



# RESILIENCE – POLICY BUZZWORD OR KEY CONCEPT?

How relevant is resilience as a tool for promoting  
positive outcomes for ‘at-risk’ young people

Doctoral thesis

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**Resilience – policy buzzword or key concept? How relevant is resilience as a tool  
for promoting positive outcomes for ‘at-risk’ young people?**

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## ***Abstract***

Successive governments have placed increasing emphasis on ‘resilience’ for the positive development of children and young people as they negotiate their academic careers. It is a ubiquitous buzzword that pervades current policy directives and interventions, aimed at all levels of the educational system. Used in this context, resilience is seen as a key skill or attribute that young people need to acquire in order to thrive in today’s world. It is defined as an individual’s ability to ‘bounce back’ from adversity or to overcome adverse circumstances to nevertheless achieve positive outcomes. Overcoming these various risks or adverse circumstances, however, involves more than being taught ‘how to be resilient’ as part of the regular curriculum.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, I draw on quantitative data from a large-scale survey of students, matched administrative data acquired from the Department for Education (DfE) and qualitative focus groups with teachers to highlight the importance of access to support and resources for young people to be able to cope with and surmount the challenges they face.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, I engage with the literature on risk and resilience (Rutter, 1985; Masten *et al.*, 1990; Werner, 2000) to frame the processes involved in promoting support for students who might otherwise be expected to struggle academically in terms of ‘buffering’ them against adverse circumstances to promote resilience. In particular, I show that teachers operate within a key proximal relationship of a young person’s microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and are uniquely well-placed to impart support and guidance to students facing a range of adverse circumstances.

My thesis contributes to the weight of existing evidence on the significant link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational attainment. Going beyond this, my thesis also makes a significant new contribution to understanding the mechanisms which underpin the role of positive social support networks in supporting young people at school.

My thesis challenges, therefore, the salience of the concept of ‘resilience’ as a personality trait that can be taught through ‘character education’ initiatives. Indeed, I argue that such initiatives are inevitably destined to be fruitless without government, teachers and curricula taking a much more holistic ‘whole-child’ approach in schools, with complementary social policies that seek to mitigate the structural inequalities that continue to disadvantage students in twenty first century Britain.

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## 1 – The role of teachers in promoting resilience amongst ‘at-risk’ young people

*“In order to tread a path to success, young people need more than just an excellent academic grounding. They also need to be instilled with attributes and skills like confidence, team-work and resilience – the kind of character traits that will help them to thrive”*

– Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP (Secretary of State for Education, 4 May 2016)

*“We should train children in resilience”*

– Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP (Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, 9 October 2018)

These two quotes demonstrate how the government has, through successive ministers and across different policy areas, placed increasing emphasis on ‘resilience’ for the positive development of children and young people. It is a ubiquitous buzzword that pervades current policy directives and interventions, aimed at all levels of the educational system. Used in this context, resilience is seen as a key skill or attribute that young people need to acquire in order to thrive in today’s world. It is defined as an individual’s ability to ‘bounce back’ from adversity or to overcome adverse circumstances to nevertheless achieve positive outcomes. Borrowed from mechanical science (Jaral, 2018), the resilient metaphor conjures up the idea of an elastic band or a plastic ruler, capable of springing back into its original shape following exposure to considerable stress. However, children are not made of elastic. Resilience as a social phenomenon has been studied in relation to child development for at least the last four decades. Sociologists and developmental psychologists have sought to explain how and why children exposed to significant risk factors nevertheless ‘succeed’, with the aim of promoting such success amongst as wide a number of young people as possible. Resilience is conceptualised, therefore, in opposition to ‘risk’, which can be defined variously according to the context in which children or young people find themselves.

Overcoming these various risks or adverse circumstances, I argue, involves more than being taught ‘how to be resilient’ as part of the regular curriculum. It involves affording all young people access to the support and resources they need to be able to cope with and surmount the challenges they face. My thesis calls into question the government’s unfair emphasis

on developing resilience through so-called 'character education', which serves only to individualise academic 'success' and 'failure'. Such initiatives appear destined to be fruitless without a much more holistic whole-child approach in schools, and complementary social policies that seek to mitigate the structural inequalities that still persist and pervade the education system.

Part of a wider neoliberal agenda, current and previous governments have readily latched on to the notion of character and resilience education to highlight the importance of non-cognitive 'soft' skills to an individual's success. They see the potential for character education and non-cognitive skills development to provide greater opportunities for upward social mobility. As outlined in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on social mobility's Character and Resilience Manifesto these skills encompass the "attributes that enable individuals to make the most of opportunities that present themselves, to stick with things when the going gets tough, to bounce back from adversity and to forge and maintain meaningful relationships" (Paterson *et al.*, 2014, p11). However, I argue that this is problematic in at least two ways: first, it imbues such 'soft' skills with a moralistic appraisal of one's 'character', implying that there is an objective and reliable set of skills associated with virtuous behaviour (overlooking that this is highly socially- and culturally-specific); second, it ignores entirely the structural inequalities that exist in the way resources are distributed on a societal level. Equating certain skills development with the ability to 'be resilient' belies the inequality of adversity that must be overcome by different groups in society. These are issues that ought first to be addressed through wider social policies before the potential for character education and non-cognitive skills development can hope to result in increased social mobility.

Nonetheless, within such a system, teachers are uniquely well-placed to impart support and guidance to students facing a range of adverse circumstances. In this way, teacher support can provide a catalyst for a longer-term process of developing resilience through prolonged and consistent supportive relationships. Despite this, my thesis additionally highlights the challenges facing the teaching profession at a time of increased pressure and constrained resources, and underlines the need for teachers to develop their own capacity for resilience.

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This introductory chapter outlines the rationale and basis of my doctoral study. Whilst the study itself was from the outset embedded within the European-funded project, ‘Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe’ (RESL.eu), I highlight the significant ways in which the focus of my thesis departs from the overall aims of the wider European project. In particular, I discuss how I have been able to broaden the extent of my focus by supplementing the data collected within the RESL.eu project with additional qualitative data and matched administrative data acquired from the Department for Education (DfE). This bespoke dataset has provided me with data on participants’ educational outcomes and, hence, allowed me to interrogate the RESL.eu survey data with a causal dimension.

To begin with, I provide a more detailed overview of the wider RESL.eu project (2013-18) and outline my role as a research assistant on the project, with regards to the design and implementation of the study in the UK. I also highlight my extensive role in designing, co-ordinating and analysing the quantitative element of the project across all participating teams in the European consortium.

The second section then outlines a clear rationale for the focus of my thesis, and discusses the main concepts it seeks to explore in greater depth. I discuss the initial process I underwent to distinguish my doctoral study from the wider European-funded project and how my early expectations developed and changed as my research advanced. The final section of the chapter outlines how my doctoral study builds upon the work of the cross-national comparative RESL.eu study, and highlights the ways in which my thesis departs from the RESL.eu project to hone in on the concept of resilience and the specific role of teacher support within the context of the education system in England.

## **1.1 Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu)<sup>1</sup>**

### **1.1.1 Project overview**

In 2013, the European Commission funded a five-year cross-national comparative study aimed at investigating the phenomenon of ‘early school leaving’ across nine EU member states, with the intention of uncovering examples of best practice already taking place in

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of the aims, objectives and outputs arising from the RESL.eu project, please see the project website: [www.resl-eu.org](http://www.resl-eu.org) or the Routledge edition: ‘Comparative Perspectives on Early School Leaving in Europe’ (2018), edited by van Praag *et al.*

schools and learning environments and of recommending changes to policy at European and national level to reduce current rates of ESL to below a 10% target by 2020 (European Commission, 2010).

The basic assumption of the RESL.eu project was that, through the examination of the processes that lead to a pupil's decision to leave school or training early, many relevant structural, systemic, institutional and individual features of resistance to change, and failure to adapt to and overcome these social transformations would become visible.

For these reasons, the project aimed to provide insights into the mechanisms and processes that influence a pupil's decision to leave school or training early; as well as into the decision of school leavers to enrol in alternative learning arenas. In addition, RESL.eu not only focused on pupils who left education or training early, but also on those identified as NEET (not in education, employment or training), as the most vulnerable groups of young people in terms of life outcomes.

Furthermore, the RESL.eu project aimed to identify and analyse the intervention and compensation measures that succeed in transferring knowledge and in keeping pupils in education or training despite a prevalence of theoretical 'risk' factors.

Whilst the available research data on early school leaving (ESL) only explains certain, discrete aspects of a process of disengagement towards ESL, the RESL.eu project analysed the phenomenon from a holistic and intersectional perspective. The complex and often subtle interplay of factors influencing ESL were framed on a macro- (e.g. educational system and wider societal factors), meso- (e.g. school, family and peer factors) and micro- (e.g. individual self-concept and agency) level, which could be deconstructed to uncover particular aspects underlying the process of ESL. This allowed the formulation of conceptual models, beneficial for the development and implementation of policies and specific measures to reduce ESL. For this reason, the project was "not purely of academic interest, but relevant also to policy makers, school staff and representatives of civil society" (RESL.eu project website, 2018).

The RESL.eu study developed and refined a theoretical framework focusing on the role of social reproduction theory (Coleman, 1966; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Jencks, 1972) and sought to highlight the continued importance of socio-economic status to the educational attainment of young people, whilst also acknowledging the intersectional nature of

disadvantage and negative outcomes linked to a range of demographic and structural factors (Driessen, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2010).

The RESL.eu project employed a mixed-methods research design, undertaking a large-scale survey of students ( $n = 19,631$ ), a survey of teaching and educational support staff ( $n = 1,977$ ) and a follow-up survey of those students participating in the first wave survey ( $n = 7,072$ ) in order to add a longitudinal dimension to the study. In addition, qualitative interviews with individual students identified as being 'at-risk' of early school leaving were undertaken, as well as further interviews with their parents/guardians and focus group discussions with their peers and teachers. This qualitative part of the project also involved a longitudinal dimension by employing repeat interviews and more than one contact point with participants to gain further insights into young people's trajectories as they negotiate their transitions from school to work.

The RESL.eu research consortium was made up of partner institutions across nine EU member states: Belgium, the UK, Poland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, Austria and Hungary. The UK team, within which I worked as a Research Assistant, had overall responsibility for co-ordinating the quantitative research component, comprising the design, implementation and analysis of three cross-national surveys: a survey of students in schools, a survey of school personnel and a follow-up survey of young people who participated in the first students' survey.

### **1.1.2 My role as Research Assistant**

My role as research assistant, primarily (though not exclusively) working on the quantitative part of the RESL.eu project, was considerable at all stages of the research process: survey design, participant selection and recruitment, data collection and data analysis. In addition, I played a role in the co-ordination between the partner institutions to ensure the smooth implementation of the surveys across all the countries, in a number of different languages, designed to produce comparable cross-national data. Each of the surveys followed a sequential timeline and I was involved at all steps of the process. The students' survey required first undertaking a review of available statistical data in partner countries relating to students, school leavers and young people, including those not in education, employment or training (NEETs), which I co-ordinated across the countries. Within the context of the RESL.eu project, this summary was brought together for publication in the paper: 'Early School Leaving in the European Union: data availability and reporting' (Kaye

*et al.*, 2014), and provided me with a robust basis for further investigation with regards both to the on-going work of the project and my own doctoral focus.

Following this initial step, I was heavily involved in the design of the survey questionnaire, reviewing existing cross-national instruments and making decisions on which variables and indicators to include in the survey and how best to adapt existing scales or psychometric measures to our survey participants. This process also involved a degree of negotiation with other participating RESL.eu teams, balancing the requirements for a detailed questionnaire that covered all potential factors relating to students' decision-making process, whilst also attempting to keep the length of the survey instrument to a minimum. Once completed, I again played a key co-ordinating role to ensure that the questionnaires were translated (and back-translated) into the native languages of the participating countries (i.e. Dutch, Swedish, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish and Catalan. It should be noted that the Austrian and Hungarian teams did not undertake any primary empirical research.

Following a pilot of the survey, whereby the questionnaire was administered to pupils in one of the participating UK schools, I co-ordinated the feedback from our pilot group with comments arising from similar pilots in the other partner countries to amend and revise the final questionnaire (see appendix 1).

In addition to designing the questionnaire, I also assisted in formulating a cohort selection procedure whereby appropriate year groups in each of the RESL.eu partner countries were selected for inclusion in the project based on their proximity both to the end of compulsory schooling and to the completion of upper secondary education. In this way the data we collected would come from comparable cohorts of young people upon which to base meaningful cross-national analysis.

I was also involved in the recruitment of schools across two research areas involved contacting key gatekeepers at institutions in London and the North East of England (these two areas were chosen on the basis of data which revealed the relatively high levels of youth unemployment experienced in these parts of the country, whilst the two areas also display markedly different demographic profiles and local economic conditions). Once partnerships with schools and colleges had been established, I assisted in the collection of data in both research areas, administering the survey to whole year groups of young people, most commonly as part of a computer science or IT session in the school whereby the students would complete the questionnaire via the online interface.

My role also involved setting up the seven questionnaires (one for each participating country, in their native language) using an online platform (*Qualtrics*), and monitoring the progress of the survey in each of the RESL.eu partner countries. Once data collection was complete, I was responsible for collating the data for all countries into one central database and cleaning the data in preparation for analysis.

Following this extensive period of data collection, I undertook preliminary analysis of the cross-national dataset with regards to identifying patterns amongst young people potential 'at-risk' of leaving school early. This included performing dimension reduction through factor analysis to produce meaningful composite variables for School Engagement – a key dependent variable, suggested by the literature to be a valid proxy for potential future early school leaving – as well as for Teacher Support, Parental Support, Peer Support and others; identifying statistically significant demographic and socio-economic factors relating to students with 'low' school engagement, those with 'low' social support or teacher support and those with 'low' educational aspirations; undertaking analysis both at cross-national and national level, uncovering demographic profiles of 'at-risk' students in each of the participating countries; and performing regression analysis to examine the key factors predicting low school engagement, low teacher support, low social support from parents and friends and low levels of educational aspirations.

The survey of school personnel followed a similar process and my input into the design process was again substantial, through a review of existing surveys of school staff at a cross-national level and the co-ordination of input from other teams. The final questionnaire was devised by myself and colleagues in the UK team to produce an instrument designed to elicit staff members' views as to the causes of early school leaving and the policies and practices they believe can be most effective in tackling it. Whilst the staff survey was administered via an online link, it was still necessary to co-ordinate and monitor the questionnaires for each of the seven RESL.eu teams, ensuring that the process of translation (and back-translation) was sufficient to allow for the collection of comparable cross-national data. Once again, I was responsible for collating the data for all countries into one central database and cleaning the data in preparation for analysis. The analysis proceeded on the basis of illustrative case study schools, which combined an analysis of the responses to the survey by staff from that school with a more detailed description of the issues facing the institution, and the extent to which they are implementing policies and practices to reduce ESL, grounded in the qualitative field work undertaken by the partner teams. My

role involved collating the cross-national findings of the school staff survey and elaborating on the issues arising through analysis of the case study schools in each country.

The third survey – a follow-up survey of young people who participated in the first students' survey – was designed to be as brief as possible, allowing for the probability of high attrition rates amongst people in this age group (and particularly amongst those considered 'at-risk'). My role in designing the questionnaire for the follow-up survey consisted of devising succinct questions to elicit key factual information relating to participants' level of education, current activity status, experience of dropout/return to education and future aspirations. Input from other teams was minimal and the requirement for the survey to be as short as possible to encourage response rates was agreed upon across all country teams. Whilst also co-ordinating and monitoring the surveys for each country through the online survey platform (*Qualtrics*), I was primarily involved in overseeing the collection of data from the UK participants, through a co-ordinated effort of emails, mobile phone application messages and telephone calls. Following the completion of data collection, I was responsible for collating the data into one central dataset for all countries and merging this dataset with matched responses from the first students' survey. The analysis of the quantitative data collected from the students' survey and its follow-up has been published as a chapter in the Routledge edition: 'Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU: A Comparative Qualitative and Quantitative Research' (D'Angelo & Kaye, 2018).

My work on the RESL.eu project, therefore, allowed me to be heavily involved in the design, implementation and analysis of all aspects of a substantial cross-national project. However, the broad focus of the European-wide project (necessarily) far exceeds the remit of my own doctoral research. Whilst it serves as a strong basis and resource for my own study, it is nevertheless only a starting point from which to explore my examination of the concept of resilience and the role of teacher support within the educational system in England.

It is the specific focus of my doctoral study to which I now turn, providing a clear rationale for examining the main concepts involved, outlining the specific research questions it seeks to answer and highlighting the ways in which it builds upon and distinguishes itself from the wider RESL.eu project.



## **1.2 Developing the focus of my doctoral research study: promoting young people's resilience**

The RESL.eu project did not make mention of the concept of resilience. Instead, it employed notions of 'protective' and 'risk' factors. The initial stages of my PhD research necessitated that I distinguish my own study from the much broader European project within which the doctoral studentship was embedded. From a theoretical perspective, closer examination of the concepts of protective and risk factors associated with young people's decisions to leave school early led me to a substantial body of literature on resilience. As discussed in greater depth in the literature review (chapter 2), resilience is a term that has been employed widely in developmental psychology and, to a lesser but growing, extent in sociological and educational contexts. In fact, its application within an educational context was developing a more and more prominent position amongst government policy makers (see chapter 3) as my research developed. From 2014, the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, sought to instil resilience as a key trait amongst all young people in schools. This further gave my research a real and contemporary relevance and focusing on this aspect of government policy provided me with a way to build on the research of the RESL.eu project, whilst developing a narrower focus on young people within a UK-specific context.

Of course, within this reading of the literature, policy and the issues it seeks to address, I must acknowledge my own positionality as a researcher. I am a white, middle-class male with a university education and, as such, I have developed an understanding of the world around me that aligns closely to the 'dominant culture' within our society. Nevertheless, I grew up in a city (London) that is home to a hugely ethnically, socially, culturally and linguistically diverse population, and my own experience of the education system was alongside peers, classmates and teachers from a wide range of backgrounds. From an ontological perspective, however, my experiences at school and beyond have led me to a number of presuppositions that may be specific to the time and space in which they were formed. My mother, a primary school teacher for many years, has also clearly been a strong influence on my positionality towards the role of education in society and importance of teachers to individual students.

My schooling took place at a time when Thatcher's reforms to the educational system were introducing a highly-standardised National Curriculum and a new examination regime of GCSEs, and where around 30% of students still left school at age 16 (Bolton, 2012).

Prevalent debates in the public sphere centred around class sizes (especially at primary level) and, within secondary education, the closure of the majority of grammar schools was leading to a less-overtly stratified (yet more fragmented) system than that seen under the former tripartite arrangement. That having been said, faith schools and some selective grammar schools (of which I attended one) still remained and were, by-and-large associated with higher levels of educational attainment.

My background – social, cultural and temporal – my experiences and my influences have meant that I have already, before engaging with the present research issues, acquired a number of presuppositions with regard to the role of education in our society. Of course, it is exactly this that has piqued my interest in this area and without which, I would not have had as strong a motivation to my current and future work in this field.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge these in the name of transparency. For me, I have always strongly felt that educational attainment leads to positive outcomes throughout life. However, the extent to which this true might not always be evident. Socioeconomic inequality appears to be getting worse and society can be seen as still very stratified (Dorling, 2018; Warwick-Booth, 2018). Whilst lip service is paid to the idea of ‘meritocracy’, at the same time, it appears that who you know is as important – if not more important – that what you know once you get into the highly-competitive labour market (McNamee & Miller, 2013; Payne, 2017).

Moreover, I see the role of education as one that ought not to be solely focused on a human capital approach, centred towards preparing an individual for the labour market and seeking to develop the skills best suited towards them accruing personal financial reward (although this is clearly an important function of schooling). Beyond this, I believe education should be part of a wider process of individual and societal enrichment, with the ultimate aim not the financial gain one can exploit within a market for labour, but where educated individuals can think reflexively, participate fairly and contribute fully to a more equitable society.

Stratification within the education system is also something that I vehemently oppose, and I believe that education should be organised on a level playing field – all students from all background should be entitled to an equally-high standard education. Students who require additional support ought not to be clustered within one or other institution and, where this occurs, resources should be provided to enable these young people the assistance they

need. It is clear that the role of parents, teachers and friends is hugely important and, especially from my own experience, I have seen that teaching professionals can make all the difference. At the same time, however, they have for too long been under-resourced and over-worked. They are a key player in the lives of all young people and as such, they need to be supported and backed in order for them to fulfil their roles successfully.

Whilst the focus of my research looks very much at the role education can play in the lives of socio-economically disadvantaged young people, it is important to acknowledge that I was not amongst the most deprived groups in my community and I was, furthermore, able to access a range of support from attentive parents and helpful teachers within the context of a selective and academically-focused secondary school. I have, therefore, been cautious in my research, and sought to engage with research participants in as neutral terms as possible, listening to their 'realities' and making sure I interpret my findings in a reflexive and critical way to mitigate against the extent I perceive my own white middle-class experience of education as normative and to acknowledge and draw out the structural inequalities and contemporary issues that are affecting students and teachers negotiating the current education system.

That having been said, the expectations I had of my empirical analysis were to some extent naively clear-cut. I expected, in accordance with the theoretical framework used in RESL.eu, and from my own reading of the risk-resilience literature, that a clear and profound equation would emerge: that, as long as students' protective factors ( $p$ ) were greater than their risk factors ( $r$ ), they would be successful ( $s$ ): That is, if  $p > r = s$ . However, during the course of my research I very quickly found that quantifying 'p', 'r' and 's' in any meaningful way is highly nuanced and as my thesis developed, I found it necessary to apply some key principles in order to operationalise such an equation (see chapter 5).

Moreover, I was from the outset sceptical of the government's policy to 'teach' resilience to young people in schools. My reading of the literature had led me to espouse an outcomes-based conceptualisation of resilience, such that young people who are able to achieve positive outcomes, despite the existence of risk factors, were, by definition, displaying resilience. For me, I was wary of assigning specific traits to young people that meant that they were innately more likely to 'be resilient' – and hence, preclude some young people without these traits from being able to negotiate resilient pathways out of adversity. From this perspective, it is not the role of schools to instil 'resilience' in young

people, rather it is about providing resources to young people who are experiencing adversity, such that they can achieve resilient outcomes.

In relation to young people's attitudes to school, teachers and parents, I was also expecting a clear correlation between positive support relationships and academic outcomes, with those students reporting feeling strongly supported being those with the resources to be able to achieve positive outcomes at school. How teachers, in particular, were seen by their students quickly became an important aspect of my research. Whilst I was conscious from the beginning that I did not want to neglect the voice of educational professionals, as my research developed, I became more and more aware of just how pivotal a role teachers play in the lives of young people. This had an effect on both a methodological and theoretical level: undertaking a qualitative exploration of teaching practices and experiences was designed to complement the quantitative analysis of students' attitudes and perceptions; moreover, on a theoretical level, I expected that the importance of the student-teacher relationship would be more easily seen and disentangled amongst students who were not necessarily able to call on support from other sources.

As with most research of social phenomena, however, the way in which this all fit together 'on-the-ground' was much more complex and the clear-cut hypotheses I started out with very quickly began to melt away (see chapter 10). Nevertheless, what I developed throughout the process was a need to keep the main research questions I was seeking to investigate in focus, whilst also being aware of what the study would and would not be able to answer.

What was also instrumental in developing my thesis was the opportunity to work as part of a wider research team, who were also acquainted with the project, familiar with the data and with whom I could discuss my nascent thoughts and ideas. Within the RESL.eu project consortium, I was able to discuss issues specific to the study with other PhD students at other institutions across the participating countries. However, it was the close working relationship with the other three members of the UK team at Middlesex University that I found most helpful. Throughout the length of the study (and beyond), I was able to have a more detailed discussion of the data with colleagues as closely connected to the project as I was, and I found this an invaluable resource as my research developed and my own thesis was emerging.

### **1.3 Building on RESL.eu by narrowing the focus: the role of teacher support**

In terms of its research design, my doctoral study makes use of the new, extensive RESL.eu dataset in addition to a unique bespoke dataset matching UK participants' survey responses to the DfE's administrative records. These quantitative data are combined with qualitative information in the form of teacher focus groups and documentary analysis of school policies to explore in greater depth the relationship between students and their teachers, especially amongst those young people at-risk of performing poorly at school and experiencing negative educational outcomes.

In particular, the focus of this thesis is on young people in England with identifiable risk factors associated with what is termed in the European policy discourse as early school leaving. Early school leaving is defined at a European Union level as having attained no higher than lower secondary education, whilst not currently receiving any education or training (Eurostat, 2013). This means that the concept covers not only dropouts from compulsory education but also those students who completed their education but who, nonetheless did not achieve the benchmark level of attainment – equivalent in England and Wales to five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C. This key threshold for academic 'success' is prevalent in the educational literature in the UK, even if the terminology of 'early school leaving' is not (Ryan & Lőrinc, 2015).

Previous research and on-going sociological studies (e.g. Ferguson *et al.*, 2005; Robson, 2008; Dale, 2010; Lamb *et al.* 2011) have identified that some young people are more 'at risk' of leaving school early and/or becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training) than others. These risk factors can be biological, socio-cultural or environmental but in reality are often combined as a significant number of young people experience multiple adverse conditions. Academic research has focused on such risk factors as catastrophic life events, students with learning difficulties, children in care or those with parents in prison or with health issues (Rutter, 1972, Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987; Masten et al, 1990; Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Miller, 2007). Furthermore, young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage or in areas of high levels of urban poverty have also been identified as potentially being at risk of becoming early school leavers or NEETs (Werner & Smith, 1982; Garmezy, 1991, 1995).

Almost any threat to students' well-being in their everyday lives can be seen as a potential risk, yet by no means all young people with these experiences go on to leave school early.

The fact that the majority are able to complete their studies, integrate themselves into the labour market and undergo successful transitions from school to work is because protective factors work to 'buffer' against the impact of such risks (Rutter, 1985; Werner, 2000). Protective factors lie in individuals' personal characteristics, family conditions, supports in the environment and self-concept (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

Just as risk factors may be transmitted from one generation to another, allowing for the persistence of structural inequalities, the provision of protective factors may similarly be able to mitigate such risks by laying a foundation for overcoming these persistent barriers and leading to more favourable developmental outcomes. In a sociological sense, the endurance of positive outcomes and successful adaptation despite the existence of a number of risk factors can be thought of as 'resilience'. Moving away from the idea of resilience as an innate personality trait (a notion most often found in the developmental psychology literature) it is important to view the concept not only as an outcome – the result of having overcome risks to achieve a particular outcome – but also as a dynamic process that involves the on-going adaptation of behaviours, decision making and coping strategies to numerous and evolving risk factors at both an individual and societal level. In this way it is clear that there exists the potential to promote resilience, both through the alleviation or reduction of risk factors and through the establishment and development of protective strategies.

An important tool for the promotion of resilience comes in the form of social support, either through family members, from peers or through other community networks. For those young people who, for a variety of reasons, do not receive such support, their interaction with teachers at school can become invaluable. The support of their teachers can provide an important alternative source of 'social capital', a vital resource that mitigates the impact of risk factors in their everyday lives and helps them to negotiate successful post-school transitions.

Whilst the issues surrounding early school leaving and NEETs have been the subject of much research, quantitative studies have tended to focus on longitudinal studies with a retrospective view on participants' schooling and educational trajectories. The use of new empirical data enables a more contemporary analysis of young people's experiences, motivations and relationships at school. Furthermore, an examination of the role of teachers in providing support to young people 'at-risk' of poor academic attainment from

the perspective both of teaching staff and students allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the different sources of support available to young people in secondary education.

Whilst the remit of the RESL.eu project encompassed systemic, structural and individual factors across multiple educational contexts, it is important to narrow down the frame of reference to enable a thorough and robust examination of the salient issues affecting policies, experiences and outcomes within a single jurisdiction.

This study, therefore, builds upon the work of the wider RESL.eu project in three main ways: First, it seeks to investigate a more focused and targeted set of research questions than the broader EU-wide project. It looks primarily at the role of teacher support amongst at-risk young people and, in particular, at strategies to promote resilient outcomes as an important protective factor against negative educational outcomes. Focusing in particular on the institutional framework that exists within the context of the education system in England, I explore the importance of teacher support strategies to promote resilience within this specific national framework. As such, the following research questions provide for a more focused and targeted investigation of the key issues under investigation:

**RQ1:** What is the relationship between levels of perceived support and educational outcomes?

**RQ2:** What is the effect of teacher support on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in relation to their educational outcomes?

**RQ3:** How can teachers overcome the challenges facing students to mitigate their exposure to risk and to increase availability of support?

**RQ4:** What effective strategies are employed in schools to promote students' capacity for achieving positive (and resilient) outcomes?

Beyond this, my study draws on contemporary empirical data collected as part of my role in the RESL.eu project, but also includes matched administrative data acquired from the DfE, which provides important insights into the situation of young people currently reaching completion of their compulsory schooling within the current policy environment and educational system. In addition to a statistical analysis of this newly-acquired quantitative dataset, my doctoral study is also informed by a qualitative case study of one local authority area in London. I undertook additional data collection through qualitative focus groups with teachers, and a documentary analysis of school-level policies and Ofsted inspection reports

to explore in greater depth the strategies employed by schools and teaching personnel to promote and assist their most vulnerable students. This part of the study provides an important perspective from the viewpoint of teaching professionals and allows for the identification of best practices in schools.

A third way in which my work builds upon the RESL.eu project relates to narrowing its focus to highlight issues specific to the education system in England. The quantitative element of the study uses responses from survey participants in schools in England, which provides an opportunity to investigate and study in greater depth the underlying structural and institutional effects related to students currently going through this specific education system. It furthermore allows findings and conclusions to be drawn in relation to the current policy environment and under current economic and labour market conditions. On a practical level, this eliminates the need to disentangle the various international standardisation procedures associated with cross-national comparative research and, in particular, in relation to the study of education systems, which are often highly national-specific and organically-derived.

As my study seeks to answer a focused set of research questions, it is therefore appropriate to use data analysis techniques that can provide a more nuanced understanding of the specific concepts and issues under investigation. For this reason, I adopt a mixed-methods approach to explore my research questions using both quantitative and qualitative data to encompass both the students' and teachers' perspectives.

Using the dataset of student responses surveyed at part of the RESL.eu study, statistical models can be produced to assess the extent to which certain factors and variables can provide a greater or lesser protective effect for 'at-risk' young people. Using matched administrative data, furthermore, allows for causal inferences to be made in relation to the effect that teacher support has on educational outcomes.

Further, a case study approach using the qualitative teacher focus groups and documentary analysis provides a more in-depth exploration of actual strategies that schools employ by way of providing support to vulnerable young people and which, when taken together, can provide an evidence base for future directions in studies of educational outcomes and policy making in this domain.



My study, therefore, has both a theoretical and applied focus and its findings aim to inform on-going debates around current interventions and strategies to improve outcomes for vulnerable students, as well as contribute to the policy discourse within education policy in England and, more broadly, within the discourse on social mobility. The study uses an innovative mixed methods approach to interrogate newly-acquired quantitative and qualitative data collected from students and teachers who are negotiating the existing institutional and policy environment in the English education system.

This thesis adds to the academic literature on risk and resilience and contributes to a clearer understanding of the mechanisms involved in supporting 'at-risk' young people. Taking into account the perceptions of the young people themselves and the perspectives of teaching professionals, I highlight opportunities for the development and adoption of recommended 'best practice' in schools, whilst emphasising the need for a whole-child approach to policy making. I argue that a focus on resilience as an individualised deficit-focused policy lever is likely to be fruitless without a much more holistic approach in schools, and complementary social policies that seek to mitigate the structural inequalities that disadvantage students from backgrounds without access to capital valorised by the mainstream education system.

Nonetheless, within such a system, I argue that teachers are uniquely placed to play a pivotal role in the lives of young people. They provide both a buffer against the various difficulties faced by many students by providing support and guidance to students facing a range of adverse circumstances, and are a valuable source of social and cultural capital. Furthermore, they also serve as the primary means through which policy at an institutional level may be implemented towards tackling persistent social and educational inequalities.

## 2 – Literature Review

This literature review explores the prominent literature in sociology of education, cultural sociology and developmental psychology over the last forty years, drawing out some of the key theoretical developments across the fields and developing an effective synthesis of these models to provide a theoretical guide for my own doctoral study and to underpin the potential for its findings to contribute to on-going academic debates and policy development to reduce educational inequality.

It first outlines the major themes and developments of risk and resilience research, looking at how both concepts have been defined theoretically and operationalised in empirical work. Masten *et al.*'s (1990; 1999) compensatory model of development is highlighted as a particularly relevant theoretical foundation of research into resilience amongst young people exposed to risk before a further exploration of how resilience may be studied effectively through an outcomes-based approach is also undertaken. It moves on to look at the concepts of risk and resilience from a sociological perspective and challenges the highly debatable view of resilience as a personality trait, found prevalently in the psychopathology literature.

The review further explores the extent to which Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) theory of social reproduction may be applied within an over-arching risk-resilience theoretical framework. It looks at how risk factors are transmitted from one generation to the next, allowing structural inequalities to persist, whilst also examining whether the availability of social and cultural resources can also reproduce resilience through the accumulation of effective protective factors. In this way, my thesis brings together the seminal work of Bourdieu with the sociological and developmental psychology canon on resilience theory in an innovative way, to highlight how each can contribute to a greater understanding of how inequalities are reproduced along class lines through the persistence of risk factors, whilst also identifying how these might be broken down and reduced.

The extent to which existing hierarchies can be transformed through the active resistance of institutions, such as schools, and individuals within them, is also examined. In particular, the role of teachers is considered in greater depth as to their ability to foster and promote resilience by providing social support and guidance to developing young people experiencing adversity or those exposed to significant risk factors. My own argument contends that teachers are uniquely placed to play a pivotal role in the lives of young

people, providing a buffer against the various difficulties faced by many students either by providing access to social and cultural capital or as a means of implementing policies at an institutional level aimed at reducing persistent social and educational inequalities.

The importance of an individual's personal experience is also examined through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory of development, which highlights the prominent role that contextual factors in one's environment play in mediating an individual's specific developmental pathway. I suggest that this theoretical model can also be situated within the literature on risk and resilience and establish how Bronfenbrenner's thesis can be useful as a means of understanding the complex relationships experienced and developed as young people negotiate the transitions throughout their educational careers.

The chapter concludes by outlining how these theoretical models have influenced recent social policies and interventions aimed at improving the outcomes of 'at-risk' young people on an individual, family/home and institutional/societal level (chapter 3 gives a more detailed account of policies as implemented by successive UK governments). Within this context, my study draws upon these models in synthesis to explore the role of the teacher-student relationship to promote educational resilience amongst young people exposed to risk, particularly during periods of transition during their educational pathways. Furthermore, it highlights how lessons can be learnt from teachers' strategies at the institutional level to influence the development of social policies and interventions to reduce persistent inequalities in our society.

## **2.1 Risk-resilience theory**

'Resilience' as a social phenomenon has been studied in relation to child development and educational psychology for at least the last four decades. The concept seeks to explain how and why children exposed to significant risk factors nevertheless 'succeed'. Resilience is conceptualised, therefore, in opposition to 'risk', which can be defined variously according to the context in which children or young people find themselves. Young people are identified as 'at-risk' due to both biological and environmental factors (Honig, 1984), although these cannot easily be isolated from each other and significant interdependence exists between such factors. Academic research on resilience has had a focus on those

children who have been involved in major disasters (Masten *et al.*, 1990; Yule, 1990) or catastrophic life events (Rutter, 1972; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987), but has also expanded to include young people identified as having 'multiple adverse conditions', such as children in care (Jackson & Martin, 1998), those with learning difficulties (Morrison & Cosden, 1997), children of parents in prison (Miller, 2007) or with mental health problems (Werner & Smith, 1977), or the effects of urban poverty or socio-economic disadvantage (Garmezy, 1991; 1995; Werner & Smith, 1982). More recently, though, approaches to risk identification amongst children have shifted to focus on all young people at an individual level. Rather than focusing on acute and dramatic risks, this research instead seeks to identify sources of threats to students' well-being within their everyday 'lived experience' (Howard & Johnson 2000; Martin & Marsh, 2008, Johnson, 2008).

Risk and resilience have been used as a conceptual framework in several empirical studies on the development of young people through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. Most studies of resilience "focus on subgroups of people who are at high risk for psychopathology or maladjustment but which somehow avoid unfavourable outcomes" (Tiêt & Huizinga, 2002, p261). Risk, however, has been operationalised in a wide number of ways, either through specific life circumstances of an individual or by the presence (or absence) of multiple indirect correlates or markers of potential vulnerability. The risk-resilience literature abounds with various constructions of 'risk', such that there are almost as many definitions of the concept as there are studies. Risk factors may be categorised as personal (learning difficulties [Morrison & Cosden, 1997], poor behaviour at school [Hughes *et al.*, 2001; Masten *et al.*, 1999], physical disability [Garmezy *et al.*, 1984]); familial (family instability [Werner and Smith, 1982; Rutter, 1979], parental domestic abuse [Rutter, 1979; Martinez-Torteya *et al.*, 2009], large family size [Rutter, 1979]); or environmental (low socio-economic status [Garmezy, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992; Rutter, 1979], ethnic minority status [Baldwin *et al.*, 1993; Connell *et al.*, 1994; Nettles *et al.*, 1994]), and studies may choose to focus on one specific factor or several risk factors in combination. Although some factors (e.g. low socio-economic status) do recur across studies as being detrimental to healthy development, what is clear is that the concept of risk has no universally-agreed definition and how it is operationalised can be highly specific to the context in which research is undertaken.

Likewise, gauging whether – or to what extent – someone displays resilience is also prone to significant variability of definition. In fact, there is no consensus as to whether 'resilience'

is a psychological trait: something that can be quantified or measured in some way and which is personal to an individual's make-up or disposition; or whether the term should apply only in terms of specific positive outcomes where a significant level of risk would seem to suggest that negative outcomes would have been more likely.

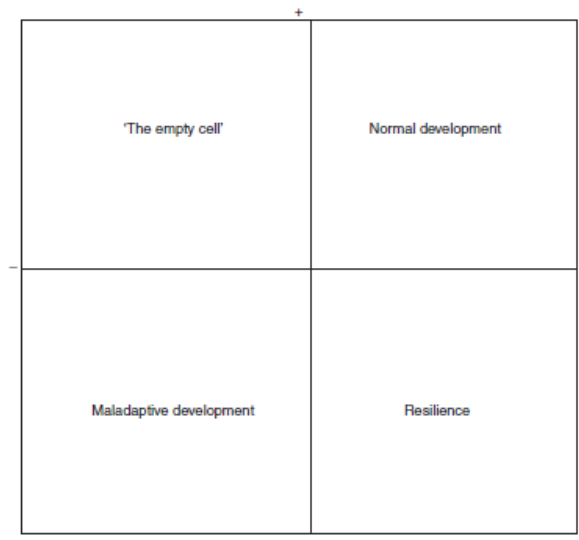
The former definition, as a 'measurable' personality trait, is prominent within the psychopathology literature as practitioners attempt to develop instruments that can gauge the level of resilience an individual has, in much the same way as their level of creativity or self-esteem (Wagnhild & Young, 1990; 1993; Charney, 2004). In this case, a lack of resilience is thereby pathologised and individuals divided into those who are, and those who are not, resilient. An internal, fixed conceptualisation of resilience has therefore been used as an explanatory variable to indicate why some individuals experience positive outcomes, while others do not. Kirby and Fraser (1997) define resilience in relation to a "constellation of characteristics that children have when they manage to develop successfully despite being born and raised in disadvantaged conditions" (cited in Wu *et al.*, 2014, p638). Psychological studies of development attempt to quantify the extent to which a number of mediating factors – including exhibiting a resilient character – can protect individuals from negative developmental outcomes or maladaptation (Ong *et al.*, 2006; Wu *et al.*, 2014). However, the conceptualisation of resilience in this way is highly contestable. Whilst prominently discussed in relation to models of psychological personality types, trait theory (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Eysenck, 1967; McCrae & Costa, 1999) attributes characteristics to individuals on the basis of their "tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (McCrae & Costa, 2003, p25). However, from a sociological viewpoint, these models can be seen as somewhat reductionist and the extent to which people display consistent patterns of behaviour across different contexts and within different societal situations and expectations seems to ignore the complexities of the systems within which people play out their own lives.

Waxman *et al.* (2003), conversely assert that resilience should not be seen as a fixed, personal attribute but as "something that can be promoted by focusing on 'alterable' factors that may impact an individual's success" (p1). What these alterable factors are and the ways in which they might best be positively affected has been the subject of much research. This is especially the case within the context of education, where young people negotiate their development within a formal institutional framework with clearly-defined educational outcomes. What is important to emphasise here though is that 'resilience' in

this case is operationalised in terms of a positive outcome despite the existence of specific adverse circumstances. All young people equally have the opportunity to display resilience in these ways, regardless of individual character traits or personality types. What is important in this conceptualisation is that resilience can be promoted through a range of measures, interventions or positive relationships.

Whilst several researchers espouse this outcome-based operationalisation of resilience (Rutter, 1985; Masten *et al.*, 1990; Wright & Masten, 2005; Schoon, 2006), Masten *et al.* most clearly demonstrate the interaction of internal, within-child factors and external, environmental factors that may lead to 'resilience' as defined by "normal development under unfavourable conditions" (Masten *et al.*, 1990). Under this 'compensatory model', high levels of stress exposure are mediated by the presence of a select number of attributes which 'compensate' for this exposure to risk. Children within supportive contexts have access to more resources and are therefore more likely to display greater developmental competence despite exposure to adversity. Toland and Carrigan (2001) illustrate Masten *et al.*'s compensatory model through the use of a simple 2x2 matrix (see figure 2.1) whereby the horizontal axis represents the developmental trajectory of the child, whilst the vertical axis indicates the effect of environmental factors acting upon them. The top-left-hand quadrant represents those who experience maladaptive development despite supportive environmental factors. However, it appears that research has found too few children falling into this category for any meaningful analysis to be undertaken (Toland & Carrigan, 2001, p99). Masten *et al.* (1999) infer from this 'empty cell' phenomenon the importance of a supportive environment to promote resilience by reducing the effect of potential adverse circumstances. Although an overly-simplistic model, it does serve to highlight the role of such protective factors to 'compensate' for the level of risk to which developing children may be exposed.

**Figure 2.1: Compensatory Model of Development**



Source: Toland and Carrigan (2011), adapted from Masten (2001)

From a sociological viewpoint, resilience is multidimensional, the result of a processes occurring within a wide range of contexts. Olsson *et al.* (2003) assert that resilience can be conceptualised as both process-based and outcome-based:

Resilience can be defined as an outcome characterized by particular patterns of functional behaviour despite risk. Alternatively, resilience can be defined as a dynamic process of adaptation to a risk setting that involves interaction between a range of risk and protective factors from the individual to the social (Olsson *et al.*, 2003, p2).

In either case, it is important to monitor the extent to which resilience is being displayed in a young person's development so that any evidence of maladaptation can be identified with a view to rectifying the situation. An outcome-orientated approach can allow for a process of benchmarking at one or more points in time. This then begs the question: which outcomes are the most appropriate to indicate that a young person has displayed resilience in their development?

Broadly speaking, 'positive outcomes' may be described at a socio-economic level as educational achievement or successful integration into the labour market but – arguably more importantly – also encompass positive psychosocial and behavioural adjustment. Longitudinal studies (Werner, 2000; Sacker *et al.*, 2002; Schoon, 2006) have attempted both to measure differences in these outcomes over time and to uncover the extent to which material deprivation and social disadvantage may affect them. Sacker *et al.*'s (2002) study

concludes that low social class continues to exert a cumulative effect on children's development over time by the process of internalising social class norms acquired from their parents' cultural practices and attitudes. This assimilation of low social class norms and expectations can also be seen as contributing to the persistence of differential outcomes into adulthood.

This having been said, however, these studies also evidence the identification of resilience processes by examining cases that display positive outcomes despite being exposed to the same type and level of risk as their peers. Werner's (2000) study identified that these cases differed in that they had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally and also that they displayed temperamental characteristics that allowed them to take advantage of support networks in the local community, even when the support of their biological parents was not available (cited in Toland & Carrigan, 2011, p99). This highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships to promote resilience amongst at-risk young people throughout their development.

## **2.2 Social reproduction of risk**

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of social reproduction posits that individuals develop views about their possible selves based on perceptions of their place in the social structure. According to their theory, the reproduction of the social system as a whole is due to the intergenerational transmission of culture through homes and schools, in both non-formal and formal educational settings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The reproduction of existing social systems, including their inherent power structures and inequalities serves to perpetuate risk factors across generations, which are delineated along class lines. The way in which this reproduction is effected involves the transmission of 'capital' from one generation to their children. Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital: *economic*, *social* and *cultural* (Bourdieu, 1986).

*Economic capital* refers to material wealth; resources that are "immediately and directly convertible into money" (Bourdieu, 2011, p82). Less tangible, yet still hugely important, are what Bourdieu terms social and cultural capital.



*Social capital* comprises “networks and support relationships, the aggregate of actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1997, p51).

*Cultural capital* refers to those resources that confer value in regards to the dominant culture within a society. It comprises both tangible access to cultural goods, such as books and films, and the accumulation of ‘sanctioned’ cultural behaviours, incorporating ways of speaking, behaving and interacting that are seen as desirable within a social system.

The accumulation of these capitals is a major concept in the theory of social reproduction, such that they are formed, developed and fostered through interactions with family and social institutions such as home and schools (McLaren, 1989; Meadmore, 1999), and can thus be seen as class-related. According to Bourdieu’s theory, ‘risk’ comes from a paucity or lack of access to economic, social and cultural capital and are reinforced across generations along class lines which reproduces the extant power dynamics and hierarchies with a social system.

However, this structuralist reading of Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory has been challenged by a number of authors (Harker, 1984; Giroux, 1983; Nash, 1999; Reay, 2004; Mills, 2008), who focus on the prominent role given to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ as a mechanism for adapting behaviour. The habitus reflects an individual’s agency in seeking successfully to negotiate their position within the existing social hierarchy. The extent to which social change can be effected through adaptations in habitus on an individual and collective level, however, is somewhat moot. Reay (2004) contends that whilst “choice is at the heart of habitus... [c]hoices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, their external circumstances” (p435).

Using Bourdieu’s notions of capital and habitus, several authors have sought to undertake a cultural analysis of class. This cultural-theoretical approach seeks to examine and explain how class is made and given value through culture. Reay (1998; 2004; 2006) has been prominent in emphasising the differential attribution of value given to class by way of cultural processes and practices. This perspective highlights the “unacknowledged normality of the middle classes” whilst pathologising and undermining that of the working classes (Reay, 2006, p289). Within the context of sociology of education, the acknowledgement of the importance of class has gained some traction in the works of Ball,

Reay, Savage, however, as Reay (2006) points out this cultural perspective of class remains largely absent from the policy discourse in England, where the “prevailing focus has been on within-school processes; a focus that has often been at the expense of understanding the influence of the wider economic and social context on schooling” (p289).

From an education system perspective, Ball (2003) highlights that all the authority remains with the middle classes, who not only run the system but for whom the system is designed to reward: that is, the system itself is one that valorises middle class, rather than working class, cultural capital. This systemic bias can be seen as one of the main drivers behind the persistence of class inequalities in education whereby middle-class families’ access to cultural resources can correspond to a greater engagement with the schooling process. However, Reay (2006) points out that beyond being purely an economic issue (i.e. access to material resources) there is also “an issue of representation and othering that both feeds into and is fed by social and economic inequalities” (p294-5).

This perceived cultural deficit of the working classes leads to social stigma (Goffman, 1963; Crocker *et al.*, 1998; Heatherton *et al.*, 2003) and this may be further upheld and perpetuated through the process of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ in relation to disadvantaged young people’s interactions with teachers or other adults in positions of authority and who are ‘part of the system’. Stemming from the seminal work of Robert K. Merton (1948), a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when an initial erroneous social belief leads to its own fulfilment. The literature on self-fulfilling prophecies understands the process in three stages: first that an erroneous set of expectations of a group is perceived; this in turn influences how these ‘perceivers’ treat this group; before the target group reacts to this treatment in a manner that conforms to and confirms the initial expectations (Jussim *et al.*, 2003, p378).

This process clearly has implications for the central role of teachers’ interactions with their students, highlighted by Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1968) pivotal study: “Teacher Expectations for the Disadvantaged”. Their experiment in a US school found that, by artificially boosting teachers’ expectations of the intellectual potential of a randomly-assigned group of students, these students actually demonstrated greater gains in IQ than their peers<sup>2</sup>. As well as providing an explanation for why disadvantaged children might

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<sup>2</sup> Although, it must be noted, that IQ only measures one aspect of the concept of intelligence (cf. Sternberg, 1993).

struggle at school in the face of unconscious negative stereotyping, the study also seems to provide a cost-effective solution for the same issue, emphasising the relative savings in both time and money that might be made by inducing teachers to expect more of their students without making any formal changes in teaching methods or by imposing more costly intervention programmes.

