful schools, we are told somewhat tautologically, have values which include a positive "school learning climate" (Bryk 2010) or, as above, "a focus on teaching and learning" (Muijs et al 2004). In other words, they subscribe to the version of school success contained within the logic of capital – a version of success concerned with symbolic output in the form of grades and Ofsted ratings. I move away from this depiction of values as static and one-dimensional. Value, in my framework, is a verb and not a noun, a doing and not a being. The process of valuing is one of constant reenactment and reevaluation. I do not offer a prescriptivist list of values – or characterise a particular climate or focus – that sets apart odds-changing schools. Instead, I offer an analysis of ways that the things schools come to value are themselves formed and shape the rest of the odds-outcomes cycle.

There is a version of social justice within education that premises itself on meritocracy. As quoted in the literature review, Reay references RH Tawney, who describes this version of social mobility as "merely converting into doctors, barristers and professors a certain number of people who would otherwise have been manual workers" (Reay 2012: 590). This logic, the "logic of capital" (Zipin et al 2012), accepts that rewards – examination grades, jobs, access

to a good standard of living – are scarce, and seeks to equip "disadvantaged" children to compete for them. It ascribes a seemingly immutably high value to the professions Tawney lists – doctors and barristers – misrecognising these paths as inherently and intrinsically more rewarding (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989), rather than interrogating the distributive injustice and inequality of recognition (Fraser 2000) that undergirds this perception.

Odds-changing schools, however – those which strive towards participatory parity – manifest an ethics of generosity by recognising lifeworld use value (Zipin et al 2012), going beyond normative values by choosing to seek contributions and offer rewards that are not recognised by the economy of exchange. Rather than trying to align the "values" of students, families and communities with a pre-existing school "climate" or "focus", these schools sincerely value what their communities have reason to see as important. In some cases, they do this while raising consciousness of social injustices in the kind of way envisaged by Freire in his schooling for "humanisation" (2017), for example the curriculum focus on race, migration history and language at CLA. Value in my framework is context-informed, albeit with a common focus on social justice as participatory parity.

However, socially just schooling cannot eschew the "logic of capital" completely. Schools must allow learners to "improve their life chances in the capitalising world as historically received, through redistribution of powerful cultural capitals" (Zipin et al 2012: 181). My argument, then, is that socially just schools do both; they engage in post-capital "utopian thought" (Zuk 2020) at the same time as recognising the competitive, unjust nature of the world that their learners "receive". This ability to reconcile recognition and redistribution is the fundamental characteristic shared by odds-changing schools, regardless of differences in context. This reconciliation is directly tied to the emancipatory politics of recognition as articulated by Nancy Fraser (1996) as constituting, alongside redistribution, participatory justice.

When schools adhere to the "logic of capital"

There were of course ways in which the two schools in my study demonstrated congruence with the "logic of capital". As is typical, the curricula and school culture across both schools were geared towards statutory examinations and the symbolic capital that students could accrue from good performance in these. At St Bernadette's School, this symbolic capital was increased due to the scarcity of similarly "high-achieving" schools in the local educational landscape. The school profited from this scarcity: it enabled the school to appear odds-

beating in attaining the best academic outcomes within its local area; well-resourced parents "fought" for places at the school; and teachers spoke of the positive impact of students' "pride" in the school. These advantages accumulated to the benefit of St Bernadette's. Likewise, the whole-school improvement in GCSE grades was important at CLA; the school website proclaimed "the best results we have ever seen" after the most recent round of examinations.

Both schools were entrepreneurial in their local education contexts as a Teaching School and a Research School respectively. St Bernadette's Teaching School, though, was a particularly striking example of the manipulation of these capitals within a competitive educational marketplace. This "commercial" arm of the school existed entirely on the basis of the main school's excellent academic reputation – the symbolic capital of examination grades. In turn, the capital generated by the Teaching School paid for several additional teaching assistants and attracted high-calibre staff with its plentiful opportunities for professional and career development. The symbolic educational capital of examination results generated social capital by bolstering the school's standing in the community, as well as economic capital in revenue for the Teaching School, and so the wheel kept turning. Disadvantaged pupils, a significant minority of the pupil population but not a proportion which reflected the high levels of disadvantage in the local area, were seen to benefit just by being at the school (and this view was supported by GCSE outcomes, which showed high levels of attainment for these pupils). In some obvious ways, by aligning itself shrewdly with the values of the contemporary policy climate, the Teaching School operated as a utility-maximising and competitive agent within the "logic of capital" (Zipin et al 2012). It benefited from local scarcity and competitiveness for the "best" school places. Though the Teaching School played a role in system improvement, this involved a financial relationship with all of the schools it worked with, and so there was considerable generation of economic capital too.

However, there were times when the flow of capitals was disrupted as the school assumed an odds-changing orientation closer to the ethics of generosity. The economic returns from the Teaching School were not subject simply to an asset-maximising reinvestment. Rather, the proceeds were often spent where the potential for generation of further capital was low, for example by hiring additional teaching assistants to work with the most vulnerable children who were likely to add the least value to the school in terms of the symbolic capital of examination results. By recognising the lifeworld use value that additional TA support brings to vulnerable children – for example, teaching them social and communication skills in small

groups – the school combined odds-beating and odds-changing practices, pragmatic and utopian thinking, and the logic of capital with the ethics of generosity.

Working to reconcile visions of social justice

It is one thing to say that schools "played the game" within the framework of capital whilst simultaneously subverting its rules, but it is also necessary to ask how schools managed this reconciliation. Sometimes, interviewees described their motives in a way that situated them outside of the "logic of capital" (Zipin et al 2012), characterising the driving forces behind the actions of school staff simply as love and care. They wanted to "make things better" (an intent expressed by Carol at St Bernadette's), and improve students' "quality of life" (a goal indicated by both Carol at St Bernadette's and Chrissie at CLA). These motivations are strikingly simple and are expressed in broad, altruistic terms that suggest a wide understanding of, or valuing of, outcomes which would make a positive difference to a child. However, there was also an evident anxiety to frame broader disadvantage-mitigating strategies within the framework of capital, a desire driven surely by a policy climate that encourages schools to be zealous and competitive in the accruing of capital for themselves and their students.

At times this was unconvincing. For example, Pablo's insistence that the children in the St Bernadette's nurture group should achieve "our standard expectations of performance come Year 11" seemed to belie the reality of a grading system based on scarcity which would inevitably withhold rewards from children at the end of the "curve". Staff at both schools made rather tenuous links between the resource-intensive pastoral support offered to the neediest children and "academic" outcomes, for example the claim made by Lizzie at CLA that supporting parents through the legal immigration process would improve their child's GCSE results. Though there is a possibility that this is true at an individual level, it seems doubtful that this is a purely utility-maximising approach to distributing the school's economic and social resources. The "returns" here are very unlikely to justify the school's heavy investment under the strict "logic of capital"; though distal causal chains are viable in the long term, it seems doubtful that this kind of intervention would offer returns of symbolic capital (GCSE grades) in the necessary timescale in a way that is sufficiently predictable. Staff, though, are ready to manipulate the all-pervasive language and discourse of a capital-focused political environment to justify actions taken in pursuing lifeworld use value (Zipin et al 2012). Of course they saw genuine value in accruing qualifications as capital both for the individual and the school, but this wasn't the limit of their investment in the child.

Nevertheless, the discourse of capital at least was wrapped around the school's moral purpose – its capital-transcending ethics not just of generosity but also love and care.

When schools subvert the "logic of capital"

Sometimes, both schools – or niches within the schools – were more ready to subvert or deviate from normative systems of capital without couching it in this discourse. This was, perhaps predictably, more common in interviewees who spent time working with children least likely to accrue the capital of exam grades. Sally, a teaching assistant in the St Bernadette's nurture group, offered an almost anti-capital construction of outcomes, contrasting what she saw as the superficial goal of "get[ting] these exams" with the more holistic aim of emerging from school "a good member of society". It is important that these lifeworld rewards – participants also placed importance on emotional and social wellbeing – are not scarce, and so can be striven for in a spirit of optimism, with "absolute generosity". These rewards are relational and collective, and concern not the individualistic accumulation of capital, but the social benefits of schooling.

In recognising the limits to these normative forms of capital, the schools in my study took a broader view of value when planning curricula (at St Bernadette's, this mostly applied to the nurture group; the mainstream curriculum was more traditional). The competitive system of statutory assessment in the UK is underpinned by the notion that educational achievement in its narrowest, quantifiable sense is the gateway to the good life. This is the paradox of the proxy. Qualifications are indeed correlated with better health and improved access to economic resources, but this is not a causal or linear relationship. At CLA, lessons about career planning were premised on "economic well being", which broadly seemed to mean living comfortably and avoiding the poverty that many of the pupils had experienced as children. CLA refused to put all of its eggs in one basket by relying solely on the purported lifeworld use value of the symbolic capitals of qualifications. Instead, these careers lessons cut to the chase, providing labour market information about the local area, and promoting pathways to the kind of lives valued by students and their families. The values inscribed in cultural and symbolic capital such as examined curricula can be regarded as "arbitrary" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), but the lifeworld use value which informed and contextualised the curricula contradicted this arbitrariness. The process of valuing – the formulation of worthwhile schooling outcomes – was deeply rooted in the school's unique context. In lessons at CLA, there were opportunities for children to express their priorities and desires.

Fraser characterises misrecognition as a denial of the opportunity to participate as a "peer" or "full partner" (Fraser 1996: 48-49 – this is distinct, as I have explained, from the Bourdieusian concept of misrecognition). Leaders at CLA were proud of their interactions with parents on a respectful and equitable footing focussed on assets. By situating parents as "experts" on their children, leaders at CLA showed that they valued and recognised parents' knowledges and experiences, which is a necessary condition (though not in itself sufficient) for parity of participation. At St Bernadette's, the values of the parents were perceived in general to be in sync with those of the school; these were "families that push education" (Beth). At CLA, this was more complex. Often families valued education highly but did not express this in ways endorsed by the school. For example, Lola complained that some parents did not see the value of PE lessons though were highly invested in more traditional subjects: "you want them engaged in every part of the academic life, not just English, maths and science". Some children, particularly those from African backgrounds, reported being beaten by parents as an attempt to improve their behaviour both at home and at school: "You don't understand about African culture… Most people here are from Africa, so they're going to get beaten" (Worth, a Year 8 pupil at CLA, talking to his form tutor). Some of the children argued that these beatings made them behave better, and it was uncomfortable for many staff that, whilst in some ways this discipline showed an alignment of values, it was administered in a way that they found distasteful. There are no easy solutions here, but it does demonstrate that the coercive elements of capital-chasing are never too far from the surface. True parity of participation and social justice, it would be hoped, would take power away from the spectre of capital, addressing the fear felt by marginalised groups about competition for scarce resources.

A functionalist, utility-maximising schooling system based on efficient, "merit"-based acquisition of capitals seeks to reproduce the structures that uphold it. A final important way in which the schools subverted the "logic of capital" was when resources were redistributed in ways which challenged this paradigm of efficiency, looking instead to a paradigm of generosity. A clear example was in the St Bernadette's nurture group, where considerable economic and human capital flowed from the Teaching School to the nurture group, even though there were few "returns" on this investment in the sense of symbolic capital – i.e. GCSE grades – to bolster the standing of the school or Teaching School. "Machine intelligence" – investment for maximal return – is replaced with "equality investments" ; the "bloodless paradigm" of capital exchange gives way to the "human paradigm" of generosity and care (Fullan 2021), and it is this which makes a school odds-changing.

Trust

I advance the understanding of trust in school improvement and effectiveness studies by offering a view of trust that is oriented towards participatory parity and therefore to odds-changing-ness. This moves away from the tautological construction of "relational trust" as describing merely the social conditions which correspond with "academic productivity" (Bryk and Schneider 2003). Bryk and Schneider's functionalist view of trust is not attuned explicitly with social justice; trust, for them, is cultivated to advance the purpose of capital. The "culture" and "climate" that supposedly underpin this "relational trust" are often premised on participatory *dis*parities. Bryk and Schneider describe trust as constituting "mutual dependencies" without interrogating the currents of capital and power undergirding this supposed mutuality. I will show that this functionalist understanding of trust belongs within the paradigm of efficiency, or "the fluid and efficient mechanisms of the market" intrinsic to the "implicit philosophy of the economy" (Bourdieu 2001: 29-30). I offer an alternative conceptualisation of relational trust through the lens of the participatory parity model of social justice.

Efficiency, or "academic productivity", is the core of Bryk's model and a dominant conceptual force of the industrial age (Rittel and Webber 1973). It is ubiquitous as an unchallenged good within policymaking and, for Żuk (2020), poses a risk to the utopian imaginary: any value system which "rejects economic or technological inefficiency as the final criterion for deciding which solution is better" (1049), he argues, is itself worthy of being called utopian. Efficiency is, of course, a pervasive feature of educational systems. Trust involves two crucial components on the part of the trustor: a loss of control, and a degree of uncertainty. Productivity and efficiency, geared towards maximising utility and value, do not deal well with these elements. Trust requires a spirit of generosity and optimism, a movement beyond the linear exchange-value structure of capital.

Trust as an alternative to efficiency

It is the paradigm of efficiency which leads schools and school systems to highly functionalist curricula and pedagogies. Examples include the increasingly popular "no excuses" approach to discipline and the growth of the "knowledge curriculum". Whilst these systems may seem oriented towards social justice in a meritocratic or distributive sense – proponents argue that they give students the best chance of attaining the valuable symbolic capital of examination grades – they make at best "cosmetic corrections" to systemic inequity (Żuk 2020: 1054).

This functionalism is based on a set of under-examined, normative values and a distinct lack of trust.

An example is the "no excuses" discipline system, increasingly popular in UK secondary schools. This tends to feature an obsessively strict application of rules to ensure compliance – down to regulating students' posture and banning them from speaking in certain spaces and times of day. It betrays a fundamental lack of trust in students' ability to behave in a way conducive to the learning and wellbeing of themselves and others, and in students' natural curiosity and desire to learn. Furthermore, such an approach undermines trust in teachers' professional judgement, reducing them to technicians applying policies indiscriminately, or "compliant and closely monitored producers of standardised performances" (Hargreaves 2003: 5). At both St Bernadette's and CLA, teachers described an approach to behaviour management that placed trust in teacher discretion. Steve, at St Bernadette's, spoke against "automatic" sanctions, characterising the school's system of behaviour management as "inclusive" and "understanding". The automation to which Steve contrasted the St Bernadette's approach is semantically and substantively connected to efficiency. Leaders such as Steve took the view that "most of the pupils are doing the right things anyway" and that staff were fundamentally "caring"; this exposes an orientation towards true trust and an ethic of care that is absent from the technocratic-functionalist economy of symbolic capital, which focuses on maximising utility without a vision of social justice.