The role of teacher expectations, however, is complex. Jussim *et al.*'s (2003) review points to a number of studies (Rist, 1970; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985; Rosenthal, 1989) that provide evidence that teachers tend to like their high-expectancy students (those they expect to perform well) more than their low-expectancy students and so exert more effort in teaching them (p393). The differential impact of this affective interpretation can more clearly be seen when students are formally placed into ability streams or tracks. Studies have shown that teachers often spent more time preparing for their high-track classes (Rosenbaum, 1976; Evertson, 1982) and tend to be more enthusiastic about teaching them (Oakes, 1985). Furlong (2006) highlights that placing a child into a stream can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, as described above, whereby teachers' lower expectations reinforce pre-existing perspectives and limit the opportunities for those in low ability tracks (p61). More fundamentally, recent studies have shown that the streaming of students actually reproduces social inequalities rather than reducing them, with almost nine-out-of-ten students remaining in the same ability grouping throughout their time at school (Boaler, 2005).

This process of self-fulfilling prophecy can also be clearly seen in relation to students to whom a diagnostic label may have been attached. Within the contemporary classroom, students may have been knowingly- or unknowingly-to-them identified as 'at-risk' or with 'special educational needs' or with any number of psychological or physiological issues (e.g. ADHD, learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder). Labelling theory highlights that 'perceivers' – in this case teachers – tend to overemphasise the role of the actor's disposition in determining their behaviour (Ross, 1977). Thus, students who have been stigmatised with such labels are also subject to the erroneous expectations that lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy of negative outcomes for the stigmatised group.

Notwithstanding the potential for systemic bias, personal prejudices or individual affective behaviour, with sufficient political will the education system does provide the possibility of surmounting persistent structural risks and disadvantages and transforming existing

hierarchies through the active resistance of institutions, such as schools, and individuals within them.

Their agency – constrained as it may be by political will, cultural norms or subconscious psychological biases – has the ability to overcome these structural risks by actively fostering ‘buffers’ or protective effects that enable disadvantaged students to successfully adapt to the extant socio-cultural environment, providing the social and cultural resources not available from other sources: a process that can be seen as promoting resilience for so-called at-risk groups.

### **2.3 Protective factors and capital**

Whilst it has been highlighted that multiple risk factors acting in synergy may far exceed the effect of any one significant life event (Luthar, 1993; Allen, 1998, cited in Olsson *et al.*, 2003), the same might be said of resilience. Citing Egeland *et al.* (1993), Olsson *et al.* argue that:

Just as risk factors have been posited to lay a foundation for a negative chain of events, protective factors may similarly ensue a positive chain reaction leading to favourable developmental outcomes (Olsson *et al.*, 2003, p4).

In opposition to these multiple risk factors, studies have sought to identify the factors which have the greatest protective effect on preventing individuals from succumbing to negative outcomes. Rak and Patterson’s (1996) review of the risk-resilience literature divided such protective factors into four key categories: **personal characteristics, self-concept, family conditions** and **supports in the environment**.

It has been contended (Garmezy *et al.*, 1984; Rutter, 1983; 1985; 1987; Werner, 1984) that certain people display personal characteristics that make them more predisposed to being able to cope with adverse situations. Rak and Patterson (1996, p369) cite such character traits as ‘optimism’, ‘autonomy’, ‘active approach to problem solving’ and ‘a proactive perspective on life’ as having been empirically associated with reduced risk amongst young people in adverse circumstances. However, the causal direction of these supposed correlations cannot be easily discerned and defining resilience as a personality trait as such runs the risk of excluding or writing off youngsters without these ‘innate’ characteristics.

Similarly, though separately, the notion of self-concept has also been cited to act as a protective factor for at-risk young people. This psychological self-awareness and ability to be reflexive appears to enhance individual coping mechanisms when faced with adverse circumstances. It has been posited that “for some vulnerable children, stressful events actually serve to steel them against harm and to challenge them rather than to exacerbate their vulnerability” (Rak & Patterson, 1996, p370). However, although there appears to be some empirical evidence for this (Werner, 1984; Prince & Nurius, 2014), the reliance on individual character traits again precludes some young people from being able to negotiate resilient pathways out of adversity.

If we are to understand resilience in a sociological context as the endurance of positive outcomes and successful adaptation despite the existence of a number of risk factors, the application of Bourdieu’s theories to the analysis of resilience amongst young people can provide a useful prism through which to understand how such processes can mitigate the impact of adversity. In particular, it can be seen that the role of young people’s environments, particularly at home and at school, and their interaction with significant adults – family members or teachers – provide access to important social and cultural capital resources.

The central role that parents play in activating material, social and cultural resources for the benefit of their child has been highlighted by several influential authors (Lareau, 1987; Vincent, 2001; Crozier & Reay, 2005), who invoke Bourdieu’s theories of social reproduction through the intergenerational transmission of capital. Such cultural capital may take many forms, including not only access to cultural experiences and goods but also the transmission of cultural ‘ways of behaving’ – that is, codes and norms that are valued and rewarded as desirable and advantageous to those who are able to employ them.

Social capital, comprised of the interpersonal support relationships and networks to which one has access, can further be seen as an important resource for young people as they negotiate their path through their formal education. Bourdieu (1986) cites social capital as a means for maintaining social reproduction as it embeds one’s membership to a group by attaching value to the on-going relationships and networks provided by it. Robert Putnam (2000) further developed the idea that social capital is a resource that provides both a means of promoting group cohesion (*‘bonding’*) and fostering intergroup linkages (*‘bridging’*). In this way, social networks can be seen as intrinsic to the ability to resolve

reproduced inequalities through accumulated knowledge, connections and resources (Putnam, 2007).

Drawing on her work on recent migrant groups, Ryan (2011), however, cautions that dynamics within and across social networks are complex: for example, “a network made up of people from similar or lower socio-economic groups may further reinforce social marginalisation” (p721). Social capital may be better conceptualised in terms of the nature of a relationship and the resources available to an individual, rather than in terms of the commonalities or differences between group members (Ryan, 2011, p721) to provide greater insights into the process by which social capital can be activated to overcome persistent inequalities.

As stated above, the cultural resources to which young people have access is also important in their ability to negotiate successful adaptation and positive outcomes. However, as Reay and Ball have emphasised, the role of dominant cultural norms exerts additional pressure on those young people whose cultural context is not valorised in the same way. For these young people, it must be questioned whether it should be incumbent on them to conform to the dominant, middle class cultural by seeking to access the resources that are valued within the existing social system, or should there be a more fundamental shift in the policy discourse to overcome the systemic bias that presupposes the desirability of one form of cultural capital over another?

If the latter proposition is to be achieved, education policy provides an integral part of the required shift in discourse, lying as it does at the interface of politics, sociology and labour market economics. However, there would need to be the political will to change a system that inherently favours the dominant culture of the elite. Even then, to implement such a policy would necessitate overcoming the biases that exist within the education system, policies that have, over the course of several decades, introduced self-reinforcing measures such as setting and streaming or differential education in the form of academy schools, free schools and independent schools. The politicisation of education in this way remains a significant challenge to overcoming the inherent biases that do little to reduce persistent inequalities in the social system as a whole (see chapter 3).

Whether disadvantaged students must seek to access the ‘valued’ cultural resources of the middle classes or whether education policy provides an opportunity of overcoming the stigmatisation of working-class culture, it is clear that the role of teachers is pivotal in either

case. In the former, teachers can provide a key relationship through which their students can access social and cultural capital; in the latter scenario, teachers are the primary means through which policy at an institutional level may be implemented to reverse the othering of working-class cultural capital, and to promote a greater level of social inclusion.

## **2.4 Specific role of teachers**

The potential for teachers to provide a number of roles to facilitate the positive attainment of their students has long been established. Whilst Morrison *et al.* (2006) assert that “academic achievement is best fostered in an environment that supports the child across multiple contexts,” it is clear that teacher support within a school environment is particularly important for those students who do not have access to alternative sources of support from other adults (Bowen *et al.*, 1998). Indeed, Mills (2008) contends that teachers are able to act as “agents of transformation rather than reproduction” and therefore “make a difference for the most disadvantaged students” (p262). Effective schools and positive school experiences are key in promoting resilience amongst ‘at-risk’ young people (Masten *et al.*, 1990) and teacher-student relationships on both a practical and emotional level are important in nurturing and protecting positive development outcomes (Bowen *et al.*, 1998, Klem & Connell, 2004, Crosnoe & Elder, 2004, Noble & McGrath, 2012).

Klem and Connell’s study (2004) identifies that positive teacher support promotes student engagement, which in turn leads to higher academic achievement and reduces the probability of leaving school early. Their influential quantitative study concludes that students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report being engaged at school. Qualitative studies (Howard & Johnson, 2000, Johnson, 2008) have also emphasised that student perceptions of effective teacher support strategies include being accessible and engaging, actively involved in students’ work, displaying empathy and advocating by using their professional capacity on the behalf of their students (Johnson, 2008).

However, the institutional and contextual framework within which teacher-student relations are allowed to play out provide pitfalls as well as opportunities. Reay (2012) highlights that class setting and streaming, which are endemic in the current education

system, serve to emphasise and reinforce differential educational practices delineated along class lines, such that “white middle class children in socially mixed schools are mostly educated separately in top sets away from their black and white working-class peers” (p6). Within such structural constraints it is clear that inequalities can be persistently reinforced, even if unintentionally. Sukhnandan’s (1998) review of academic research on streaming, setting and ability grouping in the UK context concludes that teacher and student effects can have a negative impact on outcomes:

Research indicates that within homogeneous settings, teachers are predisposed to make negative judgments of low ability pupils which, in turn, negatively affects these pupils’ self-perceptions, levels of achievement and experiences of schooling. Furthermore ... homogeneous grouping reinforces the segregation of pupils along lines of social class, gender, race and age (season of birth) (Sukhnandan, 1998, p54).

Through the mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecy and subconscious influence of labelling, the perceptions of teachers and students have been shown to have a significant effect on whether young people are able successfully to negotiate their educational trajectories. My own doctoral study examines this further, using subjective measures of students’ perceptions of support from their teachers to investigate the effect that this support has on the most socio-economically disadvantaged students. In this way, I also seek more broadly to disentangle the relationship between resilience and perceptions of support – from teacher, parents and peers – whilst also incorporating the voice of educational professionals to highlight the unique and pivotal role that teachers can play in promoting resilience amongst their most vulnerable students.

## **2.5 Ecological systems theory**

The central argument of my thesis highlights the importance of young people’s relationships and support networks to overcome individual and societal risk factors. In this context it is clear that environmental factors exert a significant impact on how young people negotiate their way through their lives, both at home and at school.

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s seminal work, *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979), expounds an ecological theory of development whereby an individual’s environment can be thought of in terms of interacting but distinct bio-ecological ‘systems’. These exist at successive levels from the individual at the centre (see figure 2.2).



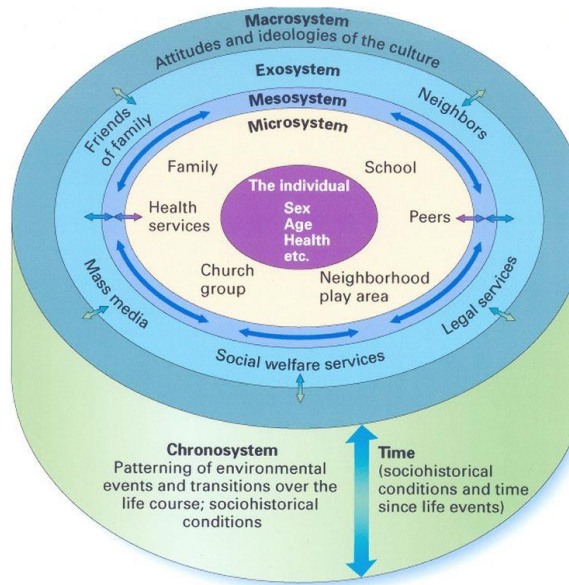
The *microsystem* comprises “a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p22). This system, therefore, includes the interactions that have the most direct and significant impact of the development of an individual. Most prominent amongst these, are the family, peers, school, neighbourhoods and community organisations. Closely related, the *mesosystem* involves the interactions that take place between these different groups, for example, between parents and school or between peers, which will have an impact on the development of the young person. It can be seen, therefore, as a system of microsystems.

Moving beyond the systems that directly impact on an individual, Bronfenbrenner describes the *exosystem* as a setting beyond the individual’s immediate context in which events occur that have an indirect impact in relation to their development. Examples may include interactions that occur at a parent’s place of work or activities within a local neighbourhood group that would affect how parents or others interact with the developing person.

The highest topological system identified in Bronfenbrenner’s model, the *macrosystem*, is composed of larger societal structures, their underlying cultural norms, customs and belief systems. The macrosystem, then, comprises the wider cultural context within which a person undergoes their own individual development.

A later addition to the overall model, Bronfenbrenner (1986) identifies the *chronosystem* as a pattern of interactions that influence the person’s development through changes and continuities over time in the environments in which they are living. Influenced by Elder’s (1977, 1979) life course theory, the chronosystem encompasses the timing of events that take place, either internally (e.g. psychological development) or externally (e.g. the timing of a parent’s death) in an individual’s life. It also places a person’s development in the wider socio-historical context of the time and place in which they are located.

**Figure 2.2: Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory of development**



Source: Santrock, 2007

Schoon (2006) adopts this bio-ecological systems model in her work on risk and resilience, drawing empirically on longitudinal cohort studies. She shows that Bronfenbrenner's model is an appropriate way to understand the complex structures and interactions that govern human development across time and context.

This view is shared by several authors (Garbarino, 1992; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Sacker *et al.*, 2002; Jones & Lafreniere, 2012) seeking to conceptualise how contextual factors affect an individual's development throughout their childhood and adolescence, and, in particular, within an overall risk-resilience theoretical framework. Howard and Johnson (2000) go so far as to claim:

Bronfenbrenner's theory has the potential to illuminate why some children do and others do not display resilient behaviours in the face of adverse life circumstances (p323).

Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's model can be broadly categorised into proximal and distal systems according to whether they impact upon an individual directly or whether they have a more indirect influence. Within the micro- and mesosystem, interactions between family members, at home and at school are examples of proximal systems. The interpersonal relations that operate within these proximal systems are significant in providing a network of support and resources for an individual. It is important here to note that these influences

are bidirectional and these relationships constitute reciprocal systems of which the individual represents an active part. Clearly this idea of interconnected linkages between individuals within a network is congruent with Bourdieu's (1984; 1986) conceptualisation of 'social capital'.

Distal systems are those that operate primarily at the meso-, exo- and macrosystem level. Sacker *et al.* (2002) identify social class as a distal system relating as it does "to children's development indirectly, mediated by the material resources available to the family and the emotional resources of parents which may affect the quality of the relationship with their children" (p865). They cite Bourdieu (1984) in emphasising that social class encapsulates not only occupational characteristics and material living standards, but also cultural norms and customs, which Bourdieu terms 'cultural capital'.

In relation to young people approaching the end of their compulsory education, the relationships within their immediate micro- and meso-systems are likely to undergo a significant degree of flux. These periods of 'transition' have been shown to be of huge importance as young people attempt to negotiate their paths towards higher education, further training or into the labour market (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Bynner *et al.*, 1997; Macdonald *et al.*, 2001; Roberts, 2011). At this point, the relationships that young people have developed with their school provide a vital source of support and specialist knowledge in preparing them for 'the next step', that may not be available at home or from amongst their peers.

Bronfenbrenner is clear that schools constitute "a key part of the micro-system of the developing child" (cited in Toland & Carrigan, 2011, p100) and this is no more clearly the case than at periods of transition within a child's educational trajectory: entering primary school; transferring to secondary education; reaching the end of compulsory education; and transitions involving further training or education and/or entering the labour market. Within his ecological systems model, Bronfenbrenner identifies transition as occurring when an individual's position is altered as the result of a change in role, environment or circumstance. This model, therefore, captures the transition occurring in a child's world at local, national and global levels as part of their everyday life experience (Scollan & Gallagher, 2016).

At every level within these bio-ecological systems, but most importantly within proximal systems of the micro- and mesosystems, there can be difficulties as well as protective

elements. The degree of risk to which an individual is exposed and the extent to which they can rely on protective support structures can be viewed in Bourdieusian terms as related to their access to, or lack thereof, economic, social and cultural capital.

As discussed above, the reproduction of risk factors is associated with insufficient access to resources that is unable to be breached from one generation to the next. This includes economic capital and material resources. Equally, on the other hand, the presence of social and cultural capital can serve as protective 'buffers' against unforeseen adversity as well as at times of heightened flux and transition.

The focus, therefore, on promoting access to social and cultural capital amongst those whose resources (both material and non-material) may be limited should be high on the agenda amongst institutions and groups closely influencing and impacting on the development of the young person. This is particularly important as young people undergo significant transitions in their lives, such as reaching the end of compulsory schooling, where schools and the interpersonal relationships developed therein can provide a vital role in promoting strong support and advice networks within an individual's microsystem.

In this way, the models developed by both Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu can be seen as advocating positive interactions between actors to enhance personal development, that is to promote resilience amongst those who may experience significant risk factors to achieve positive outcomes. They are both agreed that schools are a vital actor within this process and the role they can play is particularly important at times of transition and periods of uncertainty and change.

However, significant differences do exist between the two models, primarily in terms of the focus they place on the role that resources can play in mediating an individual's development. This can be seen in Bourdieu's extension of the idea of 'capital' from an economic model towards a more holistic social and cultural model. In this way, social capital and cultural capital hold value in and of themselves, independently of the extent to which they can be 'monetised' or the extent to which they are merely a further indication of economic wealth.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, by contrast, views economic resources primarily as a means of acquiring material resources in order to mitigate the relationships affecting an individual's successful socio-emotional development.

Through this lens, Bronfenbrenner's theories can serve as a means to understand the process by which economic deprivation negatively impacts upon children's and adolescents' development. Eamon's (2001) examination of the effects of poverty on children's socio-emotional development explicitly outlines the proximal processes associated with individual relationships within each of Bronfenbrenner's five 'ecological systems'. She contends that children from poorer families are, for example, more likely to experience peer rejection, lower popularity and conflictual peer relations. This occurs through a lack of family resources, which constrains the child's ability to purchase 'acceptable' clothing or to participate in peer activities. Isolation in this way further decreases the opportunities for social interactions and building and maintaining peer relations (Eamon, 2001, p258).

In reference to mesosystem interactions, Eamon (2001) highlights evidence that low levels of maternal school involvement partially mediate the effect of economic deprivation on school social adjustment. Mothers who are uninvolved in their children's schools may also employ less skilled parenting practices in the home, the effects of which can be observed in the classroom (p260).

Exosystem networks are also highlighted in the form of parental social support networks and local community interactions. Whilst wider support networks can mitigate the impact of economic hardship, lower income families are much more likely to have fewer social contacts, and/or whose social networks may themselves be a source of stress or obligation. Community environments may also have an indirect effect according to the provision of economic or social opportunities, existence of neighbourhood violence or the potential for associations with deviant peers.

Eamon's review highlights the usefulness of Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory for assessment and intervention purposes in the fields of social work and social policy. She endorses the model as a suitable framework through which to provide practice-based interventions at an appropriate 'level' and aimed at an appropriate target to maximise their impact on children's socio-emotional development.

## 2.6 Interventions and social policies

Much of the research on risk and resilience has been undertaken with the aim of providing a meaningful framework for developing effective intervention measures and wider social policies. Seminal authors in the fields of mental health, developmental psychology and educational psychology have identified the promotion of resilience through the development/nurturing of protective factors as an effective means to address extant risks within a psychopathological framework (Werner, 1984; Rutter, 1985; 1987; Luthar, 1993; Garmezy, 1993; 1995; Haggerty, 1996).

The research that underpins these models demonstrates that despite the existence of significant risk factors, positive outcomes and successful adaptation is possible for all young people via the means of properly targeted interventions. The purpose, therefore, of these interventions becomes “an explicit and planned attempt to shift the balance from vulnerability to resilience either by decreasing exposure to risk factors or by increasing the number of available protective factors, or both in a two-pronged attack” (Toland & Carrigan, 2011, p102). The research questions under investigation in my own study are focused towards understanding the mechanisms by which this can be achieved. The effectiveness of strategies and interventions at school is examined in regards to enabling all students to achieve positive adaptation and successful negotiation of their educational trajectories.

A relatively large number of studies and policy evaluations in the area of resilience-based interventions have taken place within a North American context (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Ungar, 2011) and many are related to clinical interventions around substance misuse (e.g. Velleman *et al.*, 2005) or in response to post-traumatic stress (e.g. McFarlane & Yehuda, 1996). However, these examples grounded within the American social care and mental health systems do form a basis for similar research in Australia, the UK and elsewhere and, more importantly, as a framework for policy and intervention design within other institutional contexts.

Interventions to improve the outcomes of young people identified as experiencing adversity or exposed to risk can be broadly categorised into three: measures aimed at the individual young person; those aimed at their family and home environment; and policies implemented within the wider ecology, most importantly within schools. [A fourth category may encompass broader governmental policies that, although not designed as specific,

targeted interventions, have an indirect and positive impact on alleviating poverty, social inequality or educational disparities, which is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.] At each of these levels interventions and policies may seek to minimise or manage risk factors or nurture or promote protective mechanisms. An integrated, holistic approach would entail a degree of intervention at each level to encourage resilient development pathways (see figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3: Intervention matrix**

	<i>Decrease Risk Factors</i>	<i>Increase Protective Factors</i>
<i>Individual</i>		
<i>Family</i>		
<i>School / Community</i>		

### 2.6.1 Individual-level

Rak and Patterson (1996) highlight the role that guidance and counselling can play in response to children and adolescents identified as being ‘at-risk’. These interventions involve ‘solution-based’ counselling for young people in response to a particular adverse life event or following a prolonged period of behavioural misconduct. Whilst a range of individual-level resources are thought to be important in developing capacity for resilient behaviours – temperament, intelligence, sociability, communication skills and self-concept (Morrison *et al.*, 2006; Olsson *et al.*, 2003) – many authors on the subject highlight the fact that young people learn these skills not so much through instruction but through experience (Olsson *et al.*, 2003, p6-7). This is not to say, however, that young people should

be exposed to adversity or risk as a matter of course. However, it should be noted that over-protection and shielding of young people has the potential to do as much harm for individual resilience development as over-exposure to risk or adversity. Interventions at an individual level should focus on developing the protective mechanisms that may buffer the impact of risk factors as and when they arise, equipping young people with the tools to deal with their circumstances and actively engage with their risk setting.

Individual-level interventions involve the development of assets and resources in young people's lives. This includes both the enhancement of individual cognitive skills, but also of the fostering of social resources, developing and conducting positive interpersonal relationships with peers, family members and members of the wider community. At an individual level, common skills development and asset building can be identified as the focus of interventions, which may occur on a one-to-one basis or in groups; either in a school environment, at home or in a clinical setting. However, "it is vital that public health interventions that use a resilience approach pay particular attention to the unique features of the population of interest and the context in which the approach is employed" (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005, p413). As with other level interventions none of these policies should be considered in isolation. The centrality of the ecological context in which an individual plays out their everyday life necessitates that any interventions focused on achieving positive outcomes by mitigating risk and fostering protective mechanisms must be sufficiently tailored towards the realities experienced by young people on an individual basis.

### **2.6.2 Family-level**

Olsson *et al.*'s analysis (2003) emphasises the importance of positive parent-child attachment within the context of promoting adolescent resilience. As the primary source of social support, young people's immediate home environment and family relationships can be seen as a critical forum through which targeted interventions can take place.

The focus of family-level interventions comprises opportunities for successful adaptation of family members, particularly parents, to identified risk factors. Parenting education and specific counselling for parents has been shown to have success both in a preventative capacity and a crisis intervention setting. Rak and Patterson (1996) contend that counselling for parents – and particularly for teenage parents – assists them in understanding that "children's capacity for resilient behaviour is diminished when they experience a high



degree of uncertainty and emotional turmoil within the family” (p371) and help them to adapt their parenting practices to promote positive parent-child interactions.

A further focus for interventions at this level involves social capital development. Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) argue that membership of social support networks connects the external conditions of young people’s lives, their ‘social capital’, with their internal emotional worlds, their ‘resilience’, and as such social support network membership should be the main site for family support interventions with young people to promote resilience. In this regard, the building of social capital within the setting of the family and the local and wider community provides an “holistic context within which positive parenting skills can develop and strengthen ... characterised by mutual trust, reciprocity and collective resolution of problems that parents may have in common” (Stone and Hughes, 2002)

Family intervention at the early years’ stage is crucial (Smokowski, 1998; Werner, 2000; Cassen *et al.*, 2009; Egeland *et al.*, 1993). Early intervention for parenting practice education, positive parent-child relationships and social capital development has been shown to have a preventative effect on managing potential sources of risk and developing protective mechanisms through which to promote the capacity for resilience behaviour. Additionally, the relationship between parenting practices and child behaviour has been shown to have cumulative and reciprocal effects over time (Eamon, 2001) such that the earlier positive interactions can be embedded, the greater the opportunity for the parent-child relationship to provide a source of protection from exposure to risk in the longer term.

Studies (Rutter, 1985; Murray *et al.*, 2000; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003) highlight also that family interventions cannot be successfully undertaken in isolation. Several intervention programmes emphasise the need for consistent and constructive interaction between parents and schools.

### **2.6.3 School-/Community-level**

Given the centrality of the role that schools can play assisting and fostering the successful development of young people, interventions and policies implemented within these institutions are both desirable and critically important. Within the school context, Schoon and Bynner (2003) affirm that “policy directed at improving the life chances of children and young people needs to be directed at reducing the detrimental impact of risk factors and ensuring that appropriate protective mechanisms are in place.” They emphasise that

school-based interventions should not attempt to improve isolated skills or competences and warn against a lack of consideration of the wider context within young people's everyday lives.

However, heavily influenced by American policy and practice, centralised interventions aimed at promoting resilience in UK schools (e.g. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Strategy for School (SEAL; see DfES, 2005); Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies programme (PATHS; see Challen *et al.*, 2011)) have sought to improve children's emotional and social 'competences', building upon the idea of resilience as a personality trait. These schemes espouse the idea that a certain set of behaviours can be taught and then transferred successfully to a range of life and educational situations with powerful positive effects (Ecclestone & Lewis, 2014). Strategies framed around resilience within an overall psychological well-being context seek to derive legitimacy from strands in mental health, counselling and clinical psychology. However, a sociological reading of such strategies would caution against such a reductionist approach of 'treating' the behavioural consequence rather than the underlying social cause of which it is a symptom.

Countering this prevalence for behaviour-based intervention, Schoon and Bynner (2003) further contend that, as with policies at family-level, there needs to be a "shift of emphasis from crisis intervention to primary prevention before serious maladjustment has already manifested itself" (p26). For children exposed to co-occurring multiple or accumulating risk factors, they caution that services that are highly differentiated or specialized can actually be counterproductive. Instead they advocate that policies "should aim for a holistic approach, for community interventions and integrated service delivery [involving] families and communities in addition to the young people themselves."

This approach is consistent with Luthar and Cicchetti's (2000) application of resilience research to social policy and practice. Their comprehensive guidance is explicit in advocating integrated strategies for the practical promotion of resilience:

[Interventions based on resilience research] must reflect careful consideration of the ways in which goals and techniques 'fit' with the life circumstances and everyday ecologies of the individuals serviced: Integrative, community-based approaches to service delivery are critical (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p24).

In summary, the current sociological and developmental psychological literature on resilience-based interventions highlights a number of key guiding principles. Measures that

are targeted at the behavioural misconduct of young people are seeking to treat the symptom and not the underlying cause. Interventions can be more effective when they take into account the ecological context of the individuals concerned, including inter-relationships that occur at every 'level' of their ecological system. A holistic and integrated approach to service delivery and implementation enables measures to effect a multifaceted response to a complex situation, providing a many-pronged attack to an accumulation of risk factors. To this end, the purpose of interventions becomes an attempt to promote resilience by decreasing exposure to risk factors *and* by increasing the number of available protective factors. These principles of an integrated approach to service delivery hold whether for crisis intervention situation or for early prevention measures. An emphasis on early intervention, though, is important as this can reduce the cumulative impact of adverse circumstances or detrimental relationships and can provide the opportunity for positive relationships and social resources to develop as a source of protection from exposure to risk in the longer term.

These guiding principles for developing interventions within a resilience-based framework allow for the design and implementation of meaningful, effective measures within the context of public health and education systems experiencing a period of scarce resources. Whilst the interface of research and public policy and practice contains great potential for successful intervention, Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) were, more than fifteen years ago, already advocating a degree of caution for policy makers, practitioners and those in charge of resource allocation:

The inherent promise of the construct of resilience must, however, be continually weighted against the dangers of hasty applications (e.g. those with little conceptual coherence or ecological relevance). Improvident interventions not only dissipate limited service dollars in the short term but also, more seriously, can serve to perpetuate dangerous beliefs over time about the intractability of problems among various vulnerable segments of contemporary society (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, 24)

Clearly, the theoretical models discussed in this chapter can provide a solid basis for policy making, whilst current intervention practices also contribute to the evidence base upon which governments ought to build social policies aimed at improving the outcomes of the most vulnerable young people in society. Furthermore, there remains scope for on-going teachers' strategies at the institutional level to provide key insights and influence the development of future policies to promote social mobility.

I turn, therefore, in the next chapter, to assess the extent to which successive UK governments have sought to address the gap in attainment and opportunity between socially disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. I outline the trends in policy over the past two decades that have had a direct impact on promoting social mobility through education initiatives, looking in particular at recent governments' focus on individual character and resilience education.

### **3 – Education policies for promoting social mobility**

Whilst this chapter does not seek to provide a comprehensive review of education policies implemented over the past twenty years (for a more detailed examination, see e.g. Forrester & Garrett, 2016; Bochel & Powell, 2016), it does nevertheless attempt to outline some key trends in policy that have had a direct impact on promoting social mobility through education initiatives. The chapter focuses on how the New Labour administrations (1997-2010), Coalition government (2010-15) and subsequent Conservative governments (since 2015) have sought to address the gap in attainment and opportunity between socially disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers, and highlights both the underlying continuities between successive governments and the more apparent changes in emphasis. The second part of the chapter provides a more detailed discussion of the current government's agenda towards developing students' 'character and resilience' as a means of promoting social mobility, particularly aimed at young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The focus on the development of non-cognitive skills of the individual is critically assessed with particular attention to the construction of 'resilience' as a key concept within its delivery.

#### **3.1 Continuity and change**

Education policy in the UK has been characterised both by continuity and change (Furlong, 2013; Bailey & Ball, 2016). On the one hand, successive governments have sought to put their stamp on education and to promote reform on the basis of their own interpretation of the challenges and demands facing the country's social and economic needs; on the other hand, authors (Apple, 2004; Furlong, 2013; Bailey & Ball, 2016) have identified an underlying consensus in education policy which has been characterised by the adoption of a neoliberal approach, emphasising the diversification and marketisation of provision and the oversight of a strong, guiding central government. Such a consensus has its origins as far back as the Thatcher government (1979-90) and, in particular, in the adoption of the Education Reform Act in 1988. This landmark piece of legislation introduced a common National Curriculum and introduced new types of educational establishments that were funded directly from central government (grant-maintained schools) and which were effectively free from local authority control. The act paved the way for an education system based on the principles of consumer choice and marketized provision. Ball (2008) has

described the numerous policy initiatives by subsequent administrations in terms of a 'policy ratchet', whereby "small and incremental policy moves can be identified, which have disseminated, embedded and naturalised privatisation within public sector provision" (p185). To this extent, the New Labour government, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government and current Conservative administration all conceived and implemented education policies under a certain underlying narrative of a neoliberal free-market economy, albeit with differing emphases. As Ball (2013) has further highlighted, a key difference between the Conservative Party's approach to policy making and New Labour's 'third way' relates to the extent to which such principles underpinned the government's level of ideological dogmatism: "While neoliberalism rests on a fairly unreflexive belief in markets and the private sector as the engine of national economic competitiveness [...] the third way rests more on the adoption of a 'flexible repertoire' of state roles and responses" (p97). Thus, whilst the Conservatives' adherence to neoliberal principles within education policy has been on the basis of a strict ideological orthodoxy, the Blair/Brown governments implemented such reforms on a more managerialist basis, focused towards 'what works'.

### **3.2 Targeted resources**

As highlighted by Burn & Childs (2016), "both New Labour and the Coalition governments sought to address the gap between the outcomes of wealthier and poorer pupils by directing resources into specific educational provision for the most disadvantaged" (p399). In contrast to the tendency towards *laissez-faire* market solutions of the previous Conservative administration, New Labour's policies to address widening educational inequalities were framed around the discourse of a 'third way', whereby an 'active state' (Giddens, 2000) continued to implement social programmes to ensure the market performed effectively. The guiding principle of New Labour education policy emphasised investment in human capital within a knowledge-based economy so as to be able to compete on a global stage. The focus on a global economy shifted the education policy discourse further away from the so-called welfare model of education such that "education is being rearticulated in terms of modernisation and dynamism, echoing the pace of globalisation and speed of contemporary capitalism" (Ball, 2013, p103-4).

Specific programmes were introduced to target areas of particular socio-economic deprivation. *Educational Action Zones (EAZ)* and *Excellence in Cities (EiC)* were initiatives that sought to improve provision by schools in deprived areas, such as inner cities, by increasing funding and promoting partnerships between schools, business and community organisations. These interventions were based on the premise that compensatory measures alone could overcome the educational inequalities experienced by pupils from economically-deprived areas. By contrast, the *SureStart* and *Every Child Matters* flagship policies of New Labour's second term, adopted a more holistic approach to improving the socio-economic and health circumstances of all children. Both initiatives provided a range of health services and social services for parents who could access them easily through *SureStart* Children's Centres, operated by local authorities. Within the framework of *Every Child Matters*, New Labour policies provided a commitment to multi-agency working to establish a network of support, including health and social services working closely with schools, to combat the effects of social disadvantage (Burns & Child, 2016).

*Educational Action Zones*, introduced by the Blair government in 1997, focused on clusters of local schools in specific geographical areas of disadvantage and encouraged the development of innovative approaches to raising attainment. These included: adapting the curriculum, varying teachers' pay and conditions, or running family literacy schemes (Lupton & Obolenskaya, 2013). This scheme was extended to a wider number of urban areas as part of the *Excellence in Cities (EiC)* policy in 1999. Increased funding was provided to all secondary schools within selected local authorities to support a range of interventions to improve achievement amongst its pupils. *EiC* eventually covered over 1,300 secondary schools in 58 local authorities, providing more than £300m in additional funding (*Ibid.*, p12). Whilst the policy did have a positive impact on raising attainment of disadvantaged students at Key Stage 3 (age 14), the outcomes at GCSE level were much more mixed: Kendall *et al.*'s (2005) national evaluation of the scheme concludes that "the initiative has not led, or not yet led, to a decided change in the overall performance of pupils in deprived inner city schools" (p124).

Whilst New Labour's *Every Child Matters* strategy was not a schools policy per se, the role of schools was to be hugely important in implementing a number of key initiatives. It aimed to "reduce the numbers of children who experienced educational failure, engaged in offending or anti-social behaviour, suffered from ill-health or became teenage parents" (DfES, 2003, p13) and encouraged schools to see achievement in a broader sense, to offer

a wider range of learning opportunities in order to promote engagement, and to work with other agencies to support achievement, particularly for the most disadvantaged (Lupton & Obolenskaya, 2013).

The overall success of New Labour's flagship policies aimed at addressing the attainment gap through targeted policies in areas of disadvantage has been the subject of extensive evaluation (Heath *et al.*, 2013; Lupton & Obolenskaya, 2013). Countering the Conservative Party's claims that educational inequalities had increased during the Labour government (Conservative Party, 2008), Lupton & Obolenskaya (2013) have found that over this period "attainment overall increased and socioeconomic gaps were reduced on every measure" (p47). They state that, whilst it not necessarily possible to attribute this to government's policies, "the indicators point in that direction [with] increased effort and targeting coincid[ing] with accelerated improvement, especially in respect of narrowing socio-economic gaps" (*Ibid.*, p47).

Despite these achievements, by 2010, there still remained a substantial gap in attainment between students eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their more affluent peers. The proportion of young people eligible for FSM achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C was just 58.6% compared to non-FSM attainment of 78.8% (Lupton & Obolenskaya, 2013, p42). Socio-economic inequalities were still significant in the area of educational attainment and persisted despite the targeting of policies to schools in disadvantaged areas, and the underlying structural causes of inequality were not sufficiently addressed despite an increased emphasis on a whole-child approach.

Indeed, whilst there was a focus on policy for a more holistic approach to education policy under New Labour, there was also a significant part of the party who advocated greater choice and diversity and an increased involvement of the market in the provision of education and an overall continuity with the previously-established neoliberal consensus which could raise 'efficiencies' to increase attainment of young people from all backgrounds.

On a more philosophical level, too, the underlying premise of New Labour's discourse on equal opportunities has been described by Powell (2000) as "constructed around the problem of how to enable 'them' ('the different') to become more like 'us' ('the normal')" (p48). This again emphasises the de-valorisation of cultural norms not associated with the dominant white, affluent middle classes and further reinforces the idea of a deficit model



that attributes the academic shortcomings of students to their own internal deficiencies and thereby individualises their own ability to succeed or fail, consistent with neoliberal discourse of meritocratic individualism.

Following the 2010 election, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government ostensibly placed tackling widening educational inequality at the centre of its education policy commitment (Cabinet Office, 2010, p28). It too sought to close the attainment gap by directing resources to the most disadvantaged students. In contrast to New Labour's centralised approach to raising attainment, the subsequent Coalition government sought to provide individual schools and school leadership teams the autonomy to decide the most appropriate way of utilising funds to reduce the attainment gap. The *Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)*, rather than targeting increased funding to geographical areas of deprivation, was a grant available to all schools on the basis of the number of students who were eligible for free school meals (as a proxy for those experiencing the greatest economic deprivation). The *Pupil Premium Grant* "linked funding to individual pupils and this effectively made all schools clearly accountable for the achievement of children identified as economically disadvantaged" (Burn & Childs, 2016, p399). As with targeted New Labour initiatives, the *PPG* constitutes a compensatory measure, providing additional money to schools to assist the most deprived students. However, as Bailey & Ball (2016) have pointed out, "there is a lack of clarity over how this [money] is actually spent, with some concerns that it may be being used to offset the effects of other budget cuts" (p142). This may negate the positive impact that such grants can have in directing resources to redress economic inequalities. Carpenter *et al.*'s (2013) independent evaluation also highlighted that the discretion given to schools in terms of how they spent the additional funding has allowed some to maintain forms of provision that had previously been funded from other sources and to focus the money on the basis of educational need rather than pupil premium eligibility *per se* (p13). Whilst the Coalition government (particularly, the junior Liberal Democrat partners) framed the discourse around the *PPG* as one of state intervention to redistribute resources to where they are needed most, it has been argued that it represents a continuity from earlier market-led Conservative policies, emphasising the emergence of:

'an economy of student worth', whereby schools compete to attract students deemed capable of adding 'value' in the form of good test scores. These (largely middle-class) students pose less risk to schools and are less likely to require additional support, which might be expensive. The Pupil Premium is interesting in this respect as it assigns a market value to those students who are less attractive

to schools, and can hence be considered an instance of neoliberal policy. (Bailey & Ball, 2016, p142-143).

Whilst the *Pupil Premium* has been retained by the current Conservative government, it has been acknowledged that any clear impact on closing the attainment gap has yet to be seen (Ofsted, 2014). Lupton and Thomson's (2015) analysis of the effect of Coalition policy on socio-economic inequalities has also highlighted that the *Pupil Premium* has been a somewhat 'isolated policy', such that, whilst it has redistributed funding towards more disadvantaged schools, it represents "a rare example of investment in the life chances of disadvantaged children among a broader range of policies which have reduced family incomes and depleted services" (p10). They cite examples of severe cuts to non-protected areas of public spending, particularly in local government services as well as a range of cuts to welfare benefits, as undermining students from low-income families' access to improved life opportunities. This, they describe as part of an approach that shifts responsibility from the wider welfare state to schools and individuals and call into question "whether the pupil premium can be expected to have any meaningful impact as part of a suite of education and social policies likely to work in the opposite direction" (*Ibid.*, p17). Indeed, the systematic implementation of wide-scale 'austerity' measures has served to undermine the efforts of individuals and the Pupil Premium cannot be expected to plug the gap that this has created.

### **3.3 Diversification of educational provision**

As stated above, education policy over the past 2-3 decades has been underpinned by a consensus in adopting a neoliberal approach which emphasises a drive towards increased marketisation and diversification of educational provision. The Thatcher reforms of the 1980s had begun the process of opening up schools that were free from local authority control and had also subsequently established greater diversity in provision by introducing more specialist schools. The New Labour government tacitly complied with the prevailing ideological wind and embarked on a policy of creating City Technology Colleges, which implemented sponsored colleges as a public-private partnership initiative. This was a "policy with strong neoliberal resonances, both in its involvement of the private sector and in its emphasis on parental choice and the promotion of competition between different

kinds of providers” (Burn & Childs, 2016, p390). This was followed, in 2000, by the establishment of the first ‘academies’, which were privately-sponsored schools independent of local authority control. Under New Labour’s plans, academies were explicitly designed to turn around under-achieving schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Consistent with the belief in the efficiency of the market, these new kinds of educational establishments were designed to “bring creativity and energy to bear upon entrenched social and educational inequalities” (Bailey & Ball, 2016, p137). The academies programme was framed as a schools’ improvement strategy, seen as devices to transform learning experiences in the most disadvantaged urban areas, rather than a policy of diversification of educational provision. However, by the time of the 2005 white paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, the academy model was seen as an important tool in driving up standards across the board, and it advocated “expand[ing] choice, creat[ing] real diversity of provision, and ensur[ing] that the benefits of choice are available to all” (DfES, 2005, p20). This diversification of educational provision, it was hoped, would drive up standards in under-achieving areas by increasing parental choice and competition between schools.

The Conservative-led coalition, in one of its first acts, greatly expanded Labour’s academies programme (Academies Act, 2010) and allowed schools rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted to apply to convert to academy status. This was in line with the then-secretary of state, Michael Gove’s expectation that academies would become the norm amongst English schools, with new establishments being directly accountable to the Department for Education (DfE) and by-passing oversight by local authorities. Additionally, academies are free to operate outside of the restrictions of the National Curriculum and – often the most important motivation (see Francis, 2015) – there were substantial additional funding incentives for schools to convert. Further diversification of provision was implemented by the introduction of ‘free’ schools, which may be set up by a wide range of organisations, such as businesses, charities, existing schools, community organisations or parents’ associations and which enjoy the same freedoms from local authority control as academies. Again, the neoliberal market-led ideal was invoked with “the rhetoric of free schools built round the idea that any person with the will and the support could set up a local school and be funded to do so by the state: [...] market forces, if set free, will improve standards through competition between schools offering diversity of pedagogical approaches and ethos” (Allen, 2015, pR36). Parents and students are conceptualized as consumers within

this diversified market-place and, despite the supposed benefits brought by this increase in choice, there is also potential for a detrimental 'over-fragmentation' of the education system.

Indeed, the diversification of educational provision has already led to a hybrid system of governance and, far from driving up standards, studies (Machin & Wilson 2009; Wrigley 2011; Allen 2013) have argued that the liberation of academies and free schools from the constraints and oversight to which other schools are subject has failed to deliver significant improvements in attainment, let alone any closing of the achievement gap (Wilkins, 2015). In particular relation to the broad expansion of academies to all 'good' or 'outstanding' schools, Machin & Veroit (2010) forewarned that "under the Coalition government, the academies programme is now likely to reinforce advantage and exacerbate existing inequalities in schooling. At a time of budget restraint, it seems natural to question whether the large expenditure involved in converting these advantaged schools to academies is justified" (p21). Whilst Conservative ministers insist that increased school choice will lead to social mobility, middle-class parents will always be better placed to 'game the system' and ensure their children 'win' places at the most successful, and desirable schools (Hatcher, 2011), facilitating the reproduction of existing social inequalities.

A further consequence of successive governments' adherence to neoliberal approaches to reducing educational inequalities is the redistribution of responsibility for tackling this to schools, teachers and families. As Apple (2004) has observed, "we are witnessing a process in which the state shifts the blame, for the very evident inequalities in access and outcome it has promised to reduce, from itself onto individual schools, parents, and children" (p24). Framed within the 'broken society agenda', the Coalition government, and subsequent Conservative administrations, have invoked a degree of moral outrage and emphasised the need for increased control, discipline and personal responsibility in society at large (Cameron, 2011). This has come at the same time as a period of welfare reform and public service savings that have seen a reduction in the incomes of the most disadvantaged and a reduced capacity of local support services. Whilst the government's education policies have individualised academic success or failure, its moralising agenda is an example of its increased desire to impose a centralised control over what constitutes acceptable behaviour and values in society.

### 3.4 A traditional-values curriculum

Whilst commitment to a minimal state and its emphasis on neoliberal market-led approaches have underpinned education policy making in the past decades, the Coalition government was instrumental in, at the same time, imposing a centralised curriculum based on highly traditional values. This contrast has been noted by several authors (Allen, 2015; Bailey & Ball, 2016; Forrester & Garrett, 2016), and characterised as a “tension between a weak but strong state [...] between freedom and control, liberty and authority” (Bailey & Ball, 2016, p131). Education policy making, as Apple (2004) highlights, “consistently involves conflict and compromises between groups with competing visions of ‘legitimate’ knowledge, what counts as ‘good’ teaching and learning and what is a ‘just’ society” (p14) and so reflects the dominant ideology of those with the power to set policy.

Under New Labour, whilst funding in education increased substantially, the level of state intervention also rose, ushering in a system of targets, benchmarking and monitoring, National Strategies and National Challenges, and various task forces, which aimed to deliver and demonstrate good value for money (Exley & Ball, 2014). As highlighted above, the Labour government’s focus on ‘what works’ in education appeared to transcend strict ideological adherence, although the underlying ‘third way’ model sought to use centralised state-directed mechanisms to “smooth the adverse consequences of market reform” (*Ibid.*, p22), rather than to reverse the progression towards ever-increasing marketisation of education. This evolution led to a managerialist state, which, accompanied by an ‘almost hyperactive’ (Heath *et al.*, 2013, p228) introduction of reforms and initiatives, put in place a complex and far-reaching framework that has facilitated centralised government control over what is taught in schools.

Despite the overwhelming raft of New Labour policies designed to raise standards in education in a measurable and accountable way, it has been noted that these initiatives were often not introduced in such a way that they could be rigorously evaluated. Although the data has shown an overall raising of attainment and a narrowing of the gap between disadvantaged young people and more affluent students, the extent to which this can be attributed to the various policies introduced under the Blair and Brown governments is not at all clear-cut (Heath *et al.*, 2013; Lupton & Obolenskaya, 2013).

Whilst the emphasis of the myriad New Labour policies in education was on raising educational standards across the board, the vast infrastructure that it constructed to

implement and monitor its outcomes can be seen as complicit in part of an overall 'rightward turn' in education policy that was zealously taken up and adapted by subsequent Conservative-led governments.

Under the Coalition government, this rightward turn has invoked a commitment both to neoliberal marketisation and to a neo-conservative, middle-class, managerialist-inspired regulatory state. The tendency of Conservative-led education policies towards one-nation neo-conservatism is evident in both its central command and control over knowledge and values and the ongoing mistrust and surveillance of the teacher (Bailey & Ball, 2016). This has been driven by a belief in 'traditional values', as viewed by ministers and advisors in charge of the department (most notably, as secretary of state, Michael Gove – see Finn, 2015), and implemented, through a prescriptive and narrow curriculum, in such a way as to "[give] the impression that anybody involved in education as it was set – local authorities, teachers and educationalists – was either not up to the job or could not be trusted" (Allen, 2015, pR36).

The way in which the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments have exerted ever-increasing control over knowledge and values has been characterised by the amending of the national curriculum and a re-emphasis on 'traditional' subjects and pedagogies through the restructuring of performance assessment and accountability. Reforms to the content and requirements for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications have included the introduction of "more rigorous" and "academically demanding" syllabuses (DfE, 2016a); the removal of coursework and controlled formative assessment and the replacement of modular courses with linear ones, examined at the end of two years of study, rather than through coursework set on a module-by-module basis. In addition, there has been a major overhaul of how GCSEs are to be graded, with a new system being introduced applying a scale from 1 to 9 to "enable more fine-grained distinctions and greater 'stretch' at the top end of the scale (with A/A\* being replaced by three grades: 7, 8 and 9)" (Neumann *et al.*, 2016, p10).

In conjunction with this reform, new school accountability measures have already been implemented, providing a brand-new headline measure to replace the former standard of 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) has become the new benchmark of educational attainment, with schools ranked and compared based on students' attainment in core 'academic' subjects: English, maths, two sciences, a humanity

subject and a language subject (DfE, 2015b). This has already had the effect of reducing schools' resourcing and dependence on arts and vocational subjects and teachers in these subjects are wary that the marginalisation and devaluing of creative and vocational subjects with disadvantaged lower-attaining and low-income students disproportionately (Neumann *et al.*, 2016, p12).