At both schools, "deficit" views of parenting, which imposed a normative view of "correctness", coexisted alongside more trusting attitudes towards parents and communities. At CLA, as I demonstrated above, leaders characterised parents as the holders of "expertise" about their child and family. Rather than seeking alignment with preexisting values oriented towards "academic productivity" (Bryk and Schneider 2003), this recognition of the value of parental knowledges demonstrated genuine trust, where it constituted voluntary loss of control and inherent uncertainty. Trust requires a spirit of optimism – here, that parents and pupils can and do make worthwhile contributions. In the same way that St Bernadette's approach to behaviour management operated on the assumption that children were "doing the right things anyway", leaders at CLA took for granted that parents held useful knowledge about their children and wanted the very best for them. Relationships with parents went beyond simply "engagement". This version of "relational trust" is predicated on the sharing of power, and on participatory parity in the setting of educational agendas (Kerr et al 2016). There were other examples of this at both schools. Pupils' and parents' accounts of their own circumstances and needs were used when constructing categories of disadvantage or vulnerability. Children in both nurture groups were given the power to set, to

an extent, the agenda for their own day-to-day schooling; this constituted recognition of difference as per Fraser's "bivalent" construction of social justice (2001).

Another hallmark of efficiency-led schooling is the knowledge curriculum. This pedagogy has emerged in response to the reforms to statutory assessment by Education Secretary Michael Gove during his incumbency from 2010 to 2014. In an explicit reversion to more "traditionalist" curriculum content, these reforms championed an established cannon of historical and cultural knowledge, rebounding, as Grosz might describe it, "with echoes of an exchange dictated by the past"; this is conservatism in its most literal form. This highly defensive approach to knowledge is inherently untrusting; it is a refusal to relinquish control, an aversion to uncertainty, a resistance of the "pure propulsion into the future" Grosz envisions as an alternative to the slavish adherence to the logic of capital (Grosz 1999: 11).

Though both schools in my study necessarily adhered (to an extent) to the values of a "knowledge" oriented examination curriculum, they also supplemented this with elements more geared towards lifeworld use value – and thus more aligned with trust, and less preoccupied with a narrow view of efficient academic output. For example, following the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020, science teachers at CLA decided to begin science lessons with an overview of a contribution made by a black scientist. This was apart from the formal examined curriculum. CLA placed a strong emphasis on skills in their curriculum, with cooking lessons in particular being taken very seriously by staff and students alike. These were highly practical, with meals carefully chosen to reflect students' likelihood of using the recipes outside of school. This was an expensive area, as all ingredients were purchased by the school. At St Bernadette's, this more imaginative expansion of the traditional curriculum was evident mainly in the nurture group rather than throughout the mainstream school – perhaps because of the construction of disadvantaged pupils as a significant minority rather than a critical mass. For example, the nurture group pupils had small structured sessions with a specialist TA to develop social skills such as active listening. These examples from the schools' curricula bring together the twin concepts of trust and value. Instead of scrabbling around for the scarce capital endorsed by policymakers, the schools made efforts to find out what students had reason to value (see the example given above – the careers lesson at CLA where children were invited to share their own aspirations) and then invest accordingly. In doing so, they expressed an optimistic trust in teachers and students alike. This also constituted, to an extent, the "cultural validation of endogenous perspectives" (Dyson and Kerr 2012: 277).

Knowing

"Knowledge" or "knowing" is about disadvantage conspicuously absent as a resource or a process in existing models of school improvement. Muijs et al's model comes perhaps the closest, stating that an odds-beating school is an "information-rich environment", a phrase used synonymously with "data-richness". The "data" to which Muijs et al refer include "exam results, standardised and teacher-made test results, [and] questionnaires" (2004: 158). "Information" here is functional, and does not describe the more elemental process of "knowing" that I feature in my framework. I attach great importance to schools' "epistemologies of disadvantage": ways that disadvantage is conceptualised, categorised and acted upon in the unique context of the school. This speaks much more broadly to concerns of social justice. Models and studies such as Bryk et al's make certain epistemological assumptions that align them with forms of capital endorsed by prevailing political structures. Disadvantage is presented as static: a characteristic or set of characteristics with which pupils arrive at the start of their school career. It is portrayed as an objective measure with no contextual variance – there is no recognition that what may be a disadvantaging factor in one context may operate differently in another. Similarly, current models assume a kind of false objectivity when deciding which outcomes constitute the beating of odds. The absence of any kind of analysis of a "disadvantage epistemology" in these models speaks to the Bourdieusian (as distinct from the Fraserian) concept of "misrecognition"; it is taken for granted that certain attributes constitute disadvantage, and that certain outcomes are intrinsically desirable. My framework, on the other hand, allows for variances in "odds" and "outcomes" dependent on local context as well as the values and justice-orientation of the school. It recognises that the school's unique conceptualisation of disadvantage – its "disadvantage epistemology" – dictates its responses.

Politically endorsed knowledge about disadvantage is dominated by the Pupil Premium policy. It is by this measure alone that school funding to mitigate the effects of disadvantage in a school's pupil population is allocated (SEN funding, in contrast, is provided to meet the specific needs of specific pupils). PP is a necessarily blunt instrument which creates a hierarchy of disadvantage. One type of disadvantage – poverty (or poverty according to the PP metric) – is put into the policy spotlight and crucially translates into economic capital for the school in the form of additional funding. Although the Department for Education endorses the use of the funding for non-eligible pupils – giving the example of young carers (Department for Education 2022) – this is somewhat inconsistent with the high level of scrutiny to which schools are subject; they must show that they are making use of the

funding to "close the gap" between "disadvantaged" (Pupil Premium eligible) pupils and their "non-disadvantaged" counterparts. The tackling of disadvantage along these lines – all based on whether parents are eligible for certain state benefits – is thus heavily incentivised. There is an anxiety to quantify and measure disadvantage and the corresponding "outcomes" in a way that does not recognise the intersecting, cumulative, complex, context dependent nature of disadvantage as I have shown it to be.

The PP approach is an attempt towards social justice predicated on redistribution; it allocates greater resources to schools to "make up" for hardship faced by poorer pupils. However, it falls short of Fraser's vision of social justice as "participatory parity"; the policy itself does little to obviate the material conditions of poverty which create "disadvantage", seeking instead to equip schools to "beat" these odds. The aim – as expressed in the evaluation processes for PP spending – is for disadvantaged pupils to accrue capital in the form of examination results (Carpenter et al 2013). The policy does not explore other outcomes which may have lifeworld use value for students.

Each school has its own "epistemology of disadvantage" which is only half-recognised by policymakers, and is implicitly undermined in the national processes for evaluating "outcomes" for disadvantaged children. These knowledges transcend the functionalist view of disadvantage which is premised on the logic of capital. They rely on localised understandings of disadvantage. Again, context-responsiveness in my model is not an addendum – it is a whole worldview which dictates not only responses to disadvantage but how it is conceptualised in the first place. These knowledges are "local" or "regional"; they are "disqualified", "located low down on the hierarchy", "subjugated" and "buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation" (Foucault 1980: 81). Foregrounding these knowledges is essential to recognition, as it is conceptualised in Fraser's framework. Some examples would be the knowledge built up by staff at CLA about the outcomes which are possible and desirable for new migrant children, or insights about the complex problem of hidden homelessness. These are knowledges with lifeworld use value, not readily exchangeable for capital. Perhaps most importantly, these kinds of knowledges do not flatten or silo disadvantages into discrete categories but are particularly attuned to the unique ways in which disadvantage "bundles" or "clusters" in school-specific contexts. They capture entanglements among policy, locality, school, individuals and families. This allows knowledge about disadvantage and how to address it to be anticipatory, drawing on local experience or intuition to formulate responses best suited to the distinctive configurations of needs within each school's pupil population.

PP, of course, necessarily considers disadvantage on an individual basis, and does not consider its aggregate effects. The policy is blind to the fact that a disadvantaged child will have a very different experience if they are one of a handful of disadvantaged pupils in their school, versus if they attend a school in a disadvantaged area with a very disadvantaged intake (Sylva et al 2012). Pupil disadvantage is more than the sum of its parts. One important facet of a school's disadvantage epistemology, then, will be whether the school considers its disadvantaged population as a critical mass or a significant minority. In general, staff at St Bernadette's viewed its disadvantaged cohort as constituting a significant minority; disadvantage was considered to affect a fraction of the students. At CLA, the pupil population in general was considered disadvantaged. These respective characterisations dictated ways in which schools responded. This must in turn have implications for both elements of Fraser's bivalent characterisation of social justice: for redistribution and recognition.

At CLA, approaches to understanding disadvantage were explicit and systematic due to its critical mass status. Leaders had a list of ten factors they understood to be disadvantaging based on their knowledge of the local context, ranging from adverse childhood experiences to health needs. The presence of these factors were not in themselves reasons for intervention, but children were "tracked" and any "tipping" points noticed and managed. The "tracker" here constituted an alternative to, even a resistance of, the Pupil Premium policy. PP as a one-dimensional, superficially redistributive approach was supplemented by system which combined redistribution with recognition.

At St Bernadette's, a school which saw its disadvantaged intake as a significant minority rather than a critical mass, this approach was less mechanised, but just as context-responsive. Identification of disadvantaged children beyond PP was a continuing process (as disadvantage factors themselves are in flux and not static) based on close daily interaction with pupils and their families, leading to in-depth, situationally specific knowledge. "Carol's children" were the informal, smaller-scale equivalent of the "tracker pupils" at CLA. The kind of knowledge that she acquired was held in high regard – was valued and trusted – by leaders and others at St Bernadette's. This meant that the knowledge was deployed usefully, such as depending on Carol to indicate which pupils might benefit from free textbooks or music lessons. *Recognition* of disadvantage led also to appropriate *redistribution* of resources, uniting Fraser's two components of social justice (Fraser 2000).

Cultivating a broader view of disadvantage meant that schools responded in multifarious and creative ways. Although a broad range of approaches is endorsed by DfE guidance (e.g.

Department for Education 2020), the knowledges that the schools held about disadvantage meant that they went beyond the redistributive methods aimed primarily at facilitating disadvantaged children's acquisition of established forms of capital. These close knowledges of their students, families and communities allowed them to formulate, as I have shown, outcomes with real lifeworld use value: for example, being able to maintain eye contact when having a conversation, navigate the school independently, or speak eloquently on issues of racial justice. Thus the responses to disadvantage transcended capital and were geared towards recognition as well as redistribution, again paving the way for an odds-changing approach.

Agency

Agency is the final pillar in my framework and another element which receives scant attention in dominant theories about school improvement and effectiveness. In Bryk et al's model (2010), agency is implicitly circumscribed by the researchers' view of what I call the purposive boundaries of the school. This is linked to their model's narrow view of odds and outcomes as constituting a linear pathway. As I have discussed, certain outcomes (or "purposes") are taken for granted, but it is also clear that the model sees odds as immutable; there is no suggestion that schools could change these odds. Agency, for Bryk et al (2010), is limited by these two intransigencies. Durand et al, furthermore, exclude from their definition of odds-beating schools those which have access to above average levels of financial resources (2014). This negates any agency on the part of the school to acquire these resources. I argue, however, that agency is in fact far broader than the way in which it has been conceptualised in the field thus far. My research has shown – in a policy context different from Bryk's – that schools can and do "change" these odds. (In any case, Durand et al's criterion would not work in the UK context, as schools with higher numbers of poorer children obtain more funding through the Pupil Premium formula.)

The project of decentralisation in UK education policy for the past two decades would seem to have given schools greater agency, though this has been characterised merely as an illusion of freedom (Rose 1999) or "chaotic centralisation" featuring "competing claims to authority" (Greany and Higham 2018: 12). A deliberate shrinking of what is expected of the state in relation to services outside of schools – through, in the UK, a decade of public sector cuts and austerity politics – has left an agency gap in areas like welfare provision and health and social care. Thompson et al (2020) go as far as to suggest that this "responsibilisation" of schools is a political project. It inflates a subject's moral agency, rendering them morally

responsible for tasks that would hitherto be the duty of the state. At CLA, this included ensuring children and families had access to affordable groceries by running a food bank project, providing clothes or even furniture to families, and offering English language classes to parents newly arrived in the UK. At St Bernadette's, examples included assistance in navigating an application for food vouchers during the Covid lockdowns, or buying school shoes for a child whose family could not afford them. The completion of this kind of work almost depends on a moral misalignment between the school and the state. Schools are ethical entities that cannot accept "odds" as pupils present with them, particularly the conditions of poverty and hunger. Schools feel powerful moral imperatives to engage in these odds-changing practices predicated strongly on their localised knowledge of the needs within their communities.

A powerful example from both schools of the creative exercise of agency concerned the ways in which St Bernadette's and CLA engaged with other schools. The former school, as I have explained, had a financial relationship with all of the schools which used its "services". St Bernadette's had taken advantage of a policy environment which encouraged schools to capitalise on existing success for their own benefit, but, again as has been discussed above, had reallocated this accrued capital in line with an ethics of generosity to benefit the most disadvantaged learners. This example constitutes a compelling reason to question Durand et al's (2014) implicit assertion that a school with above-average access to financial resources cannot be odds-beating. In fact, the generation of income to support the most vulnerable learners, in line with a policy context that encourages this kind of entrepreneurialism, can be seen in itself as an odds-beating and odds-changing practice.

St Bernadette's, the only Ofsted designated "outstanding" school in an educational "cold spot", also worked to make itself attractive to ambitious, middle-class parents whose children would otherwise go "over the border" to grammar schools in the neighbouring local authority. The school exercised its agency by marketing itself shrewdly and "competing" for parents and children it felt could add value to the school. Staff argued that this concentrated cultural and social capital within the school in a way that was beneficial to all of its students including those who were disadvantaged.