Furthermore, Abrahams (2016) has identified that low-income, 'working-class' students are facing further inequality with regards to school curricula. Her in-depth study provides an example of how, "through the differences in the subjects offered and restrictions imposed by blocking systems<sup>3</sup>, young people are faced with quite different option sets depending upon the institutional context" (p168-9). These institutional opportunity structures therefore impact upon students' chances of building credentials seen as necessary or valuable by higher education institutions and employers. Access to only a limited range and level of options at GCSE and A-level and the 'blocking system' implemented by some more disadvantaged institutions, serve to severely restrict the possibilities for disadvantaged students, which has a detrimental knock-on effect for young people seeking to gain a university place or in terms of their long-term career plans.

The distinctions applied in these cases highlight the continued class-based stratification of educational curriculums. Abrahams (2016) maintains that young people from disadvantaged background are still being streamed into vocational education, which has "continually been positioned as of less academic worth than courses based on abstract or theoretical learning" (p156). This further restricts the options open to working-class students and serves to maintain and legitimise a socially-stratified education system, on the basis of 'socially-appropriate' forms of training (Brown, 1987).

Despite these criticisms, the system of post-16 qualifications has been further reformed, decoupling AS levels from A-levels, restructuring the grading system, and introducing another set of technical and applied A-level courses. These 'T-level' qualifications will be implemented from 2019 and are designed, according to the government's *Building Our Industrial Strategy* green paper, to create "a proper system of technical education, to benefit the half of young people who do not go to university and provide new, better

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<sup>3</sup> A system operated by some schools whereby GCSE/A-level options are located within subject 'blocks', such that pupils can select only from a limited number of pre-determined groups of subjects (Abrahams, 2016).

options for those already in the workforce [by] creating a small number of high quality new routes” (BEIS, 2017, p47).

The government’s policy in relation to the EBacc and its focus on ‘academic’ subjects (set out by the Department for Education) appears to stand in contradiction to their industrial strategy (the domain of an entirely different government department, the Department for Business, Entrepreneurship and Industrial Strategy). The needs of the labour market and the desire to address a ‘skills shortage’ has led to a commitment to reforming technical education and to expanding the number of apprenticeships by a further 3 million by 2020. At the same time, however, the secondary education system is again reinforcing a ‘gold standard’ of core academic subjects that will inevitably serve to downgrade and marginalise vocational, arts and creative subjects. Vocational and technical qualifications already suffer from a stigma of being of less academic worth to GCSEs and A-levels (Ryan & Lórin, 2018) – it is not yet clear how the government’s strategy will be able to raise the esteem with which these new T-levels will be held by employers, teachers, parents and students. As Waters (2015) has remarked, the limiting of the valid subjects included in the English Baccalaureate “was seen by many as a backdoor return to grammar schooling with an eventual move to some schools offering the EBacc and other pursuing more vocational alternatives” (p69). The debate over the proposed reintroduction of grammar schools, high on the government’s agenda before the 2017 general election (May, 2016), has provoked a wealth of research citing evidence that such a two-tier system would do little to improve social mobility and could in fact exacerbate existing social inequalities (Burgess *et al.*, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2016; Ware, 2017).

Such extensive structural changes have inevitably impacted on school-level policies and pedagogies, as individual schools and teachers seek to implement centrally-mandated policy changes, whilst also remaining accountable for maintaining standards and raising attainment.

Research, commissioned by ‘Schoolzone’ (Cassidy, 2014) and the National Union of Teachers (Neumann *et al.*, 2016), has already uncovered some serious concerns expressed by teachers and school staff around how these reforms will affect students’ outcomes and teaching practices. Overall, there is scepticism to the government’s reversion to a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach at GCSE level, which “makes it harder for teachers to respond to the diversity of students’ needs and disadvantages students who are less able to perform well



in written examinations” (Neumann *et al.*, 2016, p6). The move to a linear structure for all GCSE courses negates the ability of those students who prefer to work in a more creative or personalised way that modular coursework assignments allow. Cassidy’s study has highlighted the possibility that “removal of coursework will favour boys because the long-standing gender gap in performance has been widely attributed to girls achieving higher grades in this aspect of assessment” (p3). Furthermore, the move towards terminal examination following completion of a course raises the stakes by placing substantial pressure on students to do well in final exams. (The impact of high-stakes assessment on students was a concern that was raised by a number of teachers in the focus groups undertaken as part of this research – see chapter 7).

Neumann *et al.*’s study found that teachers’ assessments of the impact of the EBacc and the new GCSEs “were overwhelmingly negative”, being particularly critical of a “traditional knowledge-focused approach to both the content [which was seen by some as] uninspiring and anachronistic (e.g. neglecting the skills that are required for a technological age)” (p7). This concern marks a worrying inconsistency in the government’s strategy of placing increased emphasis on core academic subjects to the neglect of practical skills and vocational knowledge likely to be much coveted in the labour market.

In terms of the teaching profession, Neumann *et al.*’s research (2016) highlights that “teachers’ responses suggest that the combined effects of the reforms have ben to exacerbate the pressures already present in a high-stakes accountability context fuelled by data-driven policies”. In particular, vocational and technology subject teachers reported experiencing increased job insecurity as a result of the reforms.

This is in combination with an increasing role for Ofsted, the schools’ inspectorate, focused ever-more stringently on “pupil achievement, teacher quality, leadership and management, and the safety and behaviour of pupils” (Bailey & Ball, 2016, p139). Further changes to the inspection regime have included the re-designation of ‘satisfactory’ schools as ‘requiring improvement’, with institutions receiving such a grade three times consecutively being placed into ‘special measures’. The amount of notice given to schools before an inspection was also greatly reduced, from three weeks to just two working days. Whilst this has increased the powers held by Ofsted, there remains “grave concerns about consistency and quality of the inspectorate, most of whom [are] employed by external agencies” (Allen, 2015, pR38). These policies serve further to undermine confidence and

trust in the teaching profession and to enhance and strengthen the 'guiding hand' of the regulatory state. This, in turn, tends towards the "reproduction of dominant pedagogical and curricular forms and ideologies" (Apple, 2004, p39-40).

Several authors (e.g. Ball, 2013; Lightman, 2015; Waters, 2015; Coiffait, 2015) have remarked on the troubled and conflictual nature of the relationship between the state and the teaching profession. This notably declined during Michael Gove's period as secretary of state, when "rather than supporting teachers to be empowered and skilled agents of change in education, he beat them down to the extent that he lost the trust of the whole profession" (Coiffait, 2015, p146). As reported by the National Union of Teachers (NUT), Gove "failed to conduct his duties in the manner befitting the head of a national education system... basing policy on dogma, political rhetoric and his own, limited experience of education" (*Ibid.*, p146). Under Gove and subsequent Conservative Education Secretaries, authors (Waters, 2015; Coiffait, 2015; Gunter, 2015) have noted that education has become more politicised than ever before; a lever through which to enforce a government-sanctioned view of what represents a valuable education.

The ideological monopoly of 'legitimate' knowledge and values has been accompanied by a punitive welfare regime with its focus on the moral correction of a 'broken society'. This has served to individualise 'problematic' families or communities, with responsibility for social mobility being linked to an individual's ability to acquire such knowledge and values as are valorised by the dominant social class. Within such an environment, an emphasis has been placed on character education, whereby disadvantaged students are encouraged to develop the "character and behaviour traits that will supposedly enable them to 'thrive in modern Britain'" (Bailey & Ball, 2016, p143). The next section provides a closer examination of character education, its use as a policy tool and the way in which it seeks to construct 'resilience' as a key concept within its delivery.

### **3.5 Character education**

Whilst it has been contended (Garmezy *et al.*, 1984; Rutter, 1983; Werner, 1984) that certain people display personal characteristics that make them more predisposed to being able to cope with adverse situations, the conceptualisation of resilience in relation to a 'constellation' of characteristics that children do or do not possess (Kirby & Fraser, 1997) is

highly contestable. Such a model can be seen as somewhat reductionist and the extent to which people display consistent patterns of behaviour across different contexts and within different societal situations and expectations seems to ignore the complexities of the systems within which people play out their own lives. It furthermore runs the risk of excluding or writing off youngsters without these 'innate' characteristics, whereas alternative conceptualisations (Masten *et al.*, 1990; Waxman *et al.*, 2003) highlight that all young people equally have the opportunity to display resilience in different ways, regardless of individual character traits or personality types. What is important in this conceptualisation is that resilience can be promoted through a range of measures, interventions or positive relationships.

The idea that there are specific character skills that certain students lack, and which can be instilled in individuals, is therefore problematic if not accompanied by an acknowledgement of the flexible and relativistic nature of young people's contextual circumstances. Regardless of this, much policy research has suggested that specific character skills, also variously referred to as 'non-cognitive skills' or 'soft skills', have a positive impact on young people's educational outcomes and labour market prospects (Gutman & Schoon, 2013; Heckman, 2011). This has implications for social mobility and the potential for character education and non-cognitive skills development as a social policy 'lever' has been highlighted by the UK all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on social mobility. Their Character and Resilience Manifesto implores the government to adopt a range of policy measures aimed at promoting social and emotional skills as a means of "closing the opportunity gap between the affluent and the disadvantaged" (Paterson *et al.*, 2014, p6). The manifesto invokes research across the disciplines of developmental psychology, neuroscience, child psychiatry and youth development to outline a range of concepts and attributes that broadly fall under the umbrella term of 'character and resilience'. Whilst the authors acknowledge that such skills are often overlapping and interchangeable, they affirm that they encompass the "attributes that enable individuals to make the most of opportunities that present themselves, to stick with things when the going gets tough, to bounce back from adversity and to forge and maintain meaningful relationships" (*Ibid.*, p11). The manifesto highlights research in the US and the UK which has empirically shown a link between non-cognitive skills development and increases in relative life chances (Dixon *et al.*, 2006), improved educational attainment (Blanden *et al.*, 2006) and labour

market outcomes (Feinstein, 2000; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001), as well as reduced levels of anti-social behaviour and criminality (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001).

Other studies have also promoted character education and the benefits in well-being and prosocial behaviour associated with the implementation of programmes for ‘socio-emotional and character development’ or ‘positive psychology’ (Arthur *et al.*, 2015; Snyder, 2014; Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2013; Berkowitz & Bier; Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2015). Whilst it has been acknowledged that “until recently, character education suffered from a lack of large-scale independent and systematic evaluations” (Walker *et al.*, 2015, p87), some specific pilot initiatives in both the UK (e.g. Building Schools of Character) and the US (e.g. Penn Resilience Programme; Strath Haven Positive Psychology Curriculum) have been shown to be successful in effecting positive change amongst participants (White & Warfa, 2011; White & Shin, 2016; Seligman *et al.*, 2009). However, it must be noted that, whilst evaluations in the US take place within a very different policy context and institutional environment, the authors of the Building Schools of Character programme are at pains to highlight their results as preliminary and requiring further study (White & Warfa, 2011, p58). Indeed, what evidence has been collected into the effectiveness of character education initiatives seems to be predicated on the principle that they are holistic in their approach (White & Warfa, 2011), well-designed, integrated into the school culture and allowed to run for a necessary length of time with a minimum degree of commitment by the schools (Walker *et al.*, 2015).

The policy drive towards character education in the UK has largely followed the lead of well-established American initiatives, such as the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). KIPP schools are college preparatory schools that have been set up in some of the most deprived areas in the US and which place character development at the heart of their ethos (Kisby, 2017).

This can be seen as part of a wider trend, with influential US educational theorists, most notably E.D. Hirsch (1987; 1996), providing the Coalition government in Britain in particular with a framework for its curriculum reforms. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Foundation has set up schools on the basis of a consistent, incremental curriculum – a cumulative knowledge sequence to be taught through a return to ‘traditional’ pedagogies of verbal instruction and repetitive practice. Whilst acknowledging the ‘excellent work’ that KIPP schools are doing along similar lines, Hirsch (2009) suggests that they “would be even better if they started

in the early years and adopted a cumulative year-by-year core curriculum set up in advance” (p150).

The disproportionate influence that such authors appear to have held over policy reforms of subsequent Conservative-led governments has seen evidence-based policy making eschewed in favour of importing wholesale initiatives from America despite with, what Pollard has identified as, “no clear relationship between the proposals and the many overseas examples cited to support them” (cited by Ball, 2013, p111).

Worryingly, in relation to valid and outspoken resistance to these proposals, “the Coalition ministers are drawing on ‘evidence’ they claim, and examples of ‘good practice’, and a commitment to equity, to portray criticism from teacher unions, academics, professional associations and others, as a kind of ‘progressive conservatism’ that is taken to be resistant to change and to ‘good sense’” (Ball, 2013, p111).

Whilst evaluations of KIPP schools have shown mixed results (Carnoy *et al.*, 2005), the positive impact of a focus on character education has been readily picked up by British policy makers, particularly under the Conservative-led Coalition government. The increased emphasis placed on the development of character to promote academic achievement was most enthusiastically taken up in the UK by Nicky Morgan during her period as Secretary of State for Education (2014-16). She placed character education at the heart of her strategy for social mobility, setting out her position as placing a much greater importance on non-academic character skills:

In order to tread a path to success, young people need more than just an excellent academic grounding. They also need to be instilled with attributes and skills like confidence, team-work and resilience – the kind of character traits that will help them to thrive by believing in themselves, working well with others and picking themselves up from disappointments. (Morgan, 2016)

In line with this strategic focus, the government has introduced sizeable grants for schools that implement character building initiatives in order to incentivise the promotion of the attributes and skills seen as desirable for individual development (DfE, 2015a). Whilst the cabinet reshuffle that removed Morgan from the Education portfolio and replaced her with Justine Greening (July 2016) reduced to some degree the centrality of character education to the government’s agenda, the subsequent replacement of Greening with Damian Hinds (January 2018) has seen the notion regain traction.

Whilst Greening's focus during her brief time as secretary of state foregrounded existing geographical disparities, increased investment in teacher recruitment and improved technical and vocational education as her three priorities for social mobility (Greening, 2017), the current incumbent appears to have placed character, resilience and workplace skills as central to his vision for boosting social mobility. He chose his first major speech as Education secretary to highlight the importance of soft skills to success, echoing the thoughts of his predecessor, Nicky Morgan:

The hard reality of soft skills is that actually these things around the workplace and these things around character and resilience are important for what anybody can achieve in life, as well as for the success of our economies. (Hinds, 2018)

Subsequent speeches and policy announcement seem to confirm that under Hinds' stewardship, the Department for Education will continue to "promote the importance of character education [and] encourage schools to develop young people's resilience and grit" (DfE, 2016b).

Additionally, prominent advocates of character education are also influencing current government policy. Most notably, the University of Birmingham's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues ([www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk)) has invoked a virtue ethics approach to developing young people's character by promoting such 'traits' as perseverance, confidence and motivation – traits, which Kisby (2017), however, points out "could in practice underpin amoral or immoral as well as moral behaviour" (p16). There is a focus on individual self-improvement with young people encouraged to acquire and display a number of subjectively virtuous qualities or values.

Framing character education and non-cognitive skills development as a solution to the widening 'opportunity gap' between the affluent and disadvantaged is somewhat problematic for a number of reasons. Situated at the intersection of the government's tendency towards both neoliberal and neo-conservative agendas, the drive to impart character and behaviour traits constitute both an individualisation of 'success', whilst at the same time imposing a paternalistic ethico-disciplinary policy exercising increased 'command and control' over knowledge and values (Bailey & Ball, 2016).

Kathryn Ecclestone and Lydia Lewis have been critical of the tendency towards this individualisation of success and failure through the government's discourse around non-cognitive skills: "An essential critical challenge to the powerful discourse of trainable,

transferable dispositions is objection to the individualisation of resilience and the marginalising of social and welfare responses” (2014, p211). Furthermore, Ecclestone, has argued that “discourses of well-being and character both recast virtues and moral values as psychological constructs that can be trained without requiring moral engagement” (2012, p476). Kisby (2017) goes even further, highlighting that:

while focusing on developing ‘grit’ and ‘resilience’ can be empowering for some, concentrating on questions of individual character in relation to student ‘success’ is clearly problematic, ignoring entirely the enabling or constraining role of social structure [...] Structural inequalities – affecting, for example, the way resources or opportunities are distributed – based on gender, class, ethnicity, disability etc. need to be seriously addressed. As regards economic disparities, unless really meaningful action is taken by the government to tackle issues of poverty and wealth and income inequality in British society then, [...] statements about the need for students to learn to be resilient, at best, ring hollow, and at worst are insulting, liable to be interpreted by many as suggesting that poor people would be fine if only they were more virtuous (p32).

Placing an emphasis on developing certain character attributes or non-cognitive skills cannot be seen as inherently wrong – clearly ‘soft skills’, such as grit, self-control or resilience, are beneficial to those able to harness them. What is more controversial is the way in which such attributes are framed in policy terms: who becomes the arbiter of ‘good’ character, which skills are desirable and how they are best imparted within a school environment? For character education to be effective for social mobility there needs to be the recognition that the traits displayed by the affluent, middle-class within a western cultural tradition are not necessarily the standards by which ‘success’ should be judged. Claxton (2007) has highlighted that the government’s character education agenda invokes “liberal western assumptions about the value of self-control, social thoughtfulness or delayed gratification without any explicit recognition that some of these values are contentious and culture-specific” (p23). They highlight, as Camfield (2015) describes, the “ethnocentric and class-blind nature of non-cognitive skills” as imagined by the APPG’s Character and Resilience Manifesto and other advocates of the character education agenda. Far from developing character in its broadest sense, these initiatives have become “a way of encouraging the development of a very narrow set of skills purely to drive better attainment. Calling for improvements in character does not acknowledge that there could be differences in character by social background and that they could be quite valid. The existence of character is being measured by a set of standards constructed on the basis of

what very affluent and powerful people do” (Atherton, 2016, p73). This command and control of knowledge and values ‘from above’ constitutes another example of how the system is run by and for the middle classes, as one that valorises middle class cultural capital (Ball, 2003). The drive towards character traits and behaviours exhibited by the affluent middle classes typifies the “unacknowledged normality of the middle classes” (Reay, 2006).

Even beyond the ‘middle-classes’ for and by whom Ball and Reay propose the system is run, there is yet a higher layer in the hierarchy, who direct the government’s policy agenda and have control over what constitutes legitimate knowledge within the education system. This elite class of state administrators, civil servants, policy makers and ministers form a self-perpetuating stratum of, what Bourdieu has termed, the ‘state nobility’ (Bourdieu, 1996). These are people who are most frequently educated at private independent schools and Oxbridge, institutions which have traditionally been associated with the transmission of privilege and power and which, even now, retain higher prestige and evidence of lasting social advantage (Power *et al.*, 2003). Indeed, of the current UK cabinet, 30% were privately educated and 44% went to either Oxford or Cambridge (Ali, 2016).

Whilst an agenda of ‘widening participation’ within a more meritocratic model has, at least in principle, opened up elite institutions to students from all social classes, educational mobility has remained stubbornly low. Indeed, this framing of access to such schools and universities as part of a meritocratic process is vital to maintaining the legitimacy of the system, whilst still perpetuating the reproduction of the elite class. As explained by van Zanten (2015a), despite increasing competition from other social groups, elites continue to ‘hoard’ educational opportunities through two crucial methods: first, “evaluations of scholastic merit are related to particular understandings driven by the culture of the dominant groups in society and [second], parents of dominant groups are able to use their cultural assets and to transform their economic capital into cultural capital in order to help their children to comply with school expectations and enjoy successful school careers” (p5). Whilst this has been shown by Bourdieu (1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and others (Lareau, 2011; van Zanten, 2015b) to be a key means through which social reproduction of inequality is perpetuated, there has furthermore been a tendency towards ever-greater stratification within the social hierarchy. As, on the one hand, greater lip service is paid to widening participation and greater accessibility, there has simultaneously been a redefinition of what confers ‘elite status’. This ‘moving of the goalposts’ was outlined by Bourdieu as long ago as the 1980s in relation to the French *grandes écoles* (1984). However,



it is also apparent in the current British system, where Wakeling and Savage (2015) have described a 'royal road' pathway from service-class social origins, through independent-school secondary education and via the 'golden triangle' of elite universities (Oxford, Cambridge and a select few current and former University of London colleges) to a 'super-elite' that "fit with the general predictions of both Bourdieusian reproduction theory and the effectively maintained inequality hypothesis (Lucas, 2001)" (Wakeling & Savage, 2015, p181-2). It is this super-elite of very affluent, privileged upper-middle class – in opposition both to the working class and 'ordinary' middle-class – who, through control of the government agenda set themselves up as the omniscient arbiter of 'good' character, decide which skills are most desirable and confer legitimacy on acceptable knowledge and values.

### **3.6 "Resilience"**

As mentioned above, the Character and Resilience Manifesto uses the phrase 'character and resilience' as a catch-all term for a number of concepts comprising various aspects of social and emotional development (Paterson *et al.*, 2014). Whilst it mentions such attributes as 'sticking with things when the going gets tough', 'bouncing back from adversity', 'perseverance' and 'mental toughness', it stops short of tying these explicitly to the concept of 'resilience' and, importantly, talks about evaluation of non-cognitive skills only in broad terms. In fact, there is a recognition that the capabilities and skills concerned are to some extent interchangeable and overlapping. In terms of evidence-based policy making, there is also an acceptance that in attempting to measure and quantify non-cognitive skills, some studies have encountered difficulty in disaggregating cause and effect in relation to the link between these and desirable outcomes (*Ibid.*, p16).

Gutman and Schoon's (2013) review of the literature on non-cognitive skills, which is referred to throughout by the authors of the Character and Resilience Manifesto, does attempt systematically to identify individual capabilities and attributes that contribute to the overall non-cognitive skills set of young people. For them, resilience is highlighted as one of these key skills and defined, in line with seminal authors on the concept (Masten, 2009; 2011; and Rutter, 2006), as "positive adaptation to despite the presence of risk" (p27). They are very clear in their use of the concept that: "resilience is not considered an attribute or personality trait that some children possess and others do not, but rather a developmental process" (*Ibid.*, p27). In contrast to 'coping' – "efforts to manage specific

external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p14) – resilience is described not as a skill that can be manipulated but rather as a dynamic, interactive process (Gutman & Schoon, 2013, p27).

As discussed at greater length above (also see: chapter 2 – Literature Review), the use of ‘resilience’ as a measurable psychological trait is problematic and highly contestable. This is not to say, however, that it can have no use for policy interventions at local or national level. What is clear, though, is that initiatives aimed at promoting resilience should focus on reducing risk factors at both a structural and individual level, in addition to increasing the presence of protective factors that can help to ‘buffer’ young people experiencing adverse circumstances. Policies that attempt to impart resilience as a skill ignore the fact that the term encompasses the achievement of positive outcomes despite the existence of difficulties or substantial risk factors. Policies that focus solely on personal characteristics and skills development also place these outcomes at the feet of the individual and overlook the importance of structural factors that affect the way in which students negotiate their educational trajectories. In particular, it is important not to problematise the ‘character’ of young people from different social or cultural backgrounds to the middle class, affluent ‘ideal’. As Atherton (2016) highlights, “resilience, self-control or any other components wedged into the character ‘box’ are being associated with what happens in private schools. When politicians and others make this link, they only contribute to the ‘character problem’ that they are allegedly setting out to solve, as they ignore where the real ‘character’ is being displayed on a day-to-day basis. Those in lower socioeconomic groups show determination, character and resilience every day to survive on low incomes in unrewarding, low-paid jobs” (p73-74).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Education policy-making by successive governments has always purported to seek and promote social mobility by reducing the gap in attainment and opportunity between socially disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. Under New Labour, socio-economic inequalities remained significant in the area of educational attainment and persisted, despite the targeting of policies to schools in disadvantaged areas, as the underlying structural causes of inequality were not sufficiently addressed.

In contrast to New Labour's centralised approach to raising attainment, the subsequent Coalition government sought to provide individual schools and school leadership teams the autonomy to decide the most appropriate way of utilising funds to reduce the attainment gap; an approach that shifts responsibility from the wider welfare state to schools and individuals. This was additionally at a time when the systematic implementation of 'austerity'-led cuts was undermining the support available to students and their parents through significant reductions in funding and resources for vital social policies and public services.

The policies implemented by New Labour, the Coalition and subsequent Conservative-led administrations have been guided by an underlying consensus, which has been characterised both by a neoliberal commitment to market-led approaches, emphasising the diversification and marketisation of provision, in combination with the oversight of a strong and centralised regulatory state (Apple, 2004; Furlong, 2013; Bailey & Ball, 2016).

Within this diversified market-place, parents and students are conceptualized as consumers, able to take advantage of increased choice and competition between schools. However, there is also potential for an 'over-fragmentation' of the education system, which could become more complex and difficult to navigate.

At the same time the government's moralising agenda has sought to impose a centralised control over what constitutes acceptable behaviour and values in society. Driven by a belief in 'traditional values', as viewed by ministers and advisors in charge of the department implemented, through a prescriptive and narrow curriculum. The government's strategy of placing increased emphasis on core academic subjects to the neglect of practical skills and vocational knowledge – likely to be much coveted in the labour market – presents a worrying inconsistency and one that can affect the opportunities open to young people in the future.

These policies further serve to undermine confidence and trust in the teaching profession, exacerbating an on-going conflictual relationship between the state and educational professionals (Ball, 2013; Lightman, 2015; Waters, 2015; Coiffait, 2015). This, in turn, also serves further to politicise the domain of education by enhancing and strengthening the 'guiding hand' of the regulatory state.

Furthermore, the ideological monopoly of 'legitimate' knowledge and values has been accompanied by a punitive welfare regime with its focus on the moral correction of a 'broken society'. This has served to individualise 'problematic' families or communities, with responsibility for social mobility being linked to an individual's ability to acquire such knowledge and values as are valorised by the dominant social class.

Within this policy context, there is the potential for character education and non-cognitive skills development to be used as a social policy 'lever' to improve young people's outcomes and labour market prospects. This agenda was formed the heart of Nicky Morgan's strategy for social mobility during the last years of the coalition government and into the current Conservative administration. This has been reinforced by strong proponents of developing non-cognitive skills as a means of overcoming disadvantage by imparting behaviour traits that will enable students to 'thrive in modern Britain' or by instilling 'good moral character' amongst those who lack it.

However, framing character education and non-cognitive skills development as a solution to the widening 'opportunity gap' between the affluent and disadvantaged is problematic if it is not also accompanied by an acknowledgement of the flexible and relativistic nature of young people's circumstances. For character education to be effective for social mobility, there needs to be the recognition that the traits displayed by the affluent, middle-class within a Western cultural tradition are not necessarily the standards by which 'success' should be judged.

Within the government's agenda of 'widening participation', a more meritocratic model has, at least in principle, opened up opportunities at elite institutions to students from all social classes. However, educational mobility has remained stubbornly low. Indeed, this framing of access to such schools and universities as part of a meritocratic process is vital to maintaining the legitimacy of the system, whilst still perpetuating the reproduction of the elite class (van Zanten, 2015a). It is this super-elite of very affluent, privileged upper-middle class – in opposition both to the working class and 'ordinary' middle-class – who, through control of the government agenda set themselves up as the omniscient arbiter of 'good' character, decide which skills are most desirable and confer legitimacy on acceptable knowledge and values.

In addition, we have seen a disproportionate influence that certain educationalists and authors (e.g. Hirsch) appear to have held over policy reforms of subsequent Conservative-

led governments, which has seen evidence-based policy making eschewed in favour of importing wholesale initiatives from the United States.

Situated at the intersection of the government's tendency towards both neoliberal and neo-conservative agendas, the drive to impart character and behaviour traits constitute both an individualisation of 'success', whilst at the same time imposing a paternalistic ethico-disciplinary policy exercising increased 'command and control' over knowledge and values (Bailey & Ball, 2016).

Furthermore, by conflating resilience with a range of several overlapping and interchangeable non-cognitive skill is to fundamentally misunderstand the term – whilst the development of character 'skills' can promote resilient outcomes, it must be recognised that resilience is a dynamic, interactive process and not something that can be manipulated or "learnt" in the classroom. Policies that focus solely on personal characteristics and skills development also place these outcomes at the feet of the individual and overlook the importance of structural factors that affect the way in which students negotiate their educational trajectories. In particular, it is important not to problematise the 'character' of young people from different social or cultural backgrounds to the middle class, affluent 'ideal'.

To this end, initiatives aimed at promoting resilience should focus on reducing risk factors at both a structural and individual level, in addition to increasing the presence of protective factors that can help to 'buffer' young people experiencing adverse circumstances.

## **4 – Mixed methods approaches to research**

Before detailing the research design and methods employed in my doctoral study (chapter 5), this chapter pauses to consider on a more philosophical level the application of mixed methods approaches to social science research. A relatively new development in the research of social phenomena, mixed methodologies have gained more traction as the rigid, dogmatic adherence to either quantitative or qualitative methodological approaches has waned, particularly in the last twenty years or so. I, myself, espouse a flexible approach to undertaking research and retain an air of caution against relying too heavily on one methodological ‘paradigm’ or another.

In this chapter, I first outline the historical development of mixed methods and situate this approach within the broader context of historical research paradigms. Following this, I go into more detail to discuss the various definitions and typologies associated with mixing methods, highlighting some of the most influential academic proponents and critics of the paradigm. Finally, I set out my own epistemological position and offer my own rationale for employing a mixed methods approach in my doctoral research study to take into account the different perspectives of students and teachers in relation to the research questions under investigation.

### **4.1 Historical development: paradigm wars and détente**

Research in the social sciences is frequently characterised in terms of the underlying ontological and epistemological basis upon which research is conducted. The idea of separate ‘quantitative’ research and ‘qualitative’ research paradigms has been firmly entrenched since the emergence to prominence of the latter in the 1960s and 1970s.

Quantitative research in the social sciences stems from the application to the social world of techniques of data collection and statistical analysis associated with 19<sup>th</sup> century developments in the physical sciences and mathematics, mostly notably by influential sociologists such as Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). Adhering to the scientific principles of their predecessors and contemporaries, the underlying ontological basis of these early social scientists was that there existed certain incontrovertible social ‘truths’ awaiting discovery by the researcher – an approach formalised by Comte as ‘positivism’. On an epistemological level, quantitative methodology

seeks to apply a rigorous natural-scientific programme to social research in order to empirically seek out and uncover these truths.

Conversely, qualitative research, involving the collection and analysis of in-depth oral, textual or visual information from social subjects, eschews this positivist viewpoint and understands the social world in terms of “a continuous process of creation and recreation by its participants” (Bryman, 2008, p13). Qualitative researchers adopt an interpretivist and constructionist stance and speak not of absolute ‘truths’ but of several constructed ‘truths’ that are relative to the time, culture and subjective experience of social participants. This view is derived from 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century social philosophers, with its roots in the theories of phenomenology (Husserl, 1859-1938; Merleau-Ponty, 1908-61), hermeneutics (Heidegger, 1889-1976) and social constructionism (Mead, 1863-1931; Schutz, 1899-1959). It is, however, only after the publication of seminal works of Goffman (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959), Berger and Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality*, 1966) and Blumer (*Symbolic Interactionism*, 1969) that the use of qualitative methodologies and the theoretical legitimacy underpinning them gained substantial traction amongst academic researchers in the social sciences.

The distinct ontological and epistemological basis for each of these methodologies comprise their own research ‘paradigm’. The idea of paradigms of understanding in scientific knowledge can be traced back to the seminal work of the American historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, whose 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, outlined how this central concept can be seen as the means by which scientific knowledge is advanced. Summarising Kuhn’s writings, Heyl (1975) provides the definition of a paradigm as “the world view – the matrix of theories, models and exemplary achievements – through which a scientific community perceives the universe relevant to its particular discipline” (p61). Kuhn’s thesis proposes that advances in knowledge proceed whereby one paradigm of understanding is effectively replaced by another – a paradigm shift. In this understanding, competing paradigms cannot exist concurrently and that the fundamental beliefs contained within one are incompatible with any other.

With the increasing prominence and proliferation of qualitative social research in the 1960s and 1970s, the competing underlying interpretivist epistemology represented a challenge to the established positivist order. Several authors have framed the inherent tension

between proponents of each of these main paradigms in terms of 'paradigm wars' (Gage, 1989; Hammersley, 1992; Oakley, 1999; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Bryman, 2008).

These paradigm wars that raged throughout the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by doctrinal purism on both sides with a focus on the differences and incompatibility between the competing epistemological standpoints. As Guba (1987) states: "The one [paradigm] precludes the other just surely as belief in a round world precludes belief in a flat one" (p31). This philosophical distinction reinforced the separation of researchers employing either quantitative or qualitative methods, such that within the social sciences, two distinct research cultures emerged with little cross-over or interaction (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, already by the mid-1980s the 'incompatibility thesis', was being challenged and authors were beginning to cast doubt on the dogmas on which it was premised, and leading the path towards a period of détente (Howe, 1985).

Since the late 1980s, researchers (Bryman, 1988; Howe, 1988; Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Greene *et al.*, 1989; Creswell, 1994) have sought to reconcile these competing paradigms, with the aim of utilising the advantages that each has to offer. The main thrust behind these researchers' argument is that, far from being incompatible, the two paradigms can instead be seen as complementary by providing different tools and angles from which to approach a particular research problem (Howe, 1988). As stated by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), "the goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either of these approaches but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across research studies" (p14-15).

The philosophical underpinning of this 'movement' of mixed methods research is one of pragmatism, outlined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as a middle ground between pre-existing philosophical dogmatisms and rejecting traditional dualisms between objective inquiry and subjective realities. Pragmatism views knowledge as being both constructed *and* based on the reality of the world we experience, with 'truths' and 'meanings' being tentative and changing over time. It acknowledges that research is value-oriented and derived from extant cultural beliefs and values (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p18). This epistemological worldview advocates methodological pluralism and the use of multiple modes of inquiry in order to achieve greater understanding through social and behavioural scientific research. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) have endorsed pragmatism as a separate paradigm, situated between positivism (and its modified version, postpositivism) and



constructivism. In Teddlie and Johnson's paper (2009), the authors expound that "pragmatism offers a third choice that embraces superordinate ideas gleaned through consideration of perspectives from both sides of the paradigms debate in interaction with the research question and real-world circumstance" (p73). Pragmatism, thus, underpins and provides a philosophical justification for mixed methods research.

This pragmatic approach to research has been hailed as a "third paradigm", underpinning what has variously been called 'mixed methods' (Creswell *et al.*, 2003), 'combined methods' (Niglas, 2004), 'mixed methodology' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), 'mixed models' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), 'multi-methods' (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Brannen, 1992) and 'multi-strategy' (Bryman, 2004) research. However, the ways in which these terms are defined and used in practice are subject to nuanced interpretation.

## **4.2 Definition of mixed methods research and typologies**

In plain terms, mixed methods research can be defined as "the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research" (Creswell *et al.*, 2003, p212). However, within this definition there has been a great deal of academic endeavour aimed towards outlining a more comprehensive classification of types of mixed methods research.

Greene *et al.* (1989) identified five main justifications that researchers offered for undertaking mixed methods research, as opposed to using a purely monomethod approach (see figure 4.1). The first of these – 'triangulation' – builds on the previous work of Denzin (1970), whereby investigators use different methods in order to seek corroboration from results of quantitative and qualitative data. Second within this typology is 'complementarity', which "seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another" (Greene *et al.*, 1989, p259). 'Development' as a justification for employing mixed methods research is described as using the results from one method to inform the other, for example, in sampling methods. Similarly, a separate category, 'initiation', goes further by seeking to uncover contradictory findings from different methods and to look at a research problem from different perspectives. The fifth classification in Greene *et al.*'s typology is named 'expansion' and

aims to use mixed methods research to “extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components” (1989, p259).

**Figure 4.1 – Greene et al.’s typology of justifications for mixed methods research**

1. *Triangulation*: convergence, corroboration, correspondence or results from different methods. In coding triangulation, the emphasis was placed on seeking corroboration between quantitative and qualitative data.
2. *Complementarity*: ‘seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another’
3. *Development*: ‘seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation, as well as measurement decisions’
4. *Initiation*: ‘seeks the discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives of [sic] frameworks, the recasting of questions or results from one method with questions or results from the other method’
5. *Expansion*: ‘seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components’

(Greene et al., 1989, p259)

This typology devised by Greene and her colleagues has been influential amongst authors examining the emerging field of mixed methods research, who have employed this schema in their own work (Niglas, 2004) or as the basis for further elaboration (Bryman, 2006). However, other writers seeking to catalogue this emergent ‘paradigm’ in a systematic way have focused their attentions not only on the rationale for employing mixed methods, but on the way methods appear to be mixed throughout the research process.

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) offer a typology based on the extent to which the methods are mixed (fully or partially); the timing of the stages of research for each method (concurrent or sequential) and whether one or other of the methods has priority in the

research design (equal or dominant-less dominant status) (p269). For them, research design exists on a continuum from monomethod designs to fully mixed methods, with partially mixed designs occupying regions somewhere in between. Fully mixed designs involve using both qualitative and quantitative research across all components of a single study. That is: in devising the research objectives, the type of data collected and the process by which this is done, at the data analysis stage and at the level of interpretation of the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p267).

In terms of research design, then, Leech and Onwuegbuzie's classification attempts to position mixed methods studies into an exhaustive typology. Bryman attempts to go further by summarising the typologies devised by these, as well as other, authors (Morgan, 1998; Morse, 1991; Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, all cited in Bryman, 2006) by five main considerations:

1. *Are the quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously or sequentially?*
2. *Which has priority – the quantitative or the qualitative data?*
3. *What is the function of the integration – for example, triangulation, explanation, or exploration?*
4. *At what stage(s) in the research process does multi-strategy research occur?* It may be at stages of research question formulation, data collection, data analysis, or data interpretation.
5. *Is there more than one data strand?* With a multi-strand study, there is more than one research method and hence source of data. With a mono-strand study, there is one research method and hence one source of data. However, whether a mono-strand study can genuinely be regarded as a form of mixing methods is debatable.

(Bryman, 2006, p98-99)

### **4.3 Critiques of mixed methods research**

Despite a wealth of academic interest in the advancement of mixed methods, there has also been a substantial critique of those who view it as a panacea in social science research. Particular criticism has been laid at the door of what Bryman (2006) describes as, an 'over-

formalisation' in the classification of typologies of mixed methods research, to the detriment of a more systematic appreciation of how methods are mixed in practice. He states that "most of the[se] typologies have been constructed in largely theoretical terms and have not been apparently influenced in a systematic way by examples of multi-strategy research" (p98).

Furthermore, Symonds and Gorard (2010) have rejected the premise on which mixed methods is based, that the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative lines of inquiry is essentially a false one that has been crystalized and perpetuated through the prism of the 'paradigm wars' of the 1970s and 1980s. They advocate a new ecology of research premised on methodological independence, free from rigid paradigmatic classifications. They challenge the assumptions that data collection tools, types of data and analytical techniques 'belong' to one paradigm or another and propose that "the basic structural and process elements of research should be discussed, taught and popularised" without formal adherence to a particular paradigm (Symonds & Gorard, 2010, p14). In this way, research methodology becomes not about mixing quantitative and qualitative methods at all, but about the use of a suite of techniques available to researchers to be employed according to the specific research situation.

Other authors also reject the false dichotomisation of quantitative and qualitative research (and by extension the premise of mixed methodologies). Giddings' work (Giddings, 2006; Giddings & Grant, 2007) has critiqued the emergence of mixed methods research as perpetuating the pre-existing positivist bias by requiring the researcher to include a quantitative element – a consequence she describes as a 'Trojan horse for positivism'. Giddings further argues that the imposition of a false quantitative/qualitative dichotomy 'invisibilises' the methodological diversity contained within both paradigms. Moreover, she posits that the advocacy of mixed methods as a third research paradigm continues the dominance of positivist inquiry and relies on pragmatist stances to 'fit in' some descriptive qualitative methods, whilst the methodology remains anchored in the quantitative tradition (Giddings, 2006, p202).

#### 4.4 Strengths of mixed methods research

Regardless of the criticism that has been laid at the door of both mixed methods research and the underlying premise of rigid research paradigms upon which the 'mixing' of methods is based, several authors are firmly of the opinion that this new mode of inquiry represents a third research paradigm (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Johnson & Omwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson *et al.*, 2007). Some go further than others in this regard. Johnson and Omwuegbuzie (2004) contend that mixed methods, based on a philosophy of pragmatism, comprises a new approach to research – one in which the research question is fundamental and in which the use of epistemological and methodological pluralism is contingent on the research question(s) being addressed.

Within this methodological 'eclecticism', researchers are free to combine whichever tools they feel are the best to answer a given question. The extent to which different methods are mixed – when in the research process this is done, whether one approach is dominant over the other and how the methods are combined – may vary considerably according to the nature of the research and the objectives being addressed. Whilst a fully integrated mixed methods approach would combine both quantitative and qualitative techniques at all stages of the research process (called 'mixed model' by Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), mixing methods at any stage affords the researcher a high degree of methodological freedom and flexibility.

Indeed, it has been acknowledged that as mixed methods is still emerging as an approach to inquiry, there remains many unanswered questions about when and where in the research process to mix methods, how best to do this and the rationale for undertaking such an approach. Creswell and Garrett's (2008) review of the use of mixed methods in educational research outlines three main standpoints. First, they speak of applied methodologists, for whom there is no focus on any underpinning 'philosophy', but who instead seek to collect, analyse and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data within a single research study. Second, the authors highlight those researchers who advocate mixed methods as a process of research, with all stages of a study guided by the principles of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. This view raises questions, however, of whether multiple paradigms can be combined to this extent or if they remain incompatible on some level. The final stance Creswell and Garrett acknowledge is that of those researchers espousing the idea of mixed methods research as a new philosophical

movement, underpinned by pragmatism and focused on the research question as the fundamental key to how research is designed. This is compatible with Johnson and Omwuegbuzie's thesis but also covers researchers who define and justify their use of mixed methods through other philosophies such as a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010) or even through multiple philosophies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). What connects this last group of researchers is that they are placing their research firmly within a 'new' philosophical approach to research with little *a priori* focus on the practical applications of research methods.

Whilst the relative strengths and limitations of mixed methods research remain contested by authors and practitioners across the social sciences, the next section of this chapter outlines my own epistemological position and offers my own rationale for using a mixed-methods approach in my doctoral study, with reference to the above methodological typologies and debates.

#### **4.5 Using Mixed Methods in my Doctoral Research**

As a researcher who espouses a flexible approach to addressing a research problem, I am keen to highlight the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate often complex and wide-ranging social phenomena. Much can be learnt both by examining the underlying patterns of behaviour that prevail amongst certain actors, as well as through the more detailed examination of individuals' 'realities'. The former may provide an understanding of what is going on, how people tend to react to situations and how specific factors are inter-related. The latter can provide much richer, more detailed information about the experiences and motivations of actors to gain a more focused and in-depth understanding of why people behave and interact the way they do. For me, these two approaches are complementary and not mutually exclusive. To this extent, therefore, I reject the idea of an 'incompatibility thesis' and position myself very much as a 'mixed-methods researcher'. Holding a study's research questions as the primary focus of research, I believe that a researcher ought to use whatever tools are at his/her disposal to investigate the issue at hand. Using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in this way each bring their own benefits and advantages, whilst also mitigating against the drawbacks that using one of these approaches alone might engender.

My own doctoral study seeks to understand the key relationship between teachers and students, with a particular focus on 'at-risk' students, from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. From here, it extends its brief to include the views of teachers: examining the extent to which they are able to help students to overcome risk factors and outlining the main ways in which they implement strategies to provide increased support for those most in need.

The complexity of the research aims lends itself to a mixed methods approach, whereby the breadth and range of inquiry can be expanded by using different methods to pursue different research questions. This study frames the research objectives firstly in terms of understanding the role of teacher-student relations, with a particular focus on students experiencing structural disadvantage, before seeking to investigate the strategies employed by teachers to support the vulnerable students in their charge.

Current perspectives on mixed methods research highlight the centrality of a study's research questions so it is worth explicitly restating the questions that my study seeks to address here:

**RQ1:** What is the relationship between levels of perceived support and educational outcomes?

**RQ2:** What is the effect of teacher support on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in relation to their educational outcomes?

**RQ3:** How can teachers overcome the challenges facing students to reduce their exposure to risk and to increase availability of support?

**RQ4:** What effective strategies are employed in schools to promote students' capacity for achieving positive (and resilient) outcomes?

Whilst some (e.g. Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) argue that a mixed methods approach is most effective when methods are combined at all stages of the research design, the research questions underpinning each stage of my study are such that this proves impracticable. Instead, a sequential 'multimethod' design (Brewer & Hunter, 1989) is employed, whereby a quantitative phase is undertaken using survey data and matched administrative data from a large number of students, before a more in-depth and focused qualitative design is employed in order to elicit the professional experiences and opinions of teaching staff. As Brewer and Hunter state, the multimethod approach allows investigators to "attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have non-

overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths” (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p17).

The quantitative stage of the research seeks to address the first two research questions and uses statistical analysis techniques to assess the extent to which students’ perceptions of support and educational attainment are correlated and, further, what effect teacher support has on disadvantaged students in terms of their educational outcomes. Through the RESL.eu study, information is collected from the students themselves with regards to their perceptions of support from their teachers, parents and peers using psychometric scales and measures. This is analysed in combination with administrative data on students’ background and examination results to disentangle how these variables are inter-related (see chapter 5.3 for a more detailed account of the design and implementation of this stage of the study).

The quantitative element of the study, however, neglects to include the teachers’ voice with regards to this important support relationship. For this reason, a second stage focuses on the latter two research questions enumerated above. A qualitative design is employed to investigate how teachers seek to overcome the challenges facing their students and what strategies they use to promote students’ capacity for achieving resilient outcomes. Focus groups with educational professionals aim to elicit rich in-depth information from participants working on the ground in schools, providing teachers with a voice to describe and reflect on their own experiences, beliefs and strategies with regards to supporting the most vulnerable students. Chapter 5.4 provides an in-depth account of the design and implementation of this qualitative stage of the study.

Through a mixed-methods design, the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of my study are then combined at the interpretation stage of the research to garner insights into the role that teacher support can play in promoting resilience amongst ‘at-risk’ young people. In particular, whilst the discussion in chapter 9 takes the different stages in the research design into account, it seeks also to synthesise the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study. In taking a holistic view of the data, the discussion highlights the contribution these findings has on understanding the mechanisms involved in supporting ‘at-risk’ young people at school and, furthermore, considers the implications that these findings can have on practice in schools and for policy making at a more strategic level. The study benefits from examining the research problem from the



viewpoint of both the students and the teaching staff with whom they interact, which allows my study to provide a much broader picture of the situation, taking into account the different perspectives.

Situating my own study within Bryman's (2006) typology, I am employing a sequential research design (1), with neither source of data given priority over the other, as they are seeking to address different aspects within the study (2). The integration of quantitative and qualitative data is justified in terms of the exploration of a broad and complex issue, not only to understand the nature of the phenomenon but also to examine potential strategies towards providing effective responses to it (3). The separate focus of the quantitative study and the qualitative stage do not lend itself easily to a fully mixed methods approach and so for the purposes of my study I have taken the decision to combine the findings from each phase of the project at the interpretation stage (4). In this way, my research design comprises two strands of data, with different research methods being applied to each strand according to the context (5).

Under Greene *et al.*'s schema, the combined use of quantitative and qualitative research methods is justified here in terms of 'expansion' – it "seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components" (1989, p259). To this end the insights gained from the interpretation of both the quantitative and qualitative data in this study capitalises on the strengths that each has to offer as a distinct methodology, whilst mitigating the potential weaknesses that a mono-method study might imply.

## 5 – Research Design and Methods

### 5.1 Context of the study

The design of my own research study is embedded within the context of the wider, European-funded RESL.eu (Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe) project, as discussed in chapter 1. The project as a whole involved collaborative research across nine member states of the EU to provide insights into the wide array of processes and mechanisms influencing students' decisions to leave school or training early, as well as to uncover examples of best practice currently being implemented to reduce levels of early school leaving.

Within this framework, I have designed my PhD study to explore a more focused and targeted set of research questions, looking more closely at the relationship between social support and attainment and focusing on role that teachers play in promoting resilience amongst their students, with a particular focus on those young people who may be at greater risk of leaving school without sufficient qualifications and/or becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). It takes advantage of access to a new empirical dataset collected from students who are currently experiencing, or have very recently experienced the education system and, as such, can provide insights into contemporary policy discourses.

Although the RESL.eu project sought to provide a cross-national perspective, my own research focuses solely on the English education system, which allows this study to examine in greater depth the underlying structural and institutional effects related to students currently going through this specific education system. In addition to a statistical analysis of a large quantitative dataset derived from the RESL.eu project, my study design also incorporates a qualitative case-study approach to elicit much richer information from teachers working within the English education system and to provide a more in-depth exploration of the actual strategies that teachers employ by way of providing support to vulnerable young people.

This chapter builds on the methodological literature discussed in chapter 4 and provides an outline of how the present study has been designed to answer the specific research questions being addressed.

## 5.2 Research design

I have employed a mixed-methods approach in my research design as a means of addressing the complex nature of my research aims. In seeking to explore the protective effects of teacher support for young people who may otherwise lack support structures elsewhere in their lives, a mixed-methods approach allows for the breadth and range of inquiry to be expanded by using different methods to pursue different research questions.

As stated in chapter 4, this study frames the research objectives firstly in terms of understanding the key relationship between teachers and students, with a particular focus on students from the most socio-economically disadvantaged background, before extending its brief to include views of teachers insofar as they are able to help students to overcome risk factors and provide increased support for those most in need.

Current perspectives on mixed methods research highlight the centrality of a study's research questions and promote the idea of designing research using the most appropriate techniques available to answer them.

A mixed-methods approach allows me to address the first two of my research questions, which focus on the perceptions of students, through a statistical analysis of student survey data. In particular, this stage of the study seeks to examine:

- **RQ1:** What is the relationship between levels of perceived support and educational outcomes?; and
- **RQ2:** What is the effect of teacher support on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in relation to their educational outcomes?

A quantitative analytical approach allows me to operationalise and explore the relationships between the key variables involved using correlation analysis and regression modelling on a large survey dataset, matched with key schools' census and attainment data obtained from the Department for Education (DfE).

Beyond this, my research goes on to examine two further research questions, framed from the perspective of teaching professionals:

- **RQ3:** How can teachers overcome the challenges facing students to reduce their exposure to risk and to increase availability of support?; and
- **RQ4:** What effective strategies are employed in schools to promote students' capacity for achieving positive (and resilient) outcomes?

These questions necessitate a more in-depth examination of the views of teachers and the implementation of specific strategies designed to provide support, promote resilience and improve educational outcomes. For this reason, this stage of my research lends itself much more readily to the use of qualitative examination techniques to uncover more detailed and in-depth data from the schools and teachers themselves in the form of a case study approach. The case study of one outer London borough comprises a documentary analysis of school policies, official inspection reports and focus group discussions conducted at two schools. The qualitative phase of my research is not designed to be a comparative study, but rather attempts to capture the experiences of teachers from different institutional settings, working within the same local and wider policy contexts.

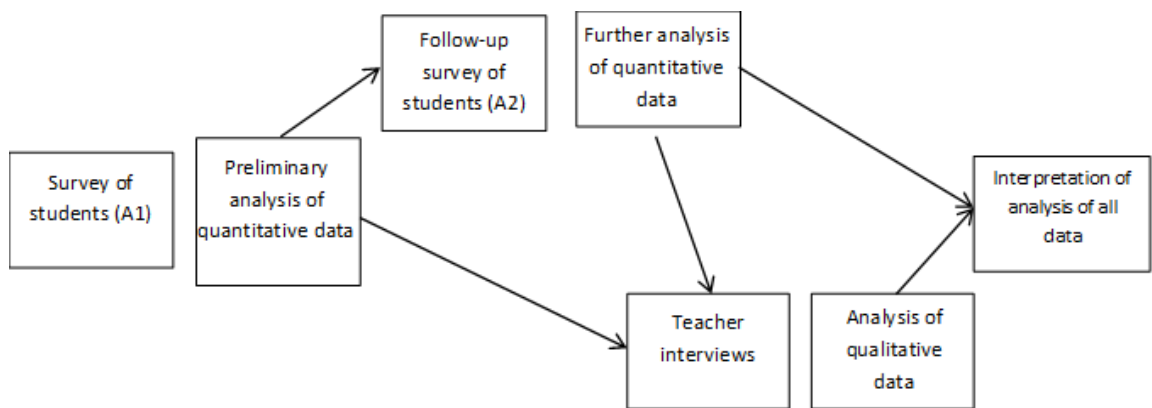
As the focus of my research questions, RQ1 and RQ2, is conceptually quite separate from RQ3 and RQ4, and furthermore seeks to examine the key issues relating to support and attainment from quite different angles, it is impractical to attempt to mix methods at every stage of this study. However, this is not to ignore the important synergies that do exist in approaching separate, but related, research questions from different angles. It is important that there is dialogue throughout the study and for each stage to inform the next to provide a consistent interpretation of the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. For this reason, a multimethod sequential design is employed, using the analysis of the quantitative survey data to inform a further exploration of the findings through the use of a qualitative case study, before a fuller, richer discussion of the study's findings can be explored and understood.

### **5.2.1 Important changes to the research design**

Figure 5.1 provides a visual representation of how the study was originally designed to proceed, with the use of the follow-up survey of students undertaken in the RESL.eu project, and the inclusion of teacher interviews as the primary source of qualitative data. However, quite early on it became apparent that the follow-up survey would not provide sufficient data on attainment to allow me to conduct a robust statistical analysis of the students survey using educational outcomes as a key variable. The survey (A2), which was conducted in 2016, two years after the original student survey (A1), recorded a retention rate of just 28% (Kaye *et al.*, 2017), and would necessarily be subject to significant self-selection bias, with students with positive educational outcomes likely to be over-represented in the final dataset. In addition, preliminary analysis of the data on young

people’s parental occupation (designed to provide a proxy measure of social class) proved to be very inconsistent, with a lot of missing or uncodable values (more than 40%). Even during the data collection process, it was clear that some students were unable to sufficiently recall what their parents did for work (many asking researchers what to do if they weren’t sure) and several provided very generic responses, such as ‘manager’, ‘engineer’ or ‘office worker’. These responses proved impossible to code successfully into a classification schema, such as the ILO’s International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) as intended.

**Figure 5.1: Original research design**



For these reasons, I sought to obtain matched administrative data from the DfE’s National Pupil Database (NPD), which would provide official attainment statistics at key stage 4 and 5, along with key socio-demographic data from the annual schools census, such as eligibility for free school meals and special educational needs status. These data would be matched for the students included in the RESL.eu study in England for the corresponding year in which the follow-up survey took place (i.e. 2016). This process, however, proved to be a slow and protracted affair, involving several email exchanges, completion of various forms and provision of satisfactory evidence of data protection and information security policies. Despite the submission of the request in August 2017, several follow-up emails from the Department required supplementary information, more details on data protection and university ethics protocols - even minor amendments to the exact wording used in the application. This all added to the lengthy bureaucratic process, such that even six months later, by the end of February 2018, I had no indication that approval for the request would be granted. Alternative statistical analysis proposals were deliberated with the help of my supervisory team, but these were all considered sub-optimal compared to being able to

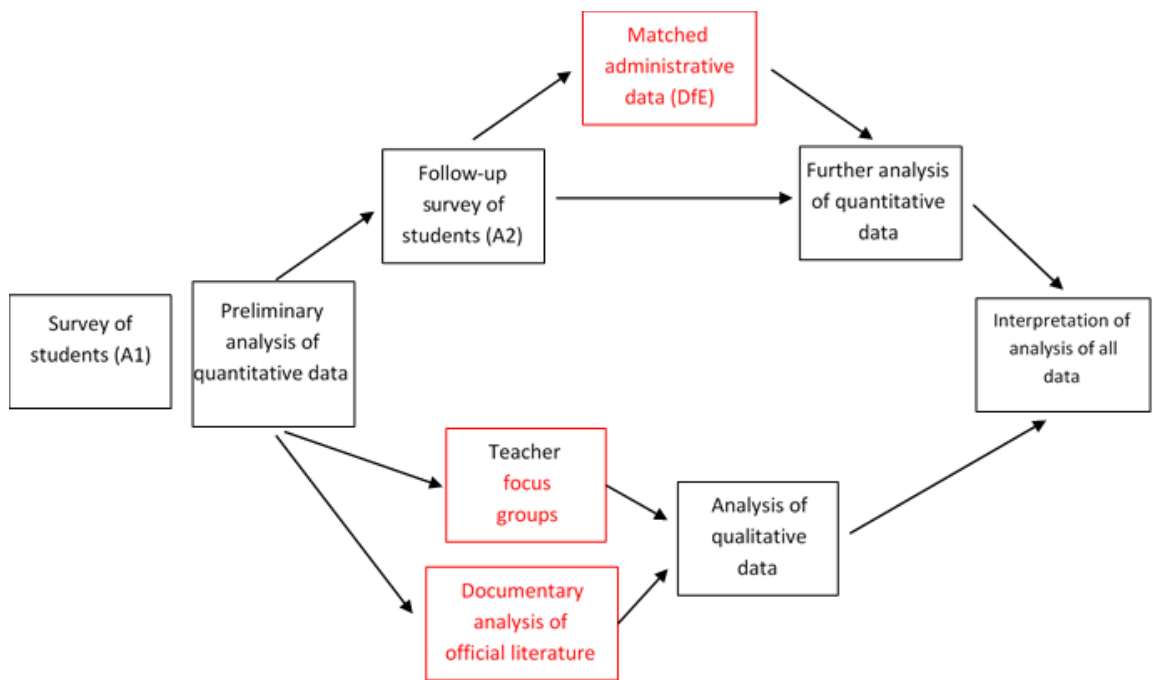
access the administrative data from the DfE. My request finally received approval in March although it took a further six weeks to actually received the files containing the data. Whilst the long, drawn-out process had afforded me the time to refine my data analysis strategy to some extent, it was not until I was able to access the data that I knew what statistical processes I would be able to employ – and, of course, I would not have any findings before I could interrogate the matched survey and administrative data.

What this also meant was that the original sequential design of my research study became much more of a parallel study which, although focused on separate aspects of the subject, allowed for more reciprocal approach. The preliminary findings from the first student survey could feed into the design of the qualitative phase, whilst the findings emerging from the case study could also be considered in relation to the final quantitative analysis. The allowed me to have a wider lens when interpreting all of the data and incorporating the findings from both stages of the study into my discussion and conclusions section (see chapters 9 and 10).

A further important adaptation I made to the research design involved expanding the qualitative phase from a series of teacher interviews to a more rounded case study approach. Whilst I had originally planned to use interviews to allow teachers to express potentially sensitive views about individual students in a confidential space, upon further reflection I thought that focus groups would enable me to assess whether there existed a particular school ‘culture’ with regards to strategies for supporting young people and promoting resilience. Documentary analysis of official literature produced by the school and inspection reports about the school would also allow me to analyse the extent to which teachers were willing to deviate from the ‘official’ ethos in relation to these policies and provided a starting point from which to probe the issues further within a focus group setting. Finally, I decided that a case study focusing on one local authority could allow for different schools to set out their interpretation of government guidelines and examples of effective practice, whilst ostensibly being situated within the same local and wider policy contexts.

Figure 5.2 therefore outlines the revised research design, as adapted according to the above considerations (changes to the original design – figure 5.1 – are highlighted in red).

**Figure 5.2: Revised research design**



### **5.3 Quantitative study design**

The quantitative phase of my study uses data from three main sources: from the students' survey conducted as part of the Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) project; from the follow-up RESL.eu survey of the same young people; and from matched administrative data accessed via the Department for Education (DfE). Whilst the RESL.eu surveys include information collected in seven European countries, my analysis focuses on the UK sample, which also allows for their survey responses to be matched with official attainment and schools' census data.

The nature of the quantitative phase of my research is exploratory and seeks primarily to analyse the data to disentangle the relationships between various sources of social support for students in relation to their educational outcomes. Within the context of the study's overall objective to examine the role of teacher support in promoting resilience amongst 'at-risk' young people, my analysis proceeds by focusing on two key research questions:

- **RQ1:** What is the relationship between levels of perceived support and educational outcomes?
- **RQ2:** What is the effect of teacher support on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in relation to their educational outcomes?

In this way, the quantitative study focuses on the relationship between educational outcomes and levels of perceived support and seeks to further the understanding of the role that teacher support can have on improving educational attainment for those young people lacking effective support structures elsewhere in their lives. The role of teachers to promote 'resilient outcomes' for the most at-risk students by providing a buffer effect can also be examined in relation to previous studies espousing this theoretical viewpoint.

Of course, as with all self-reported surveys of this nature, what is being measured here is young people's 'perceptions' of support, which may or may not correspond to the actual levels of support being provided at home, at school or from peer groups. Nevertheless, studies have shown that young people's engagement at school is mediated through their perception of support (Ryan *et al.*, 2019) and that this is therefore, in its own right, a legitimate lens through which to analyse the effect of support on academic outcomes.

This section proceeds, first, by discussing the selection of participants and recruitment of schools and other educational institutions. The design of the key instruments (the RESL.eu students' survey and follow-up survey) is then outlined, before the data collection process is presented in more detail. Finally, the data analysis procedure for this phase of the study is detailed, with a description of the key measures and variables included in the final analysis.

### **5.3.1 Participant selection and recruitment**

The RESL.eu study sought to elicit the views, experiences and trajectories of young people approaching the end of their compulsory education and, specifically, those who are potentially at risk of becoming 'early school leavers' (Kaye *et al.*, 2015). To this end, it was decided that this first students' survey was to focus on two cohorts of students based, not on age groups, but on academic year groups and where they were situated in relation to the attainment of upper secondary level qualifications. In the UK, this meant that the target cohorts related to students in Year 10 and Year 12 (or equivalent in FE colleges) – that is, either side of the key GCSE examinations that are usually taken in Year 11.

Having selected which cohorts were our primary focus of study, the project also sought to highlight within-country regional variations and so two research areas were selected per participating member state on the basis of contrasting demographic and/or socio-economic profiles. Urban areas with lower-than-average youth employment rates were used as an



over-arching selection criteria for all countries in order that those students most at-risk of becoming early school leavers by the time of the follow-up survey, two years later, might be captured in the first stage of data collection. In the UK, the selected research areas were London and the North East of England. Whilst both of these regions had above-average youth employment rates, they each presented their own local economic conditions and opportunity structures. In particular, the demographic composition of young people in the two regions provided an interesting contrast, with London's levels of social and ethnic diversity far exceeding those found in the North East.

Within each of the research areas, secondary schools and FE colleges were contacted by the research team and those who were willing to participate in an on-going partnership (including participation in the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study) were recruited to the project. It was important to include at least one FE college in each of the research areas to capture the large proportion of students in post-16 education who do not stay on in their secondary school sixth form. Within each of the participating institutions full academic-year cohorts in schools were targeted so as to capture a cross-section of the student body in that area. A total of 3,018 students in 17 schools and colleges took part in the RESL.eu students' survey in the UK.

The follow-up survey sought to track the same young people who completed the students' survey two years later and was conducted primarily online or over the phone using the contact information provided at the time of the first survey. Only 843 young people completed this follow-up survey in the UK, representing a retention rate of 27.9% and it was felt likely that the data collected in this survey would contain a high degree of self-selection bias. For this reason, as mentioned above, data from the National Pupil Database was requested from the DfE so that accurate information on educational outcomes could be matched to the students who participated in the first students survey. In this way, complete data was available for a total of 2,500 young people.

### **5.3.2 Instrumentation design**

The RESL.eu students' survey (A1) is an 86 question instrument, divided into six major sections, viz. Personal Information, Your Family, At School, Your Friends, Your Neighbourhood and Your Future Plans and Aspirations (see appendix 2). The broad focus of the quantitative stage of the RESL.eu project meant that a wide range of variables were considered for inclusion in the final questionnaire. Key demographic variables – gender,

age, ethnicity, country of birth, migrant status, parents' educational level, employment status and occupation – were collected, as well as factual information about respondents' educational trajectory (attendance at pre-school, repetition of school year, level and track at which they were currently studying).

In addition, several psychometric scales were included in the design of the questionnaire in order to gauge participants' attitudes to education, perceptions of support from parents, peers and teachers and their behaviour, motivations and aspirations in regards to school. These were included on the basis of theoretical considerations within the framework of the overall RESL.eu project (Clycq *et al.*, 2014). As far as possible, items from previously-validated instruments were included, although it was the aim to assess the construct validity of such scales through an exploratory analysis of the study's sample.

Items were included from teacher support scales (Eggert *et al.*, 1991); parental support instruments (Wills *et al.*, 1992), school attitude assessment scale (McCoach, 2003) and other self-concept questionnaires (Liu & Wang, 2005) devised and validated in the context of previous studies. Where appropriate, items were adapted to fit the specific purposes of the RESL.eu questionnaire (e.g. adapting the wording of the parental support instrument to ask about peers', rather than parents', support. Further detail about the reliability of the final derived scales is presented in section 5.3.4, below.

Design of the research instrument was a collaborative process between members of the RESL.eu research consortium, which involved a high degree of negotiation and acknowledgement of trade-offs to collect data on a wide number of issues, whilst keeping the overall length of the questionnaire to a minimum. Ultimately, it was the Middlesex University team – and primarily me, in my role as quantitative research assistant – that had responsibility for finalising the items for inclusion in the final questionnaire. Following this, the international questionnaire was translated into the relevant country languages (a step that was not necessary for the UK survey).

The follow-up survey (A2) comprises a much shorter instrument (12 questions), conducted two years later with the same participants as the original survey (see appendix 2). The questionnaire underwent the same collaborative design process as the original students' survey and asked information about respondents' current study, employment and qualifications as well as their short-term (in one year's time) and medium-term (in five years' time) aspirations.

The administrative data from the DfE came from the National Pupil Database and the Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census. These sources contain official data collected by schools in relation to pupils' characteristics and attainment. The data matched to RESL.eu survey participants in the UK provided further information on their eligibility for free school meals, special educational needs (SEN) status, Key Stage 4 attainment and (for the older cohort), Key Stage 5 attainment information. These data were aligned to the same year of collection for the RESL.eu students' survey, with regards to socio-demographic variables, and to the year of collection for the RESL.eu follow-up survey, with regards to attainment data.

### **5.3.3 Data collection**

Following an initial piloting period towards the end of 2013, data collection for the RESL.eu students' survey was undertaken in the spring and summer terms of the 2013/14 academic year. In the UK, research teams (including myself) administered the questionnaire in schools or colleges, primarily via an online electronic survey platform (*Qualtrics*). This allowed responses to be automatically registered and saved to a central server database. Most frequently, the questionnaire was conducted as part of a class's ICT (information and communications technology) lesson and it was necessary to run several sessions to ensure the whole academic cohort had the opportunity to participate. Researchers familiar with the content of the questionnaire were on-hand to answer any queries from the participants. Where facilities were not available, some questionnaires were collected on paper and manually input into the online system by researchers at a later date. Overall, the length of the questionnaire meant that it often took participants longer to complete than originally envisaged – especially with students who had identified special educational needs. On average students took 31 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Fieldwork for the follow-up survey took place between spring and summer 2016, two years after the students' survey. Using the contact information provided by participants in the first survey, young people were contacted, initially with an email invitation to complete the questionnaire via an online link. Subsequent follow-up contacts involved calling the participants to administer the brief survey over the phone. A further strategy involved sending out reminders to complete the online survey via WhatsApp. However, a high degree of missing contact information (%) meant that inclusion in the follow-up sample was necessarily limited. Furthermore, as have been well-documented in the literature (Ribisl *et al.*, 1996; Winefield *et al.*, 1990; Uhrig, 2008), attrition rates amongst young people in

surveys of this nature are notoriously high. It has been suggested that this may be due to a lower sense of social obligation (Groves & Couper, 1998); it may also be related to the much higher degree of residential mobility experienced by young people compared to more settled populations (Stoop, 2005).

An attrition rate of more than 70%, though, will inevitably have an impact on the validity and reliability of any analysis conducted on the basis of the follow-up survey. For this reason, data from administrative sources was requested so that robust statistical analysis could be undertaken in relation to participants' educational outcomes. The data request process (as outlined above) was lengthy and conformed to the DfE's stringent data protection and ethical protocols. The dataset was finally acquired in April 2018 – two years after the end of fieldwork for the follow-up survey.

**Ethics:** The research conducted in the UK as part of the RESL.eu project was undertaken under the approval of Middlesex University's Ethics Committee (see appendix 1). Data collection for the students' survey was carried out with the consent and under the supervision of the schools and colleges involved. The survey took place on-site at the students' school, during normal teaching hours and with at least one staff member present alongside the researchers. The survey was, where possible, conducted online, using the schools' IT equipment. All information was entered by the participants themselves – neither the school staff nor the researchers had access to responses during the survey. Before undertaking the research in the schools, prior consent for participating in the study was sought from the students or, where they were under 16, from their parents or guardian. Students (and parents/guardians) were informed about the project's aims and research methods, and it was explained that taking part in the survey was fully voluntary; participants being able to withdraw at any time without having to explain their actions. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were also explained to participants. Although the survey elicited some personal information, including names and contact details from participants, utmost care was taken that all personal details were kept absolutely confidential. Personal information was separated from the rest of the answers during data analysis stage and used only for tracking purposes, so that the research team could contact the survey participants later on during the project. The analysis of the survey data is conducted on an aggregate level and, where appropriate, small counts are suppressed to ensure no individual can be identified.

The follow-up survey was also conducted under the auspices of Middlesex University's Ethics Committee and took the form of an online self-completed questionnaire. Information about the study was reiterated to the participants, reminding them of their participation in the first students' survey two years earlier. Participation in the follow-up survey was on a voluntary basis and confidentiality was maintained by using anonymous web-links to the survey that would automatically connect answers to the follow-up survey with participants' responses to the first students' survey. Where researchers contacted participants via telephone, they input the data using the same process, such that, once registered in the system, the anonymous responses were recorded and matched to the same individual's first survey answers.

The data request procedure for acquiring the DFE administrative data involved the completion of two 13-page forms: a Data Request Application Form (appendix 4) and a Data Information Security Questionnaire (appendix 5). Detailed information concerning the nature of the research – the data being requested and how it is intended to be used – was provided, along with a justification for the request under the Data Protection Act 1998. The Security Questionnaire sought more technical details concerning the University's data protection policies, including the security of the IT systems involved with regards to storing, accessing and disposing of sensitive data in an appropriate way. As mentioned above, this was a lengthy and heavily-bureaucratic process and, once the required evidence was provided, the request was finally approved.

#### **5.3.4 Data analysis**

Statistical analysis of the dataset was undertaken using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program and proceeded in a number of steps: first, the data was cleaned and preliminary analysis identified the main scales used in subsequent analysis. Scale development was conducted using the entire international RESL.eu dataset ( $n=19,586$ ), which was then subsequently verified as fitting to the data on a national level. Factor analysis was then employed to assess the construct validity of the support measures, establishing in which configuration these items most logically fit and ensuring the most appropriate construction of scales on the basis of the study's sample (Leech *et al.*, 2014). Items were subjected to a principal components analysis (PCA), with items for teacher support, parental support and peer support being assessed separately. On this basis, scales

and sub-scales for perceived teacher support, parental support and peers' support were formulated and used in my analysis of the data in the UK.

Descriptive univariate statistics provided an overview of the UK sample and statistical tests were used to assess where significant differences existed between the older and younger cohorts in relation to their levels of perceived support.

Following this, the relationship between levels of perceived support and educational attainment (RQ1) was analysed using bivariate correlation and further statistical tests indicated the significance of socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age and socio-economic disadvantage. Binary logistic regression analysis further examined the combined effect of gender and disadvantage on students' likelihood of attaining the benchmark level of education for each academic year group.

Having established the effect of socio-economic disadvantage as a 'risk factor' for educational attainment, further analysis compares those students who demonstrate resilient outcomes (that is, positive attainment, despite being 'at-risk') with (a) students who are 'at-risk' and do not achieve the expected level of attainment; (b) all students (whether 'at-risk' or not) who do not manage to achieve the expected level of attainment; and (c) 'typical attainers': those who are not at-risk and who do achieve the expected level of attainment – as a base comparison group. Again, logistic regression is employed to assess the effect of a number of socio-demographic variables on the likelihood of being in this 'resilient' group.

The statistical analysis then proceeds to examine the effect of social support (particularly teacher support) on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in relation to their educational attainment (RQ2). The relationship between support and attainment was assessed using bivariate correlation analysis, before one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to ascertain significant between-group differences. Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests facilitated the interpretation of the analysis, comparing students identified as 'resilient attainers' with other groups, in relation to their levels of perceived support.

The specific impact of teacher support for those lacking support in other areas was analysed by running correlation analyses on sub-samples of the data, including only those students reporting 'low' levels of support from parents and/or peers. The threshold for 'low' support was placed at 1 standard deviation below the mean.

### 5.3.5 Key terms and variables

Although various conceptualisations of resilience abound in the literature, this study takes as its starting point the notion that it can be operationalised in terms of a positive outcome despite the existence of specific adverse circumstances or risk factors (see Masten *et al.*, 1990; Olsson *et al.*, 2003).

In order to examine what affects students' propensity to realise *resilient outcomes*, therefore, it is necessary to identify which group or groups are at-risk. In addition, it is also incumbent to operationalise what is considered a 'positive outcome' before those cases where such results occur despite the existence of substantive 'risk factors' can be identified as resilient outcomes.

Once this principle is applied, further socio-demographic variables and support scales and sub-scales were analysed to assess the extent to which they can affect students' likelihood of attaining positive (or resilient) outcomes.

#### ***Outcome and risk variables***

**Educational attainment:** is a binary variable derived from the National Pupil Database and pertains to attainment by 2016. For the younger cohort, achievement of Level 2 (equivalent to 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C) – the government's benchmark attainment level for this year group – is coded as '1', whilst non-achievement is coded as '0'. For the older cohort, achievement of Level 3 (equivalent to 2 or more GCE A-levels) – the government's benchmark attainment level for this year group – is coded as '1', whilst non-achievement is coded as '0'.

**Socio-economic disadvantage:** is a binary variable derived from the Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census and pertains to a student's eligibility for free school meals (FSM) in 2014. Those who were eligible are coded as '1'; those who were not eligible are coded as '0'.

**Resilient attainment:** is therefore derived from the two variables above – resilient attainers are those who are coded as: (Educational attainment = 1 and Socio-economic disadvantage = 1). Other outcome 'types' can be derived in this way: typical attainers (Educational attainment = 1 and SE disadvantage = 0); at-risk non-attainers (Educational attainment = 0 and SE disadvantage = 1); and other non-attainers (Educational attainment = 0 and SE disadvantage = 0).

### **Other variables**

**Cohort:** is a binary variable derived from the RESL.eu students' survey and coded as '1' = Cohort 1 (Year 10) and '2' = Cohort 2 (Year 12 or equivalent)

**Gender:** is a binary variable derived from the RESL.eu students' survey and coded as '0' = male and '1' = female.

**Special educational needs (SEN) status:** is a binary variable derived from the Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census for 2014 and coded as '0' = no identified SEN and '1' = SEN.

**Ethnic group:** is a categorical variable derived from the RESL.eu students' survey and coded into 6 categories: White British (1); White Other (2); Mixed/multiple ethnic groups (3); Asian/Asian British (4); Black/Black British (5); and Other ethnic group (6).

**Teacher Support:** students' perceived level of support from their teachers was gauged using a composite scale formed of items from a number of existing instruments. The final scale included: 4 items taken from the Teacher Support Scale devised by Eggert *et al.* (1991); 6 items from the 15-item Parental Support instrument derived by Wills *et al.* (1992), adapted for teachers; one item from the School Attitude Assessment Scale (McCoach, 2003) and one from the Academic-Self Concept Questionnaire (Liu & Wang, 2005).

Analysis of the scale items resulted in two items being removed and factor analysis identified two teacher support sub-scales: one related to teacher school support and one for teacher social support. Responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and were averaged to produce mean factor scores.

**Table 5.1: Items included in the final teacher support sub-scales**

Item	School support sub-scale	Social support sub-scale
<i>Most of the teachers at this school are good teachers</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers feel that my work is poor*</i> (removed)		
<i>My teachers try to help me do well in school</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers respect me as a person</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers do not treat me fairly*</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers don't care if I fail or succeed*</i>	✓	
<i>I feel that I can trust my teachers as people to talk to</i>		✓
<i>If I tell my teachers about a problem, they will probably blame me for it*</i> (removed)		



<i>If I talk to my teachers, I think they will try to understand how I feel</i>		✓
<i>If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my teachers for help</i>		✓
<i>If I'm having a social or personal problem, my teachers would have advice about what to do</i>		✓
<i>When I feel bad about something, my teachers will listen</i>		✓

\* = items were reverse coded

**Parental Support:** Students' perceived level of parental support was also measured using a composite scale including items from the Parental Support Scale designed by Eggert *et al.* (1991) (9 items), the Parental Support instrument developed by Wills *et al.* (1992) (6 items) and Cernkovich and Giordano's (1987) Parental Control and Supervision scale (3 items). Factor analysis identified four parental support sub-scales: one related to teacher school support and one for parental social support, one for parental control and one for parental involvement at school. Responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and were averaged to produce mean factor scores.

**Table 5.2: Items included in the final parental support sub-scales**

Item	Social support sub-scale	School support sub-scale	Control sub-scale	Involvement at school sub-scale
<i>I feel that I can trust my parent as someone to talk to</i>	✓			
<i>If I tell my parent about a problem, they will probably blame me for it*</i> (removed)				
<i>If I talk to my parent, I think they will try to understand how I feel</i>	✓			
<i>When I feel bad about something, my parent will listen</i>	✓			
<i>If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my parents for help</i>	✓			
<i>If I'm having a social or personal problem, my parents would have advice about what to do</i>	✓			
<i>My parents make sure that I do my homework</i>		✓		
<i>My parents make sure that I go to school every day</i>		✓		
<i>My parents praise me when I do well in school</i>		✓		
<i>My parents believe that education is important to succeed in life</i>		✓		
<i>My parents talk to me about my future</i>		✓		
<i>My parents give me the support I need to do well in school</i>		✓		
<i>My parents want me to tell them where I am if I don't come home straight after school</i>			✓	

<i>My parents want to know who I'm out with when I go out with other kids</i>			✓	
<i>In my free time away from home, my parents know who I'm with and where I am</i>			✓	
<i>My parents attend regular meetings with my teachers</i>				✓
<i>My parents have attended school events and activities in the last year</i>				✓
<i>My parents encourage me to be involved in school activities</i>				✓

\* = items were reverse coded

**Peer Support:** was measured using six items derived from the Wills *et al.* (1992) Parental Support Instrument, adapted to suit the context of students' perceptions of the support they receive from their peers. Factor analysis did not reveal any underlying sub-scales although one item was removed in the final peer support scale to increase its internal construct validity. Responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and were averaged for a mean perceived peer support score.

**Table 5.3: Items included in the final peer support scale**

Item	Peer support scale
<i>I feel that I can trust my friends as people to talk to</i>	✓
<i>If I tell my friends about a problem, they will probably blame me for it*</i> (removed)	
<i>If I talk to my friends, I think they will try to understand how I feel</i>	✓
<i>If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my friends for help</i>	✓
<i>If I'm having a social or personal problem, my friends would have advice about what to do</i>	✓
<i>When I feel bad about something, my friends will listen</i>	✓

\* = items were reverse coded

### **Scale reliability and content validity analysis**

The validity of these support scale measures was examined and content validity analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha scores. Scale reliability analysis confirmed moderate-to-strong internal reliability for each of the sub-scales (although 'parental involvement at school' fell slightly below acceptable levels). Each of the scales was developed using principal component analysis (PCA) of the international RESL.eu dataset, with reliability analysis re-run on the UK sub-sample to ensure that the scales were appropriate to be used in my own subsequent statistical analysis. A summary of the final scales and sub-scales with their corresponding Cronbach's alpha scores is presented below:

**Table 5.4 : Summary of factor analyses**

	No of items	Cronbach's alpha (RESL.eu dataset)	Cronbach's alpha (UK sub-sample)
<b>Teacher support</b>			
Teacher social support	5	.867	.851
Teacher school support	5	.780	.808
<b>Parental support</b>			
Parental social support	5	.865	.880
Parental school support	6	.816	.834
Parental control	3	.758	.789
Parental involvement at school	3	.635	.657
<b>Peer support</b>	5	.886	.885

## 5.4 Qualitative Study Design

As illustrated in the final study design above (see figure 5.2), the qualitative phase of the study was undertaken within the context of a multimethod sequential design and comprised a case study analysis of a local authority area situated in outer London. Whilst the initial design (figure 5.1) proposed undertaking a number of interviews with teachers subsequent to the analysis of data from the students' survey, in fact I revised this to incorporate a more comprehensive case study approach. Although this was done originally as a matter of expedience, awaiting matched administrative data from the Department for Education (see section 5.3 above), I feel this has allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the attitudes of teaching staff and how policies were being interpreted and implemented by institutions within a diverse urban setting. I therefore, I feel it has contributed to a stronger piece of research overall.

The qualitative data collection took place throughout 2017, subsequent to the completion of the quantitative survey (summer 2016). The design of this stage of the research was therefore informed to some extent by initial explorations of the survey data. However, fundamentally, this qualitative stage of my research was guided by the research questions it sought to answer, and I proceeded to design and administer the focus group discussions and to analyse the official literature and focus group transcripts after only preliminary statistical analysis of the survey data. For this reason, the qualitative findings are driven more by theoretical considerations than by the outcomes of the quantitative data analysis.

In addition, the qualitative element of the wider RESL.eu project also provided a broad template of how the design of this stage should proceed. Whilst the survey data elicited

responses from students, the aim of this part of the study was to probe and explore the views and experiences of teaching professionals. Furthermore, whilst some qualitative data had been collected from school staff within the context of the RESL.eu fieldwork, the focus of those focus groups and interviews had been much more broadly-defined and designed to elicit cross-national comparative data regarding EU policy priorities – and particularly surrounding early school leaving (a concept that is largely absent from the UK policy discourse – see Ryan & Lőrinc, 2015).

The aim of this qualitative phase of my PhD study therefore is to allow for a more in-depth exploration of educational professionals' perceptions of their role in assisting and supporting students successfully to achieve positive educational outcomes. In particular, it seeks to expand the range of inquiry from the identification of risk and protective factors experienced by students (the focus of the quantitative stage), to an exploration of how teachers feel they are able to effect change within the institutional environment of the school. This stage of the research, therefore, is guided by and aims to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ3:** How can teachers overcome the challenges facing students to reduce their exposure to risk and to increase availability of support?
- **RQ4:** What effective strategies are employed in schools to promote students' capacity for achieving positive (and resilient) outcomes?

The case study design I employ comprises an examination of one London borough – Outerborough<sup>4</sup> – and focuses on two schools operating within the same local authority area, viz. High Hill<sup>4</sup> and Slopewood<sup>4</sup>. The qualitative study is not designed to be a comparative analysis, but rather attempts to capture the experiences of teachers from different institutional settings, working within the same local environment and wider policy contexts. Whilst students from these schools had participated in the quantitative survey, this stage of the research sought to provide the teachers in these institutions a voice through focus group discussions on the broad role of teachers to influence young people's outcomes.

Of course, I recognise that teachers in mainstream schools are not the only influence on young people's education. Depending on students' individual context and environment, the role of family members, friends, community schools or other organisations may be of

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<sup>4</sup> The names of institutions and local authorities have been given pseudonyms to protect the identities of research participants

greater importance in terms of their motivation or attitudes towards academic achievement (Ryan *et al.*, 2019). However, the focus here is on the role of teachers and pastoral support professionals in mainstream schools. It is in these institutions that the vast majority of students' educational experience is played out and the absolute importance of the student-teacher relationship in this context is clearly a key consideration.

In addition to focus groups undertaken on-site at the school with teachers, and within the context of a case study approach, I collated auxiliary materials, consisting of external and internal school reports, institutional policies (e.g. behaviour policies, codes of conduct, statements of values, and other relevant documents) and school-level statistical data, to provide detailed contextual information about each of the schools. I have also undertaken a more detailed analysis of school policies and culture that impact upon the overall support available for students and the extent to which the teachers were able to positively affect young people – particularly those facing the most challenging circumstances.

This contextual analysis is set out below, focusing first on the local authority which comprises the case study area and then providing a more in-depth profile of the two participating schools, examining the composition of the student body, and describing the individual school culture within which the teachers' attitudes and experiences can be more thoroughly understood.

Following this contextual examination of the schools and local area, I provide more detail on the focus groups undertaken with teachers and school staff, including information on instrumentation design, data collection, ethics, data analysis and the make-up of the focus groups themselves.

#### **5.4.1 Outerborough and the local context**

Both of the case study schools that participated in this stage of the project were situated within the same local authority area. Located in outer London, the borough is one of the most populous in the capital and is home to a diverse range of communities. Overall, around 40% of Outerborough's population is of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) origin, with just over a third of residents having been born abroad. As with many areas of the capital, there are substantial groups of established Indian, Iranian and Jewish communities as well as more recent immigrants from Poland, Romania and other Eastern European countries. In this diverse community, the Schools Census has identified more than

100 languages spoken by children at school in the borough, with more than one in three secondary school students speaking English as an additional language.

In terms of socio-economic conditions, Outerborough experiences close to the national average levels of deprivation across the key indicators included in the Government's index of multiple deprivation (IMD). Although the trend is for increasing levels of deprivation over recent years, the local authority area continues to compare favourably against other boroughs in London. The level of unemployment stands at around 5%, slightly above the national average (4.7%) but below the London average of 5.7%. Whilst deprivation is unevenly distributed across the local authority area, the highest levels are seen in the west and south of the borough, where both of the case study schools are located.

Educational attainment is relatively high amongst pupils in the borough. Almost three-quarters of students achieve five or more GCSE grades A\* to C including English and maths, compared to the national average of 63%. Almost half achieve the English Baccalaureate – i.e. achieving at least a C grade in English, maths, sciences, a language and either history or geography (see chapter 3) – which is substantially higher than the national average of just 24.7%. Although the proportion of students classed as 'disadvantaged' (being eligible for the Pupil Premium – see chapter 3) is higher in Outerborough than for England overall, attainment is generally greater amongst these students in the borough – more than half achieve 5+ A\*-C grades at GCSE including English and maths – than the national average for the group (43.1%).

The case study schools were located in the west (High Hill<sup>4</sup>) and the south (Slopewood<sup>4</sup>) of the borough in separate wards. Both wards have similar demographic compositions, with around a third of residents being of BAME origin and around half being foreign born. In most of the key indicators of deprivation, there was little difference between the two wards although in most measures the ward in which Slopewood School is situated could be said to experience slightly greater levels of deprivation. Overall, though, both wards are located in the less affluent part of the borough and experience higher levels of deprivation than other areas of the local authority.

The next section outlines profiles of the two schools participating in the study. As mentioned above, there is no attempt to compare the two institutions and the aim is rather to elicit information from teachers at different institutions who, nevertheless, are subject to similar local contexts and issues. To this end a description of each school can provide a

broader picture of the individual institutional context within which teachers work, as well as providing context for understanding how and why participants responded to the topics discussed during the focus groups.

#### **5.4.2 The schools**

**High Hill School** is a larger-than-average secondary school situated in an outer London borough. It is an Academy Converter school catering for 11 to 18 year olds of both genders. The community it serves is very diverse, both ethnically and socially. More than 85% of the student population are of Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) origin (compared to a national average of around 30%) and over half of students speak English as an additional language (national average is 15.7%). Twenty-five percent of students are eligible for free school meals, a key proxy for socio-economic disadvantage, which is more than one-and-a-half times the national average of 14.6%. In addition, 6.8% of students have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care (EHC) plan, which is close to double the average across England (3.9%).

Despite this diversity of student demography and complexity of needs, the most recent Ofsted inspection rated the school as 'Outstanding', highlighting that whilst 'students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average, [t]hey make outstanding progress during their time at the school so that attainment at the end of Year 11 is high. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or facing other challenging circumstances, and those for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as their peers' (appendix 8, p5). In fact, in 2015/16, 61% of students in Year 11 achieved grade A\*-C in English and maths GCSE, slightly higher than the national average of 59.3%.

Similar to most schools in England, there is a gender gap in attainment, with 65% of girls at High Hill school achieving five or more GCSE grades A\* to C including English and maths, compared to 56% of boys. This 9 percentage-point difference is approximately the same as that seen on average across the country (8.7pp). However, 'disadvantaged' students (i.e. those who are eligible for the Pupil Premium, and students who speak English as an additional language) have slightly higher rates of attainment than the school average – 63% achieving 5+ good GCSEs including English and maths compared to 61% overall.

Whilst the most recent Ofsted report for High Hill is now more than six years out of date (the last inspection was undertaken in 2011), it did highlight that 'the school knows itself

very well through rigorous self-evaluation. Clear priority setting has meant that there has been a sustained upward trajectory in students' attainment' (appendix 8, p4). This finding has more recently been corroborated by the most recent Annual School Report (2016), which affirms that 'leaders know their school well and they are open and accurate in their assessment of strength and areas for improvement' (appendix 9, p3).

The school culture has also been praised in the report as one encompassing an 'ethos of mutual respect and community cohesion', which extends from the school leadership team downwards. This is further demonstrated by teachers' 'relentless focus on students' achievement, entitlement and personal development [...] providing the highest quality opportunities and support for all' (*Ibid.*, p3).

In particular, student academic progress is supported by staff at High Hill School through collaborative practice 'to ensure that students' needs are met and they are vigilant in identifying and supporting students' emotional and social needs' (*Ibid.*, p3).

As part of the research in the wider RESL.eu project (see chapter 1) I was part of the research team that administered the survey to students at High Hill in 2014 and was also in contact with staff members at the time and intermittently in the intervening period. The focus group with teachers provided a further opportunity to engage with the school and to understand the ethos and culture underpinning the strategies used to support their students. It was apparent that, although a large school with a widely diverse student body, overall the teachers were a strong unit who put the interests of the student at the centre of their practice. The teachers were keen to emphasise their collaboration and 'joined-up' nature of the pastoral support they provide. They were also at pains to point out that recent changes in government policy had meant that they were expected to do more (e.g. introducing a new curriculum) with fewer resources at their disposal. Responsibility for any educational 'failures' or challenges were assigned to 'the government' or to the specific circumstances (e.g. home life, parental attitudes, self-perception) of individual students.

**Sloewood School** is a smaller-than-average Academy Converter secondary school catering for 11 to 18 year olds of both genders. It is situated in the same outer London borough as High Hill, although in a different neighbourhood. The students who attend Sloewood reflect the social and ethnic diversity of the local area and of the wider catchment area across this and adjacent boroughs. More than two-fifths of students (41.7%) are eligible for free school meals (the national average is 29%), whilst almost 90% are of Black, Asian



or Minority Ethnic origin (BAME). Pupils at Slopewood speak more than 70 different languages and 72% of students have a first language other than English (the national average is just 14.4%). The latest Ofsted report in 2014 highlighted that the proportion of students with special educational needs was well above the national average, although the latest figures (2015/16) show that just 1% of students have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care (EHC) plan, compared to a national average of 3.9%.

The latest Ofsted inspection report rated Slopewood School as 'Good'. The report notes that whilst students join the school with well below average levels of attainment, they make good and sometimes exceptional progress so that, by the end of Year 11, they attain close to the national percentage of five GCSE grades A\* to C including English and maths. The school's own report highlights that in 2010, Slopewood was on the top 1% of most improved schools in the country and that student outcomes had improved still further every year since then.

The educational attainment of students at Slopewood is similar to the national average at GCSE level. In 2015/16, 51% of students achieved at least a C grade in five or more GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 59.3% across the country. Attainment for girls (57%) is higher than for boys (46%), although both perform slightly below the national average. The 11 percentage-point gender gap is wider than the national average (8.7pp). Only 39% of 'disadvantaged students' – those who are eligible for the Pupil Premium – achieve five or more GCSE grades A\* to C including English and maths. This is 4 percentage points below the national average and 12 points below the proportion achieving this benchmark overall at the school. Those students with English as an additional language perform slightly better than the overall average for the school (53% achieving 5+ good GCSEs including English and maths), although attainment remains slightly below the national average.

The ethos and values of Slopewood School include a commitment to 'developing the whole child' and ensuring that 'every single child is the subject of regular academic reviews and interventions where necessary'. The Ofsted report praised the robust tracking of students to identify those who are falling behind and providing additional support where needed. Whilst the school is commended for its 'knowledgeable and enthusiastic' teachers, the report highlights that the proportion of outstanding teaching could be improved by

ensuring that all teachers are consistent in their use of effective strategies, marking and providing clear guidance and feedback to students (appendix 10, p3).

Of particular note, the school leadership at Slopewood was rated as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, embodying a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and an inclusive ethos. The report states that 'there is a determined focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning [which] is brought about by rigorous monitoring and by sharing good practice'. The teachers at Slopewood are keen to mobilise resources available to them outside of the school context and work particularly hard to involve parents in their children's learning, especially those who might be less confident about working with the school.

Again, I had been part of the team that administered the students' survey at Slopewood in 2014 and had also assisted in staff interviews and student focus groups for the RESL.eu project during the same period. These experiences, along with the staff focus group undertaken here, provided me with the opportunity to gauge the school culture within which students, teachers and pastoral support officers interacted. Overall, students in the school appear to have an extremely diverse range of needs – most notably there are a large number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school has a well-established Pastoral Team to which teachers were keen to refer and which appears to form the backbone of their student support strategy. During the focus group, staff members often provided very generic responses, often reeling off the various institutional policies they have in place to help pupils, and they appeared very cautious to mention specific examples of individual students. With prompting, some – mainly positive – examples were presented, and there was, I felt, an air of mistrust between myself as the researcher and the participants. Understandably, the teachers felt under scrutiny, as they are so often through external assessment (e.g. Ofsted inspection). Whilst this relationship did become more trusting as the session progressed, the conversation remained quite broad focused and non-specific. The dynamic between teachers was also interesting, with one or two participants taking the lead and being much more forthcoming than their colleagues. In fact, during the session, two of the participants had to leave to 'attend to other school business'. Whilst, similar to the High Hill participants, the teachers at Slopewood presented themselves as a strong and united unit, it was clear that some staff members were more comfortable talking about how challenges faced by students have been managed within the school than others.

### 5.4.3 Focus group research

Focus groups allow for a group process of exploration and discussion of views and experiences. In the case of teachers and school staff members it can provide a voice to professionals who work with young people on a day-to-day basis. Focus groups are dynamic processes and interactions between research and participant and between participants themselves necessitate speakers to justify and/or clarify their views. The interaction of focus group members can also provide insights into institutional or collective narratives, presented by participants as 'how things happen here'.

There is also a therapeutic aspect of focus groups, whereby teachers feel more comfortable in a group of professional colleagues to disclose information that they might not have done in a one-to-one interview. Within this 'safe' environment, participants can feel more at ease to provide examples or anecdotes to illustrate and give voice to specific concerns or issues.

The optimum number of participants for a focus group ranges considerably in the literature on the subject. Whilst some recommend no more than 4-6 participants (Greenbaum, 1998), others advocate as many as twelve (Baumgartner, Strong, & Hensley, 2002; Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Much has also been written about the role of the researcher as an 'outsider' in such focus group settings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Ryan, 2015). In this context, it is difficult to acquire the trust of participants, who typically view outside researchers as lacking the credibility to understand their experiences, or as an authority seeking to pass judgement over their practice. Elliott (1988) has highlighted the epistemological tension between 'insider' self-reflective practitioners and 'outsider' critical, neutral brokers, emphasising that the research process can only be beneficial to both parties if trust, access and disclosure is successfully negotiated by those involved. This is part of the role of the focus group facilitator and especially important when undertaking research with teachers. As discussed further in the qualitative findings (chapters 7 and 8), teachers are a group who clearly feel the immense pressure of being under near-constant examination from government, inspectors, governors, parents and students, and it is understandable that they should take a cautious view in relation to further 'outside' scrutiny in the form of academic research.

#### **5.4.4 Instrumentation design**

The focus groups at the two schools were both guided by the same topic guide (appendix 6). I designed the topic guide to elicit participants' attitudes, thoughts and experiences in relation to the key research questions, outlined above. The final instrument aimed to provide a broad structure to steer the participants but was not intended to comprise a rigid formalistic 'interview' of the teachers. (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1996, Powell & Single, 1996). Essentially, the topic guide contained nine questions, under four broad sections but allowed much scope for organic and naturalistic discussion between and amongst all of the participants. I designed the phrasing of the questions to be as neutral as possible and I took care not to use language that could be construed as holding teachers responsible for educational 'failure' or lack of support amongst their students. I utilised prompts and follow-up questions in order to elicit examples of challenges and strategies employed at the school and I sought to encourage the participants to provide a detailed and nuanced account of their experiences in their own words.

As outlined in the topic guide, I began each of the focus groups seeking to stimulate a general discussion of the challenges facing students and the factors that can help them to succeed in their educational career (Q1-2). I followed this up by asking what role teachers could play to support and assist their students (Q3).

I then sought to steer the focus groups towards a discussion of specific government policies, especially in relation to character education and resilience, and of how these concepts could be of use to promote better educational outcomes (Q4-6).

Finally, using this discussion as a foundation, I asked participants to provide specific examples of strategies being undertaken at the school to support students and/or to promote resilience (Q7-9).

The dynamics of the relationship between participants in the two schools meant that the focus groups developed differently, with some of the teachers choosing to focus more on the effects of policies, and others providing more detailed examples of strategies employed at the school. I used the topic guide primarily as a light-touch steer to guide the conversation where there was a lull or where participants had begun to veer far beyond the scope of the intended research topic. In this way, the focus groups both took less than

an hour to conduct and elicited a large amount of rich qualitative data focused towards my primary research questions.