CLA, like St Bernadette's, provided traded services to other schools through its Research School. However, unlike at St Bernadette's, its Family Region – which was a very important way in which it interacted with local schools – did not involve any kind of financial buy-in, though the schools did pool resources. In this way, the school was perhaps more aligned with odds-changing in its broadest, utopian-oriented, capital-resistant sense, rather than

seeking to achieve these goals via capital. The school used its agency in conjunction with its localised knowledge – knowledge developed alongside and pooled with other schools in the area. For example, after recognising the lack of local access to green space, the schools worked together and shared their spaces to create "forest school" areas, training some teachers as outdoor instructors. Here, CLA's moral purpose transcended capital-informed constructions of odds and outcomes by focusing on the lifeworld use value that such a resource could present to children. This was "absolute gift, expenditure without return" (Grosz 1999: 11). Though the forest school sites were used to support curricular learning, they were not by any means an attempt to facilitate the efficient acquisition of the symbolic capital of "attainment".

The school pushed at its purposive boundaries to deal with distal as well as proximal odds – the "causes of the causes" (Marmot et al 2020) – even where there was a weaker statistical or narrative link between the mitigation of these odds and improved outcomes in the narrow academic sense. Whilst ensuring that pupils attained valuable qualifications no doubt contributed to the holistic agenda of the school, it is clear that this wasn't the limit of what the schools would do to help pupils and their families. These distal odds were seen as worth addressing in themselves to effect justice. When CLA ran a campaign to raise awareness of hidden homelessness within the city, or bought a washing machine for a family living in poverty, they presented with their words and actions expansive visions about what the school was for and how far it could go to make real differences in the lives of its students. This undergirds a more radical view of social justice, marrying redistribution with recognition. As I have shown throughout, the two schools became adept at balancing their own strong moral imperatives – based at CLA on a strong identity as a school for the local community, and at St Bernadette's with values of "Catholic excellence" – with the need to conform to the narrower, less just goals of policy.

13 Conclusion

Research questions

These questions were set up to facilitate a project that moves away from functionalist models of odds-beating-ness. They sought to uncover understandings of disadvantage and the nature of schools' responses, suggesting constructivist or at least contextually-responsive approaches.

1) How do schools which appear odds-beating understand disadvantage in their local contexts and student populations?

The fact that constructions of disadvantage themselves were an object of study from the start intrinsically distinguishes this project from other odds-beating studies.

The notion of "disadvantage", in its most literal and etymological sense, is inherently competitive ("advantage" coming from the Old French meaning "in front"). In functionalist policy discourses, the framing of poverty, disability, race and all sorts of other factors as "disadvantage" is entirely congruent with the logic of capital.

Odds-changing schools possess, I have argued, a different disadvantage-epistemology which disrupts normative views of disadvantage – views which are often deficit-focussed and see disadvantage as an intransigent property, external to the school's locus of control. Odds-changing schools have a broader sense of agency; they tend to see disadvantage in their local context and student populations as a problem they can do something about, rather than seeking to "achieve" in spite of these conditions.

Because odds-changing schools recognise disadvantage as plural, intersectional and accumulative, schools transcend policy "knowledges" about disadvantage, thinking beyond the Pupil Premium and its proxy problems. Context-responsiveness pervades my study and the framework I have generated. A key part of a school's understanding of disadvantage is its perceived prevalence in the student population – whether disadvantaged students are considered to be a critical mass or a significant minority. This has profound consequences for schools' responses to disadvantage.

Odds-changing schools tend to see their disadvantage-mitigation as a fight against structural inequities, rather than an attempt to compensate for individual deficits or bring students and families in line with a set of normative values. In accordance with Fraser's "bivalence" (1996: 3), odds-changing schools' understandings of disadvantage are oriented towards "recognition" as well as redistribution; differences are celebrated and seen as a valuable resource, rather than pathologised or erased.

Finally, understandings of disadvantage are inextricable from constructions of desirable outcomes – the end point of the implied race. For odds-changing schools, these outcomes centre around lifeworld use value. For example, a desire to "stay local" for further study and employment is not viewed as a disadvantage or deficit that needs fixing, but a legitimate aspiration that can be supported by the school. The rewards of schooling are seen as relational and oriented towards the public good; again, understandings of disadvantage are not premised on individual competitiveness but broad social patterns.

2) How do they respond to this?

My framework differs from existing work in the field in that it does not offer a prescriptivist list of responses which, taken together, form a recipe for an "odds-beating" school. Instead, it describes a kind of orientation or worldview which can encompass an infinite variety of odds-beating and odds-changing activities. As understandings of disadvantage go beyond Pupil Premium, so to do responses; they target children who are PP eligible and those who are not, and go beyond the narrow scope of disadvantage-mitigation prescribed by the state. Odds-changing schools deploy their agency creatively within complex and often hostile policy climates to acquire resources or utilise their position in the local educational marketplace.

I argue fundamentally that schools which successfully mitigate disadvantage in a justice-oriented way do not just beat odds but change them. They do not accept social inequities and try to work around them; they do not seek examination passes for their students in spite of their barriers. They trace the local pathways underneath the symptomatic problems and see the remedies as within their scope, even where this doesn't demonstrate "efficient" deployment of resources. As such, odds-changing schools are aligned with an ethic of generosity which subverts policy trends towards efficiency, automation and standardisation. These schools demonstrate relational (power-sharing) trust and a philosophy of love and care, always prioritising the lifeworld use value of intended outcomes.

Such schools manage to marry up the two components of Fraser's model of bivalent social justice (2001). They recognise that normative forms of capital do have lifeworld use value for students, but their responses to disadvantage are by no means limited to the acquisition of capital. They incorporate the politics of recognition, providing opportunities for students, families and communities to participate in full partnership – as peers.

3) What is it about the nature of their response that supports their success?

This question is different to the one immediately above it because it introduces the idea of "success". This necessitates a return to the question of outcomes, and what "success" means in the individual context of the odds-beating or odds-changing school. As my model positions odds and outcomes in a chronologically chaotic cycle, success can point to the changing of odds as a child moves through the school. Success is also defined cooperatively with students, families and communities, taking into account things which they have reason to value.

I would not characterise all "high-achieving" schools serving a disadvantaged cohort as successfully odds-changing. Success in my model is constructed as the exercise of a school's moral agency towards the bivalent vision of social justice articulated by Fraser – working towards true participatory parity.

Contribution to knowledge

This study is situated within a much broader, sustained scholarly critique of neoliberal trends in global education policy. Social justice has in recent decades been accepted by state discourses as being equivalent to meritocracy or mobility. Social justice, we are told, is the creation of opportunities for individuals to compete for and accrue capitals regardless of their starting point. Parallel to this is the more recent paring down of the state's role, not just in education but more generally. This abdication of governmental duties has precipitated a project of responsibilisation, relying on moral compulsions within schools to meet children's needs in "extra-curricular" ways. This project is about ways in which schools can be more justice-oriented, more optimistic, more hopeful, more utopian, even in hostile, neoliberal, inequitable policy contexts.

A major contribution to odds-beating research from this project is my new framework. Unlike its predecessors, and particularly that of Bryk et al (2010), the model is not premised on efficient schooling, "academic productivity" (Bryk and Schneider 2003), or the acquisition of capitals alone. It does not pre-ordain "disadvantage" ("odds") or "outcomes"; using a social constructivist approach, my model sees these as specific objects of study in themselves, and disadvantage in particular as contextually constructed. I thus move away from a linear input-output or causal model. This wider view of odds and outcomes facilitates a broader conceptualisation of school agency which is missing from previous models, and aligns the odds-beating research field with the policy context of responsibilisation.

Fundamentally, my framework is oriented towards a vision of social justice which is absent from other accounts of odds-beating schools. I am making claims about the bivalent or even utopian nature of social justice that other accounts are not. Previous studies have taken the view that social justice is basically attained when disadvantaged students achieve high grades; there is a high level of reliance on the proxy of capital. This approach is particularly unsuitable where GCSE grades are used to measure academic attainment, as the distribution of these is based on scarcity and competition. My model recognises lifeworld use value and the context-specificness of odds and outcomes, moving beyond the flat homogeneity of capital.

I hope of course that the findings from this project will support schools to enhance their odds-changing practice. But I also hope that this framework contributes to the scholarly and professional field a way to recognise to odds-changing work that schools already do. There is already plenty of powerful moral agency at work which propels schools to look and act beyond the confines of conventional schooling goals. Odds-changing practices happen anyway, whether or not they are incentivised by broader education policy – but they are under-documented and under-theorised. This framework helps to recognise and document these practices.

Implications for the professional field

I hope that my framework can support discussions about the operation of each pillar – knowing, trust, value, agency – within a school (or a niche within a school). I have produced a Discussion Guide for schools to guide conversations for schools to evaluate the ways in

which they are odds-changing, and generate ideas for future development towards schooling for social justice.

TABLE 7: Odds-changing schools – a discussion guide

Knowing
- What does our school know about disadvantage in our pupil population?
- How have we come to know it?
- Do we consider that a critical mass of our pupils are disadvantaged, or does this apply only to a minority (and is it a significant minority?) How does that shape our responses?

Trust
- Do we trust pupils and parents to define disadvantage in their own lives?
- Do we express trust in our pupils by what we teach and how we teach it?
- Do we share power by trusting pupils and parents to contribute as peers to the setting of our educational agenda?

Value
- What outcomes do students in our school have reason to value? Are these outcomes aligned with those that we strive for as a school?
- How do we demonstrate recognition and respect for difference?
- Which groups of students do we invest in? What "returns" do we get back from this investment?

Agency
- What do we do as a school that isn't only schooling? Why do we do this?
- What is our place in the local educational landscape and how do we use this position?
- How do we change the odds for our disadvantaged pupils?

It is hoped that the findings from this thesis will help more schools to consider ways in which they can not only beat odds but also change them in a way that is aligned with a utopian-oriented vision of social justice involving participatory parity.

In both of the schools in this study, a commitment to odds-changing was at the heart of their existence. CLA was set up as a school to serve the highly disadvantaged local area in a way that truly met the needs of the community; St Bernadette's was in its character inextricable from its legacy of "success", the attendant prosperousness of the Teaching School and the virtuous odds-changing cycle that this created. However, in order to explore the contributions made by this thesis to schools in different contexts – perhaps those which don't have such a

strong justice-orientation already – it is necessary to ask what such schools might need to do to become odds-changing.

Odds-changing-ness and a social justice orientation, as I have shown, run to the philosophical and political core of the school as a (partially) autonomous project. Can this core change, then? KIPP (the Knowledge is Power Programme) is a network of charter schools serving disadvantaged communities throughout the USA. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, the organisation announced that they would be retiring their slogan "Work hard. Be nice.": "Working hard and being nice is not going to dismantle systemic racism… It suggests being compliant and submissive… It supports the illusion of meritocracy" (KIPP Public Schools, 2020). This is an astonishing turn-around for a chain of "no-excuses" type schools – odds-beating but hardly odds-changing. KIPP is a network strongly associated with Teach for America and modelled on a vision of education for disadvantaged students which involves a high level of control (even coercion), and prioritises "preparing every student for college". Perhaps this demonstrates that with organisational overhaul based explicitly on commitment to a different kind of social justice, schools can become odds-changing and oriented towards participatory parity.

Conversely, consider a school which displayed a strong justice-orientation and was morally motivated to provide impactful "extra curricular" student support, yet didn't achieve good outcomes for its students on standardised tests such as GCSEs. Could such a school be characterised as odds beating/changing? I would argue not. Lifeworld use value and capital exchange value are not mutually exclusive. For the vast majority of students and families, the symbolic capital of qualifications does have at least some lifeworld use value, even though the value of schooling is not limited to this alone. To display an orientation towards bivalent social justice, then, schools must also act to secure distributive justice by supporting students to attain capitals which are useful to them. Crucially, though, odds-changing schools will do this and much more.

The schools in this study work creatively to generate additional income to support their odds-changing activities. Ideally, of course, statutory funding would allow all schools to pursue resource-intensive odds-changing practices such as nurture group provision. This study, however, has as its backdrop an increasingly impoverished school system (and, indeed, collapsing public services more broadly). I have documented schools which step into the vacuum left by the retreat of the state in the maintenance of welfare support and health and social services, as well as in-school educational provision for the most vulnerable. Schools in general might be well placed to provide this assistance to families given adequate staffing

and funding. However, this thesis is about the ways that schools respond in the world as it is – by resisting relentless capital-exchange. In doing so they model what could be possible. Conventional work on odds-beating schools takes for granted that some pupils will always enter with narrowed "odds" (this is a basic premise of, for example, Bryk et al 2010). The schools in this study call this premise into question by challenging the inevitability of, for example, food poverty and homelessness in their pupil populations and wider communities. In doing so they offer a blueprint for a society in which odds are changed, and not just beaten, and an alternative to the ubiquitous discourse of social mobility.

Further directions

A natural next step for this work would be taking lessons from this project and transforming them into more concrete policy recommendations or resources for schools and school systems.

In particular, there is scope for this thesis to underpin policy suggestions to solve what I call the "proxy problems". Interventions aimed at tackling disadvantage are often dependent on similar proxy measures. For example, there is the use of attributes such as English language learner status or neighbourhood crime levels as a proxy for disadvantage (for example in Durand et al 2014), when the picture may be more complex and harder to generalise - as I explained in Chapter 8, for instance, gang crime particularly may disproportionately impact racialised boys. Of course, the most frequent proxy used for disadvantage in the UK is Pupil Premium eligibility, the limits of which have been discussed. There is often an implicit assumption that good GCSEs will guarantee equitable access to other social and economic rewards: for example, the Department for Education promises that Pupil Premium, properly used, will allow students to "achieve their full potential" (Department for Education, 2023). Questioning these proxies, and instead stressing the importance of more context-sensitive approaches, can facilitate a more productive consideration of ways in which students are disadvantaged in their particular circumstances, and which outcomes have lifeworld use value for students.

Another outcome could be the creation of a toolkit for school and MAT leaders aimed at encouraging orientation towards a bivalent vision of social justice – the discussion guide above could play a part in this. This would articulate the difference between true participatory parity and one-dimensional redistributive justice which focuses entirely on capitals. The

example of the seismic change in the political orientation of the KIPP network shows that, with the right tools, this is possible.