#### **5.4.5 Data collection**

Data were collected via two focus groups, which took place on-site in the schools, as well as through collating all freely-available documentation on school policies and reports via institutional websites and central educational databases (primarily Ofsted and the Department for Education's 'Edubase' site).

The focus groups were led by myself, with a colleague from Middlesex University assisting by taking notes throughout. At High Hill, the discussion took place in the early afternoon in a staff-only room, with coffee and refreshments provided by the school. At Slopewood, the focus group was undertaken in an empty teaching classroom during the lunch break. Prior to the start of each of the sessions, I gave a brief presentation of the study, including highlighting issues of ethics and confidentiality, and invited participants to read and sign the participant information sheet and consent form (appendix 7). With participants' permission, the focus groups were both taped using electronic voice recorders so that the discussion could be transcribed for analysis later. The focus groups sessions both lasted approximately an hour – High Hill: 57 minutes; Slopewood: 51 minutes.

**Ethics:** The research conducted in this study – both quantitative and qualitative elements – was undertaken under approval of Middlesex University's Ethics Committee (see appendix 1). As mentioned, all participants were briefed prior to the focus group sessions and consented to taking part and being recorded for the purposes of future analysis. Participants were informed that all information they provided would be confidentially handled and no institution or individual would be identifiable in the resultant analysis. The teachers were encouraged to provide specific examples of individual students or situations, although it was made clear that the no personal details would be published. Recordings of the focus groups were kept securely in electronic format on the university's computer servers with restricted access. Following transcription of the focus group discussions, participants' identities were protected by providing them with pseudonyms, used throughout the thesis.

#### 5.4.6 Data analysis

I analysed the focus group discussions using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p79). Whilst it has been acknowledged that thematic analysis covers a broad range of analytical techniques and procedures (see Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), it is nevertheless widely used in the social sciences when seeking to extract and interpret meaning from rich textual data.

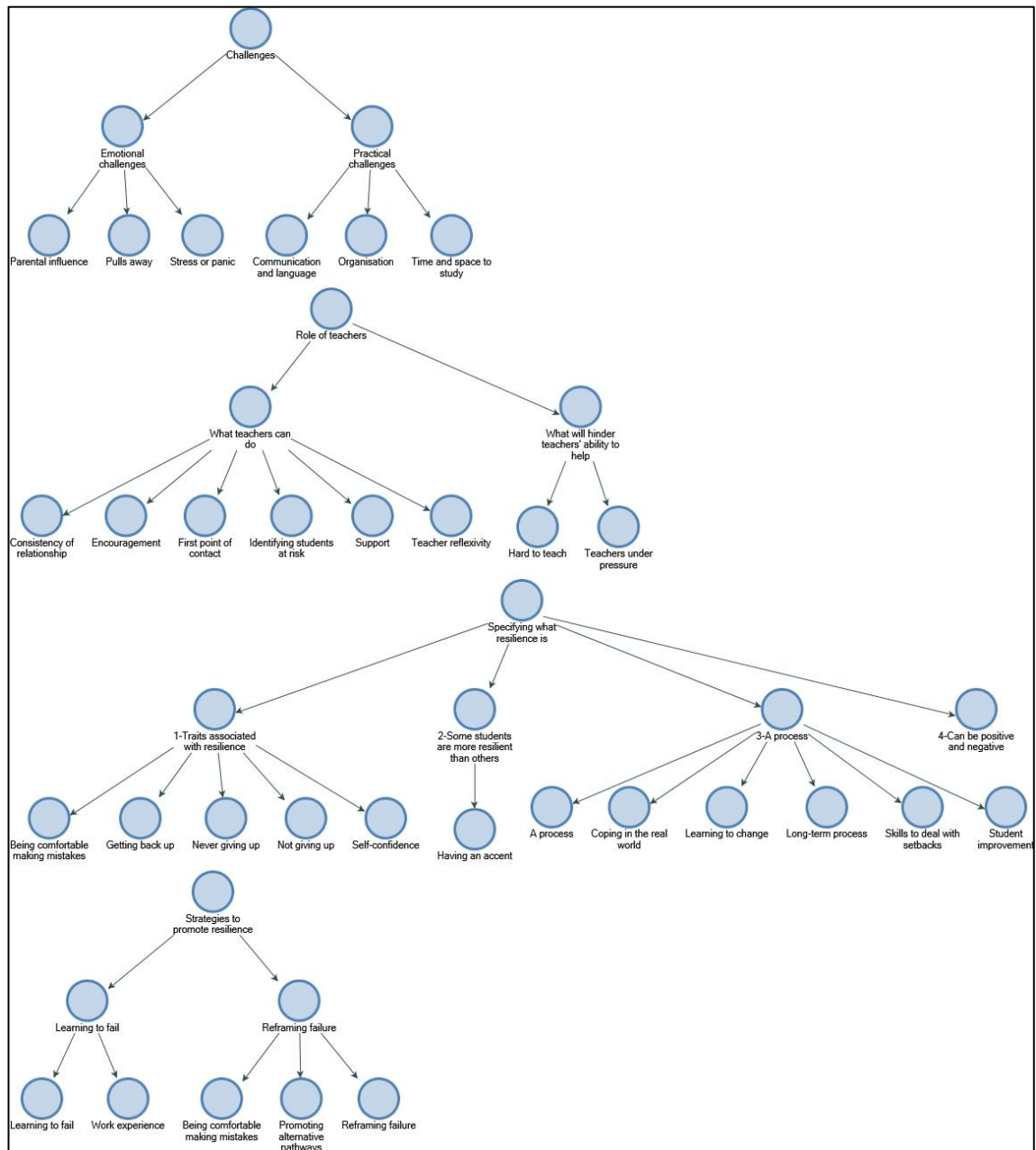
In order to facilitate the analysis of the data, I imported the focus group transcriptions into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program, *NVivo 11*. Reading and re-reading of the transcripts allowed me to familiarise myself with the data before I generated initial codes using the broad questions from the topic guide as an initial frame. Following this, open coding of the data allowed me to generate further themes in relation to the research questions under investigation. I organised the themes identified through the coding process into a logical structure before reviewing them to ensure (1) that the data was appropriately coded and (2) the codes were organised in a way that produced a robust framework within which to interpret the data.

An intermediate coding frame is presented below in figure 5.3. However, this did not represent a final endpoint to the analysis but instead provided me with a preliminary framework upon which to flesh out and expand upon my own interpretations of the data. In reality, it was only after several attempts to present and organise the data in a meaningful and coherent way, that the analytical process – in relation to this thesis at least – can be said to have reach its conclusion.

**Figure 5.3: Intermediate coding frame for qualitative analysis**

<b>Main theme (Parent node)</b>	<b>Child node</b>	<b>Grandchild node</b>
<b>Challenges for students</b>	Emotional	Parental influence
		Pulls away
		Stress or panic
	Practical	Communication or language
		Organisation
		Time/space to study
<b>Role of teachers</b>	What teachers can do	Consistency of relationship
		Encouragement
		First point of contact
		Identifying students at risk
		Support
		Teacher reflexivity
	What hinders their ability to help	Under pressure
		Hard to teach
<b>Resilience</b>	Traits associated with resilience	Being comfortable making mistakes
		Getting back up
		Never giving up
		Not giving up
		Self-confidence
	Some students more resilient than others	Having an accent
	Resilience as a process	Coping in the real world
		Learning to change
		Long-term process
		Skills to deal with setbacks
Student improvement		
Positive and negative		
<b>Strategies to promote resilience</b>	Learning to fail	Learning to fail
		Work experience
	Reframing failure	Being comfortable making mistakes
		Promoting alternative pathways
		Reframing failure

**Figure 5.4: Visual representation (classification tree) of coding frame**



### 5.4.7 Participant selection and recruitment

The sample of teacher participants were drawn from two secondary schools who had already been involved in the wider RESL.eu project in the UK. As described in chapter 1, data collection for the wider European-funded study was undertaken in two research areas in the UK – namely the North East of England and Greater London. For the purposes of the more focused study undertaken here, two schools located within the same local authority area were selected for inclusion on the basis that this would allow for a meaningful analysis of the views of teachers working within the same local and policy contexts. Owing to their



previous and on-going participation in the RESL.eu project, the headteacher/deputy headteacher at each of the schools were aware of the study and very willing to work on this additional piece of research. After several contacts, via telephone and email, two focus groups with teachers were arranged – one in each of the schools. Participants were recruited via these contacts with the head/deputy headteacher and were selected by them on the basis that they had regular experience working with young people approaching the end of secondary school (years 10 to 13 – students ranging from 14 to 18 years old).

#### **5.4.8 Focus group participants**

Ultimately, the focus groups at each of the schools comprised 5 staff members, with a mix of gender, teaching experience and length of service at the school (see figure 5.5). The primary focus of this stage of the research was to explore how teachers were supporting students on-the-ground. To this end, it was important to elicit the views of staff members with a wide range of experience – both in the school and, more broadly, as an educational professional. Whilst I also wanted to include the views of both male and female staff members to understand how this might affect the interactions and experiences between teachers and students, further examination of other demographic considerations (e.g. teachers' and students' ethnicity) would provide a further stratum of analysis but, for want of space, must lie beyond the scope of this piece of research.

The High Hill focus group included two men and three women, with an average length of 16.4 years' teaching experience. All participants had direct contact with students as subject teachers and some had additional responsibilities relating to, for example, post-16 progression or as head of subject. Whilst most participants were teachers with a relatively long history in the teaching profession, a range of experience was represented (between six and 22 years).

At Slopewood, one male and two female teachers took part along with two female non-teaching pastoral support officers. The average length of experience for teaching staff was years slightly less than at High Hill – 11.3 years – whilst the pastoral support officers had an average of 12.5 years' experience in this role. There was also a much broader range in terms of how long participants had been working in schools for – between 1 and 23 years – and where as some participants had been working at the school for many years (e.g. Geoff and Denise), some were more recently-appointed members of staff (e.g. Sabrina).

**Figure 5.3: Focus group participants**

<b>High Hill School</b>	<b>Jason</b> male Subject teacher 21 Years' experience (Yr.)	<b>Ryan</b> male Asst Head & head of subject 15 Yr.	<b>Nichole</b> female Asst Head & subject teacher 18 Yr.	<b>Rita</b> female Subject teacher 22 Yr.	<b>Claire</b> female Subject teacher 6 Yr.
<b>Sloewood School</b>	<b>Geoff</b> male Head of subject 23 Yr.	<b>Alice</b> female IAG tutor & subject teacher 10 Yr.	<b>Amanda</b> female Pastoral support officer 9 Yr.	<b>Sabrina</b> female Subject teacher 1 Yr.	<b>Denise</b> female Pastoral support officer 16 Yr.

The findings of the qualitative study are presented across two chapters: chapter 7 explores the challenges and risk factors that school staff feel affect their students, including structural, social and individual factors, whilst chapter 8 goes on to provide a keener examination of resilience processes – both in terms of the role that teachers feel they can play in promoting resilience amongst their students and in terms of their own capacity for resilience as educationalists. In chapter 9, a discussion of the findings relates the key themes arising from the qualitative data back to the research questions and, more widely, to the academic and policy discourse. It is at this stage of the research, also, that the qualitative findings are combined with the findings of the quantitative stage of the study to explore the implications of the overall results in greater depth.

## 6 – Quantitative findings: resilient students, typical attainers

### 6.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the quantitative findings resulting from analysis of the survey data collected as part of the RESL.eu project in the UK and matched administrative data obtained from the Department for Education (DfE). The chapter seeks to examine what effect teacher support has on students' educational outcomes and particularly for those students most 'at-risk'. As outlined in chapter 5, the statistical analysis is focused towards answering the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What is the relationship between levels of perceived support and educational outcomes?; and
- **RQ2:** What is the effect of teacher support on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in relation to their educational outcomes?

In order to unpick these questions, my analysis seeks to answer a related sequence of more focused questions, each of which centres on an important aspect of the main research questions. In this way, the chapter attempts more broadly to disentangle the relationship between resilient outcomes and perceived support from parents, peers and teachers.

The statistical analysis proceeds in a number of steps: an initial exploration of the concepts of risk and resilience examines how study participants – students in two cohorts at schools and FE colleges in London and the north-east of England – can be categorised according to their socio-economic background and their academic outcomes. Further analysis interrogates the relationship between students' 'at-risk' status and their educational attainment level, and considers differences according to participants' gender and academic year group.

Analysis of those students who demonstrate resilient outcomes compares this key group with (a) students who are 'at-risk' and do not achieve the expected level of attainment; (b) all students (whether 'at-risk' or not) who do not manage to achieve the expected level of attainment; and (c) 'typical attainers': those who are not at-risk and who do achieve the expected level of attainment – as a base comparison group.

Following this, I use correlation analysis to explore the hypothesis that teacher support will be more important for young people who lack support in other areas, with regards to their educational attainment. Whether these students are from disadvantaged backgrounds or

not, the relative importance of teacher support for students reporting low levels of peer support or parental support is examined.

The chapter firstly details the preliminary process of data cleaning, scale development and matching of datasets (section 6.2). I then outline how risk and resilience are operationalised in the present analysis and explore which students can be thought of as being most 'at-risk' (section 6.3), before examining the relationship between 'at-risk' status and educational attainment (section 6.4).

Students identified as having experienced resilient outcomes are then compared to other groups to examine whether any differences can be seen between these students in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics (section 6.5).

The chapter then interrogates the relationship between resilience – that is, resilient *outcomes* – and social support (section 6.6). As a focus of policies and interventions to bring out positive outcomes, including educational attainment, I examine whether resilient outcomes can be promoted by targeting specific forms of support from particular sources.

Finally, I seek to analyse the relationship between teacher support and resilience by examining the impact of this source of support on attainment for those students who report a lack of support from other areas of their lives (section 6.7). To what extent can support from teachers compensate for a lack of parental involvement, support or positive peer networks?

## **6.2 Preliminary analysis and data preparation**

### **6.2.1 Data preparation**

The data used in this quantitative chapter incorporates datasets from three sources. Primarily, the data comprises the UK sub-sample of the seven-country RESL.eu dataset ( $n=3,018$ ) (see chapter 5 for more details).

Scale development, as outlined below, was conducted using the entire international dataset ( $n=19,586$ ), which was then subsequently verified as fitting to the data on a national level. On this basis, scales and sub-scales for perceived teacher support, parental support and peers' support were formulated and are used in my analysis of the data in the UK.

Outcome data relating to participants in the UK sub-sample were obtained by applying to the DfE for administrative data. This process (see chapter 5 for details) anonymously matched attainment data (2016) at Key Stage 4 (GCSE or equivalent) and, for the older cohort, Key Stage 5 (A-level or equivalent). In addition, administrative data was provided, from the annual schools' census (2014), on participants' free school meals (FSM) eligibility and special educational needs (SEN) status. Whilst matched attainment data was available for 2,813 students (93.2% of the sample), further data on their FSM eligibility and SEN status was not available for 313 of these students, which were subsequently excluded from further analysis. The final sample, therefore, comprises 2,500 respondents (82.8% of the original sample).

All data screening, scale development and subsequent analysis was conducting using the SPSS software program.

### **6.2.2 Scale development**

The RESL.eu questionnaire sought to gauge students' perceptions of support from their parents, peers and teachers by including a number of items from previously-validated instruments used in similar studies (see appendix 2). Factor analysis was then employed to assess the construct validity of the support measures, establishing in which configuration these items most logically fit and ensuring the most appropriate construction of scales on the basis of the study's sample (Leech *et al.*, 2014). Items were subjected to a principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS, with items for teacher support, parental support and peer support being assessed separately.

#### *Teacher support*

Correlation analysis of the 12 teacher support items indicated that many were strongly inter-correlated. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin value of .919 exceeded the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Bartlett, 1937), indicating the presence of latent factors underlying the items. PCA with all items revealed two factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, with the first factor accounting for 44.16% of the variance and the second factor accounting for a further 12.28%. Varimax rotation of factor scores facilitated interpretation of the configuration of the two components. However, the two factors did not fit the expected conceptual construction; the PCA revealed one factor that related to the 8 positively-phrased items and one to the 4

(reverse-scored) negatively-phrased items. By contrast, the initial construction of the questionnaire had anticipated two underlying factors, comprising a ‘social support’ component and a ‘school/instructional support’ factor. This theoretical configuration of the teacher support items was therefore subsequently tested using confirmatory factor analysis techniques to verify whether it was useful to retain these sub-scales for further analysis or to revert to the factors revealed by the PCA.

Model-fit indices (table 6.1) showed a factor structure with two 5-item sub-scales – conforming to ‘teacher social support’ and ‘teacher school support’ (model 3) – fit the data better than either the structure revealed by the PCA (model 1) or a two-factor structure including all 6 items on each theoretical factor (model 2). This model is the only one that reaches acceptable levels of goodness-of-fit on all three indices.

**Table 6.1: CFA model-fit indices for three hypothesised factor structure models**

Model		CFI (> .90)	TLI (> .90)	RMSEA (< .08)
<b>Model 1</b>	<i>Two-factor model (8 items; 4 items)</i>	.925	.889	.079
<b>Model 2</b>	<i>Two-factor model (6 items ; 6 items)</i>	.906	.861	.088
<b>Model 3</b>	<i>Two-factor model (5 items; 5 items)</i>	.954	.926	.073

Comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) – acceptable fit threshold > .90 (Bentler & Bonett, 1990); Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) – acceptable fit threshold < .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993)

The final teacher social support scale comprising 5 items shows strong internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .867); the five-item teacher school support also shows good internal reliability (Cr. alpha = .780).

**Table 6.2: Items included in the final teacher support sub-scales**

Item	School support sub-scale	Social support sub-scale
<i>Most of the teachers at this school are good teachers</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers feel that my work is poor*</i> (removed)		
<i>My teachers try to help me do well in school</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers respect me as a person</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers do not treat me fairly*</i>	✓	
<i>My teachers don't care if I fail or succeed*</i>	✓	
<i>I feel that I can trust my teachers as people to talk to</i>		✓
<i>If I tell my teachers about a problem, they will probably blame me for it*</i> (removed)		
<i>If I talk to my teachers, I think they will try to understand how I feel</i>		✓
<i>If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my teachers for help</i>		✓
<i>If I'm having a social or personal problem, my teachers would have advice about what to do</i>		✓
<i>When I feel bad about something, my teachers will listen</i>		✓

\* = items were reverse coded

Re-running the analysis on each of the national sub-samples revealed the applicability of this factor structure for all countries. For the UK sub-sample, both factors showed good internal reliability (Teacher social support: Cr. alpha = .851; Teacher school support: Cr. alpha = .808).

#### *Parental support*

Correlation analysis of the 18 parental support items indicated that many were strongly inter-correlated. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin value of .910 exceeded the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Bartlett, 1937), indicating the presence of latent factors underlying the items.

PCA with all items revealed four factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, with the first factor accounting for 34.73% of the variance, the second factor accounting for a further 11.32% and the third and fourth factors accounting for 7.26% and 6.18% respectively. Varimax rotation of factor scores facilitated interpretation of the configuration of the four components. The rotated solution showed that items relating to parental social support loaded onto Component 1, parental school support loaded onto Component 2, parental

control loaded onto Component 3 and parental involvement at school loaded onto Component 4.

Scale reliability analysis confirmed moderate-to-strong internal reliability for each of the components: parental social support (5 items<sup>5</sup>; Cr. alpha = .865); parental school support (6 items; Cr. alpha = .816); parental control (3 items; Cr. alpha = .758); and parental involvement at school (3 items; Cr. alpha = .635).

**Table 6.3: Items included in the final parental support sub-scales**

Item	Social support sub-scale	School support sub-scale	Control sub-scale	Involvement at school sub-scale
<i>I feel that I can trust my parent as someone to talk to</i>	✓			
<i>If I tell my parent about a problem, they will probably blame me for it*</i> (removed)				
<i>If I talk to my parent, I think they will try to understand how I feel</i>	✓			
<i>When I feel bad about something, my parent will listen</i>	✓			
<i>If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my parents for help</i>	✓			
<i>If I'm having a social or personal problem, my parents would have advice about what to do</i>	✓			
<i>My parents make sure that I do my homework</i>		✓		
<i>My parents make sure that I go to school every day</i>		✓		
<i>My parents praise me when I do well in school</i>		✓		
<i>My parents believe that education is important to succeed in life</i>		✓		
<i>My parents talk to me about my future</i>		✓		
<i>My parents give me the support I need to do well in school</i>		✓		
<i>My parents want me to tell them where I am if I don't come home straight after school</i>			✓	
<i>My parents want to know who I'm out with when I go out with other kids</i>			✓	
<i>In my free time away from home, my parents know who I'm with and where I am</i>			✓	
<i>My parents attend regular meetings with my teachers</i>				✓
<i>My parents have attended school events and activities in the last year</i>				✓
<i>My parents encourage me to be involved in school activities</i>				✓

\* = items were reverse coded

<sup>5</sup> Cronbach's alpha was further improved for parental social support by the removal of the item with the weakest factor loading so that it comprises a 5-item scale



Re-running the PCA on each of the national sub-samples revealed the same factor structure for most of the countries<sup>6</sup>. For the UK sub-sample, the factors showed moderate-to-strong internal reliability (parental social support: Cr. alpha = .880; parental school support: Cr. alpha = .834; parental control: Cr. alpha = .789; parental involvement at school: Cr. alpha = .657).

#### *Peer support*

Correlation analysis of the six peer support items indicated that many were strongly inter-correlated. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin value of .880 exceeded the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Bartlett, 1937), indicating the presence of latent factors underlying the items.

PCA with all items revealed only one factor with an eigenvalue of more than 1, which accounted for 59.19% of the variance. Inspection of the scree plot confirmed a clear break after the first component and factor loadings were strong (>.7) for five of the six items. Scale reliability analysis confirmed that a five-item peer support scale had a strong internal reliability (Cr. alpha = .886).

**Table 6.4: Items included in the final peer support scale**

Item	Peer support scale
<i>I feel that I can trust my friends as people to talk to</i>	✓
<i>If I tell my friends about a problem, they will probably blame me for it*</i> (removed)	
<i>If I talk to my friends, I think they will try to understand how I feel</i>	✓
<i>If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my friends for help</i>	✓
<i>If I'm having a social or personal problem, my friends would have advice about what to do</i>	✓
<i>When I feel bad about something, my friends will listen</i>	✓

\* = items were reverse coded

Re-running the PCA on each of the national sub-samples produced the same result for all countries. For the UK sub-sample, the peer support scale showed good internal reliability (Cr. alpha = .885).

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of the Polish sub-sample

A summary of the final scales and sub-scales that emerged from the factor analysis with corresponding Cronbach's alpha score for the cross-national RESL.eu dataset and for the UK sub-sample, are provided below (table 6.5).

**Table 6.5 : Summary of factor analyses**

	No of items	Cronbach's alpha (RESL.eu dataset)	Cronbach's alpha (UK sub-sample)
<b>Teacher support</b>			
Teacher social support	5	.867	.851
Teacher school support	5	.780	.808
<b>Parental support</b>			
Parental social support	5	.865	.880
Parental school support	6	.816	.834
Parental control	3	.758	.789
Parental involvement at school	3	.635	.657
<b>Peer support</b>	5	.886	.885

### 6.2.3 Student characteristics

Having matched the RESL.eu survey data with the DfE administrative data and computed mean factor scores for the support scales, as constructed above, the final sample for analysis included 2,500 respondents. Table 6.6 presents descriptive statistics for the main demographic characteristics, and levels of attainment. The data are given separately for the younger cohort (Cohort 1 – students in Year 10) and for older students (Cohort 2 – those in Year 12, or equivalent). This is because the attainment levels and thresholds by which these groups are being assessed are different according to the academic year they were in at the time of the RESL.eu survey.

**Table 6.6: Characteristics of students by cohort**

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	808	55.1%	812	60.3%
Male	659	44.9%	534	39.7%
<b>Free school meals</b>				
Eligible for FSM	266	18.3%	135	12.9%
Not eligible	1184	81.7%	915	87.1%
<b>Special educational needs</b>				
SEN	325	22.5%	120	11.5%
No identified SEN	1125	77.5%	930	88.5%
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White British	768	52.7%	744	55.6%
Other White	128	8.8%	108	8.1%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	86	5.9%	68	5.1%
Asian/Asian British	228	15.6%	218	16.3%
Black/Black British	160	11.0%	132	9.9%
Other ethnic group	88	6.0%	69	5.2%
<b>KS4 attainment (2016)</b>				
5+ A*-C GCSEs or equiv. (Level 2)	1094	74.6%	-	-
Below Level 2	373	25.4%	-	-
<b>KS5 attainment (2016)</b>				
2+ A-levels or equiv. (Level 3)	-	-	1029	82.7%
Below Level 3	-	-	216	17.3%

As shown in the table, female students are the majority for both cohorts, accounting for 55% of the younger cohort and more than 60% of Cohort 2. This is primarily due to the over-representation of single-sex girls' schools included in the UK sample (see chapter 5). However, in the case of the older cohort, it may also be related to the gender attainment gap, whereby girls who continue to out-perform boys at Key Stage 4 are thereby more likely to continue their studies to Key Stage 5 (and beyond).

More than one-in-six (18.3%) of the younger cohort and one-in-eight (12.9%) of the older cohort were eligible for free school meals – the government's benchmark for socio-economic disadvantage (see 6.3 below). The secondary school population average in 2014 was 14.6% (DfE, 2014a) and the under-representation of such students in the older cohort might also be due to a greater propensity for better-off students to continue their studies for longer. This can also be seen very clearly in the disparity seen between students with special educational needs. Against a national school population average of 17.8% (DfE,

2014b), only 11.5% of students in Cohort 2 have an identified SEN. By contrast students with SEN are over-represented in the younger cohort compared to the national average.

The ethnic composition of the samples is broadly comparable, with over half of both cohort identifying as White British, around 1 in 6 as Asian or Asian British and around 1 in 10 as Black or Black British. In terms of attainment, amongst the younger cohort three-quarters attained at least 5 GCSEs at grade A\* to C (equivalent to level 2). For the older cohort, more than 80% achieved the equivalent of 2 or more A-levels (level 3). This means that some 25% of Cohort 1 students and 17% of Cohort 2 students – a total of almost 600 students – can be described as ‘non-attainers’, i.e. they have not achieved the benchmark level of educational attainment compared to other students in their academic year group.

Table 6.7 examines students’ scores on the support scales and present the results of independent-samples Student’s t-tests to determine whether mean scores for one cohort are statistically different from the other.

**Table 6.7: Descriptive statistics for support scales**

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		t	p-value
	mean	SD	mean	SD		
<b>Teacher support</b>						
Teacher school support	3.77	.72	3.84	.67	-2.40	.017
Teacher social support	3.33	.80	3.41	.67	-2.35	.019
<b>Parental support</b>						
Parental social support	3.95	.87	3.87	.89	4.25	< .001
Parental school support	4.35	.60	4.22	.64	7.72	< .001
Parental control	4.20	.77	4.04	.78	6.92	< .001
Parental involvement at school	3.49	.88	3.52	.82	2.03	.042
<b>Peer support</b>	3.93	.82	4.04	.72	-3.55	< .001

Looking at the support scales by cohort, there are statistically significant differences between the younger year group of students and the older group on all scales. Perceived teacher support is higher for the older cohort on both of the sub-scales, school support and social support. Conversely, all parental support sub-scales show higher scores for the younger students. Peer support is significantly higher for the older students compared with the younger cohort. This suggests that, as students progress from compulsory education within a school environment to one with a greater degree of learner autonomy (e.g. within a school sixth-form or a college of further education), they rely more on their peers and educators for support and the (perceived) impact of parental involvement is reduced.

### **6.3 Operationalising risk and resilient outcomes**

Resilience, as discussed in chapter 2, is defined in the literature in opposition to risk: It is the successful attainment of positive outcomes despite the existence of significant risk factors. As I have emphasised earlier, rather than being perceived as an innate character trait or an individualised ‘ability’ to overcome adversity, resilience can more properly be thought of in terms of achieving a positive outcome despite the existence of specific adverse circumstances. In order to examine what affects students’ propensity to realise *resilient outcomes*, therefore, it is necessary first to identify which group or groups are at-risk. In addition, it is also incumbent to operationalise what is considered a ‘positive outcome’ before those cases where such results occur despite the existence of substantive ‘risk factors’ can be identified as resilient outcomes.

#### **6.3.1 Who is at risk?**

The literature review in chapter 2 highlights the work of several authors who elaborate the impact of socio-economic status and class on educational attainment (Nash, 1999; Reay, 2006; Sacker *et al.*, 2002). Theoretical underpinnings, derived from Bourdieu amongst others, explain the process by which social class is reproduced through the intergenerational transmission of capital and specifically through the way educational fields are mediated. Chapter 3 further elucidates the way in which recent British policies aimed at promoting social mobility have not been (willing or) able to effectively overcome the inherent disadvantages for working class students to negotiate the education system as successfully as their middle class peers.

The focus of this part of my study, therefore, is on comparing outcomes for the most socio-economically disadvantaged, who are more ‘at-risk’ of educational non-attainment compared to their peers. Moreover, previous work (e.g. Gorard *et al.*; 2001) and national examination results (DfE, 2018a) have highlighted gender differences on attainment, whereby girls consistently out-perform boys. Whilst this gender effect appears to operate across class lines, it is clear that ‘disadvantaged’ boys are at the intersection of two identified risk groups.

#### **6.3.2 How are at-risk participants identified in the study?**

Whilst class is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon, with studies seeking to define the concept according to observable variables such as parental education,

occupational level or income, the DfE focus in their own analysis on students who are from a 'disadvantaged' background. Government statistics and analysis have consistently used eligibility for free school meals (FSM) as their preferred measure of 'disadvantage', and students' status in this regard is routinely collected by schools and colleges. Eligibility for FSM is a binary variable, which divides students on the basis of their parents' level of income and/or receipt of certain government benefits (DfE, 2018b). The provision of free school meals is intended, therefore, to assist children from the very poorest backgrounds. At the time of data collection for the present study, the proportion of eligible students in England stood at 14.6% (DfE, 2014a).

Whilst, as acknowledged elsewhere (Rutter, 1979; Morrison & Cotter, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1992), there are many potential sources of 'disadvantage' (e.g. existence of special educational needs, physical or mental illness or a challenging family environment), this study uses eligibility for free school meals as a proxy for student disadvantage. The rationale for this decision lies in the fact that, beyond a simple measure of economic hardship, FSM eligibility also highlights the likelihood that these young people will have less access to, for example, paid tutoring, extra-curricular activities or costly educational materials such as computers or books. As such, this binary indicator can be seen as a marker for wider socio-economic disadvantage – and one that is, furthermore, highly relevant to an analysis of how students can overcome adverse circumstances to achieve resilient outcomes, with a view to upward social mobility.

The reliability of this measure as an indicator for socio-economic disadvantage, however, is not without its detractors (Taylor, 2018), and it has been criticised as engendering a somewhat crude and binary approach. It has nonetheless been employed in a number of previous academic studies (e.g. Shuttleworth, 1995; Burgess *et al.*, 2017) and remains the benchmark indicator used by government statisticians to track the performance of so-called 'disadvantaged' pupils (DfE, 2018c). On the basis of this variable, then, survey respondents are categorised as 'disadvantaged' (FSM eligible) or 'not disadvantaged (not FSM eligible). As I mention, this places the emphasis of the analysis presented in this section on the most disadvantaged, as compared to those students who do not fall below the threshold for FSM eligibility. This, of course, has the potential to mask within-group differences amongst the majority of these 'not disadvantaged' students. Whilst it would be interesting to explore differences between, for example, the 'super-elite and the 'ordinary' middle class, to examine at which point the effects of socio-economic disadvantage (or, indeed, advantage)

continue to impact upon one’s educational outcomes (see chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this), sufficient data (e.g. on parents’ income) is not routinely collected by schools, and so this must remain beyond the remit of the present analysis.

**Table 6.8: Disadvantage and gender of students by cohort**

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Disadvantaged boys	113	17.2%	58	13.9%	171	15.9%
Disadvantaged girls	153	19.3%	77	12.2%	230	16.2%
<b>Total disadvantaged</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>16.0%</b>
Not disadvantaged boys	545	82.8%	360	86.1%	905	84.1%
Not disadvantaged girls	639	80.7%	555	87.8%	1194	83.8%
<b>Total not disadvantaged</b>	<b>1184</b>	<b>81.7%</b>	<b>915</b>	<b>87.1%</b>	<b>2099</b>	<b>84.0%</b>

The study explores attainment levels separately for the two cohorts sampled as part of the RESL.eu study. The younger cohort, who were in Year 10 in 2014, are assessed in relation to their Key Stage 4 attainment (i.e. GCSE or equivalent qualifications) two years later, by 2016; the older cohort, in Year 12 (or at an equivalent stage in a college of further education), will have already taken their KS4 exams by the time of the first RESL.eu survey, and are therefore assessed in relation to their Key Stage 5 (KS5) attainment (i.e. A-level or equivalent).

Table 6.8 summarises the proportion of students who are categorised as disadvantaged, broken down by gender. The table provides percentages for each cohort as well as for the total sample overall. As shown, out of a total of 2,500 participants, 16.0% (401) are categorised as ‘disadvantaged’ on the basis of their eligibility for free school meals. A slightly greater proportion of girls (16.2%) than boys (15.9%) fall into this category. In terms of cohort, a greater proportion of students in the younger cohort are disadvantaged (18.3%), compared to those in the older cohort (12.9%). This cohort effect, as noted above, can be seen as a reflection of the increased likelihood of better-off students to continue their studies for longer. Defining the ‘at-risk’ group as those students (in both cohorts) eligible for free school meals gives a sub-sample of 401 students (16% of the total). The addition of gender as a further risk factor on the basis of the literature gives an ‘at-risk’ sample of 171 disadvantaged boys, representing 6.8% of the overall total. The next section examines the relationship between students’ theoretical ‘at risk’ status and educational attainment.

## 6.4 What is the relationship between attainment and ‘at-risk’ status?

Having defined ‘at-risk’ students above, it is important to examine the extent to which this theoretical risk is borne out in terms of educational attainment. To this end, we can seek to test the following two hypotheses:

*H1: Educational attainment for disadvantaged students is significantly lower than for their peers*

*H2: Educational attainment for boys is significantly lower than for girls*

### 6.4.1 Attainment and disadvantage

Differences in attainment between students classed as disadvantaged and their peers can be tested using Pearson’s chi-squared test of association (Plackett, 1983). The results of this analysis are given below for the younger cohort (table 6.9.1), on the basis of their level 2 attainment<sup>7</sup> status, and for the older cohort of students (table 6.9.2), on the basis of their level 3 attainment<sup>8</sup>.

In the tables that follow, percentages are presented to reflect the proportion of students within each ‘disadvantage’ status and/or gender category who achieved the relevant attainment level.

**Table 6.9.1 – Student disadvantage by educational attainment (cohort 1)**

	Cohort 1					
	Did not attain Level 2		Attained Level 2		p-value	Phi
	#	%	#	%		
<b>Not disadvantaged</b>	248	20.9%	936	79.1%	< .001	-.209
<b>Disadvantaged</b>	118	44.4%	148	55.6%		

**Table 6.9.2 – Student disadvantage by educational attainment (cohort 2)**

	Cohort 2					
	Did not attain Level 3		Attained Level 3		p-value	Phi
	#	%	#	%		
<b>Not disadvantaged</b>	125	14.1%	764	85.9%	< .001	-.122
<b>Disadvantaged</b>	34	27.6%	89	72.5%		

<sup>7</sup> Level 2 attainment relates to the benchmark of achieving the equivalent of 5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C.

<sup>8</sup> Level 3 attainment relates to the benchmark of achieving the equivalent of 2 or more GCE A-levels.



The results of the chi-squared tests show that student disadvantage is significantly associated with attainment for both the younger and the older cohorts. In both of these cases, educational attainment is significantly lower for disadvantaged students, compared to their peers, supporting the initial hypothesis (H1).

The effect size (phi) is moderate for both cohorts (Rea & Parker, 2005) but larger for cohort 1, indicating a stronger relationship between disadvantage and attainment for younger students. Indeed, only 56% of disadvantaged students in the younger cohort managed to attain level 2 (compared to almost 80% of their peers not classed as such). For the older cohort, almost three-quarters of disadvantaged students managed to attain level 3, although this was still significantly lower than ‘not disadvantaged’ students studying towards the same level (86%).

#### 6.4.2 Attainment and gender

Differences in attainment between boys and girls are well documented in the literature. The results of the Pearson’s chi-squared tests, given below, show that for my sample also, gender is significantly associated with attainment for both cohorts of students. In both cases, girls are more likely to attain the benchmark level of education for their academic year group than boys, supporting the initial hypothesis (H2). As seen for the effects of disadvantage, the effect size of gender is slightly greater for the older cohort than for younger students. However, the association is weak for both groups, indicating that, whilst not insignificant, the relationship between gender and attainment is somewhat less important than for disadvantage and attainment.

**Table 6.10.1 – Gender by educational attainment (cohort 1)**

	Cohort 1					
	Did not attain Level 2		Attained Level 2		p-value	Phi
	#	%	#	%		
Female	180	22.3%	628	77.7%	< .01	-.080
Male	193	29.3%	466	70.7%		

**Table 6.10.2 – Gender by educational attainment (cohort 2)**

	Cohort 2					
	Did not attain Level 3		Attained Level 3		p-value	Phi
	#	%	#	%		
Female	110	14.4%	653	85.6%	< .01	-.097
Male	106	22.0%	376	78.0%		

### 6.4.3 Attainment and gender and disadvantage

Combining the risk factors of disadvantage and gender above, a third hypothesis might posit, then, that:

*H3: Educational attainment for disadvantaged boys is significantly lower than attainment for other groups of students*

Testing this using Pearson’s chi-squared test supports this hypothesis, showing a statistically significant association between gender/disadvantage and attainment for both cohorts. As for each factor individually, this effect is stronger for the older cohort than for younger students. The effect size (Cramer’s V), here, is larger than those seen above, indicating that the effect on attainment is stronger when gender and disadvantage are both taken into account than for either of these factors alone.

**Table 6.11.1 – Student disadvantage and gender groups by educational attainment (cohort 1)**

	Cohort 1					
	Did not attain Level 2		Attained Level 2		p-value	Cramer’s V
	#	%	#	%		
<b>Not disadvantaged girls</b>	110	17.2%	529	82.8%	< .001	.227
<b>Not disadvantaged boys</b>	138	25.3%	407	74.7%		
<b>Disadvantaged girls</b>	64	41.8%	89	58.2%		
<b>Disadvantaged boys</b>	54	47.8%	59	52.2%		

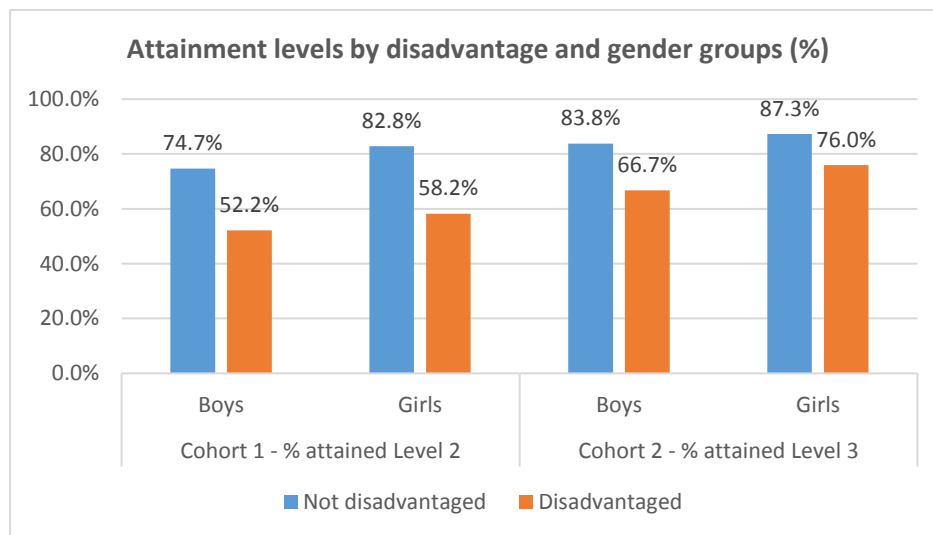
**Table 6.11.2 – Student disadvantage and gender groups by educational attainment (cohort 2)**

	Cohort 2					
	Did not attain Level 3		Attained Level 3		p-value	Cramer’s V
	#	%	#	%		
<b>Not disadvantaged girls</b>	69	12.7%	475	87.3%	< .001	.137
<b>Not disadvantaged boys</b>	56	16.2%	289	83.8%		
<b>Disadvantaged girls</b>	18	24.0%	57	76.0%		
<b>Disadvantaged boys</b>	16	33.3%	32	66.7%		

The tables, indeed, show that there is a clear hierarchy of attainment, with ‘not disadvantaged’ girls most likely to attain their expected educational level and disadvantaged boys least likely. The effect of gender appears to work regardless of disadvantage status with a greater proportion of girls attaining the benchmark level, compared to the boys of the same category of disadvantage. The stronger association seen

in the younger year group is apparent, with only 52% of disadvantaged boys in the younger cohort managed to attain level 2 (compared to 83% of ‘not disadvantaged’ girls). Figure 6.1 highlights both the disadvantage and gender effects in terms of attainment levels amongst students in the two cohorts.

**Figure 6.1: Attainment levels by student disadvantage and gender groups, by cohort**



Overall, all three hypotheses can be supported by the data. Disadvantaged students – and especially boys – have significantly lower educational attainment than their peers, indicating that this group can be considered as more at risk of experiencing negative educational outcomes.

Binary logistic regression analysis can examine the combined effect of gender and disadvantage on students’ likelihood of attaining the benchmark level of education for each academic year group. For the younger cohort, results of the analysis (table 6.12) show that girls are significantly more likely to attain level 2. The odds ratio for gender was 1.507, indicating that girls are one-and-a-half times more likely to achieve this level than boys. In terms of student disadvantage, the odds ratio was 3.068 ( $p < .001$ ), with students who are not classed as disadvantaged more than three times more likely to attain level 2 than those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For the older cohort of students, the logistic regression shows that, whilst girls were again more likely to attain qualifications equivalent to level 3, this difference was not statistically significant:  $\chi^2(1) = 3.685$ ,  $p = .056$ . Student disadvantage, however, was significantly different for this cohort; the odds ratio of 2.325 indicates that students from more well-off

socio-economic backgrounds were more than twice as likely to attain the expected level of education than their disadvantaged peers.

**Table 6.12: Binary logistic regression analysis on attainment**

	B (S.E.)	Odds ratio	p-value
<b>Cohort 1</b>			
Gender (Ref: male)			
Female	.410 (.125)	1.507	.001
Student disadvantage (ref: disadvantaged)			
'Not disadvantaged'	1.121 (.144)	3.068	< .001
Constant	.002 (.143)	1.002	.989
<b>Cohort 2</b>			
Gender (Ref: male)			
Female	.334 (.175)	1.397	.056
Student disadvantage (ref: disadvantaged)			
'Not disadvantaged'	.844 (.224)	2.325	< .001
Constant	.759 (.227)	2.136	.001

Tests for interactions between disadvantage and gender were carried out to see whether the relationship between student disadvantage and attainment was moderated by gender. However, the interaction term (disadvantage\*gender) was found not to be significant for either cohort and was therefore not included in the final models.

Both student disadvantage and gender are stronger predictors of attainment for the younger cohort than the older cohort (with the effect of gender not reaching statistical significance for the older cohort), whilst for both cohorts the effect of disadvantage appears to be more important than the gender effect. What it is clear, therefore, is that boys from disadvantaged backgrounds are the group least likely to reach the government's benchmark level of attainment, finding themselves at the intersection of two identified risk factors.

However, the gender effect appears to be less strong than the effect of socio-economic disadvantage as evidenced by the relatively largest effect size seen in the bivariate analysis and the considerably larger coefficients seen in the final logistic regression models, above. For this reason, the following sections of the chapter employ an operationalisation of risk based only on the socio-economic disadvantage variable, such that it is seeking to examine how and why students identified as being 'at-risk' of experiencing negative educational

outcomes based on their socio-economic background, can still experience positive (i.e. resilient) outcomes.

## 6.5 Resilient outcomes

As explained above, resilient outcomes can only be assessed once we have identified and operationalised what is meant by being ‘at-risk’. Those students from families with lower parental income, as indicated by their eligibility for free school meals, have been shown to be more at-risk of lower educational attainment by previous studies (Gorard, 2012; West, 2007) – a finding also borne out by the analysis above. Taking FSM eligibility as an indicator of risk, therefore, we can construct which students experience ‘expected’ educational outcomes (either positive or negative) and which experience ‘unexpected’ outcomes (see figure 6.2). Disadvantaged students, who nonetheless attain the benchmark educational level for their year group (i.e. Year 10 students attaining the equivalent of 5 good GCSEs and those in Year 12 who attain 2 or more A-levels), can here be categorised as demonstrating a resilient outcome – that is, they experienced a positive outcome despite the presence of adversity or risk.

**Figure 6.2: Risk v. outcome matrix**

	Did not attain benchmark educational level	Attained benchmark educational level
'Not disadvantaged' students	(1) Unexpected -ve outcome (‘Empty cell?’)	(2) Expected +ve outcome
‘Disadvantaged’ students	(3) Expected -ve outcome	(4) <b>Resilient outcome</b>

Comparing this risk/outcome matrix with Masten *et al.*’s (1990) schema, presented in chapter 2, it is to be expected that the majority of students fall in the upper-right sector (group 2): i.e. ‘normal’ development/attainment, without exposure to adverse conditions. Under Masten’s compensatory model, high levels of stress exposure are mediated by the presence of a select number of attributes which ‘compensate’ for this exposure to risk (1990, p438). Children within supportive contexts have access to more resources and are therefore more likely to display greater developmental competence despite exposure to

adversity. These students who demonstrate resilient outcomes are represented in group 4 of the above figure. By contrast, the model predicts a relatively small proportion of young people who fall into group 1: students not socio-economically disadvantaged who do not attain the benchmark level of education for their academic cohort. This so-called 'empty-cell' phenomenon, whereby those who experience 'maladaptive development' despite supportive environmental factors, expects that this category will contain so few children that no meaningful analysis can be undertaken (Toland & Carrigan, 2011, p99). However, as outlined above, the threshold for 'disadvantage' here – eligibility for FSM – is positioned at a relatively low level, aimed as this policy is at assisting only the students from the poorest background. This, then, will necessarily mask other potential sources of disadvantage that affect students who, nonetheless, do not fall below the threshold for FSM eligibility. It is important to note that such a binary measure belies within-group complexity, particularly amongst students who are not classified as 'disadvantaged' on this metric. Nevertheless, the focus of my analysis here is on the other side of this equation: that is, students, who given their status below the (as noted, quite stringent) threshold for socio-economic disadvantage, might be expected not to attain the government's benchmark educational level. Those who do manage to achieve positive educational outcomes, in this case, comprise a group of students that can be said to have experienced 'resilient outcomes'.

#### **6.5.1 Who are the resilient students?**

The tables below categorise the sample in terms of their 'at-risk' status (disadvantaged v. not disadvantaged) and their educational outcome (attained benchmark level of education v. did not attain benchmark level). For the younger cohort, as predicted, the majority of students (64.6%) attained level 2 as expected, without exposure to the risks associated with low parental income. Amongst students from lower income households, the majority did achieve positive educational outcomes, although attainment rate is much below that seen for other students. This 'resilient' group make up around 10% of the overall sample in cohort 1. Far from an 'empty cell', as described above, one-in-six of young people in cohort 1 (17.1%) were from backgrounds that do not fall below the threshold for 'disadvantaged' and yet did not managed to attain the benchmark of level 2 education.

For the older cohort, three-quarters of students can be categorised as attaining the expected level of education for their year group without exposure to the adverse conditions

associated with being eligible for FSM. A smaller, yet significant, minority of students in the sample can be shown to have demonstrated resilient outcomes (8.8%) – again the rate of attainment is lower for disadvantaged students than for their peers. As seen for the younger cohort, far from an ‘empty cell’, one-in-eight of students in cohort 2 (12.5%) were from better-off backgrounds and yet did not manage to attain the benchmark of level 3 education.

**Table 6.13.1 – Risk v. outcome (cohort 1)**

Cohort 1		
	Did not attain Level 2	Attained Level 2
Not disadvantaged	248 (17.1%)	936 (64.6%)
Disadvantaged	118 (8.1%)	<b>148</b> <b>(10.2%)</b>

**Table 6.13.2 – Risk v. outcome (cohort 2)**

Cohort 2		
	Did not attain Level 3	Attained Level 3
Not disadvantaged	127 (12.5%)	766 (75.4%)
Disadvantaged	34 (3.3%)	<b>89</b> <b>(8.8%)</b>

### 6.5.2 How can we compare resilient students?

Whilst the tables above categorise students by their risk and outcome status, the next stage of analysis seeks meaningfully to compare the group of students who have resilient outcomes – i.e. they are at-risk but nevertheless achieve their expected level of attainment – with students who do not. With whom, then, should this group be compared? There are three possibilities:

- a) We compare those who are resilient (group 4 in figure 6.2, above) with students who **are at-risk and do not achieve the benchmark level of attainment** (group 3)
- b) Another possibility is to compare the resilient students (4) with **all students** (whether at-risk or not) who **do not manage to achieve the benchmark level of attainment** (groups 1 and 3)

- c) A third possible strategy is to compare resilient students (4) with those who are **not at-risk** and who subsequently **do achieve the benchmark level of attainment** (2) – as a base comparison group.

Whilst the first approach can provide a more meaningful comparison by controlling for at-risk status, the second may uncover trends that transcend the binary classification and have a profound effect on non-attainment, whether anticipated or not. Furthermore, the third strategy can reveal whether significant differences exist, setting so-called resilient students apart from other 'typical attainers'.

For this reason, there are benefits for undertaking each of these comparisons and, where appropriate, the analysis below presents the profiles and levels of support of 'resilient attainers' as compared to those categorised as 'typical attainers', 'non-attainers' and 'at-risk non-attainers'.

Tables 6.14.1, 6.14.2 and 6.14.3, below, presents the socio-demographic profile of students by these different outcome types. Pearson's chi-squared tests are used to assess where differences are statistically significant between students who are 'resilient attainers' and those students who do not attain despite being 'at risk' (a); all non-attaining students (b); and all 'typical attainers' – i.e. not 'at-risk' attainers (c).

Comparing the profile of resilient attainers with those who share their 'at-risk' status on the basis of socio-economic disadvantage yet do not attain the benchmark level of education for their year group, only cohort and SEN status are significantly different (table 6.14.1). This suggests that, after controlling for 'at-risk' status, students in the older cohort and those without a special educational need are more likely to attain the benchmark educational level. There is no significant difference between these groups on the basis of gender or ethnic group.

If all non-attaining students are considered in comparison to those experiencing resilient outcomes, the profile of students in these groups differ significantly in terms of ethnicity and gender – as well as SEN status (table 6.14.2). Proportionately fewer White British students and boys are in the 'resilient attainers' group, compared to the non-attainers group. Whilst, again students without an identified SEN and those in the older cohort are more likely to be in the resilient group compared to the non-attainers group, the effect of cohort marginally fails to attain statistical significance ( $p = .056$ ).



Finally, table 6.14.3 compares students in the ‘resilient attainers’ group with the so-called ‘typical attainers’. Here, the only socio-demographic variables that are significantly different are cohort and ethnicity: students in the older cohort and White British students are more likely to be in the ‘typical attainers’ group, whilst there is no statistical difference between these groups on the basis of gender or SEN status. This suggests either that younger students and Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) students are more likely to be attain the benchmark level of education for their year group, or that these young people are over-represented in the ‘at-risk’ group.

**Table 6.14.1: Profile of students by ‘outcome type’ – ‘resilient attainers’ v. ‘at-risk non-attainers’**

	<i>Resilient (4)</i>		<i>At-risk non-attainers (3)</i>		<i>X<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>		
<b>Cohort</b>					9.875	.002
Year 10	148	62.4%	118	77.6%		
Year 12 or equiv.	89	37.6%	34	22.4%		
<b>Gender</b>					2.956	.086
Female	146	61.6%	82	53.9%		
Male	91	38.4%	70	46.1%		
<b>Special educational needs</b>					38.851	< .001
SEN	27	11.4%	58	38.2%		
No identified SEN	210	88.6%	94	61.8%		
<b>Ethnicity</b>					9.335	.096
White British	71	30.1%	55	36.2%		
Other White	23	9.7%	10	6.6%		
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	24	10.2%	13	8.6%		
Asian/Asian British	49	20.8%	17	11.2%		
Black/Black British	47	19.9%	39	25.7%		
Other ethnic group	22	9.3%	18	11.8%		

**Table 6.14.2: Profile of students by ‘outcome type’ – ‘resilient attainers’ v. ‘all non-attainers’**

	<i>Resilient attainers</i> (4)		<i>All non-attainers</i> (1 & 3)		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	#	%	#	%		
<b>Cohort</b>					3.641	.056
Year 10	148	62.4%	366	69.4%		
Year 12 or equiv.	89	37.6%	161	30.6%		
<b>Gender</b>					10.175	.001
Female	146	61.6%	264	49.7%		
Male	91	38.4%	265	50.3%		
<b>Special educational needs</b>					48.890	< .001
SEN	27	11.4%	190	36.1%		
No identified SEN	210	88.6%	337	63.9%		
<b>Ethnicity</b>					27.530	< .001
White British	71	30.1%	261	49.5%		
Other White	23	9.7%	49	9.3%		
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	24	10.2%	33	6.3%		
Asian/Asian British	49	20.8%	69	13.1%		
Black/Black British	47	19.9%	76	14.4%		
Other ethnic group	22	9.3%	39	7.4%		

**Table 6.14.3: Profile of students by ‘outcome type’ – ‘resilient attainers’ v. ‘typical attainers’**

	<i>Resilient attainers</i> (4)		<i>Typical attainers</i> (2)		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
	#	%	#	%		
<b>Cohort</b>					4.688	.030
Year 10	148	62.4%	936	55.0%		
Year 12 or equiv.	89	37.6%	766	45.0%		
<b>Gender</b>					1.005	.316
Female	146	61.6%	1003	59.0%		
Male	91	38.4%	696	41.0%		
<b>Special educational needs</b>					.293	.588
SEN	27	11.4%	215	12.6%		
No identified SEN	210	88.6%	1487	87.4%		
<b>Ethnicity</b>					102.205	< .001
White British	71	30.1%	1011	59.8%		
Other White	23	9.7%	126	7.5%		
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	24	10.2%	80	4.7%		
Asian/Asian British	49	20.8%	292	17.3%		
Black/Black British	47	19.9%	114	6.7%		
Other ethnic group	22	9.3%	68	4.0%		

Binary logistic regression analysis is used to examine the combined effect of these socio-demographic variables on students' likelihood of being in the 'resilient' group. Table 6.15 presents the results of three analyses, corresponding to the three strategies outlined above: the first model compares the likelihood of students being in the 'resilient' group, compared to 'at-risk non-attainers'; the second model compares 'resilient' students to 'all non-attainers'; and the third model compares 'resilient' students to 'typical attainers'.

**Table 6.15: Binary logistic regression analysis on 'outcome type'**

	<b>(a) Resilient v. At-risk non-attainers</b> Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> = .165		<b>(b) Resilient v. All non-attainers</b> Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> = .147		<b>(c) Resilient v. Typical attainers</b> Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> = .095	
	<b>B</b>	<b>Odds ratio</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Odds ratio</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Odds ratio</b>
Female	.082	1.085	.384*	1.468	.170	1.185
Cohort 2	.413	1.512	.024	1.024	-.303*	.738
SEN	-1.482*	.227	-1.380*	.252	-.130	.878
Ethnic group (Ref: White British)						
White other	.431	1.539	.482	1.619	.955*	2.598
Mixed/multiple ethnic group	.476	1.610	1.115*	3.048	1.445*	4.243
Asian/Asian British	.676	1.965	.867*	2.381	.867*	2.380
Black/Black British	-.056	.945	.854*	2.350	1.757*	5.793
Other ethnic group	-.231	.794	.663*	1.941	1.569*	4.800
Constant	.470	1.600	-1.202*	.300	-2.616*	.073

\*  $p < .05$

The goodness-of-fit of the three models was assessed and contrasted using the Hosmer-Lemeshow test. Calibration of the models was satisfactory with associated  $p$ -values of .718, .539 and .110, respectively, indicating that the models fit the observed data well (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1980). The Nagelkerke pseudo R<sup>2</sup> values provide an indication of the predictive power of each of the models.

In model (a), only SEN status is statistically significant in predicting whether a student is in the 'resilient' group, compared to 'at-risk non-attainers'. Those students with a special educational need are around four-to-five times less likely to be in the 'resilient group' ( $\beta = .227, p < .05$ ). This suggests that, even after taking their socio-economic status into account, students with a special educational need are still significantly less likely to attain positive educational outcomes.

Comparing 'resilient' outcomes with 'all non-attainers', model (b) shows that gender, SEN status and ethnic group are all statistically significant predictors of 'resilient' group membership. Female students are 1.5 times more likely, and students with no identified SEN around 4 times more likely, to be in the 'resilient' group than in the 'non-attainers' group. All BAME groups, except for 'White other' students, are significantly more likely to be in the 'resilient' group compared to White British young people. Those with mixed/multiple ethnicity are more than 3 times more likely to be in this group, whilst Black and Asian students are around 2.4 times more likely. Students in the 'other ethnic group' category are around twice as likely to be in the 'resilient' group than in the 'non-attainers' group, compared to their White British peers. In contrast to 'all non-attainers', for whom socio-economic status is not taken into account, those in the resilient group are, by definition, disadvantaged. Therefore, it is likely that there is an over-representation of BAME students in the 'at-risk' sample, i.e. those students for whom a positive outcome represents a resilient outcome. Notwithstanding, however, attainment appears to be related to gender, SEN and ethnicity, even when comparing non-attaining students to those students from disadvantaged background who achieve the benchmark level.

Model (c) compares 'resilient' students with 'typical attainers' – students who are not socio-economically disadvantaged and who attain their expected educational level. Whilst the overall predictive power of this model is below that in models (a) and (b), membership of the 'resilient' group (as opposed to the 'typical attainers' group) is explained by both cohort and ethnicity variables. Those in the older cohort are only 75% as likely to be in the 'resilient' group. All BAME groups are more likely to be in the 'resilient' group than White British students. Odds ratios range from 2.4 times more likely for Asian students to 5.8 times more likely for Black students to be in the 'resilient' group compared to membership of the 'typical attainers' group.

As the only difference between the 'resilient' group and the 'typical attainers' is the at-risk status of the respondents, this 'ethnicity effect' could potentially be seen as a 'disadvantage effect'. Whilst BAME students appear to have a greater likelihood of demonstrating resilient outcomes than their White British classmates, the extent to which this means they are outperforming them educationally, or whether this is due to an increased likelihood of coming from a low income family, is not apparent in the model.

## **6.6 Relationship between resilient outcomes and sources of perceived support**

As shown in the previous section, when controlling for socio-economic disadvantage (model (a)), socio-demographic factors can account for only very little of the likelihood of being able to attain positive educational outcomes. What, then, can explain why students from poorer backgrounds are able to demonstrate resilient outcomes? Further analysis of the data in this section provides insights into students' perceptions of support from different sources – teachers, parents and peers – and the extent to which these vary between young people according to their 'outcome type'. In particular, the literature (Klem & Connell, 2004; Masten *et al.*, 1990; Rutter, 1987) supports the hypothesis that young people experiencing resilient outcomes are more likely to report higher levels of social support as protective factors that 'compensate' for their exposure to adversity.

As highlighted in chapter 5, the focus on young people's perceptions of support is not without necessarily commensurate with the levels of support actual available to them. However, in the context of education, it is not simply the availability of support but rather the ways in which young people interpret and respond to support which has been found to shape outcomes (Ginevra *et al.*, 2015). In this sense, perceived social support can be seen as a series of social interactions, which are given meaning through their interpretation by the young people themselves (Ryan *et al.*, 2019).

This is, furthermore, consistent with theories of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986), whereby social capital, comprised of the interpersonal support relationships and networks to which one has access, is an important resource for young people as they negotiate their path through their formal education. It could reasonably be expected that students with greater access to such capital would have a greater chance of experiencing positive outcomes – even those who are facing hardships in other areas.

### **6.6.1 Perceived support and students' attainment**

In order to explore the relationship between perceived support and students' outcomes, correlations were calculated between student attainment and the two teacher support subscales, four parental support subscales and the peer support scale (see section 6.2.2 above). Tables 6.16.1 and 6.16.2 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation matrices by cohort; statistically significant coefficients are highlighted.

**Table 6.16.1: Pearson bivariate correlations (cohort 1)**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
<b>1. Attainment</b>							
<b>2. Teacher school support</b>	.082**						
<b>3. Teacher social support</b>	.023	.650**					
<b>4. Parental social support</b>	.020	.351**	.353**				
<b>5. Parental school support</b>	.058*	.343**	.307**	.580**			
<b>6. Parental control</b>	.094**	.256**	.231**	.364**	.506**		
<b>7. Parental involvement at school</b>	.059*	.206**	.240**	.345**	.468**	.352**	
<b>8. Peer support</b>	.135**	.309**	.287**	.220**	.278**	.257**	.164**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 6.16.2: Pearson bivariate correlations (cohort 2)**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
<b>1. Attainment</b>							
<b>2. Teacher school support</b>	.099**						
<b>3. Teacher social support</b>	.083**	.602**					
<b>4. Parental social support</b>	.045	.243**	.295**				
<b>5. Parental school support</b>	.035	.283**	.270**	.596**			
<b>6. Parental control</b>	.005	.165**	.161**	.254**	.482**		
<b>7. Parental involvement at school</b>	.088**	.218**	.244**	.395**	.548**	.364**	
<b>8. Peer support</b>	.059*	.193**	.239**	.169**	.234**	.167**	.136**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between attainment and the two teacher support subscales is positive for both cohorts, although teacher social support does not reach statistical significance for the younger academic year group. This supports the hypothesis that positive educational outcomes are associated with higher levels of perceived teacher support.

For the younger cohort, the four parental support subscales are positively correlated with attainment, although the correlations are small and, in the case of parental social support, not statistically significant. Amongst the older students, the only parental support subscale to reach statistical significance is parental involvement at school, which is positively correlated with attainment ( $r = .088, p < .01$ ).

The correlation between peer support and attainment was small yet statistically significant for cohort 1 ( $r = .164, p < .01$ ). For the older cohort of students, peer support was positively correlated with attainment, although this relationship was much weaker ( $r = .059, p < .05$ ).

### 6.6.2 Perceived support and students' outcome type

Correlation analysis appears to support the hypothesis that students' attainment is positively correlated with a number of perceived support measures. In particular, parental and peer support seem to have a stronger relationship with attainment for younger students, whilst for older students teacher support is somewhat more connected to educational outcomes.

Attainment, though, as discussed above, is only one half of the equation when considering resilient outcomes. Analysis of perceived support scores by student outcome type allows for a more meaningful interpretation of whether and how perceptions of support from various sources are related to outcomes, taking students' 'at-risk' status into account. Mean support scores for each of the outcome groups are presented below (table 6.17):

**Table 6.17: Mean scores for perceived support scales by student outcome type**

	Attained expected level		Did not attain expected level	
	<i>Typical attainers</i>	<i>Resilient</i>	<i>At-risk non-attainers</i>	<i>All non-attainers</i>
	(2)	(4)	(3)	(1 & 3)
<b>Teacher school support</b>	3.86	3.80	3.64	3.61
<b>Teacher social support</b>	3.47	3.43	3.19	3.30
<b>Parental social support</b>	3.94	3.82	3.70	3.86
<b>Parental school support</b>	4.31	4.30	4.27	4.25
<b>Parental control</b>	4.14	4.26	4.07	4.04
<b>Parental involvement at school</b>	3.55	3.44	3.26	3.35
<b>Peer support</b>	4.04	3.95	3.81	3.80

#### **'Typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'at-risk non-attainers'**

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to ascertain significant between-group differences. As 'at-risk non-attainers' are a subset of 'all non-attainers', separate ANOVAs were undertaken to compare 'typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'at-risk non-attainers' (table 6.18); and to compare 'typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'all non-attainers' (table 6.19). Post-hoc comparisons are summarised in figures 6.3 and 6.4.

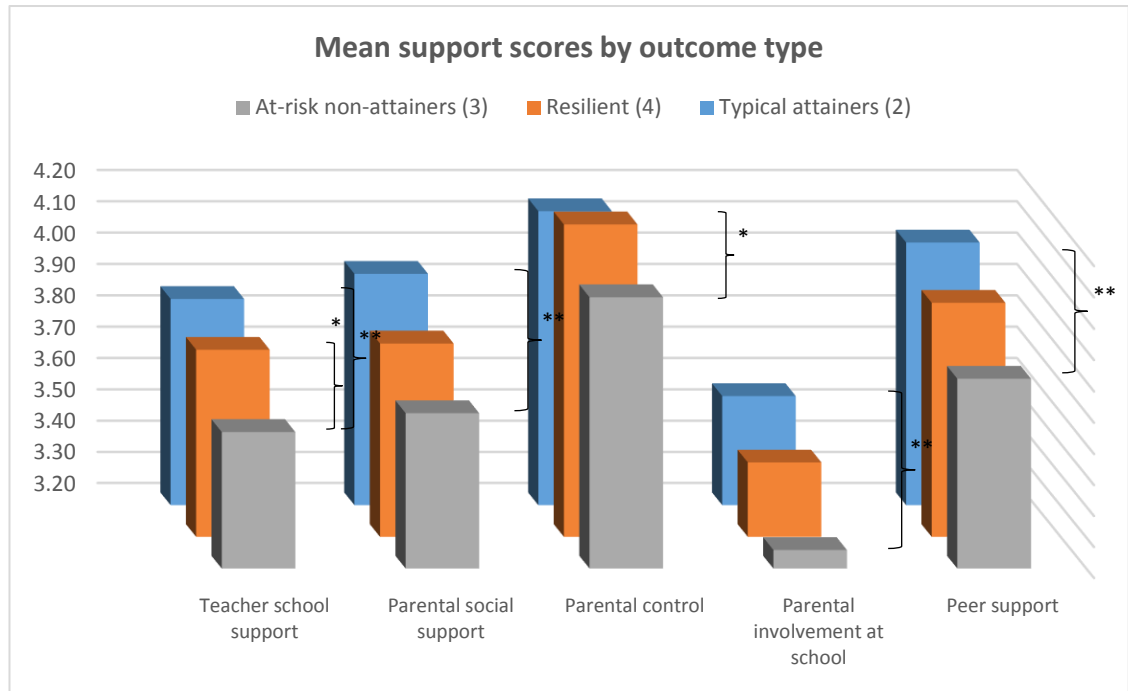
**Table 6.18: Analysis of variance between student outcome types ('typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'at-risk non-attainers')**

		Mean	SD	F	p-value
<b>Teacher school support</b>	Typical attainers	3.84	.64	8.413	< .001
	Resilient attainers	3.79	.64		
	At-risk non-attainers	3.61	.66		
<b>Teacher social support</b>	Typical attainers	3.40	.71	1.518	.219
	Resilient attainers	3.37	.67		
	At-risk non-attainers	3.30	.74		
<b>Parental social support</b>	Typical attainers	3.94	.87	6.585	.001
	Resilient attainers	3.82	.87		
	At-risk non-attainers	3.70	1.01		
<b>Parental school support</b>	Typical attainers	4.31	.59	.289	.749
	Resilient attainers	4.30	.67		
	At-risk non-attainers	4.27	.66		
<b>Parental control</b>	Typical attainers	4.14	.76	3.167	.042
	Resilient attainers	4.26	.75		
	At-risk non-attainers	4.07	.77		
<b>Parental involvement at school</b>	Typical attainers	3.55	.84	9.065	< .001
	Resilient attainers	3.44	.84		
	At-risk non-attainers	3.26	.92		
<b>Peer support</b>	Typical attainers	4.04	.75	6.395	.002
	Resilient attainers	3.95	.78		
	At-risk non-attainers	3.81	.83		

Results of the first ANOVA show that there are significant differences between student outcome groups on most of the support scales, when comparing 'typical attainers' with 'resilient attainers' and 'at-risk non-attainers'. However, teacher social support and parental school support were found not to vary significantly between the outcome groups. Levene's tests confirmed that, for measures where statistically significant differences were found, there was no violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests were therefore performed on these variables to evaluate the pattern of differences between the three outcome groups. The results of these post hoc tests is shown in figure 6.3, with significant differences between group means highlighted.



**Figure 6.3: Tukey's HSD post hoc tests – mean support scores by outcome type ('typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'at-risk non-attainers')**



Brackets indicate significant differences between mean scores for outcome types (\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ )

Levels of perceived support from different sources vary between the three groups, with 'at-risk non-attainers' reporting lower mean scores of support on all scales. Statistically significant differences are seen between 'at-risk non-attainers' and 'typical attainers' for teacher school support, parental social support, parental involvement at school and peer support. 'Resilient attainers' also report significantly higher scores for parental control and teacher school support, compared to 'at-risk non-attainers'. However, there is no statistically significant difference between 'resilient attainers' and 'typical attainers' on any of the support scale measures.

**'Typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'all non-attainers'**

Results of the second ANOVA, conducted to examine the differences in support scores for 'all non-attainers', compared to 'resilient attainers' and 'typical attainers' show statistically significant effects for all support scales, except parental school support (table 6.19).

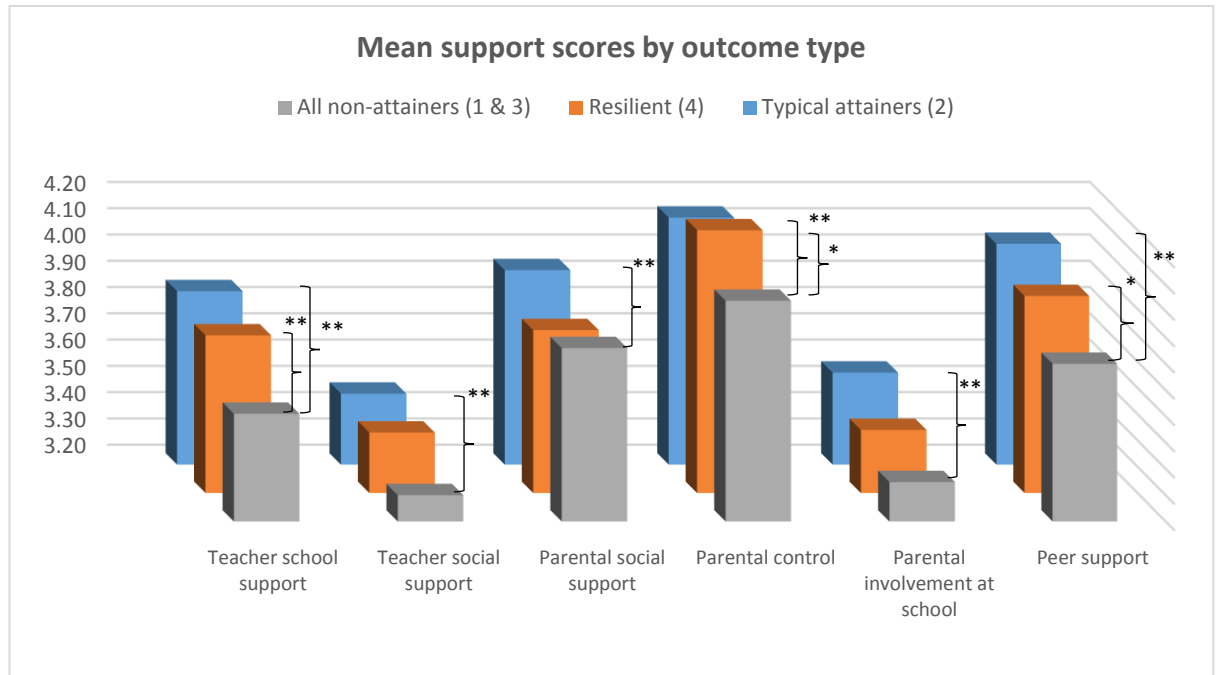
**Table 6.19: Analysis of variance between student outcome types ('typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'all non-attainers')**

		Mean	SD	F	p-value
<b>Teacher school support</b>	Typical attainers	3.84	.64	19.338	< .001
	Resilient attainers	3.79	.64		
	All non-attainers	3.63	.67		
<b>Teacher social support</b>	Typical attainers	3.40	.71	5.108	.006
	Resilient attainers	3.37	.67		
	All non-attainers	3.29	.74		
<b>Parental social support</b>	Typical attainers	3.94	.87	3.050	.048
	Resilient attainers	3.82	.87		
	All non-attainers	3.86	.92		
<b>Parental school support</b>	Typical attainers	4.31	.59	2.290	.102
	Resilient attainers	4.30	.67		
	All non-attainers	4.25	.67		
<b>Parental control</b>	Typical attainers	4.14	.76	6.919	.001
	Resilient attainers	4.26	.75		
	All non-attainers	4.04	.82		
<b>Parental involvement at school</b>	Typical attainers	3.55	.84	11.119	< .001
	Resilient attainers	3.44	.84		
	All non-attainers	3.35	.90		
<b>Peer support</b>	Typical attainers	4.04	.75	17.353	< .001
	Resilient attainers	3.95	.78		
	All non-attainers	3.80	.82		

Levene's tests confirmed that, for scales where statistically significant differences were found, there was no violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests were therefore performed on these variables to evaluate the pattern of differences between the three outcome groups. The results of these post hoc tests are shown in figure 6.4, with significant differences between group means highlighted.

'Non-attainers' reported lower scores for all support scales, where statistical significance was reached. 'Typical attainers' report significantly higher support scores than 'non-attainers' for both of the teacher support scales, parental control, parental involvement at school and peer support. 'Resilient attainers' also report significantly higher levels of perceived support than non-attainers for teacher school support, parental control and peer support. No statistically significant differences were again detected between 'resilient attainers' and 'typical attainers' on any of the support scale measures.

**Figure 6.4: Tukey's HSD post hoc tests – mean support scores by outcome type ('typical attainers' v. 'resilient attainers' v. 'all non-attainers')**



*Brackets indicate significant differences between mean scores for outcome types (\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ )*

### 6.6.3 Resilient attainers and perceived support

Analysis of students' levels of perceived support reveal that those in the 'resilient attainers' group do not report significantly different levels of support from those in the 'typical attainers' group. These two groups of students both report higher levels of support than 'all non-attainers' or the smaller subset of 'at-risk non-attainers'. That being said, however, not all of the differences seen are statistically significant.

Comparing the resilient attainers with those students who were also categorised as 'at-risk' but did not attain the benchmark level ('at-risk non-attainers'), the analysis supports the notion that teacher school support and parental control are important predictors of attainment for disadvantaged students.

If the resilient group are compared with all students who do not attain the benchmark level of education ('non-attainers'), perceived levels of peer support are seen as an additional factor contributing to attainment, particularly for 'disadvantaged' students.

What is interesting to note in the above analysis is that levels of parental support (that is, parental school support, social support and involvement at school) are statistically different only between 'typical attainers' and those students who do not attain the benchmark

educational level for their year group. Resilient attainers do not report significantly higher levels of support from their parents than non-attainers, suggesting that this is not the most important source of support for disadvantaged students. Indeed, for many students, their access to other forms of social support may be the key advantage that helps them to overcome a lack of resources associated with low parental income.

An exception to this appears to be the importance of 'parental control', which is positively correlated with attainment. Resilient attainers report significantly greater levels of control – that is, the extent to which their parents are aware of where they are, who they're with and when they'll be home – than those students who fail to reach the benchmark level of attainment. It appears to be this, rather than any specific practical or emotional support, that provides a key indicator of a supportive parental environment conducive to academic success.

The statistical analysis highlights the correlation between self-reported levels of support and educational outcomes, which is prevalent in the literature (Chen, 2005; Wentzel, 1998). However, in contrast to findings elsewhere that support is more important for 'at-risk' students, in relation to the findings presented here it appears that access to support is an important factor for educational attainment for all students. Support from parents, peers and teachers underpin attainment for all students, whether from disadvantaged backgrounds or not. The similarity of self-reported levels of support between resilient and typical attainers suggests that the risk posed by low parental income does not extend to social support networks and that, as long as students have access to key relationships (particularly outside of the parental unit) and are able to mobilise resources, they are able to achieve positive outcomes.

## **6.7 The impact of teacher support for students' lacking support in other areas**

The final section of this chapter explores the hypothesis that teacher support will be more important for young people who lack support in other areas, with regards to their educational attainment. It appears that for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, it is access to support from beyond the parental home that can make the difference in reaching the benchmark educational level for their year group.

However, it is interesting to examine the extent to which teacher support can be singled out as a protective factor for young people lacking support structures elsewhere, or whether perceptions of support are more closely inter-correlated, such that support from a number of different sources might provide a mutually reinforcing network that needs to work together to have a positive effect on young people’s educational outcomes.

***Attainment scores and perceived support for older and young students***

As seen above (tables 6.16.1 and 6.16.2) the correlation between attainment and the support scales used in the study differs according to cohort, with older students’ outcomes more closely correlated with perceptions of teacher support, whilst for the younger cohort support from their parents and peers appear to have more effect on their likelihood to reach the benchmark level for their year group.

What can also be seen in the correlation matrix above, is the level of inter-correlation between the different sub-scales of support. To provide a clearer picture of this, tables 6.20.1 and 6.20.2 present the Pearson’s bivariate correlation for attainment with aggregate (i.e. second-order) support scales: teacher support, parental support and peer support. Attainment for the younger cohort is measured here as a continuous variable in terms of their total Key Stage 4 points score (DfE, 2017); for the older cohort, the measure relates to their total Key Stage 5 points score (DfE, 2017).

***Table 6.20.1: Pearson bivariate correlations for KS4 attainment points and aggregate support scales (cohort 1)***

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. KS4 attainment points	1	.069**	.079**	.152**
2. Teacher support		1	.425**	.327**
3. Parental support			1	.298**
4. Peer support				1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

***Table 6.20.2: Pearson bivariate correlations for KS5 attainment points and aggregate support scales (cohort 2)***

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. KS5 attainment points	1	.113**	.046	.051
2. Teacher support		1	.355**	.245**
3. Parental support			1	.235**
4. Peer support				1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

This simplified analysis confirms that, for the younger students, all three sources of support are significantly positively correlated with the attainment scores. However, the strength of the correlations are relatively modest and, in fact, of the three sources of support, teachers appear to be have the least effect on attainment. By contrast, for the older cohort, the correlation between attainment points and teacher support is stronger than for the younger students (although the correlation is still modest in size), and the relationship between attainment and overall perceptions of support from peers and parents does not reach statistical significance.

Furthermore, the inter-correlations between the measures of support from teachers, parents and peers are moderately strong, indicating as suggested above, a combined effect for young people's overall network of support. Moreover, the inter-correlations between the support measures are stronger for the young cohort than for older students and, whilst having a support network composed of multiple sources of assistance may be beneficial in reinforcing the impact of this, it appears that teacher support in particular plays a more prominent role in terms of older students' attainment. Parental support and peer support may be important then for this cohort only insofar as it feeds into teacher support, such as by parental involvement at school (note a significant correlation for this parental support subscale was seen for cohort 2 in table 6.16.2 above).

#### ***Attainment scores and perceived teacher support for students with low parental/peer support***

The above analysis reveals that the relationship between different sources of support can positively impact upon young people's levels of academic attainment. The particular role of teacher support appears to have more of an impact on attainment for older students in sixth form or FE colleges, than for younger students still within a secondary school environment. By examining the correlation between teacher support and attainment for students who report low levels of parental support, we might expect therefore to see a stronger relationship – especially amongst participants in the older cohort.

Table 6.21.1 and 6.21.2 present the Pearson bivariate correlation between KS4/KS5 attainment points and teacher support scores for students whose parental support scores were lower than one standard deviation below the mean:

**Table 6.21.1: Pearson bivariate correlation for KS4 attainment points and teacher support for low parental support students**

		1.	2.
<b>1. KS4 attainment points</b>	Pearson correlation	1	.041
	N	205	202
<b>2. Teacher support</b>	Pearson correlation		1
	N		209

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 6.21.2: Pearson bivariate correlation for KS5 attainment points and teacher support for low parental support students**

		1.	2.
<b>1. KS5 attainment points</b>	Pearson correlation	1	.183**
	N	243	235
<b>2. Teacher support</b>	Pearson correlation		1
	N		283

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis, at least partially, bears out the hypothesis: For the older cohort, the strength of the correlation between attainment and teacher support did increase when only students who reported low parental support were included in the analysis (from  $r = .113$ ,  $p < .01$  to  $r = .183$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that for these students, the support they receive from teachers can have a positive impact on their academic attainment.

For the younger students, however, there is no evidence to suggest this is the case. In fact, the modest correlation between reported levels of teachers support and attainment scores is reduced when only students with low parental support are examined and, for these young people, there does not appear to be any significant relationship between reported levels of teacher support and attainment.

A comparable analysis was undertaken for students whose peer support scores were lower than one standard deviation below the mean. However, for both the older and younger cohorts, amongst students who reported low peer support no significant relationship between levels of teacher support and attainment was found.

The initial premise supposed that teacher support would be more important for young people who lack support in other areas, with regards to their educational attainment, is therefore only partially supported. It appears instead that levels of support from different

sources are highly interconnected and have a more complex relationship with helping young people to achieve positive educational outcomes. Positive perceptions of teacher support, parental support and peer support all appear to play an important role and can be seen as mutually reinforcing. Whilst this can lead to a positive feedback loop, whereby young people's network of support can extend across the home, school and other areas of their life, it is important also to realise that the reverse might also be true: students experiencing a lack of support in one area may well also perceive a lack of support elsewhere, which, taken together, can detrimentally impact upon educational outcomes. Teacher support, however, can provide a catalyst for increasing levels of support from other sources and, in this way, is an important means by which students can mobilise their social support resources to achieve positive (and resilient) outcomes.

## **6.8 Conclusions**

The statistical analyses undertaken in this chapter support the hypothesis that educational attainment and levels of students' perceived support are correlated. In particular, I have shown that having access to support structures from parents, teachers and peers increases the likelihood of achieving positive educational outcomes. Interestingly, it appears that as students proceed beyond the end of compulsory education they rely more on their peers and teachers for support and the impact of parental involvement is reduced.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights the correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and educational attainment. The findings suggest that this link is stronger for younger students and for boys (although the effect of disadvantage appears to outweigh any gender or cohort effect).

Following a clear operationalisation of resilient students based on their 'at-risk' status (i.e. eligibility for free school meals) and educational outcomes, there appears to be no significant difference in terms of perceived levels of support between students from a low socio-economic status background who attain positive outcomes and their peers from more affluent families. Importantly, access to social support appears to be a hugely influential factor for all students, not just those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For at-risk young people, as with all students, feeling supported can promote positive outcomes in terms of educational attainment.



In particular, high levels of teacher support does appear to correlate with positive educational outcomes and, for disadvantaged students, can predict resilient outcomes despite the existence of socio-economic risk. The analysis implies that parents are not the most important source of support for young people from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, for many of these students, their access to other forms of social support may be the key advantage that helps them to overcome a lack of resources associated with low parental income. However, the premise that teacher support is more important for students reporting a lack of support from parents and/or peers, is not fully supported by the analysis. The relationship between different sources of support is in reality more complex, and individual perceptions of support from parents, teachers and peers are likely to be highly inter-correlated and, to an extent, mutually reinforcing.

## **7 – Qualitative findings (1): Overcoming the challenges?**

The following two chapters (chapters 7 and 8) present the findings of the qualitative focus groups with teachers conducted at two schools in the case study local authority area – High Hill and Slopewood. Whilst the data collection for this phase took place subsequent to the students' surveys on which the quantitative stage is based, I proceeded to analyse the focus group transcripts after only preliminary statistical analysis of the survey data. The qualitative findings, therefore, are driven more by theoretical considerations and relating to my *a priori* research questions, than by the outcomes of the quantitative data analysis. This allowed me to interrogate some of the key concepts elicited by the teachers participating in the focus groups in more depth, and separately from the quantitative data, which, in turn, informed my exploratory statistical analysis of the survey and matched data in chapter 6.

As I have outlined in chapter 2, resilience is conceptualised in opposition to 'risk', which can be defined variously according to the context in which children or young people find themselves. It makes sense, therefore, first to explore the challenges and risk factors that school staff feel affect their students, including structural, social and individual factors. Chapter 7 begins with a thematic analysis of those issues discussed by participants in the focus groups relating to the challenges facing students. Within their role as teachers, however, the chapter continues with an examination of how the participants feel under pressure to overcome these challenges and, ultimately, focuses on the risk factors affecting the teachers themselves, and the impact of these factors on teaching practices.

Having enumerated and explored the risks that are involved in chapter 7, in chapter 8 I provide a keener examination of resilience processes – that is, the role that teachers feel they can play in promoting resilience amongst their students. As I discuss, teachers tend to interpret the concept of resilience in various ways, leading to different strategies and approaches both across institutions and between individual teachers. The second part of chapter 8, also explores the role of 'resilience' in relation to teachers themselves. As with chapter 7, where focus groups participants spoke about the challenges they are facing, in chapter 8, I explore the ways in which they express the need or desire to be reflective in their practice, with the aim, therefore, of developing their own capacity for resilience.

## 7.1 Chapter overview

This chapter first presents the findings relating to teachers' perceptions of the challenges facing students approaching the end of their compulsory secondary education. As discussed in more detail below, the focus groups in each of the schools were keen to discuss these challenges at length and, participants from both schools spoke about similar 'types' of challenge that students faced. For example, the influence of parents and peers, and more individual self-perceptions of the students, their motivations and characters. However, important differences between the two focus groups did emerge. When asked about specific examples of challenges, participants at High Hill were much more willing to provide incidents and individuals who typified a particular response. Staff members at Slopewood on the other hand, were more reluctant to cite individual cases, preferring instead to provide more generic examples. It was only after more prompting from myself that participants became more willing to illustrate their points with specific cases.

Focus group discussions at both schools followed the same topic guide (appendix 6), and, moving the conversation on to the role of teachers, participants highlighted that they had an important part to play in assisting young people to overcome some of the aforementioned challenges. However, they were also keen to highlight the structural obstacles in their way, both at a systemic/institutional and societal level, and, consequently, a large part of the focus groups at both High Hill and Slopewood were given over to a broader discussion about the many obstacles that they as teachers were facing.

Related to this point, the second section of this chapter discusses in more depth the pressures that teachers feel under with regards to their workloads both in terms of their academic and pastoral roles. In particular, the teachers taking part in the focus groups spoke in great detail about how recent changes to the educational system have ramped up the pressures on the teaching profession, whilst also placing a greater restriction on the resources available to schools.

Whilst the focus groups discussions represent the views of the teachers experiencing and feeling the burden of responsibility, I have in this chapter sought to engage critically with the discourses referred to by participants. In particular, there is clearly scope for strong teacher-student relationships to promote and assist some of the most vulnerable young people in their charge, especially were schools and teachers more inclined to take

pedagogical 'risks' – a theme that I discuss in more depth towards the end of this chapter as well as in chapter 8.

## **7.2 Challenges faced by students**

The focus groups of teachers and staff members at High Hill and Slopewood schools elicited strong opinions expressed by participants in relation to which were the most important challenges facing students at school. These challenges broadly fit into one of two categories: whilst certain issues relate to students' individual agency – their own motivations and self-perceptions as they negotiate their academic and social environment – others can more clearly be seen as a result of structural disadvantages, which can restrict the opportunities and choices available to young people (Reay, 2004).

What is interesting to note, however, is that, whilst teachers recognise a variety of structural inequalities and challenges facing their students, they themselves arguably run the risk of reinforcing the inevitability of the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage. In this way, they can be seen as deflecting the responsibility for the persistence of structural inequalities in education onto parents, other external influences or wider societal factors beyond their control.

As outlined in greater depth in chapter 2, socio-economic risk factors persist across generations, leading to the reproduction of structural inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The role of parental influence, therefore, is key in providing opportunities for young people through the accumulation and activation of various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Whilst inequalities in material resources clearly have an impact on students' access to practical support, what is also important is how parents' own experiences of education are 'passed down' to their children and provide a framework within which young people's own aspirations and expectations exist. The influence of parents is furthermore highlighted as a 'proximal system' within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (1979) and young people's interactions with their families and peer groups play a significant role in providing support and influencing students' decision making. Thus, friendship groups seen as 'a negative influence' were also highlighted in the focus groups as a recurrent challenge, especially for young people most at risk of disengaging from school.

Whilst structural inequalities clearly impact upon students' educational trajectories, young people's own self-perception has been shown to have a strong influence on their academic achievement (Valentine *et al.*, 2004; Morrison *et al.*, 2006; Prince & Nurius, 2014). Negative academic self-concept – i.e. the extent to which young people see themselves as being 'a good student' – can play a reinforcing role which can cause disengagement or underachievement (D'Angelo & Kaye, 2018). However, it is also important to recognise that young people's self-perceptions do not arise in a vacuum and can be seen also as a symptom of wider issues within the lives of students.

### **7.2.1 The influence of parents**

The teachers who took part in the focus groups all recognised a variety of structural inequalities and challenges that are facing their students. They were keen to highlight the influence of parents, peer groups and external pressures that can 'pull' young people away from engaging in school.

Within the High Hill focus group, parents' expectations for their child's education, their own experience with school and, what one teacher, Rita, referred to as "absentee parenting" were all cited as creating challenges for students. Within the context of the focus group environment, the teachers at High Hill readily sought to back each other up and reinforce the negative influence that 'poor parenting practices' can have. Following Rita's mention of "a lack of parental support" in terms of "just very absentee parenting", Jason brought parental educational aspirations into question:

*What are the aspirations at home for the children in terms of the academic side, you know? Perhaps there isn't kind of a positive pressure for students to do well academically. I mean, siblings and parents might not have gone to university or might not be necessarily particularly interested in the academic side. So, I think it's really difficult for students, if they've got ability, if they're not getting encouraged at home to really develop those skills. (Jason, High Hill)*

Claire was also keen to support this point of view and joined in the discussion, citing parents' lack of positive experiences of school as a potential source of a 'learnt' mistrust of authority:

*there can sometimes be learnt behaviour, habitual behaviour from parents of not trusting authority, poor experience of school themselves when they were a child, even sometimes the same school. (Claire, High Hill)*

Responding to a prompt to speak about examples where it has been impossible to engage some students in school, Nichole further emphasised that it is often the influence of the parents that over-rides the individual young person's wishes, even where it appears that the student is keen to do well:

*I can think of kids when I was head of year that just wouldn't engage with the school, and often it was the parent battle and actually the kid wanted to engage but the parents were stronger (Nichole, High Hill)*

In the High Hill focus group, the participants all seemed clear that (negative) parental influence was one of the main challenges facing young people at the school and, where there were issues with particular students, it could usually be associated with a lack of support at home.

In the Slopewood focus group, by contrast, teachers were keen to highlight the positive role that parents can play, in collaboration with the school, to overcome behavioural or academic difficulties. Geoff, a teacher with more than 20 years' experience, emphasised that it was often not the attitude of the parents that was the issue, but rather the logistical difficulties that arose from the diversity and complexity of students' needs. The location of the school in a linguistically diverse London borough provides specific challenges relating to parental engagement on both a practical level (e.g. difficulty reading letters home from the school) and in a more profound sense (e.g. unfamiliarity with the education system):

*There are some very practical concerns where English isn't the first language, so trying to communicate with the parent or carer would be not as easy as we might expect (Geoff, Slopewood)*

Furthermore, in reaction to my follow-up inquiry about a potential lack of support structures at home, Geoff highlighted challenges of maintaining contact with parents, for example, from single-parent families, but remained adamant that these logistical concerns were somewhat separate to any lack of interest on the parents' part:

*I wouldn't say we have sort of disaffected parents, I wouldn't say we have parents who aren't interested, when we make the contact, there's always a positive response, but sometimes there's the practical difficulties, and with some students who maybe only have one parent at home, trying to have a meeting set up, there aren't that many of them, but things like that. (Geoff, Slopewood)*

Clearly the significance of parental influence is emphasised by teachers in both focus groups. However, how this plays out can necessitate countering and challenging negative parental influence, whilst also fostering and developing the potential for positive relationships between home and school.

### **7.2.2 Individual self-perceptions and motivation**

Beyond the logistical challenges involved in engaging parents in their children's schooling, participants in the Slopewood focus group also acknowledged that the individual challenges in terms of how students organised their time and reacted under pressure posed significant difficulties for some young people:

*I think that's probably one of the biggest things with our students is getting organised, you know, being organised in getting themselves in a place that they can just go ahead. (Denise, Slopewood)*

Although both the teachers and non-teaching pastoral support staff at Slopewood believed that students were aware of their progress in each school subject, this did not always translate into efficient use of time or the ability to perform well in class. At the individual level, this can adversely affect students' confidence and can lead to a mental 'block', which is particularly acute in relation to deadlines and around the time of exams. As Denise, a pastoral support officer with 16 years' experience at the school, went on to explain, this translated into a 'mode' that certain students entered when under pressure:

*They just go in like a stress mode, 'I'm not going to be able to do it, I can't do it, I won't be able to cope', it's just like a panic button that goes off, and it's about trying to bring that down... (Denise, Slopewood)*

However, this 'panic mode' is not restricted to those students who are encountering difficult circumstances, or those who are underperforming academically. Particularly with regards to exams, it has been proven that some students are more comfortable than others with this form of assessment (Cassidy, 2014; Neumann *et al.*, 2016), and for those who are less suited to the pressures associated with exams – even amongst academically successful students – this can cause considerable distress, as highlighted in the Slopewood focus group by Sabrina:

*So, you may have a child who's very highly able, there's one who comes to mind in my form, but she cracks up when she's under pressure, she starts crying about exams that she's going to pass, you know, there's no doubt about her passing, if she doesn't pass it's only because of the pressure that she hasn't been able to cope with* **(Sabrina, Slopewood)**

This further highlights how recent curriculum changes (see chapter 3), whereby GCSE courses are now assessed through final end-of-course examinations, rather than by coursework or through modular programmes, will disadvantage those students who are less suited to assessment by exams. Furthermore, we can reasonably anticipate that it will also inevitably ramp up the pressure on all students by vastly increasing the stakes for these terminal examinations.

### **7.2.3 Reinforcing the inevitability of social reproduction**

What emerges strongly from the High Hill focus group, is that the teachers themselves can reinforce the view that the reproduction of structural disadvantage is inevitable. Claire expressed this idea through the very evocative analogy of students who adopt their parents' 'accent':

*It's like having an accent in a way, it's something you learn from your parents or your surroundings, it's very unusual to find a child that has a very different accent to their parents.* **(Claire, High Hill)**

The notion that the influence of parents over-rides all other factors serves to emphasise the intergenerational transmission of these attitudes on children as they negotiate their way through school and can impact more widely upon the ways in which young people interact with their social environments throughout their lives. It provides a very clear illustration of Bourdieusian reproduction and the persistence of structural inequalities from one generation to the next. The metaphor of the 'accent' is a very powerful symbol of social, cultural and class identity reproduction and the use of this trope by teachers should be a cause for concern. It suggests a degree of snobbery that exists within the profession – a further example of the valorisation of middle-class cultural norms, i.e. that there is 'correct' way to speak and an 'incorrect' way. In addition, teachers who espouse this idea that reproduction is inevitable appear to abrogate themselves from all responsibility for the persistence of societal inequalities.



Teachers may highlight that responsibility lies with parents (e.g. the ‘learnt behaviour’ alluded to by Claire above) or due to wider societal issues, over which they cannot have any control. Later in the discussion, Claire again, highlighted external pressures from, for example, friendship groups or more nefarious local ‘gangs’:

*pulls away could be parents, it could be social, friendships, or some of the other less productive groups that we’ve been seeing coming up around [Outerborough] at the minute, which is definitely dragging kids in the wrong way (Claire, High Hill)*

Individual attitudes and self-confidence are also beyond the remit of teachers, and students’ own ability to organise their time, willingness to participate in classes and inclination to take responsibility for their own learning are also significant challenges to overcome. As Claire summarised, students often face a combination of external pressures and internal factors when disengaging from school, which results in teachers having “almost no chance” in being able to help:

*it’s usually a combination where those factors create this kind of really horrible mixture of everything that could be pulling them away, but then, if it is everything, and particularly if that self-confidence, parental and friendship thing come together, then you almost have no chance of helping them. (Claire, High Hill)*

Rita, who readily took up Claire’s point of view as the discussion developed very much as a mutually-reinforcing discourse between them, lamented that there is very little teachers can do to ameliorate the situation:

*so much of it is out of our control, isn’t it, because they’re only with us five hours a day, aren’t they, five and a half if you include registration ... we probably only touch the surface of really in terms of how much we know and how much we can help. (Rita, High Hill)*

Of course, external influences and structural constraints are important challenges to overcome and the position taken up by Claire and Rita represents the view that if there are problems at home how can ‘we’ as teachers solve it? – a view embodied by Bernstein’s (1970) often-cited notion that “education cannot compensate for society”. However, five and a half hours a day, five days a week for at least five years clearly represents a not-insignificant opportunity for teachers at school. As seen in chapter 6, the relationship between students and teachers is hugely important and influences young people’s levels of engagement at school, leading to negative educational outcomes. It is important, therefore,

that they do not view their task as futile and see the opportunity they have to foster and develop long-term understanding and positive relationships for their students – and particularly those experiencing more severe challenges.

#### **7.2.4 Overcoming the challenges**

What the Slopewood focus group highlights, though, is the positive role that parents can play in collaboration with teachers to overcome the challenges faced by students. As Geoff explained, teachers are “the first point of contact”, but “children, parents and teacher, that sort of triad hopefully will come together ... because there may be a particular strategy [one of them] may know more of about that child”. The emphasis here on the importance of the tripartite relationship between student, home and school, recognises that all three elements have an equal responsibility to support the educational development of individual young people.