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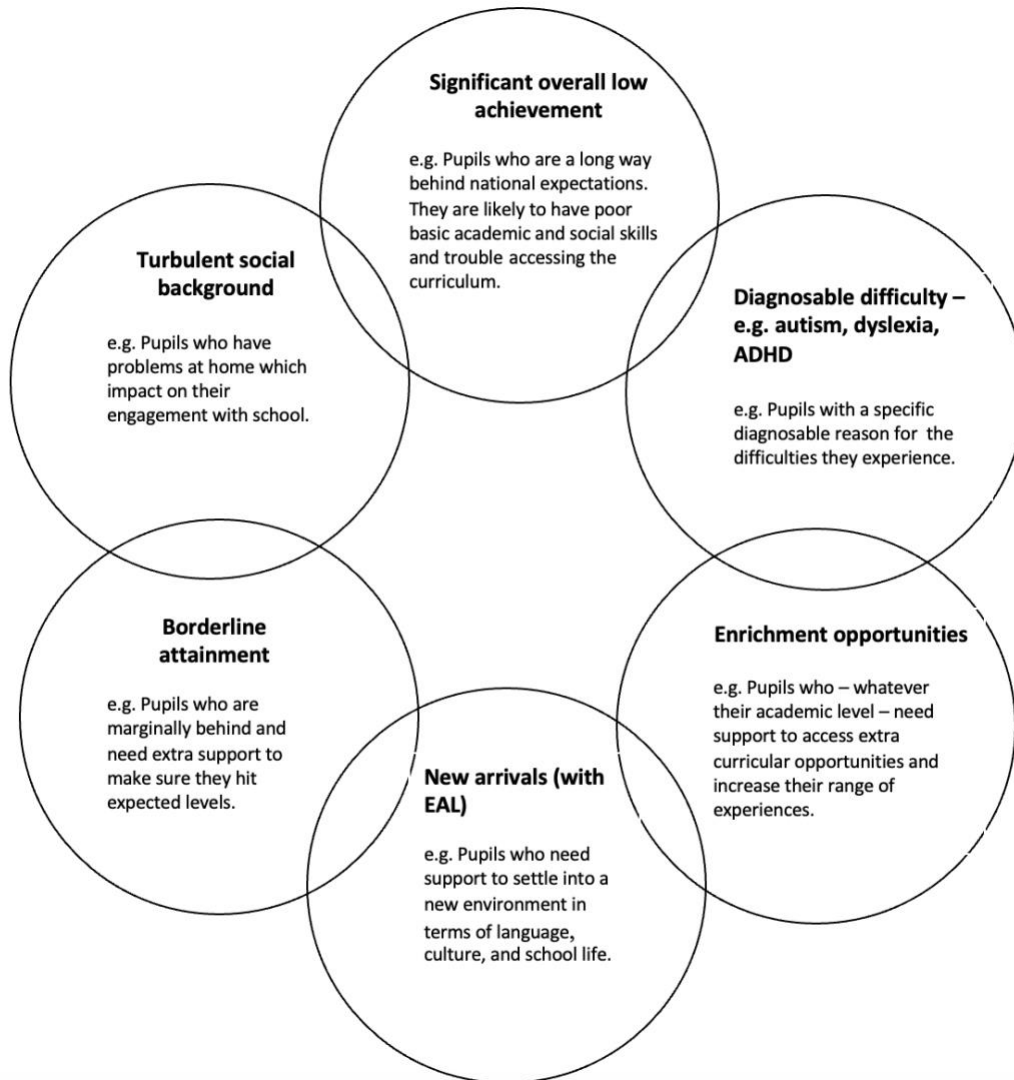Young, M.D. (1994). *The rise of the meritocracy.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

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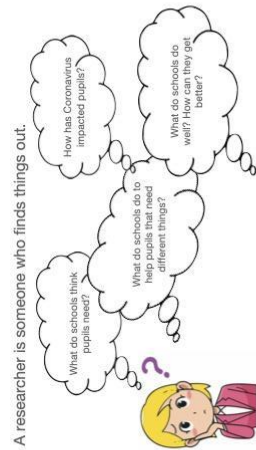
Appendices

Appendix 1: Discussion tool as used in the Evaluation of Pupil Premium research report (Carpenter et al 2013)

Significant overall low achievement

e.g. Pupils who are a long way behind national expectations. They are likely to have poor basic academic and social skills and trouble accessing the curriculum.

Turbulent social background

e.g. Pupils who have problems at home which impact on their engagement with school.

Diagnosable difficulty – e.g. autism, dyslexia, ADHD

e.g. Pupils with a specific diagnosable reason for the difficulties they experience.

Borderline attainment

e.g. Pupils who are marginally behind and need extra support to make sure they hit expected levels.

New arrivals (with EAL)

e.g. Pupils who need support to settle into a new environment in terms of language, culture, and school life.

Enrichment opportunities

e.g. Pupils who – whatever their academic level – need support to access extra curricular opportunities and increase their range of experiences.

Appendix 2: Presentation used to elicit informed consent from pupils and to invite them to participate in the focus groups.

Ms Grant
PhD researcher
Used to be an English teacher
University of Manchester

A researcher is someone who finds things out.

- What do schools think pupils need?
- What do schools do to help pupils that need different things?
- How has Coronavirus impacted pupils?
- What do schools do well? How can they get better?

What would I do if I joined in with the research?

- The session would take place in a quiet place in school, during lesson time.
- You would be in a group of 2-5 other class members. I'll make sure you are happy with your other group members.
- I will record the audio from our conversation on my tape recorder. I will take it home, type it out, and then delete the audio. No-one except me will hear the recording.
- We will be discussing some made up pupils. I will ask you to imagine what school might be like for them.

What will you do with my ideas?

- I might use your ideas to put into a book, a journal (like a magazine for researchers) or on blog posts.
- I hope that our research might help other schools to improve things for their students.

This is Amelia. She lives with her nan, because her mum isn't able to look after her at the moment. At home they speak Polish together.

Amelia was quite poorly last year and missed a lot of school. She finds it hard to understand things in lessons and keep up with the work. She also finds it really hard to organise herself and remember things such as homework and her PE kit.

She enjoys school and wants to do well.

Will you keep my information and ideas private?

- I will never use your real name when telling other people about your ideas. I might give you a made-up name. I will not tell anyone at school who said what...
- ... EXCEPT if you tell me something that makes me think that you or someone else is in danger. Then I have to tell someone at school so that they can keep you safe.
- If you want to join in, someone at school will phone your parents/carers to check it's OK with them.

Went to school until I was 16
Went to college until I was 18

Went to university and studied English until I was 21

Became an English teacher in Blackpool

Went to university again to study an MA in Education

Now working as a researcher and studying for a PhD

Do I have to do this?

- Absolutely not! This is not normal school work and you should only join in if you want to.
- You don't have to give a reason and you won't be in trouble.
- If you change your mind during our conversation you can tell me and go back to class. I will delete the voice recording.

Appendix 3: interview schedule and vignettes for pupil focus groups

Interview schedule

These fictional pupil profiles have been created from evidence gathered in earlier stages of the project from teachers asked about the kinds of pupil disadvantage they see in their school settings.

Interviews will be conducted in groups of 2-5 pupils within their existing Covid-mitigating school bubble. They are semi-structured to allow for a comfortable, wide-ranging conversation. Children will be shown the profiles one by one, with the text read aloud to them. Children will not be asked to share their own information or experiences, but to reflect on the fictional pupils. They will then be asked the following questions to stimulate a discussion.

1) How would [pupil name] get on at your school?
2) What would your school do to help [pupil name]?
3) What could your school do better to support [pupil name]?
4) How do you think [pupil name] would have coped with the Coronavirus lockdown?

Letitia lives with her mum and dad. At home, they speak Portuguese. They don't have a lot of money and sometimes struggle to buy things like school shoes. Letitia looks after her little sisters while Mum and Dad are at work.

Letitia gets average results at school. She struggles a bit with reading and writing. A teacher told her once that she might have dyslexia.

Letitia is funny, polite and has lots of friends.

This is Amelia. She lives with her nan, because her mum isn't able to look after her at the moment. At home they speak Polish together.

Amelia was quite poorly last year and missed a lot of school. She finds it hard to understand things in lessons and keep up with the work. She also finds it really hard to organise herself and remember things such as homework and her PE kit.

She enjoys school and wants to do well.

This is Jayden. He lives with his mum. His dad used to live with them but he and Mum used to fight a lot, so Jayden and Mum left and moved to a different house. Jayden doesn't really like school but likes seeing his mates every day. His mum says she didn't really like school either.

At primary school Jayden did pretty well, but at secondary school he always seems to be getting into trouble. His teachers say he is clever, but he finds it hard to care about any of the subjects or getting his homework done on time.

This is Curtis. He lives with his mum. Recently he has been finding school quite difficult and has been taking more days off. He feels grumpy all the time, but doesn't know why. Sometimes he gets really angry too.

Curtis often forgets to have breakfast, or sometimes there's nothing for breakfast in the house. This means he arrives at school feeling hungry and exhausted.

Curtis is an excellent badminton player.

This is Afsa. She has just moved to the UK and doesn't speak much English. She is really nervous to be starting a new school.

Her mum and dad are finding things quite difficult because their application for a UK visa is very stressful. They are struggling with money. It's hard to buy all of the food and clothes that Afsa and her sisters need.

Ishat is really good at languages. She speaks Urdu as well as Arabic and German.

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet for first interviews with staff.

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Research Participant Information Sheet

Lessons from "odds-beating" schools
Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

You are being invited to take part in a research study about school responses to pupil disadvantage, conducted as part of a collaborative PhD project between the University of Manchester and St Patrick's Teaching School. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

About the research

➢ **Who will conduct the research?**

The research will be conducted by Rebecca Grant, a PhD candidate at the Manchester Institute of Education at the University of Manchester's School of Environment, Education and Development.

➢ **What is the purpose of the research?**

This research aims to build an understanding of approaches to addressing educational disadvantage within the school. This could help other schools to learn about good practice.

Participants have been approached because their professional roles link to addressing educational disadvantage in some way. Up to 15 participants will be recruited.

➢ **Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

The outcomes of this research may be published in a PhD thesis. They could also appear in books, journal articles or presentations.

➢ **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check**

The researcher has undergone a full DBS Check and is registered with the update service.

➢ **Who has reviewed the research project?**

This research project has been reviewed by the School of Environment, Education and Development's Ethics Committee.

➢ **Who is funding the research project?**

This research is part of a CASE PhD studentship funded by the Economic and Social Research Council via the North West Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership.

What would my involvement be?

➢ **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

Participants will be interviewed once, on a one-to-one basis. They will answer some open-ended questions about how they perceive educational disadvantage and the school's responses to it. This will occur at St Patrick's School at a mutually convenient time. Interviews will last for a maximum of one hour. A few weeks after the interview, participants will have the opportunity to read and comment on a summary of their responses.

Version 1; Date 14/10/2019

> **Will I be compensated for taking part?**

No compensation is offered for participation in this research. Participants should not incur any costs.

> **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You can communicate your decision to the researcher by email or verbally. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself. However, it will not be possible to remove your data from the project once it has been anonymised as we will not be able to identify your specific data. This does not affect your data protection rights. If you decide not to take part you do not need to do anything further.

Audio recording is essential to participation in this study. Participants should feel comfortable with the recording process and are free to stop at any time.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

> **What information will you collect about me?**

In order to participate in this research project we will need to collect information that could identify you, called "personal identifiable information". Specifically, we will need to collect a signed consent form with your name, and also your job title. Recordings will consist only of audio.

> **Under what legal basis are you collecting this information?**

We are collecting and storing this personal identifiable information in accordance with data protection law which protect your rights. These state that we must have a legal basis (specific reason) for collecting your data. For this study, the specific reason is that it is "a public interest task" and "a process necessary for research purposes".

> **What are my rights in relation to the information you will collect about me?**

You have a number of rights under data protection law regarding your personal information. For example, you can request a copy of the information we hold about you, including audio recordings.

If you would like to know more about your different rights or the way we use your personal information to ensure we follow the law, please consult our Privacy Notice for Research.

> **Will my participation in the study be confidential and my personal identifiable information be protected?**

In accordance with data protection law, The University of Manchester is the Data Controller for this project. This means that we are responsible for making sure your personal information is kept secure, confidential and used only in the way you have been told it will be used. All researchers are trained with this in mind, and your data will be looked after in the following way:

- Your name will be replaced at the earliest opportunity with a pseudonym, corresponding to a securely stored ID number known only to the researcher.

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- Data will be held on encrypted, University-owned devices and secure University servers.

- Data, including consent forms, will be stored for a maximum of 4 years.

- Data will not be shared with other organisations.

Potential disclosures:

If, during the study, you disclose information about misconduct/poor practice, we have a professional obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform your employer/ professional body.

If, during the study, you disclose information about any current or future illegal activities, we have a legal obligation to report this and will therefore need to inform the relevant authorities.

Audio recording:

Transcripts will be produced by the researcher. Identifiable information about you or others will be removed from the transcript. Recordings will be destroyed as soon as possible after transcripts have been made.

Please also note that individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities may need to look at the data collected for this study to make sure the project is being carried out as planned. This may involve looking at identifiable data. All individuals involved in auditing and monitoring the study will have a strict duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.

What if I have a complaint?

Complaints should be directed in the first instance to Dr Kirstin Kerr, who is supervising this project.

Dr Kirstin Kerr

Kirstin.kerr@manchester.ac.uk

0161 275 3464

If you wish to make a formal complaint to someone independent of the research team or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact:

The Research Governance and Integrity Officer, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674.

If you wish to contact us about your data protection rights, please email dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk or write to The Information Governance Office, Christie

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Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL at the University and we will guide you through the process of exercising your rights.

You also have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office about complaints relating to your personal identifiable information Tel 0303 123 1113 https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/

Contact Details

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact the researcher.

Rebecca.grant-3@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

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Appendix 5: Consent form for first interviews with staff.

Participant Consent Form

Lessons from "odds-beating" schools

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

	Activities	Initials
1	I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet (Version 1, Date 14/10/2019) for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.	
2	I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set. I agree to take part on this basis.	
3	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	
4	I agree that any data collected may be published, using a pseudonym, in academic books, reports or journals.	
5	I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from The University of Manchester or regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
6	I agree that any pseudonymised data collected may be shared with researchers including those at other institutions.	
7	I agree that the researchers may retain my contact details in order to provide me with a summary of the findings for this study.	
8	I understand that there may be instances where during the course of the interview/focus group information is revealed which means that the researchers will be obliged to break confidentiality and this has been explained in more detail in the information sheet.	
9	I agree to take part in this study.	

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Data Protection

The personal information we collect and use to conduct this research will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of the person taking consent   Signature   Date

You will receive a copy of this form to keep. One copy will be retained by the researcher and will be digitised. Both physical and digital copies will be stored securely.

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