Whilst Claire and Rita at High Hill were expressing a degree of exasperation and frustration with not being able to help more, they were aware that they were, as teachers, well placed to provide support and encouragement to students who were willing to accept it. This is not to imply that they do not provide support to all of their students as required – as discussed in more detail in chapter 8 – the role of teachers to foster a strong and consistent relationship throughout young people’s time at the school was seen as key. However, by admitting that there was “almost no chance” to help some students, they are expressing that the challenges faced by certain students can become too great for the school adequately to compensate for, leading to negative educational outcomes, despite the best efforts of the school. Clearly teachers have a role to play in supporting students but the challenges that need to be overcome will only be surmountable with the cooperation of the young people themselves, as well as their parents, and through wider social change.

### **7.3 Pressures faced by teachers**

Whilst teachers highlighted a wide range of structural and individual challenges facing the students at their school, the focus group participants at both schools were in agreement in relation to the pressures facing them individually as teachers, and the challenges facing the teaching profession as a whole. Most notably, participants highlighted the spectre of constant changes in government policy as a major factor that interfered with their ability

to perform their role effectively. The current changes to the secondary curriculum (outlined in chapter 3) mean that teachers have needed to devote more time and resources to the way in which GCSE courses are taught, planning lessons towards new course structures and becoming acquainted with a new set of teaching materials. This has led to a further squeeze on the level of resources – particularly time resources – available for teachers to focus on current students' academic and pastoral needs. As one participant summed up, these policy changes mean:

*it's an ever-changing picture but I don't see at the moment it's a very positive one because there's just not enough time. (Nichole, High Hill)*

As found in other research on teachers' attitudes to current policy reforms (e.g. Neumann *et al.*, 2016), the focus groups' responses to the government's policy changes were predominantly negative, with the overall effects of the reforms seeming to highlight and exacerbate the pressures already present within the system. The impact of this 'on-the-ground' is clear to see, particularly with vulnerable students, for whom the support relationship with teachers at school can take time to develop, but for whom this can be of huge importance as a protective factor keeping them engaged in education. Moreover, these students in particular are more likely to have complex needs that often require more devoted resources at a time when these have instead become much scarcer.

Within the context of both focus groups with school staff, it was apparent that the teachers were acutely aware of constantly being judged and measured – primarily by the government, through Ofsted and the introduction of new 'benchmarking' measures (see chapter 3), but also by parents and local authorities. As a result, teachers, in particular, may be fearful of being seen as 'failing' in their job and the additional scrutiny that that brings; from their leadership team within the school and, more widely, through the impact this can have on school funding. In addition, pressure promotes a school culture that is highly risk-averse. In an environment where teachers are too afraid to take risks, pedagogical practices can lose effectiveness; they can stagnate and be slow to adapt to individual students' needs or to tackle new challenges and complex or subtle shifts in societal norms as they arise (Le Fevre, 2014).

### 7.3.1 An accumulation of 'huge' pressure

The vocabulary used by participants in the focus groups sought to emphasise the level of pressure being felt by the profession at present. This constituted a collective 'narrative', with all participants keen to highlight and corroborate the lack of time or resources, the constant changes in policy and the increased scrutiny received from Ofsted with which teachers were having to deal.

At High Hill, Claire and Ryan were clear that increasing demands on teachers' time had important, detrimental knock-on effects for students. As Claire described:

*the time element comes into it as well, I feel that five or six years ago I might have had ... we might have had more successes with it because we had more time* **(Claire, High Hill)**

Here, Claire expresses the result of a lack of time in terms of success and failure – “we might have had more successes” – which further serves to underline the anxiety that teachers feel in relation to being judged on binary outcome measures. She goes on to explain how teaching practices have changed as time resources are squeezed and this is having the effect that there is not enough time to build and develop positive relationships with students:

*So, that element of time, where we would have been able to say 'Listen, I've got a free on Tuesday, come, spend the hour with me, do it', and now I just feel that we're being pulled in so many directions, for everything that's changed, that actually we're probably less likely to want to give up all of that time to build those relationships.* **(Claire, High Hill)**

And, later on:

*I think that there were students that you had to be there, by simply not being there was enough, if they come to find you and you're not there it's as bad as them coming to find you and you turning them away.* **(Claire, High Hill)**

As Claire explained, a lack of face-to-face interaction with students is seen as “as bad as” a rejection which can have a negative effect on students who are already vulnerable. Ryan supports this view, highlighting the fact that at High Hill there are a number of pupils experiencing a range of difficult circumstances:

*Plus, the fact we've got many students with really complex needs, increasingly complex because of external factors, come into the school that require more time, and often that time just isn't there because of all of the pressures (Ryan, High Hill)*

Beyond the time constraints highlighted by focus group participants, Ryan went on to describe a raft of external pressures that teachers are having to deal with in light of changes to government policy and the increasing scrutiny being placed on the profession from above:

*There's a lot of pressures on teachers generally at the moment, but, you know, in terms of like the bigger picture I guess, at the government level, yeah, there are huge sort of curriculum changes that have been happening recently, you know, putting a huge amount of pressure on teachers, they're having to re-plan, you know, from Key Stage 3 right through to Key Stage 5, so there's huge planning pressures there (Ryan, High Hill)*

Along with these planning pressures, the Ofsted inspection regime has also been bolstered and given greater powers to enforce what they deem to be 'acceptable levels' of assessment and marking through increased monitoring and sanctions for non-compliant schools (Allen, 2015). Ryan, who first started teaching in 2002, was keen to highlight that this had changed substantially since then, and has contributed to a vast increase in teachers' workload, which shows no sign of slowing down:

*in terms of sort of inspection and Ofsted and kind of what is deemed to be the right sort of level of assessment and marking, that actually teachers, from when I first started teaching, they're putting huge amounts of effort into regularly assess and regularly marking, but that workload of doing that is, you know, huge. (Ryan, High Hill)*

Teachers in both focus groups emphasised the extreme levels of pressure they felt they were under. This is clear in the vocabulary used by participants and typified by the Ryan's repeated use of the descriptor, 'huge'. This is peppered throughout his contributions, describing "huge curriculum changes", putting a "huge amount of pressure" on teachers, resulting in "huge planning pressure". He further emphasises the "huge amounts of effort" that teachers are putting into their role, whilst acknowledging that the workload this creates "is, you know, huge". This pressure felt by the teachers shows how high they feel

the stakes are in relation to success and failure within their profession, and how overwhelming many of them find this.

### **7.3.2 Can teachers 'reasonably' be expected to 'pick up and fill in'?**

In response to this pressure, it is perhaps not surprising that teachers, when asked about what role they can play in helping students through school, are somewhat defensive. As discussed above, they highlight that responsibility lies with parents (e.g. 'learnt behaviour') or students' own ability and inclination to organised themselves; they cite the inevitable reproduction of class identity and socio-cultural disadvantages (e.g. the metaphor of the 'accent'); and they further construct policy makers as impeding their ability to perform their role effectively.

At Slopewood, the constant pressure from above was exemplified in terms of the greater emphasis being placed on all students hitting their expected progress targets. Sabrina, relatively new to the teaching profession, felt that the effect of the introduction of new benchmark measures was to shift pressure onto teachers, who are expected to account for any perceived discrepancies amongst their pupils despite the fact that students develop at differing speeds throughout their school careers:

*there's a pressure on teachers which can be really challenging sometimes to make sure that you have done everything in your power to make sure that the kids are making the progress that we expect ... It might be an unreasonable pressure because, you know, humans don't necessarily steadily make the same amount of progress all throughout their school careers. (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

Furthermore, these progress measures are used as indicators to assess and scrutinise individual schools and in relation to the amount of funding they receive, which can have significant and potentially detrimental knock-on effects. At Slopewood, experienced teacher, Geoff, and relative newcomer, Sabrina, both described the 'unreasonable pressure' this placed on them in relation to hitting these targets and the consequences that failing to achieve the expected levels of attainment might have:

*that is the pressure that's put on teachers, that is the expectation, have they made their two or three levels of progress that we expect to see. No. Why not? You need to have an answer and you need to have an explanation of what you've done. (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

*it's difficult because there is a pressure on every educational establishment to have X number of pupils getting through at these levels, you know, it's the funding, it's all these other bits and pieces (Geoff, Slopewood)*

The 'unreasonableness' of the pressure exerted on schools was further alluded to in the High Hill focus group, where Nichole highlighted the fact that schools are expected to "pick up and fill in" where wider social policy decisions, including welfare and public service budget cuts, have led to increasing pressure on peripheral support services for vulnerable young people. Schools are expected to absorb the impact of these decisions – 'picking up' the slack created in terms of addressing the complex needs shown by some students and 'filling in' for specialised external agencies – whilst continuing to hit the expected progress targets and attainment levels:

*a lack of resources outside through government policy, you know, you can take mental health and all those sorts of issues and a lot more of that coming into school that would have been dealt with outside at a much earlier level, but we're expected as a school to pick it up and fill it in (Nichole, High Hill)*

### **7.3.3 Responsibility and reforms**

The shifting of responsibility onto policy makers, as a major source of the pressure felt by teachers, further calls into question the government's neoliberal policy agenda, characterised by increasing competition for resources (Apple, 2001). Teachers in both focus groups highlighted that, inevitably, it is teachers and professionals on the ground bearing the brunt of these decisions affecting the ability of schools to provide an effective education for all students.

Changes in government policy appear a source of hindrance for teachers and the current reforms moving towards a complete overhaul of the curriculum, particularly at GCSE level, has meant that teachers feel under greater pressure in terms of their time and resources. This has meant, for a lot of teachers, that there is less time available to deal with individual students' academic and pastoral needs. This is a particular concern in relation to vulnerable students, for whom the support relationship with teachers can take time to develop, but which, once established, can be of huge importance as a protective factor keeping them engaged in education.

Moreover, the current government's reforms have increased scrutiny of the teaching profession and served to undermine teachers' job performance. Increased workloads, more frequent and tougher inspections and new benchmark targets for which they are accountable has increased the pressures felt by individual teachers, whilst the resources available to them have diminished. The resulting competition for resources is a further example of the government's neoliberal agenda, which, in combination with wider welfare and public service cuts, means that teachers and professionals on the ground have to pick up the shortfall in order to provide all students with an effective education.

Within the context of a culture of constant inspection and high-stakes testing, for which teachers are held accountable, it is not surprising that teachers seek to deflect responsibility for ostensible academic 'failures' to policy makers, parents or individuals. What is important in this case is that teachers recognise that they are still able to work towards helping their students to 'succeed', adapting their practices to the needs of individual young people. Feeling under constant pressure and beholden to unreasonable demands appears to be only detrimental to providing such important support.

#### **7.3.4 Risk-averse school culture**

Indeed, as mentioned above, teachers who feel constantly under pressure to perform their jobs effectively, can produce a culture within schools that is averse to taking risks. Teachers can feel reluctant to extend their teaching practices far beyond accepted norms, seeing the stakes as too high to risk any large-scale changes in strategy or pedagogical practices – at least within the context of the mainstream curriculum. As Le Fevre (2014) has suggested, key to implementing effective educational change are school environments that decrease teachers' perceptions of risk and support teachers' willingness to take risks.

Interestingly, the dynamics of the focus groups with teachers revealed institutional cultures that could be described as risk-averse in both cases. Whilst both focus groups had a therapeutic aspect, with participants expressing the exasperation they felt at the constant changes being imposed from above and the guilt that they felt in not being able to provide enough help to students who required it, their responses remained generic and somewhat guarded. As an external researcher, I felt myself very much to be an 'outsider', to be regarded with a degree of caution. The teachers were keen to present themselves to me as a united group, working together towards the success of the school and the students. Participants refused to be disloyal to their colleagues, supporting each other's assertions



with further examples of their own, or only very tactfully presenting an alternative view point. At the High Hill focus group, teachers readily offered specific examples of students and situations that illustrated their points, although they were careful to protect the anonymity of the individuals involved:

**Rita:** *I was thinking about that Year 11 student you had sobbing in the corridor this morning, who was a complete tearaway in Year 9 and nobody could do anything with her, and she's completely turned it around and she really genuinely cares now about how she's doing at school, and it's like –*

**Claire:** *A little bit too late.*

**Rita:** *Yeah, unfortunately it's just that little bit too late, but it's interesting that she's still with us.*

At the Slopewood focus group, by contrast, staff members were, at least initially, reluctant to provide any specific examples at all, choosing instead to respond in a generic manner, outlining school policies in a formal and matter-of-fact way:

*we make the young people aware of the need to get good grades, particularly in their core subjects, by showing them examples of jobs and job availability and how every single time it says 'C and above in at least five or more GCSEs', and they are all made fully aware of the fact that it is critical and crucial that they use any available time, you know (Alice, Slopewood)*

This reluctance to speak openly about their students demonstrates that teachers are perhaps fearful of being judged by researchers, as much as by parents or school inspectors. Understandably, they are keen to present themselves in the best light possible, implementing policies and achieving successful outcomes for their students despite the increasing constraints on their time and mounting pressure on their workloads. This is indicative of what Barth (2007) has called a 'culture of caution' within schools.

This caution was evident in how teachers sought to present their collective narrative to me, as an external 'other'. However, what is perhaps more concerning is that this cautious institutional culture was also apparent when participants were talking about their own teaching practice. At High Hill, for example, Nichole related how they had undertaken "a little pilot project with a small group [...] about getting everyone to learn how to yo-yo". This was introduced with the intention of using the students' experience of trying to acquire a skill with varying degrees of success as an illustration to call back to when they

encountered difficulties in their academic work. Whilst this does demonstrate a willingness to innovate practice and pedagogies, it is clear that the risk to teachers is minimised by applying it to only a small group of students, and focusing the exercise on a non-compulsory, extra-curricular area of activity.

Similarly, at Slopewood, innovative interventions to support students were framed as being additional to pre-existing teaching practices reserved for “delivering a programme of education”. Alice felt that implementing these strategies, whilst having a beneficial impact on students, was “taking time away from teaching”, which was, in her opinion, quite separate and paramount.

*Yes, there is always huge ways, always ways of improving the situation, but we have to balance them up with having to deliver an education, a programme of education for them to be successful. You know, it's great taking them out, it's great exposing them to all these things, but you're then taking time away from teaching (Alice, Slopewood)*

The focus groups exemplified how both schools, whilst keen to innovate practices to support and encourage students, were nevertheless reluctant to implement overtly novel policies or interventions within the mainstream curriculum, thus maintaining a risk-averse culture of caution. The risk averse nature of school cultures is evident in how teachers present themselves in the face of potential external ‘threats’ to their professional ability as well as in the extent to which they are willing to change their pedagogies. Logically, if risk-taking – even failing and surviving nonetheless – is not modelled by teachers as a deliberately positive pedagogy, it is less likely that any student will consider it as a strategy supporting their own educational resilience. Fundamentally, risk and risk-taking are critical components of innovation and change (Jaeger *et al.*, 2001) and the extent to which teachers feel able to introduce new strategies and pedagogies without fear of reprisals, will be reflected in schools’ ability to keep up with and adapt to specific circumstances as they arise.

## **7.4 Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have shown that teachers working in different institutions (yet within similar local contexts) recognise a variety of challenges currently facing students. In

particular, they highlight a number of structural inequalities that negatively impact upon young people's educational experiences. Most notably, the focus group participants underlined the great effect that parental influence – both negative parental influence and the potential for positive relationships – has on students' levels of engagement at school.

Whilst focusing on risk factors and influences situated beyond their immediate sphere of control, teachers also espouse a collective narrative of emphasising the level of pressure being felt by the profession at present, especially through the lack of time or resources, the constant changes in policy and the increased scrutiny. This increasing pressure can be seen in how high participants feel the stakes are in relation to success and failure within their profession, and how overwhelming many of them find this, which, in turn, produces risk-averse school cultures.

Within the context of a culture of constant inspection and high-stakes testing, for which teachers are held accountable, it is not surprising that teachers seek to deflect responsibility for ostensible academic 'failures' on to policy makers, parents or individuals. This can be seen as a kind of defence mechanism – especially when faced with an 'outside researcher'. What is needed, however, is for more collaboration between teachers, parents and students, towards developing the whole child. This can and should also include a range of community organisations, faith groups or other extra-curricular agencies, which can support parents and teachers, providing schools with a more collaborative and trusting regime within which teachers feel able to take pedagogical risks without fear of reprisals and through which the heavy burden of responsibility is more evenly shared across all stakeholders.

## **8 – Qualitative findings (2): Resilient students; resilient teachers**

### **8.1 Chapter overview**

Following on from Chapter 7, this chapter presents findings from the focus groups with school staff in relation to the concept of resilience and the issues surrounding it. Furthermore, it provides an examination of how different schools, whilst operating within the same national policy framework and within similar local contexts, nevertheless vary in how strategies for promoting resilience are implemented according to how school leadership teams interpret the broadly-defined government objectives.

For example, in the High Hill group, Claire very quickly brought up and spoke about the idea of resilience without any prior prompting. Describing the challenges facing certain students, she acknowledged that some “don’t have a role model of someone resilient at home” and that without having someone “that doesn’t give up then the default action is to give up”. This led on more widely to a discussion within the group about how teachers can provide this role model where it is lacking at home. The concept of resilience was prominent in this and later discussion, when I specifically asked about the strategies being employed at High Hill. Interestingly, the participants were keen to speak as much about students’ levels of resilience as their own capacity to be resilient as teachers.

By contrast, in Slopewood, focus group participants spoke with much less authority about the concept of resilience, although they were, of course, aware of the government’s agenda and the requirement to develop this amongst their students. As the focus group moderator, I raised the issue of resilience following on from a discussion about the challenges facing certain students in the school. The challenges mentioned by the participants focused primarily on logistical and practical issues and it was not until this point in the focus group that issues of personal development, behaviours and attitudes were spoken about in more depth. Whilst the participants at Slopewood were able to highlight several measures being used to promote resilience (see below), it proved less straightforward for them to link these with an over-arching school strategy. Again, as focus group moderator, I was left to join the dots and summarise the measures used in the school that could be described as having a strong focus on developing students’ resilience.

Regardless of who initiated the discussion on resilience, both focus groups were able to speak at length about the concept and its relevance and application in the school. Whilst differences in school-level strategies and how these were implemented were apparent, there were also commonalities between the two focus groups. Most notably, participants highlighted the importance of the on-going relationship between teachers and students, emphasising the long-term process that leads to resilience outcomes. As I discuss below, however, the differences in how the concept of resilience is interpreted can have a profound effect on the strategies used by the teachers, and in particular on the focus of the approach to developing resilience taken across the school.

## **8.2 Resilience as a process**

As part of the government's strategic focus on character education, most of the teachers and pastoral support officers taking part in both focus groups were aware of the concept of resilience and spoke with confidence about what the term means and how they are seeking to address behaviours and attitudes amongst their students to enable them to 'be resilient'. However, how the term was conceptualised differed between participants and even according to the same participant, depending on the context in which it was being discussed. Indeed, the discussions on resilience in both focus groups proceeded more as an organic dialogue, which speaks to the flexibility of the concept, especially when applied in an educational setting. In particular, notions of resilience as a skill that could be taught by teachers and learnt by students or the result of a more long-term process of development were employed almost interchangeably by participants.

### **8.2.1 The 'resilient student'**

Key concepts related to the idea of the 'resilient student' described by focus group participants included 'never giving up' (*Ryan, High Hill*), "the idea that you don't give up at the first hurdle" (*Geoff, Slopewood*) and "taking the knock backs, being able to get yourself back on your feet again" (*Rita, High Hill*). These last examples provide an illustration of the recurrent metaphor of facing barriers or being knocked down, an evocative picture of some students' (educational) trajectory as unavoidably challenging, or even violent.

A further aspect of resilience raised in the focus groups was the idea of being "comfortable making mistakes and recognising that everybody makes mistakes, it's not the end of the

world" (*Sabrina, Slopewood*). Again, the use of a violent, apocalyptic metaphor here further serves to emphasise the point that resilience can involve putting one's mistakes into some kind of perspective and to use them as part of a wider learning process. In specific relation to academic success, it was seen as a way to advise students that "lots of people fail the first time around and manage to get on with it and to remind them that there are other opportunities" (*Sabrina, Slopewood*). This idea of 'reframing failure' (discussed at greater length below) was felt by teachers also to be important in a broader developmental perspective beyond the success/failure dichotomy which can sometime prevail in a school setting.

Overall, there was a general consensus that, as Claire (High Hill) put it, "if all of our students were more resilient they'd definitely do better in our lessons". However, in the same breath, she acknowledged that this was a "very hard skill to teach". One might question whether the training teachers themselves experience enables them to fully understand or teach resilience. In particular, the notion of resilience was linked to young people's psycho-social development, their self-confidence, determination and self-esteem. Later in the discussion, Rita talked about the importance of developing the capacity to become resilience in relation to her own son:

*It seems like rarely people say horrible things to him, and that worries me, and I shouldn't be wanting my son to have nasty things said to him but I do think 'Where is this resilience going to come from?', because he's going to have to learn it at some point, but obviously I'm conscious of that (Rita, High Hill)*

She was concerned that a total absence of 'nasty things' could in fact be detrimental to her son's psycho-social development. Dealing with such adversities was, in her opinion, something inevitable that he would have to learn 'at some point'. Furthermore, Rita went on to link the self-confidence that young people could gain from dealing with these setbacks as something that could be instilled by parents, conscious that this can form part of a wider process of self-development. However, for some of the most vulnerable students, who were unlikely to have self-confidence 'instilled in them' by their parents, a supportive teacher-student relationship becomes even more important:

*... and I'm thinking about some of the students I've been thinking about this morning, I don't think they would have had any of that self-confidence instilled in them from their parents at all, and so I think it is really important if we can try and do it with them. (Rita, High Hill)*

The difficulty in 'teaching resilience', however, was repeatedly emphasised by the teachers. Whilst the above example illustrates the concern over an absence of 'nasty things' in relation to young people's development, the opposite is of course also particularly true. Students who have already had to endure a range of difficult circumstances throughout their lives present a specific challenge to educational professionals, who have to address issues relating to self-confidence and psychological well-being as a prerequisite for these at-risk students' academic success.

*as [Rita] says, that's a really hard thing to teach, especially to a 14-year-old who has had fourteen years of not being resilient and not having nice things said to them and having their confidence broken, so it's a big thing to undo if it's gone wrong already. (Claire, High Hill)*

The scale of the challenge facing teachers in respect to certain individuals was clearly a concern for participants, who see the benefit in developing students' capacity to become resilient, without necessarily being able to impart the tangible skills or abilities in any clear, systematic way.

### **8.2.2 Long-term path to resilience**

In opposition to the violent 'knocked down' metaphor used by participants to describe young people's trajectories, the way in which resilience could be used as concept for developing students' academic and social capacities was described in terms of 'building them up'. Examples from both of the focus groups include:

*It's all about learning, it's all about how you are going to respond next [...] if students are doing that regularly then they are building those skills, where they accept if things haven't gone right and then there's a process or an action to improve. (Ryan, High Hill)*

*in terms of when they're dealing with the academic side, in terms of if things aren't going their way, so you're building them up to, basically build on what they have achieved and looking to the future in terms of career (Jason, High Hill)*

*if she doesn't pass it's only because of the pressure that she hasn't been able to cope with, and so those students, you do have to support them by building up their resilience and that's the challenge that you have (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

This building process, it was generally acknowledged, was something that could only be achieved through a long-term interaction between teacher and student. The establishment of strong and consistent teacher-student relationships facilitates this process which can provide an important support for the most vulnerable students. The incremental effect of this approach was summarised by Geoff at Slopewood School, who explained:

*resilience is sometimes not so much to persevere really hard but just to keep going, drip feed, keep batting, keep trying, keep having a go, rather than do great huge leaps or aim too high, and when it doesn't work it's trying to keep at it* **(Geoff, Slopewood)**

Whilst the metaphor that Geoff uses speaks to a somewhat outdated, patrician view of the stoic public schoolboy who continues to “keep batting” (itself a reference to the playing fields of such institutions) in the face of overwhelming odds, it nevertheless seeks to emphasise the importance of consistent and unfailing support as a means of underwriting students’ academic success. The protective effects of the support provided by teachers can be seen as having a cumulative impact. The development of resilience comes not from the acquisition of explicitly-defined skills taught from teacher to student, but rather as the result of a longer-term relationship encompassing mutual trust and involving small, incremental changes to students’ attitudes and behaviour. An increased capacity for demonstrating resilience behaviours is part of a wider process (Egeland *et al.*, 1993; Olsson, *et al.*, 2003), within which teachers are uniquely placed to nurture and develop through strong, consistent relationships.

Focus group participants provided a number of specific examples of how a long-term approach to developing resilience behaviours had been promoted. Different ‘types’ of resilience were alluded to: in addition to being able to ‘bounce back’ from academic setbacks and ‘cope’ with exam pressures, Rita, at High Hill, highlighted the importance of learning to adapt to different situations beyond a purely academic focus. Talking about different strategies which can be used to promote different types of resilience, she related the experience of a student who was not getting on with two of her subject teachers:

*It's another type of resilience though, isn't it? In your life [...] you are going to have to work with people who you don't necessarily get on with, you know, there are 18 members of staff, do you think I get on with all of them? No, I don't. So that's a type of resilience as well, it's learning ... 'how are you going to get on with them now, what are you going to do to change?'* **(Rita, High Hill)**



Taking up the discussion, Claire, who was clearly also well-acquainted with the circumstances surrounding this particular student, used the case to highlight the relative merits of short-term and long-term developmental gains, in relation to promoting student resilience. She explained that an 'outside worker' had asked that teachers try not to use any negative words with certain students:

*[She said] 'can we talk to all the teachers about never using any negative words with these students?' And I do agree with her to some extent at the minute, that will help that student to get through to the end of the year, but [...] actually are we doing her a slight disservice...? (Claire, High Hill)*

However, as Claire went on to explain, in relation to this student mentioned above that she did not agree to move any teachers around or change her classes; and that,

*'it will help her in the short term, but I don't know if in the long term that will help her [...] It is a balance, because I want to help her get to the point where she feels positive about school because then we can probably work more broadly' (Claire, High Hill)*

This long-term view again highlights the role that teachers are playing in students' lives beyond their academic pursuits. Indeed, addressing the psychological and social effects of a range of circumstances experienced by young people is part of the process 'building them up' and is as crucial for academic success as learning book smarts. How this is achieved by individual teachers is, however, a significant challenge and involves a balance between short-term gains and longer term developmental outcomes. There appears to be no easily-teachable raft of skills or competencies that can be passed through standard classroom pedagogies. The raft of strategies employed by staff members more often encompass a general ethos or overall approach to developing students' capacity for resilience.

### **8.2.3 'Learning to fail'**

The strategies that were discussed by teachers in the High Hill focus group in relation to promoting resilience sought to provide students with experiences through which they could learn how to cope effectively with setbacks. They acknowledged that failure is a universal constant, something that everyone will be faced with at some time. However, this also presented an opportunity for young people to learn about themselves, to learn how to make mistakes and to make improvements on their previous efforts.

This idea of learning to fail was spoken about in positive terms as a recommended strategy to promote resilience (despite the acknowledgement that ‘resilience’ *per se* was very hard to teach – see above). Participants in the High Hill focus group agreed that all young people were vulnerable to failing in some aspect of their lives. As Claire explained, even “the most confident, most well-adjusted-looking person still have their weakness, and if you ask them [for example] to go abseiling, they wouldn’t do it”. In order to illustrate her point, she went on to provide an example of a high-performing independent school’s attempt to instil the capacity for resilience in their students:

*I think there was a school that published a few years ago, it was a GDST [Girls’ Day School Trust – network of independent girls’ schools], so a very high achieving girls’ school, and they instigated a ‘failure week’ because none of the girls had ever learned how to fail [...] the girls were very good, they achieved highly all the time, and they decided that they had to have a week when you just fail at stuff and you learn how to fail. (Claire, High Hill)*

Linking this example with High Hill school’s own practice, Nichole explained how they had implemented a small pilot project for a group of students, which was used as a way of getting them to learn from an activity in which they had struggled. She described how the school had encouraged students to learn to yo-yo, as a means of illustrating how difficult it can be to succeed in acquiring a new skill:

*we did a little pilot project [...] about getting everyone to learn how to yo-yo [...] of course, not everybody can yo-yo [...] so they were trying to then say ‘Actually, it doesn’t matter if you’re not great’[...]and that group [...] actually really enjoyed kind of learning together. So [...] we could take this and say ‘You didn’t do very well in your geography assessment, what could you have learned?’, or you try again, ‘How did you feel when you accomplished it?’, and trying to kind of look at ‘This is what resilience means, this is what you do’, because actually giving them little activities and things to say ‘How do you feel?’, try and capture those, almost like fun moments, things that stand out, not just the normal things, but actually ‘Do you remember when we did the yo-yoing?’, and then you come back to that. (Nichole, High Hill)*

Although, this ‘permission to fail’ was firmly placed outside of the mainstream curriculum, this activity served as a metaphor, which could be referred to within the context of students’ academic work – “Do you remember when we did the yo-yoing?”, and then you come back to that”. This strategy of calling back to an activity or experience that a student

had found particularly challenging was also illustrated by Rita, in relation to team building activities that the school provides in Year 9:

*they're all off timetable and off doing team building activities and things which you will fail at some point but you have to get through it, and I think that's really good, because often, when I've accompanied those trips, you teach that student, you can say 'Do you remember when you did that and it all went wrong, we did it, didn't we?'. I think that teaches them it, doesn't it, in a very powerful way, in a way that you really can teach in a classroom. (Rita, High Hill)*

This appears to be an effective method in which resilience can be promoted within a school environment. Allowing students to experience activities that might stretch their abilities or go outside of their 'comfort zone' provides an opportunity to explain to them in a tangible way how to deal with setbacks by both working through the challenges at the time and further, by providing a positive example to be referred back to when future (academic) challenges arise.

Bringing the conversation back to her earlier example of the 'failure week' instituted in the high-performing girls' school, Claire considered that this constituted a beneficial experience for the students, exposing them to a range of activities that the academically-successful students were not used to doing:

*I think they [failure week at the GDST school] had lots of activities. I suppose it's the kind of stuff that we were talking about, like the yo-yo stuff, and stuff that we are doing all the time, but if you are a straight A\* student who has a tutor at home, failing at maths is not something ... getting in the pit is not something that you do. (Claire, High Hill)*

Here, again, Claire uses a violent metaphor – “getting in the pit” – to describe how students attempt to ‘wrestle’ with one subject or another. This is an intentional call-back to how Jason, a maths teacher, had earlier suggested the process of learning to solve maths problems must begin with “a struggle”. In this example, Claire is turning this on its head, explaining that, for these high-performing students, there has not needed to be any struggle for them to achieve academically. Instead, it was also acknowledged that exposure to challenges and mistakes can provide an important and beneficial experience for all young people. Regular contact with these relatively small challenges can accustom students to

minor setbacks and afford them valuable 'practice' in the best way to react to these situations.

A further strategy employed at High Hill, mentioned by both Ryan and Claire, concerns 'green pen marking', where students: "correct [their] own work and you improve on it in a different coloured pen" (Claire, High Hill). This was seen as a good opportunity for students to become comfortable in making mistakes. As Claire went on to explain:

*if you're doing that five times a day or four times a day, you have to learn to cope with your own mistakes and you have to learn to face up to them and you have to learn to improve on them (Claire, High Hill)*

The idea of becoming comfortable in making mistakes was a key factor alluded to in relation to the notion of a 'resilient student' (see above), and strategies for promoting resilience focuses on developing the ability of students to react in a positive way when facing adverse situations. Ryan was very much in agreement: he saw the green-pen marking as part of an overall school focus on "assessment for learning", which he elaborated in terms of students using their assessment to "build those skills, where they accept if things haven't gone right and then there's a process or an action to improve" (Ryan, High Hill).

Similarly, in the Slopewood focus group, participants highlighted that it was important for students to learn to deal with setbacks, seeing challenging or negative experiences as an opportunity to learn. The discussion in the focus group here centred on the example of students undertaking work experience, where they can, not only gain a range of valuable insights into a specific job, but which also provides a useful example of self-discovery – with the realisation that they are keen to pursue or avoid certain aspects of a particular career. Alice spoke about how such experiences can help to build students' resilience (again using the metaphor of 'building'):

*I mean, we send them out on work experience as a way of building resilience, going back a bit, and even if they do badly, let's say they come back and they say they hated it, we turn that around as a positive by saying 'Well now you know what you don't want, and what you now need to be aiming for in order to do what you want to do or to get the excitement from work' and things like this. (Alice, Slopewood)*

Beyond such experiences in a relatively controlled environment, the educational benefit of constant setbacks was viewed with more scepticism. Sabrina argued that:

*you don't want to make them think that if they don't do it in a certain way that their life is over, and it's hard because you have to build up the significance of education. But, you know, it doesn't always go right the first-time round. (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

Thus, whilst exposure to challenges can promote resilient behaviour for some students, there is also the danger that the significance of certain decisions can raise the stakes to such an extent that students feel they cannot fail. In addition, therefore, to learning from negative experiences, it is beneficial for students to understand 'failure' through different perspectives and within different contexts. For participants in the Slopewood focus group, this 'reframing of failure' was also an important strategy that could promote resilience amongst young people.

#### **8.2.4 'Reframing failure'**

The scepticism expressed by Sabrina in terms of how much benefit students can reap from experiencing consistent knock-backs or failures – even within a low-risk, controlled environment – led her to highlight an alternative strategy to help students cope with failure. With regards specifically to educational failure, Sabrina was keen to advocate that students are not stigmatised and that academic attainment was only one barometer of success:

*It's important I think to emphasise, I think for resilience sake it's important to emphasise that, yes, education is important and it's going to unlock all sorts of things and it's going to help you to be better prepared for the world, but there are different ways of attaining. (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

Thinking aloud about this approach of reframing failure, she saw the difficulty in balancing the importance of education to students' future success with not wanting to stigmatise perceived failure to the extent that young people are too afraid to fail, too disillusioned to try again or seek a different path. What was important to impress on the young people, was that "it doesn't always go right the first-time round", and that's okay. As Sabrina continued, this approach can form part of a wider strategy to:

*encourage children to be comfortable making mistakes and recognising that actually, you know, everybody makes mistakes, it's not the end of the world [...] it's important for the teachers and the support staff that help them to remind them that they've just got to do their best, to remind them that lots of people fail the first time around and manage to get on with it and to remind them that there are other opportunities. (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

Recognising and promoting opportunities for students who have experienced setbacks in their studies is clearly important and making this a joint decision between the school and the young people themselves is equally important in terms of avoiding stigma and recognising the value of technical or vocational educational pathways. Geoff provided examples where students have left Slopewood to pursue an apprenticeship, rather than continue their studies at school:

*There will come a point where they might leave us because they and us, we've worked out that maybe an apprenticeship will be better for them, but it's just as much a valid way ahead for their circumstances (Geoff, Slopewood)*

Geoff emphasises that the process is a collaborative one between student and teacher – “we’ve worked out” – and this is part of the wider approach of reframing the perceived ‘failure’ as one of new opportunity. Furthermore, as Sabrina highlights: “you don’t want to make them think that if they don’t do it in a certain way that their life is over”. Referring to the potential for these alternative pathways to become subject to stigma, Sabrina also reflects that students whose grades might constrain their options for the future are particularly at risk from a variety of dangers:

*It's important that those other options are not seen as failure in themselves, because, you know, if children reject, if they don't manage to get through school for one reason or another with those grades and they reject the alternatives as a failure, then that leaves them, you know, in a very vulnerable position (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

The “vulnerable position” that Sabrina talks about relates to the potential for some students to become involved in criminal activity. As she explains:

*they think that's how they're going to make a success, and it sounds dramatic but, you know, you will have these conversations with kids where they'll say, 'Well I know somebody who managed to get all these grades and I saw them getting the bus, whereas somebody else from my estate is driving a lovely whatever kind of car and I don't think they did well, so why am I doing my GCSEs for the second time, what's the point?'*

Hence, there is an emphasis for certain students at Slopewood on recalibrating the parameters of what constitutes success and failure. This also has the effect of recalibrating

the capacity for resilience amongst young people experiencing academic setbacks, enabling them to cope with adverse educational outcomes by focusing on the opportunities available to them, rather than on those that become unobtainable.

This recalibration exercise is implemented in a number of ways at Slopewood. One of these, highlighted by several participants in the focus group, was the invitation to external speakers to talk to the young people approaching the end of secondary school. As Alice explained,

*[We get] people in from outside to talk to the young people, you know, people from industry, from commerce, from everyday walks of life, and they talk about, you know, 'I am where I am today because I've done ... but I wasn't ...' We, definitely with some of the more difficult, let's say, students, (a) make sure that we get somebody in who will give them a positive role, from having maybe experienced issues themselves when they were at school or at college or at university and talk to them about how they got their way through* **(Alice, Slopewood)**

These positive role models are able to testify to their capacity for resilience, illustrating to the young people, whom Alice describes as “difficult”, that positive outcomes are possible despite having experienced a range of adversities. In addition to speakers successful in industry and commerce, Alice goes on to explain that they also invite young people who have managed to go to university, despite experiencing “bad times”:

*... and we even have students who come back from university, who have just gone and come back from university or in their university years and talk about their journey, and I think that's very ... that really is where the government is trying to say 'Look, you know, you can actually achieve, even if you have good or bad times'* **(Alice, Slopewood)**

Furthermore, she links this to the government's focus on resilience as the tool to assist young people to achieve whatever their circumstances. What Alice articulates is that by showing students how it is possible to go to university or be successful in other “everyday walks of life” despite having experienced perceived failures at school, they can develop the resilience capacity that enables them to persevere, try again or explore alternative opportunities. It is important, however, that this reframing of failure does not lead to a recalibration of success, whereby what is ‘success’ in one area is seen as below or less than success in another area. The stigmatisation of non-academic options can lead this recalibration process to undermine the ability of resilience to provide the government's

panacea for unlocking disadvantaged students' potential. If this stigmatisation is not addressed, the idea of reframing failure effectively equates to a downward revision of students' aspiration and expectations – i.e. what is deemed 'success' for some young people must be recalibrated in response to their own abilities. In reality, this means that the scope for resilience to be a force for upward social mobility is restricted as these downward revisions of what constitutes successful outcomes for 'difficult' young people in turn constrains what they can achieve through demonstrating resilience alone.

### **8.3 The reflective and resilient teacher**

#### **8.3.1 The self-reflective teacher**

Part of teachers' professional role requires constant reflexivity with regards to pedagogical and pastoral practices within the teacher-student relationship. Bourke *et al.* (2013) describe reflexive educators as "active agents who can mediate subjective concerns and considerations (values, priorities, knowledge, and capabilities) with objective circumstances (for example, curriculum and assessment standardisation, accountability, and diversity of student cohorts) to act in the interests of the profession, the students and the teachers themselves" (p398).

Furthermore, self-reflection has been cited as a key characteristic in developing the capacity for resilience amongst educators, along with interpersonal skills, self-understanding, risk taking, and perceived efficacy (Yonezawa *et al.*, 2011).

At both High Hill and Slopewood, it was clear that teachers were self-reflective about their own classroom practices. Moreover, this reflexivity extended to modelling new strategies to improve their own teaching methods and learning through collaborative interactions with other teachers, both within their own school and through wider professional networks.

Fundamentally, as Geoff at Slopewood explained, teacher reflexivity represented an opportunity to think about how well a particular class had gone. With more than two decades of teaching experience, he was clear that taking the time to be reflective was vital in developing and improving as a teacher:

*... it's connected with being reflective, that you take that time to look back, whether it's looking at the class to see what you've taught, maybe a week or so ago, or even*



*just now, I've just come out the class and say, 'That went very well' or 'That didn't go so well', and being able to say 'Well okay, and I'm going to go back in there with those students in a day's time and we're going to do the positive things'. (Geoff, Slopewood)*

In this case, Geoff highlighted that this process allows him to focus on extracting and replicating the positive aspects in successful classes. However, it is also true that reflecting on classes can allow teachers to think about what specifically had gone wrong in lessons that had been particularly challenging. At High Hill, Ryan, also a very experienced educator, emphasised that if something has gone wrong it is important to assess why that might have happened so that you can, as a teacher, 'draw a line' under it and move on:

*So that you almost reflect on what might have gone wrong or why that particular student didn't do well, and then next time ... I know I do that, I make a much bigger effort to make that next lesson much better, and if there has been a falling out with an individual, that line's drawn and you've moved on, you know, you're trying to make it a positive experience next time, (Ryan, High Hill)*

Both Geoff (Slopewood) and Ryan (High Hill) regarded the process of reflecting on recent classes as an integral part of a teacher's professional development towards providing a more positive experience for students 'next time' – and hence, towards encouraging and motivating future academic success.

### **8.3.2 Modelling practice and reflexivity**

As the discussion developed in the High Hill focus group, participants described this process as an example of 'modelling' practice, that is, reflecting on what has happened and developing and adapting teaching practices, first and foremost to improve the experience for the students, but also as part of teachers' own professional development:

**Rita:** *It's little things like that and reflection, thinking 'Okay, I probably should have done this, I probably should have adjusted this more', next time I'm going back and doing it, make it better, you know*

**Claire:** *That modelling, I think, is really important, isn't it?*

In an effort to expand the modelling undertaken to improve practice, participants in the High Hill focus group were keen to describe effective strategies relating to their role as teachers. As I note above, the role of teachers is hugely important, and how this role is

played out can also be seen in the academic literature (e.g. Manke, 1997). In particular, understanding the power relationship between teachers and students with the classroom context has been studied at length by educational sociologists for at least the last eighty years (Waller, 1932; French & Raven, 1959; Richmond & McCroskey, 1992). Whilst the dominant cultural understanding of teacher-student power relations maintains that “teachers have power”; they exercise control over students because they are responsible adults and because that control leads to student learning’ (Manke, 1997, p10), this view has been contested, most notably by seminal educational theorists such as Dewey, Piaget and Vygostky. Their work, instead, focused on how children learn from a bottom-up perspective and formed a basis for student-centred learning. In this context, a constructivist understanding of power relations in schools and classrooms conceptualises ‘power’ as “a structure of relationships – a structure in which both teachers and students can build or participate” (Manke, 1997, p16).

Within this constructivist, learner-centred approach to classroom practice and teachers’ roles *confidence* and *humility* have been identified as the essential components of genuine teacher authority (Tollefson & Osborn, 2007). Humility, in particular, allows teachers ‘to be reflective about [their] own practice; to be willing to open [themselves] up to the helpful critique of [their] students, parents and colleague; and to be able to offer [their] own honest critique in return’ (*Ibid.*, p16).

A clear example of the significant impact that teacher humility can play in mediating the teacher-student relationship, was provided in the High Hill focus group, where Rita described examples of how she had adopted a strategy of displaying her own fallibility by apologising for ‘bad’ lessons or incidents with individual students:

*I think modelling it as well, if you’ve had a really bad lesson for a reason, being able to say ‘Gosh, that was dreadful, I’m really sorry, I’ve just not been on form today’, that’s quite powerful as well. (Rita, High Hill)*

*sometimes apologising to a student, say ‘I haven’t handled that very well, I’m really sorry I was really short tempered with you, I shouldn’t have been’. (Rita, High Hill)*

Rita’s colleagues had also adopted this approach, employing humility and highlighting teachers’ own limitations. This is, as Jason asserted, an empowering experience for students, which can be effective in fostering a cooperative and participatory teacher-student relationship:

*When you can level yourself with a student I think it's very empowering, you know, it's not like you and them (Jason, High Hill)*

In this way, as proposed by Manke, teachers and students become “jointly responsible for constructing power in the classroom” (1997, p2), and strong and fair relationships can be developed without undermining the genuine authority of the teacher.

### **8.3.3 Collaborative learning**

Beyond these internal ‘modelling’ processes, teachers’ reflexivity is also promoted through collaborative working, both within the school and with other professionals working elsewhere. One example offered was the introduction of collaborative lesson planning, which has the added benefit of ‘sav[ing] a lot of time’ (Ryan, High Hill). However, there are drawbacks to such initiatives, such as ‘what might work for one teacher within their teaching style, if I try to just teach that it might not go as well’ (Ryan, High Hill). This again, however, leads to further reflection on teaching practices, as the same participant explains:

*It's little things like that and reflection, thinking 'Okay, I probably should have done this, I probably should have adjusted this more', next time I'm going back and doing it, make it better (Ryan, High Hill)*

Collaboration with other teachers, particularly those in the same field, also provided a source of innovative practices and strategies. Contact with other professionals facilitates discussion and information sharing amongst teachers, which promotes new ways of thinking and developed a ‘community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This process forms part of a self-reflection with regards to teaching practices and roles. In addition to being involved in networks of professionals across the country, practitioners are also seeking to implement strategies learnt through specific training courses or examples introduced to them by other professionals. As Geoff (Slopewood) describes, having access to a vast professional network has allowed him to discuss and ‘refresh’ his own ideas and methods as a teacher:

*Well the other thing is to have contact with other professionals in their own area. I'm involved in a group of [subject] teachers and we've got links to about 5,000 teachers around the country, but various levels within that, you split off and we have discussions and comparisons and information: 'This is working for us' and 'I haven't tried that, let's see what else', and you tend to find that looking just a little*

*bit outside your own school and your own individual thing does tend to refresh you a little bit. (Geoff, Slopewood)*

#### **8.3.4 Teachers' resilience**

Whilst the government's policy agenda around resilience has provided a focus for some teachers regarding the provision of effective emotional and social support to their students, as Sabrina (Slopewood) explained, this was always considered as a fundamental part of their role:

*I do think that resilience, it's a useful thing to focus on, [...] it's good if we remember as teachers that we have to support them, but I think teachers probably were always doing that even before it was part of the government agenda. (Sabrina, Slopewood)*

However, what emerged from both focus groups was the role that teachers can play in displaying their own capacity for being resilient in the face of challenging lessons or negative interactions with individual students. This 'modelling of resilience' – or, more accurately, modelling of failure – provides an opportunity for teachers to demonstrate how to deal with something that has gone wrong:

*modelling resilience, do you know what I mean, not bearing grudges, so it has gone wrong, you're going to bounce back, make it better next time, you've reflected on that. You've thought 'This is why it went wrong, and actually I'm not going to do that again' (Ryan, High Hill)*

The strategy of adopting humility in front of students, discussed above, provides an example of co-modelling failure with both teacher and student learning from mistakes, drawing the positives from the experience and being able to draw a line and move on – i.e. if I (the teacher) show that I failed at something, they (the students) can see that that is possible and we (both) can survive it and it can be a positive learning opportunity. Whilst this co-modelling was most explicitly talked about by participants in the High Hill focus group, at Slopewood, too, the importance of teachers' capacity for resilience was also highlighted. Geoff, who again spoke with much authority on the issue, invoked the idea of 'keeping going' in the face of adversity to develop 'resilience' for both students and teachers:

*...the resilience is sometimes not so much to persevere really hard but just to keep going [...] and when it doesn't work it's trying to keep at it, from both sides, for the student as well as the teacher. [...] The resilience is also for the teachers, I think very much so (Geoff, Slopewood)*

As Henderson and Milstein (2003) have shown, "it is unrealistic to expect students to be resilient if educators are not" (p34). The importance of teachers who are able to deal with adversity and can demonstrate a capacity to be resilience is therefore clear. Resilience is related to a "strong sense of vocation, self-efficacy and motivation to teach" (Gu & Day, 2007, p1302), which equates to an increased relatability to one's students and a desire to promote their academic success, as well as positive development in other areas of their lives.

However, the interpretation of resilience and how it is performed/implemented/effected in practice by teachers is flexible and can vary from school to school – and between individuals with a school. The concept lacks a precise definition or clear guidelines as to how it should inform professional practice. This is true more widely of reflexive practice amongst teachers, which is also open to differential interpretation. This is reflected by the different experiences related by teachers in the focus groups. Whilst at High Hill, participants spoke of a co-modelling approach, which seems to work well, at Slopewood the development and promotion of resilience capacities was more integrated, with teachers providing an example of how constant support and perseverance can serve as a role model of how to show resilience.

The role model approach appears to be somewhat organically derived and how different schools choose to implement this is variable. Whilst this offers the flexibility to adapt to specific circumstances of individual students, this approach could be described as too *ad hoc*, with a lack of coordination and strategic implementation at school-level or more widely across the profession. Within already packed and pressured curricula, modelling without overt or explicit explanation and connection to the learner's particular context can also be lost on students.

The focus groups undertaken in these two schools provide strong examples that teachers are self-reflective and seek to improve their professional practice both for the benefit of the students and for their own self-development as teachers. Furthermore, under pressure from a number of sources, teachers display a clear capacity for resilience. They apply this

in their day-to-day activities in their professional lives and can use the strategies they employ to demonstrate to their students how they can also develop these capacities. However, what is not revealed by the focus groups is what happens when teachers are no longer able to display resilience. In reality, teachers' levels of resilience probably exist on a continuum and the extent to which they are engaged and motivated will be highly subjective and changeable from day to day or even from class to class. How this dynamism plays out in terms of its impact of students' development warrants further in-depth investigation.

It has always been the case that resilient teachers are a prerequisite for developing the capacity for resilience amongst students, however, and Day and Gu (2010) construct this as an issue of 'quality retention' in the teaching profession. Whilst the government's agenda foregrounds the concept of resilience to promote student outcomes, it is done with so much flexibility of interpretation, that it is difficult to see the value in such a haphazard approach. Moreover, the strategy not only overlooks the impact of teacher resilience on students but, by obliging teachers to demonstrate how their students are displaying resilience, it actually serves to mount the pressure on teachers. This, in turn, can have a negative impact on their own well-being, inhibiting their own ability to demonstrate resilience.

## **8.4 Conclusions**

In this chapter I have shown that teachers' notions of what resilience is is highly variable and subject to interpretation. Whilst discussions about the idea of a 'resilient student' elicited a range of personality traits, such as self-esteem and determination, participants also believed resilience to be the result of a longer-term process of development. Use of the 'building' metaphor demonstrated how this was something that could only be achieved through constructing durable and consistent relationships between students and teachers. The protective effects of the support provided by teachers can be seen, therefore, as having a cumulative impact. School staff also highlighted that their role lay beyond simply developing students' academic abilities, and addressing the psychological and social aspects of their development is a crucial part of the process of 'building them up'.

Despite this, teachers were clear that resilience was a very difficult thing to impart, with no easily-teachable raft of skills or competencies that can be passed through standard classroom pedagogies. As such, different strategies were employed across and within the schools, with some emphasising 'learning how to fail' – show students how to deal with setbacks by allowing them to experience activities that stretch their abilities and go outside of their 'comfort zone' – and other seeking to 'reframe' what constitutes failure – i.e. recalibrating what is seen as a 'successful' outcome for young people who have experienced an academic setback.

Regardless of how resilience is enacted and implemented in practice, teachers seek to improve their professional practice for the benefit of their students. Moreover, they are self-reflective and keen to develop themselves as teachers despite the constant pressure they feel under from all sides. This demonstrates that they themselves need to display a capacity for resilience, with the extent to which they are able to do so likely to change from day to day and from class to class.

## 9 – Discussion of findings

### 9.1 Summary of the study

My doctoral study set out to examine the different sources and levels of support available to young people approaching the end of their compulsory education, and the effect this can have on their educational attainment. In particular, the focus was on young people from the most socio-economically disadvantaged households and my analysis sought to examine the impact that the key role of teachers can have in promoting positive outcomes for these young people.

Engaging with the literature on risk and resilience, I have attempted to frame the processes involved in promoting support for students who might otherwise be expected to struggle academically in terms of ‘buffering’ them against adverse circumstances to promote resilience. However, I have been clear that ‘promoting resilience’ in this case refers to young people’s attainment of what can be seen as a resilient *outcome* – that is, achieving a positive result, where a negative one might have been more likely – and not in terms of instilling some ethereal quality that can easily be taught and learnt at will.

To this end, it might be more useful to view such processes as seeking to mitigate the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, which, as outlined by Bourdieu, comes as a result of a lack of access to economic, social and cultural capital. Highlighting the unfair emphasis of successive governments on individualising academic ‘success’ and ‘failure’, my thesis challenges the salience of the concept of ‘resilience’ as a personality trait that can be taught through ‘character education’ initiatives. Indeed, such initiatives are inevitably destined to be fruitless without a much more holistic whole-child approach in schools, and complementary social policies that seek to mitigate the structural inequalities that disadvantage students from backgrounds without access to capital valorised by the mainstream education system.

Within such a system, however, teachers are well-placed to impart support and guidance to students facing a range of adverse circumstances. Following a bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this key proximal relationship of a young person’s microsystem can play an important role in promoting positive interactions to enhance personal development. Findings from the quantitative stage of my study show that teacher support can provide a catalyst for increasing levels of support from other sources and, in this way,



is an important means by which students can mobilise their social support resources to achieve positive (and resilient) outcomes.

My study was designed as a mixed-methods investigation, comprising a quantitative 'stage' focusing on the perceptions of students and a qualitative 'stage' which sought to elicit the view of teaching professionals. This discussion of the findings attempts at this stage to combine what has been learnt from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. It seeks to answer the research questions established at the outset of the study, but, in order to examine the implications of the findings more effectively, I present my discussion in a more thematic way. The quantitative and qualitative findings are therefore drawn together in a discussion of the relationship between educational outcomes and structural disadvantage (section 9.2), the relationship between educational outcomes and perceptions of social support (section 9.3), the interconnectedness of different sources of support (section 9.4) and the way that resilience is being interpreted and played out in school (section 9.5).

The final section of the chapter explores the implications these findings have on policy and practice. Combining the quantitative findings arising from analysis of student survey data with the insights elicited from teaching professionals allows a fuller picture to emerge which can be used to devise potential 'solutions' that are effective in supporting vulnerable groups of students.

Whilst it is hoped that these findings lead to the development and adoption of recommended 'best practice', a clearer understanding of the mechanisms involved in supporting 'at-risk' young people, and a move away from resilience as an individualised deficit-focused policy lever, it is clear that further research into the effect of a more holistic approach to student development will be necessary, along with the political will to implement such evidence-based policies.

## **9.2 Educational outcomes and structural disadvantage**

### **9.2.1 Socio-economic disadvantage correlates with academic attainment**

The statistical analysis of student data, presented in chapter 6, supports the hypothesis that educational attainment and socio-economic disadvantage are correlated. The findings

suggest this clearly to be the case, with the most socio-economically disadvantaged students (i.e. those eligible for free school meals) being less likely to reach the government's benchmark level of educational attainment than their peers from more affluent backgrounds. This relationship has been the subject of much research and, in particular, within the resilience literature, seminal studies (Garmezy, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992; Rutter, 1979) have been predicated on the assumption that adverse socio-economic circumstances constitute a risk factor against which successful adaptation and positive outcomes can be seen as the result of processes of resilience.

The findings from the focus groups presented in chapters 7 and 8 also highlight the importance of structural inequalities, with teachers from both of the participating schools recognising similar challenges facing students. The teachers were keen to highlight the structural inequalities that negatively impact upon young people's educational experiences. In particular, the over-riding influence of parents was emphasised as having a potentially detrimental impact on their children at school and related to both learnt behaviours (such as mistrust of authority) and in terms of a scarcity of resources.

In fact, socio-economic disadvantage is better thought of as encompassing a whole suite of risk factors that are indicative of a number of specific disadvantages facing young people from the most impoverished backgrounds. These young people will have access to fewer resources and this paucity or lack of economic, social or cultural capital can have a multifaceted negative impact by reinforcing the structural inequalities inherent in the socio-economic system. Indeed, as Olsson *et al.* (2003) highlight, "multiple [socio-economic] risk factors acting in synergy may far exceed the effect of any one significant life event" (p4). Thus, beyond a simple measure of economic hardship, eligibility for free school meals (FSM) provides a valid proxy for indicating those students who are most likely to have limited access to, for example, paid tutoring, extra-curricular activities or costly educational materials such as computers or books. Furthermore, these young people will likely be disadvantaged in terms of their social and cultural capital. The persistence of class inequalities in the education system, as explained by Ball (2003), is largely due to the systemic bias arising from the dominance of the norms and values of the middle classes – for whom and by whom the system is run. Within such a system, therefore, this exerts greater pressure on those young people whose cultural context is not valorised in the same way and this can have long-lasting effects beyond school. Indeed, Sacker *et al.*'s (2002) study concludes that low social class continues to exert a cumulative effect on children's

development over time by the process of internalising social class norms acquired from their parents' cultural practices and attitudes.

As noted in chapter 3, despite successive governments ostensibly seeking to tackling widening educational inequalities, the continued politicisation of the education system remains a significant challenge to overcoming the inherent biases that do little to reduce persistent inequalities in the social system as a whole. The current pervasiveness in the policy discourse characterised both by a neoliberal commitment to neoliberal market-led approaches in combination with the oversight of a strong and centralised regulatory state has done little to promote social mobility – and even less in terms of valorising the cultural context of students from non-middle class, non-White backgrounds. In fact, the government's ideological monopoly of what constitutes 'legitimate' knowledge and values has been accompanied by a punitive welfare regime with its focus on the moral correction of a 'broken society', placing the responsibility for social mobility at the feet of individual families and communities. Far from accepting the structural inequalities facing the most disadvantaged, this serves to reinforce the idea of a deficit model that attributes the academic shortcomings of students to their own internal deficiencies and individualises their own ability to succeed or fail.

Against this systemic background, it is not surprising that students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to attain the benchmark level of education. However, it is also important to recognise that this finding potentially belies the diversity within the majority group of students who do not fall below the stringent threshold for disadvantage as applied in this study (i.e. eligibility for FSM). During the course of my study, I have increasingly become aware that, whilst the correlation between disadvantage and attainment is indeed a worrying trend, this is not necessarily an issue only affecting the most disadvantaged in society.

### **9.2.2 Girls out-perform boys, regardless of background or age**

The gender attainment gap, whereby girls out-perform boys in school examinations, has been acknowledged and discussed for decades (Jackson, 1998; Van Houtte, 2004; Machin & McNally, 2005). Even beyond the relationship between attainment and support, the effect of gender appears to exert a significant impact on students' likelihood to achieve academically. Analysis of the student survey, matched with administrative attainment data, supports this recognised trend, finding that girls are around one-and-a-half times more

likely to attain the benchmark level of education for their academic year group than boys. This gender-based achievement gap holds, even after controlling for socio-economic disadvantage and cohort, although the gap is particularly pronounced for lower SES young people. What this means is that boys can be seen as a risk group in terms of academic attainment, whilst boys from disadvantaged backgrounds are the group least likely to reach the government's benchmark level of attainment, finding themselves at the intersection of two identified risk factors.

Interestingly, the relative performance of girls and boys was not raised during either focus group. Illustrative examples of individual students were drawn as much from one gender as the other and this did not appear to be an important aspect of the narrative. This may indicate that, in these participating schools at least, the challenges the students face are similar irrespective of their gender. What is more likely, perhaps, is that the gender differences in educational experiences and outcomes, is so well-established that it does not require commenting upon, going literally 'without saying'.

The mechanism by which gender exerts such a significant impact on students' achievement is complex and has been debated by several authors. Whilst the prevailing discourse once talked about 'failing boys' (Ofsted, 1996; Arnold, 1997; Weiner *et al.*, 1997), this has been challenged by feminist accounts which attempt to draw the focus of the debate away from the underachievement of boys towards the relative progress that has been made by girls (Raphael Reed, 1999; Epstein *et al.*, 1998). The academic literature on the subject abounds with sociological and psychological explanations and understandings of the gender-gap phenomenon. These range from a crisis in masculinity (Connell, 1994; Jackson, 1998), feminisation of the curriculum and teaching practices (Arnot *et al.*, 1998; Budge, 1994), and changes in the examination system (Smith, 2003; Machin & McNally, 2005), to different academic cultures (Van Houtte, 2004) and even different psychologies of learning (Gardner, 1993).

Whilst academic debates rage as to the extent to which explanations are to be found in societal, political, biological or environmental causes, the gender gap in attainment shows clearly that girls are consistently out-performing boys in secondary educational attainment. This having been said, of course, this does not necessarily translate into better socio-economic outcomes further down the line. Indeed, as Treneman succinctly put it two

decades ago, “the statistical under-achievement of boys in school is nothing compared to the statistical over-achievement of men in life” (1998).

In reality, the causes of underachievement or non-attainment is likely to lie in a number of risk factors, often found in combination. Adopting an intersectional approach is not to negate the evident gender effect: rather it is to attempt to identify a range of potential factors that, when they occur in tandem, can be the focus of policy and practice. This provides a more efficient and practical way of tackling the underlying problem(s) associated with educational underachievement, focusing on more easily-targeted factors than students’ biological sex or gender socialization.

### **9.2.3 Teachers may risk reinforcing the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage**

As noted above, the structural inequalities facing students was a theme that emerged strongly from the teachers focus groups. Indeed, participants seem to reinforce the view that the reproduction of structural disadvantage is inevitable. In so doing, teachers are seeking to distance themselves from this process and placing the responsibility at the feet of the parents and the structural inequalities that render any attempt at positive adaptation futile. It is very interesting that one participant, Claire, described this situation in terms of ‘having an accent’. She is clear – and her colleagues are all in agreement – that bad behaviour and poor attainment is ‘something you learn from your parents or your surroundings’. The consensus of the teachers in this focus group is that it is ‘very unusual to find a child that has a very different accent to their parents’.

But is it? Even as an analogy, this description does not hold up to much scrutiny. It is not uncommon for families to be geographically mobile, or for parents to come from very different cultural backgrounds to each other. The fact that this focus group took place in a school with a highly diverse student population, and within an area of London with a long history of inward migration, makes this assertion appear even the more incongruous.

In Bourdieusian terms, as mentioned in relation to the quantitative findings discussed above, teachers appear to espouse the notion that the social structure is reproduced through an inevitable intergeneration transmission of culture through children’s adoption of their parents attitudes and norms. In this way, the structural risk factors that apply to one generation are passed on to the next and structural inequalities are perpetuated along class lines. Indeed, class is an important marker here as the education system continues to

valorise the dominant cultural norms of the (upper-) middle class. Whilst those young people with access to fewer of these valued cultural resources will continue to struggle, the response of the teachers in this case at best acknowledges the propensity for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to remain socially immobile, but at worse suggests a degree of passive snobbery that exists within the profession – a further example of the valorisation of middle-class cultural norms, i.e. that there is ‘correct’ way to speak and an ‘incorrect’ way.

In either case, teachers appear somewhat to abrogate responsibility for the persistence of structural inequalities, cleaving to Bernstein’s (1970) notion that “education cannot compensate for society”. However, clearly teachers are in a unique position to be able to foster and develop long-term positive relationships with their students over a period of several years. They can provide a key relationship through which their students can access social and cultural capital; and whilst they may not feel the climate supports resistance, they can actively work towards overcoming structural disadvantages by fostering ‘buffers’ or protective effects to transform existing hierarchies.

### **9.3 Educational outcomes and perceptions of support**

#### **9.3.1 Support and attainment are correlated**

A key finding emerging from the statistical analysis of student data, is the relatively strong correlation between students’ educational attainment and their reported levels of support. As predicted, positive educational outcomes are associated with higher levels of perceived support. The importance of receiving (or perceiving) support from parents, teachers and peers is clear and, although not the only positive influence on educational attainment, having access to support structures appears to have a beneficial effect for all students in terms of their educational outcomes. The literature on resilience emphasises that, for young people facing a variety of adverse circumstance, this access to support can provide a ‘buffering’ effect (Rutter, 1985; Werner, 2000), which mitigates the negative impact of adversity for these students. Indeed, it has been posited that multiple protective factors (i.e. multiple sources of support) in synergy might exceed the effect of any one in isolation, triggering a positive chain reaction leading to favourable outcomes (Olsson *et al.*, 2003).

To this end, the findings from the teacher focus groups presented in chapters 7 and 8 support the notion that strong social support relationships are key to promoting positive educational outcomes. As already noted, teachers were keen to highlight the negative effect that a lack of positive relationships can have on their educational experiences. However, the focus group data also highlight that it is possible for one source of social support can overcome a deficit in support elsewhere and emphasises the important role that teachers can play in providing a 'buffer' against a lack of support or resources.

The mechanism by which this buffering produces positive or 'resilient' outcomes, can be conceptualised in Bourdieusian terms through increased availability of economic, social and cultural capital. Access to capital can overcome the structural inequalities that pervade society and help individuals to surmount the social reproduction of risk factors. Indeed, the extent to which particularly parents transmit economic, social and cultural capital to their children is acknowledged by Bourdieu (1986) and has been studied by subsequent authors (McLaren, 1989; Meadmore, 1999; Reay, 2004). In this way, the intergenerational transmission of capital has been shown to perpetuate the reproduction of disadvantage along class lines. Whilst my study confirms this clear relationship between access to support (as a form of capital) and educational attainment, what also emerges is that support can lead to positive educational outcomes even for young people from the most socio-economically disadvantaged families, who can benefit from teacher support and peer support even in if they lack the resources at home.

Of course, it must be noted that perceptions of support are necessarily highly subjective and expectations may vary greatly from student to student. In particular, young people who receive little-to-no support at home may view even basic levels of support from teachers or peers as vital and of huge importance, whereas those who are used to high levels of parental involvement or additional support (e.g. additional tutoring) might underestimate the value of support provided by their school or from their friends.

The relationship between students' attainment and perceived levels of support also highlights the key role of proximal systems in a young person's bio-ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The positive interactions between individuals and their parents, friends and teachers provide students with additional resources and are therefore more likely to display greater developmental competence. These relationships can to some extent overcome the impact of such distal systems as class and provide a network of

support and resources that can assist students to succeed academically. Of course, this is not a one-way street and students are also active agents in their own development. It is one thing to have access to support and resources, but quite another to utilise networks and mobilise resources towards one's educational development.

The protective effect of access to and perceptions of support is particularly important at times of transition at the end of compulsory schooling. The move towards high-stakes terminal examinations means that young people are feeling greater pressure to do well in final exams, a shift which favours a minority of students and disadvantages those who prefer to work in a more creative or personalised way (see Neumann *et al.*, 2016; Cassidy, 2014). Additionally, following Year 11, students may move from a highly-regulated secondary school environment to a sixth form college or FE college – even within the same school, the learning environment within the sixth form is likely to be more flexible and learner-centred. Previous studies have highlighted the huge importance of this end-of-school periods of transition (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Bynner *et al.*, 1997; Macdonald *et al.*, 2001; Roberts, 2011) and at this point, the relationships that young people have developed with their school and teachers provide a vital source of support and specialist knowledge in preparing them for 'the next step', that may not be available at home or from amongst their peers.

### **9.3.2 Resilient attainers do not differ from typical attainers in terms of levels of support**

Those young people who, on the basis of their eligibility for free school meals, have been identified as most at-risk of not attaining the government's benchmark level of education for their year group can be considered as 'resilient' if they nevertheless manage to achieve this level. These 'resilient attainers' have seemingly overcome the strong correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and educational attainment and so it is important to understand why or how they were able to do so in order to inform potential changes to practice and policy aimed at improving outcomes for this at-risk group. However, the main finding of the statistical analysis implies that, in terms of levels of perceived support, resilient attainers do not vary significantly from attainers who come from more affluent households. This, therefore, implies that for at-risk young people, as with all students, feeling supported can promote positive outcomes in terms of educational attainment.

The link between social support and academic success is well founded in the literature (Coleman, 1988; Wentzel, 1998; Butler & Muir, 2017) – in particular, as Butler and Muir



(2017) have asserted, “young people’s education pathways are today strongly dependent on their ability to draw on the range of resources available to them” (p316). From a social capital perspective, students can mobilise resources available to them through their networks of support (Ryan *et al.*, forthcoming). As discussed in chapter 2, for those young people who face adverse circumstances of significant risk factors, having access to social support is particularly important. Authors (Rutter, 1985; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Masten *et al.*, 1990) have identified the protective role of such support in ‘buffering’ young people from the adverse effects of disadvantage or other risk factors. This gives a strong justification for promoting positive interpersonal relationships in order to enhance personal development, that is to promote resilience amongst those who may experience significant risk factors to achieve positive outcomes.

Overall levels of social support, however, are important to the academic success of all young people and, whilst the way in which support is perceived will inevitably vary from individual to individual on the basis of a number of factors (e.g. expectations, source of support being considered, or in response to specific situations), there is clear evidence that young people’s attainment can be promoted through activation of their social support networks.

## **9.4 Interconnectedness of support**

### **9.4.1 Perceptions of support appear to be interconnected and mutually reinforcing**

This having been said, however, a further finding of the students’ survey show that resilient attainers’ levels of parental support are not significantly different from students who do not achieve the benchmark level of education for their year group. This implies that parents are not the most important source of support for young people from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, for many of these students, their access to other forms of social support may be the key advantage that helps them to overcome a lack of resources associated with low parental income. The central role that parents play in the lives of young people has been shown to be key in terms of activating material, social and cultural resources for their child (Lareau, 1987; Vincent, 2001; Crozier & Reay, 2005). However, where access to these resources is limited, studies (e.g. Werner, 2000) have highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships to promote resilient outcomes.

This may be from peers – as mentioned above, adolescents tend to become more influenced by friends as they grow older – but the key role of teacher support for resilient attainers is also clear. As highlighted in the academic literature on resilience, teacher-student relationships on both a practical and emotional level are important in nurturing and protecting positive development outcomes, particularly amongst at-risk students (Masten *et al.*, 1990; Bowen *et al.*, 1998; Klem & Connell, 2004). It is important to view teachers in this context not simply as agents of social reproduction, as described by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), but rather with the potential to be “agents of transformation [who can] make a difference for the most disadvantaged students” (Mills, 2008, p262).

For older students in particular, the correlation between attainment and teacher support was found to be stronger amongst students who reported low parental support. This supports the idea that teachers are uniquely placed to provide pivotal support to young people who lack access to support at home or elsewhere. Furthermore, this reinforces the empirical findings of Klem and Connell’s (2004) hugely influential study, who identify a clear link between positive teacher support, greater engagement at school and higher academic achievement. They highlight the importance of students’ perceptions of support and conclude that “students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p270). This, again, has clear implications for policy and practice, as discussed in section 9.6.

The role of teacher support in promoting resilient outcomes, therefore, can be seen potentially as a very important one. However, this is not to lose sight of the fact that positive perceptions of parental support and peer support are also significantly correlated with educational attainment. The inter-relation between all of these sources of support appears to be a very complex one and to some extent, they can be seen as being mutually reinforcing. The important relationship between schools and parents, in particular, has been highlighted in many studies (Lawson, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Epstein, 2018). Eccles and Harold (1993) were among the first to identify the positive role that schools can play in promoting greater parental involvement in their children’s studies and to recognise that a multifaceted approach can lead to a positive feedback loop, whereby young people’s network of support extends across the home, school and other areas of their life. This having been said, however, it is important also to realise that the reverse might also be

true: students experiencing a lack of support in one area may well also perceive a lack of support elsewhere, which, taken together, can detrimentally impact upon educational outcomes.

Whilst this is a key finding of my study, it was not one that I had necessarily anticipated from the outset. That the main sources of support were so clearly inter-related was perhaps not surprising: there have been numerous studies highlighting the protective effect of social support, from one or many sources, to nurture young people's positive development (Richman *et al.*, 1998; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 2000). However, I had thought that the statistical analysis would allow me to disentangle the effects of teacher support from parental or peer support – and even more so in relation to those students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (cf. Wentzel, 1998; Roodra *et al.*, 2011; Quin, 2017). The findings presented here, however, show a more complex picture, whereby it is important to take into account the whole context of the individuals concerned, including inter-relationships that occur at every 'level' of their bio-ecological system. This underlines the need to adopt a holistic and integrated approach toward policy making and implementation in order to develop a multifaceted response to a complex situation, and to provide a many-pronged attack to an accumulation of risk factors. In this way, teacher support can provide a catalyst for increasing levels of support from other sources and, thus, is an important means by which students can mobilise their social support resources to achieve positive (and resilient) outcomes.

#### **9.4.2 Teacher-parent-child 'triad'**

A key theme emerging from the teacher focus groups related to the inter-connectedness of what Geoff (Slopewood) referred to as the 'triad' of children, parents and teachers. As mentioned above, teachers were keen to emphasise the over-riding influence of parents and the potentially detrimental impact a lack of positive parental involvement can have on their children at school. This was discussed in relation to such phenomena as 'absentee parenting', 'poor parenting practices', and 'a learnt mistrust of authority'. These are clearly very real concerns for the teachers and have been studied by academics and policy makers in order to devise successful interventions or policies to combat the apparent lack of parental support for their children's education. Parenting skills development have been shown to a preventative effect on potential sources of risk and the importance of the parent-child relationship to developmental and educational outcomes is well-documented

(Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Sacker *et al.*, 2002). With regards to the literature on resilience, it has been shown that “children’s capacity for resilient behaviour is diminished when they experience a high degree of uncertainty and emotional turmoil within the family” (Rak & Patterson, 1996, p371). Focusing attention on parenting education, promoting positive parent-child relationships and social capital development within a family context are key in enhancing the protective effect of parental support, particularly for students facing a range of adverse circumstances. Indeed, Eamon (2001) has shown that the relationship between parenting practices and child behaviour has cumulative and reciprocal effects over time. This implies that even small adjustments can have a positive impact if embedded early on in their life.

To this end, the importance of positive parent-teacher interactions is also evident. Whilst a mistrust of authority has been highlighted in a number of qualitative studies (Georgis *et al.*, 2014; Roberts & Loucks, 2015; Segal & Mayadas, 2005) – particularly amongst students in so-called ‘risk groups’ (Friesem, 2014) – how prevalent this view is amongst parents is certainly debateable. In fact, focus group participants in one school (Slopewood) did not appear to have an issue with ‘disaffected parents’ and instead highlighted the positive role that strong relationships between parents and the school has on individual students. Indeed, there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support the notion that strong parent-teacher relationships have a positive effect on young people’s educational outcomes (Epstein, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2008).

## **9.5 Resilience in schools**

### **9.5.1 Teachers are under pressure**

Whilst the quantitative findings were not able to isolate the specific impact of teacher support for students who might lack support in other areas, they did show that strong networks of support from teachers, parents and peers are highly interconnected and are likely to be mutually reinforcing. In this way teacher support can be seen as having the potential to provide a catalyst for increasing levels of support from other sources. In the best-case scenario, this can lead to a positive feedback loop, with young people’s networks of support extending across the home, school and other areas of their life. However, it is important also to realise that the reverse might also be true: students experiencing a lack

of support in one area may well also perceive a lack of support elsewhere, which can impact negatively on their educational outcomes. For at-risk young people, as with all students, feeling supported can promote positive outcomes in terms of educational attainment. The not-insignificant amount of time students spend at school means that key student-teacher relationships will have a strong influence on educational experiences and outcomes (Rosenfeld *et al.*, 2000).

What emerged from the focus groups above all else was the level of pressure being felt by educational professionals – a collective narrative to which all participants subscribed. They describe the ‘huge’ pressure on time and resources being placed on the profession, even as they are expected to implement changes to the curriculum, and many were visibly exasperated and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task in front of them. The pressure felt by teachers shows how high they feel the stakes are in relation to their own success or failure with the profession as they face ever-greater scrutiny and accountability. The pressure under which teachers are operating has been a consistent narrative for a number of years, and has been the subject of several works, both in the UK and elsewhere in the western world (Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Cooper & Travers, 2012).

The source of this pressure comes from government, inspectors, governors, parents and students. As highlighted in chapter 3, the troubled and conflictual nature of the relationship between the state and the teaching profession has been remarked upon by several authors (Ball, 2013; Lightman, 2015; Coiffait, 2015). The lack of trust in teachers was most notably embodied by Michael Gove, whose education reforms have led to substantial changes to the curriculum, implemented at a time of increasing budget cuts, a galvanised Ofsted inspection regime, and within an environment in which Coiffait (2015) notes that “rather than supporting teachers to be empowered and skilled agents of change in education, he [Gove] beat them down to the extent that he lost the trust of the whole profession” (p146).

The inevitable effect of the levels of pressure felt by teachers and the strained relationship between the state and the teaching profession is that teachers are leaving the profession in droves (Hyman, 2017). Studies of teacher retention attempt to understand the reasons behind teachers’ decision to leave the classroom, and highlight increased stress, burnout and a lack of job satisfaction (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Fisher, 2011). Of course, this is not an exclusively British issue (e.g. Certo & Fox, 2002); however, the impact of recent changes to the curriculum has already been heavily criticised by teachers in this country (Cassidy,

2014; Neumann *et al.*, 2016), whilst the increased workloads, more frequent and tougher inspections and new benchmark targets for which they are accountable reinforces the 'huge' pressures emphasised by my focus group participants.

Within the context of a culture of constant inspection and high-stakes testing, for which teachers are held accountable, it is not surprising that teachers seek to deflect responsibility for ostensible academic 'failures' to policy makers, parents or individuals. The result of this however, for those who remain in the profession, is that it promotes a school culture that is highly risk-averse. As outlined in chapter 7, teachers feeling constantly under pressure will be more reluctant to extend their teaching practices far beyond accepted norms, seeing the stakes as too high to risk any large-scale changes in strategy or pedagogical practices – at least within the context of the mainstream curriculum. However, the important role of risk-taking in instigating pedagogical change has been emphasised by Le Fevre (2014), who underlines that school environments that decrease teachers' perceptions of risk and support their willingness to take risks are key in promoting a strong organisational learning culture in schools.

The risk averse nature of school cultures is evident in the extent to which they are willing to change their pedagogies, as well as how teachers present themselves in the face of potential external 'threats' to their professional ability – policy makers, Ofsted inspectors, demanding parents or inquisitive researchers. Ultimately, risk and risk-taking are critical components of innovation and change (Jaeger *et al.*, 2001) and the extent to which teachers feel able to model risk and resilience, and introduce new strategies and pedagogies without fear of reprisals, will be reflected in schools' ability to keep up with and adapt to specific circumstances as they arise.

### **9.5.2 Inconsistent interpretations of resilience**

I have been clear to highlight in my study on what basis I have defined resilience. My analysis rests on defining a group of young people who, despite experiencing a greater level of socio-economic risk (indicated by their eligibility for free school meals), were nonetheless able to achieve what can be seen as a positive educational outcome (i.e. attaining the government's benchmark of 5 good GCSEs). This construction of resilience is consistent with an outcome-based definition (Masten, 2009; Olsson *et al.*, 2003). It focuses on the attainment of a resilient *outcome*, where students have been able to achieve a positive result, where a negative one might have been more likely. Statistical comparisons between

this group of 'resilient attainers' and those who did not achieve the same educational level ('non-attainers'), or those who did not face the same level of socio-economic disadvantage ('typical attainers'), have shown that positive outcomes are associated with greater levels of perceived support, regardless of whether a student is 'disadvantaged' or not. However, my operationalisation of resilience in this way is only one interpretation and it is in no way clear that this is how the concept ought to be understood within the context of school-level interventions.

There appears to be very little research that has sought to examine exactly how the UK government's increased focus on character education and resilience has been implemented in schools (a notable exception is Val Gillies' 2016 work, *Pushed to the Edge: Inclusion and Behaviour Support in Schools*). The qualitative focus groups in my study give an idea of just how variably the directives passed down from central government are interpreted and put into practice by teachers on the ground. The teachers participating in my research defined resilience both as a skill that could be instilled in their students (although they recognise that this is not an easy skill to teach), and also as the result of a more long-term process of development. Whilst these two interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, one might wonder what effect specific interventions or 'classes' can have if students' capacity for resilience comes primarily from a sustained relationship and continued strong, consistent interactions with their teachers.

Whilst there is nothing wrong with seeking to promote students' resilience per se, this is clearly a more complex process than simply being able to instil some ethereal sense of self-empowerment. Rather, this must be about a more holistic approach, which equips young people with the resources and tools they can employ to overcome the adversities they may face. Of course, this becomes more important the fewer resources that are available to them from other sources.

There appears to be no easily-teachable raft of skills or competencies that can be passed through standard classroom pedagogies. The raft of strategies employed by staff members more often encompass a general ethos or overall approach to developing students' capacity for resilience.

To this end, the strategies employed to promote student resilience outlined in the two schools encompass very different approaches. In High Hill, the focus on 'learning to fail' seeks to provide students with an opportunity to experience activities that might stretch

their ability or go outside of their comfort zone. This process is used as a chance to ‘fail’ – albeit within a controlled situation, placed firmly outside of the mainstream curriculum – and to explain to students in a tangible way how to deal with setbacks, work through challenges and learn from their mistakes. This strategy also provides a positive example to be referred back to when future (academic) challenges arise. The assertion that learning from one’s mistakes is part of developing a self-aware and active learning process is prevalent in the pedagogical literature (Papert, 1972; Vygotsky, 1980; Brooks & Goldstein, 2008; Giroux, 1988; Black & William, 1998). However, as Brooks and Goldstein (2008) contend, “the fear of making mistakes and failing permeates every classroom” and too frequently remains unacknowledged (p125). Furthermore, whilst exposure to such challenges might be effective in promoting resilient behaviour for some students, the fact that they are implemented outside of the ‘normal’ academic curriculum means that the positive impact of this approach may be limited when ‘real’ setbacks occur. It may be that the significance of certain decisions can raise the stakes to such an extent that students – and staff – feel they cannot fail.

In Slopewood School this concern was acknowledged and focus group participants saw the implicit difficulty in balancing the importance of education to students’ future success with not wanting to stigmatise perceived failure to the extent that young people are too afraid to fail, too disillusioned to try again or seek a different path. The school addresses this by adopting a different ethos in relation to promoting resilience amongst their students, which focuses on helping them to accept ‘failure’ and adjust their aims and objectives accordingly. This strategy of ‘reframing failure’ recognises and promotes opportunities for students who have experienced setbacks in their studies, including them in a collaborative process to help them to reassess the options open to them.

As outlined in chapter 8, this ‘recalibration’ of what constitutes success for less academically-successful students enables them to cope with adverse educational outcomes by focusing on the opportunities available to them, rather than on those that become unobtainable. What constitutes success, of course, is a key part of the equation which denotes whether someone has been able to achieve resilient outcomes (see above). As noted in chapter 2, and recognised in the resilience literature (Waxman *et al.*, 2003), the threshold for defining ‘success’ in relation to educational outcomes is highly variable and somewhat arbitrary. However, shifting the goalposts for some, ‘difficult’ or ‘less-able’ students is problematic if resilience is seen as the ‘key’ to unlocking social mobility.



This is not, of course, to underplay the important role that teachers can play in helping young people, who have not achieved the grades they had hoped for, to reassess their options in relation to their next steps. These staff members, who provide a vital source of continuity and specialist knowledge for these young people, can be key in reducing the stigma associated with 'alternative' educational pathways, such as vocational or technical education, and can highlight the positive opportunities available through these pathways. They are well-placed to advise young people who would in fact benefit from these and to downplay what can often seem as the absolute important placed on school exams in 'academic' subjects. Focus group participants at Slopewood linked this reframing strategy to the government's resilience agenda as a tool for demonstrating to students that it is possible to 'succeed' regardless of their circumstances and no matter the exam results they achieve (see, e.g. Truebridge, 2013)

However, the persistent stigmatisation of non-academic routes (Neumann *et al.*, 2016; Abrahams, 2016) can be counter-productive in promoting resilience and this recalibration strategy can undermine the ability of resilience (as conceived by current policies) to provide the government's panacea for unlocking disadvantage students' potential. Indeed, the scope for resilience to be a force for upward social mobility is restricted as constant downward revisions of what constitutes successful outcomes for 'difficult' young people in turn constrains what they can achieve through demonstrating resilience alone. Placing vague individual characteristics such as 'resilience' at the heart of the government's strategy to promote social mobility is therefore problematic, running the risk of ignoring structural inequalities that constrain opportunities. As Kisby (2017) highlights, "statements about the need for students to learn to be resilient, at best, ring hollow, and at worst are insulting, liable to be interpreted by many as suggesting that poor people would be fine if only they were more virtuous" (p32).

Gillies (2016) concurs with this perspective and is highly critical of the government's agenda on character education and resilience. She decries the fact that the focus on "'character' marks the acceleration of a neoliberal moralism operationalised through a discourse of personal responsibility and self-optimisation ... [Within this context] the experience of poverty and disadvantage come to be taken as evidence of failure to learn 'character', which equates to personal failure in its own right" (p12-13).

What the qualitative findings of my study show is that teachers are charged with implementing the government's resilience agenda with little central guidance and with only a vague sense that they should instil an ethereal and undefined character trait in individuals to promote their achievement at school. Therefore, it is unsurprising that this is interpreted differently by different institutions and even different teachers. Most commonly, this encompasses a general school-level ethos or overall approach to developing students' capacity for resilience. However, teachers need to be careful to recognise that promoting resilience engenders a long-term process of development, requiring consistent and reliable teacher-student relations. Whilst the government's agenda focuses on the individual responsabilisation of academic success and failure, this inevitably draws attention away from practices that encompass a more holistic approach that takes into account structural inequalities that constrain opportunities for some students. Promoting success for all students and providing additional assistance for disadvantaged young people is central to teachers' professional duty and, whilst it appears that this might best be accomplished by lowering the stakes of end-of-course examinations and reducing the stigmatisation of non-academic pathways, the government's prevailing policy agenda seems to be heading in the opposite direction.

### **9.5.3 Teachers are self-reflective**

Teachers 'on-the-ground', of course, are aware that students' academic achievement does not arise in a vacuum and are related to a whole range of factors beyond individual attributes or character. The findings of the focus groups highlight that teachers are very self-reflective and are constantly seeking to improve their professional practice. They do this through collaborative learning (Wenger, 1998), through modelling practice, and by being reflexive about the role of the teacher in the classroom (Manke, 1997). The importance of this self-reflection is clear and participants showed themselves to be very self-aware with regards to their own practice and their own strengths and weaknesses. As Yonezawa *et al.* (2011) remark, self-reflection is a key characteristic in developing the capacity for resilience amongst educators, and it is interesting to note that discussion of the concept of resilience in the focus groups tended to raise the issue of teachers' own capacity for resilience as much as for the students in their charge.

There is, perhaps ironically, therefore, a need for resilient teachers in the profession. As Henderson and Milstein (2003) have shown, "it is unrealistic to expect students to be

resilient if educators are not” (p34). In reality, though, teachers’ own levels of resilience probably exist on a continuum and the extent to which they are engaged and motivated will be highly subjective and changeable from day to day or even from class to class. Resilient teachers are better placed to recognise what they can and cannot achieve with regards to individual students, acknowledging that, whilst there are factors beyond their sphere of control, they are nonetheless in a unique position to effect positive change.

There is, furthermore, a need for more collaboration between teachers, parents and students towards developing strong, consistent and positive relationships. The role of community organisations and other institutions beyond mainstream schooling is also important in this regard. Robertson’s study of community schools has, for example, shown that increased contact and collaboration between these schools and mainstream institutions can play a vital role in developing strong and positive relationships. For young people from ethnic minority background, she maintains, can serve to challenge long-held societal and institutional stereotypes (Robertson, 2010).

Teachers must also have the support and collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders such that they feel able to take more pedagogical risks in their practice, without the fear of reprisals and allowing the heavy burden of responsibility to be shared more evenly.

Finally, they must have the resources available to be able properly to implement holistic support for students. The focus on individualising academic success draws attention away from the structural obstacles that some students face and under-values the ‘character’ they display within such constrained circumstances. Teachers are all-too-aware of these constraints on an individual level and the requirement for them to promote ‘resilience’ does not allow them the time and resources needed to address broader issues affecting their most disadvantaged students.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the government to provide the support (moral, financial, etc.) to allow teachers to do their jobs. However, the prevailing neoliberal agenda focused towards increased competition in educational provision, and promoting a discourse of meritocratic individualism has led to policies that seek to highlight the role of individual traits or labels such as ‘character’ and ‘resilient’ to promote social mobility. At the same time, it imposes a paternalistic ethico-disciplinary agenda exercising increased ‘command and control’ over knowledge and values (Bailey & Ball, 2016), which serves to perpetuate the de-valorisation of cultural norms not associated with the dominant white,

affluent middle classes. This has resulted in little real social mobility (Payne, 2017; Sullivan *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, it has led to an increasingly antagonistic relationship between the state and the teaching profession. With these two forces pulling in opposite directions, it is likely that teachers will have to continue to display their own capacity for resilience – promoting success for all students whilst providing additional assistance for disadvantaged young people – despite the existence of the adverse circumstances of government constraints on resources and ill-fitting neoliberal policy agenda.

## **9.6 Implications for policy and practice**

The findings of my study contribute to a clearer understanding of the mechanisms involved in supporting young people at school, and particularly in relation to positive social support networks and the significant role that teachers play. Socio-economically-disadvantaged students are particularly vulnerable and appear to be most at risk of not achieving positive educational outcomes. For these young people, it is clear that schools and teachers need to provide additional support and attention.

On this basis, it is clear that there are certain practices that schools should aspire to adopt in order to promote positive developmental outcomes for all their students. This involves, not only fostering strong long-term relationships with students, but also continuing to develop effective links with parents. More widely, teachers should experience risk, failure and resilience on their own training into the profession, to enable their greater empathy and understanding of what is involved. School policy should be allowed – even encouraged – to take more pedagogical risks in their teaching and learning practice, without fears of reprisals, and with the heavy burden of responsibility for educational outcomes shared more evenly between all stakeholders.

To this end, it is incumbent upon the government to provide sufficient resources to schools and teachers to allow them to adapt their pedagogies and pastoral support to best fit the needs of their students. This involves adopting a more holistic approach to policy making and moving away from an individualised deficit-focused agenda, typified by the current focus on resilience and character education. It is important for government ministers to recognise that students' outcomes do not develop in a vacuum and can be seen as a symptom of wider issues within the lives of students. Initiatives that seek to fetishize

'success' and 'failure' on the basis of individual character traits are inevitably destined to be fruitless without a much more holistic whole-child approach in schools, and complementary social policies that seek to mitigate the structural inequalities that negative impact upon students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **9.6.1 Mechanisms involved in supporting 'at-risk' young people**

The findings of my study contribute to the existing literature on the role of teacher-student relationships in promoting positive educational outcomes. In particular, I have shown that positive perceptions of teacher support have a positive effect on students' attainment, and, contrary to some previous studies, my analysis also provides evidence that teacher support continues to play an important role even as students become older.

These findings give a strong justification for promoting positive interpersonal relationships in order to enhance personal adjustment and development as students negotiate their educational career. Moreover, strong relationships have been shown above to be of great importance to all students (not just for the most vulnerable) and my study adds clear evidence to the premise that young people's attainment can be promoted through activation of their social support networks. The main finding of the statistical analysis implies that, in terms of levels of perceived support, 'resilient attainers' do not vary significantly from attainers who come from more affluent households. This, in turn, implies that effective support networks can promote positive educational outcomes for 'at-risk' students, as they can for all young people.

Notably, teacher support is shown to be particularly important for students who reported a relative lack of support from their parents, which supports the idea that the long-term relationship developed by teachers can prove to be a unique source of support for young people who lack access to support at home or elsewhere. As found in Klem & Connell's study of teacher support, my own findings support the notion that "students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school" (2004, p270). Certainly, teachers in the focus groups recognised the need for long-term consistency in their relationships with students and for providing structure at school, especially for those who did not receive it at home. Further qualitative research with students themselves would provide greater insights into the way in which they perceive their teachers and how this impacts upon their engagement and development at school.

From the teachers' perspective, my findings promote the idea that educational professionals need to develop and demonstrate their own capacity for resilience. It is interesting to note that discussion of the concept of resilience in the focus groups tended to raise the issue of teachers' own capacity for resilience as much as for the students in their charge. This implies a high degree of self-awareness and reflection displayed by teachers, which is a necessary part of the job. Indeed, resilient teachers are better placed to recognise what they can and cannot achieve with regards to individual students, acknowledging that, whilst there are factors beyond their sphere of control, they are nonetheless in a unique position to effect positive, transformative change.

### **9.6.2 Best practice in schools**

Given the unique position in which teachers find themselves, the findings of my study have some clear implications for practice in schools. Whilst there is already strong empirical evidence highlighting the positive impact of strong parent-teacher relationships on students' outcomes, my own findings support this and, furthermore, the qualitative data from the focus groups lends credence to the findings of the statistical analysis of students' perceived levels of parental and teacher support. Indeed, the educational professionals who participated in my study acknowledged the importance of good communication between schools and parents, and emphasised the role of the tripartite relationship between student, home and school. It is important, therefore, to recognise that all three elements have an equal responsibility to support the educational development of individual young people and there is a clear need for strong collaboration between teachers, parents and students towards developing strong, consistent and positive relationships.

In terms of teaching practice, it is important for teachers to adopt a whole-child approach at an individual level. Whilst the focus of policies moves closer towards instilling specific character traits in students, it is important not to ignore the impact of structural inequalities that negatively impact upon young people's educational experiences, and to recognise that individuals' self-perceptions do not arise in a vacuum. In terms of the resilience agenda to which all schools are forcibly subscribed, it is clear that, whilst there is nothing wrong with seeking to promote students' resilience per se, this is a more complex process than simply being able to instil some ethereal sense of self-empowerment. Rather, it must be about a more holistic approach, which equips young people with the resources and tools they can employ to overcome any of the adversities they may face. In addition, students' capacity

for resilience at school is best promoted through continued strong, consistent relationships with their teachers; to this end, there is a limit to the positive effect specific interventions or sporadic initiatives can have, especially if such strategies are, furthermore, positioned outside of the mainstream curriculum, where the lack of context may render them less relevant.

Whilst the findings of my study reaffirm the recognised attainment gap associated with socio-economic disadvantage and gender, teaching practices need, therefore, to adopt an intersectional approach when seeking to overcome individual students' specific risk factors. This is not to negate the significance of socio-demographic risk groups: rather it is to attempt to identify a range of potential factors that, when they occur in tandem, can be the focus of targeted interventions. This provides a more efficient and practical way of tackling the underlying problem(s) associated with educational underachievement, focusing on more easily-targeted factors than students' biological sex, gender socialization or family background. This, again, can be linked back to the importance of a holistic approach that takes structural factors into account in addition to individual behaviours and attitudes.

In order to implement such an approach, however, the culture within schools needs to change. The constant inspection and high-stakes testing regime that holds teachers to account for any perceived academic 'failures' foments a school culture that is highly risk-averse. Teachers need to feel that they have the ability to take more pedagogical risks in their practice, without the fear of calamitous reprisals. The pressure felt by educational professionals from government, inspectors, governors, parents and students needs to be relieved and teachers should be afforded greater trust in their professional ability. In this way, they will be free to introduce new strategies and pedagogies and this willingness to take risks will promote stronger organisational learning in schools.

The increasing importance of teacher support relationships amongst the older students in my study is likely to be due to the huge significance of periods of transition on students as they complete their GCSE studies. Following Year 11, students may move from a highly-regulated secondary school environment to a sixth form college or FE college – even within the same school, the learning environment within the sixth form is likely to be more flexible and learner-centred. The qualitative findings support this interpretation and staff members are aware that provide students with a vital source of support and specialist knowledge in preparing them for 'the next step'. Within such a capacity, also, teachers can be key in

reducing the stigma that is still associated with 'non-academic' pathways. They are well-placed to advise young people who would in fact benefit from these and to downplay what can often seem as the absolute importance placed on school exams in 'academic' subjects. The reduction of stigmatisation for vocational and technical educational routes is key in helping students to assess the value of the opportunities in front of them beyond the binary success and failure associated with high-stakes terminal examinations and a disproportionate focus on more 'academic' subjects. However, as expressed by the focus group participants, the government's education reforms are already taking the opposite tack and, combined with increased scrutiny on teachers and greater constraint on resources, it is not clear whether teachers will have the freedom and ability to implement the advice and support that is needed.

### **9.6.3 Move away from individualised deficit-focused policy making**

Of course, it is the responsibility of the government to provide educational professionals with the tools required to perform their jobs effectively. At the same time, it is incumbent on the state to allow teachers the freedom and trust to implement strategies encompassing whole-child approach without over-regulation or excessive state interference.

However, as I have shown, the policy discourse has, for several years – but most notably under successive, Conservative-led governments since 2010 – been characterised by a commitment to neoliberal market-led approaches in combination with the oversight of a strong and centralised regulatory state. Far from accepting the structural inequalities facing the most disadvantaged, this serves to reinforce the idea of a deficit model that attributes the academic shortcomings of students to their own internal deficiencies and individualises their own ability to succeed or fail. Within this discourse, as many authors (e.g. Gillies, 2016; Kisby, 2017; Ecclestone & Lewis, 2014) have pointed out, structural inequalities are recast as individual moral failings and the experience of disadvantage and poverty “come to be taken as evidence of failure to learn ‘character’, which equates to personal failure in its own right” (Gillies, 2016, p13). This policy agenda has done little to promote social mobility and further reinforces inequalities predicated on the valorisation of dominant White (upper-) middle class cultural norms.

Placing vague individual characteristics such as 'resilience' at the heart of the government's strategy to promote social mobility is therefore problematic, especially if it is not also accompanied by an acknowledgement of the flexible and relativistic nature of young



people's contextual circumstances. Policies that emphasise personal characteristics and skills development place young people's outcomes at the feet of the individual and overlook the importance of structural factors that affect the way in which students negotiate their educational trajectories. In particular, they run the risk of judging all students against a White, middle-class, affluent 'ideal', which serves only to pathologise the 'character' of young people from different social or cultural backgrounds.

The findings of my analysis present a more complex picture, whereby it is important to take into account the whole context of the individuals concerned, including inter-relationships that occur at every 'level' of their bio-ecological system (and especially between students and teachers). This is reinforced by the views of the focus groups participants, who highlight the need for sufficient time and resources to be able to adopt a holistic and integrated approach towards their practice and pedagogy. Policy makers need also to recognise that the most effective strategies for developing young people's potential for achieving resilient outcomes and the possibility for upward social mobility lie in developing a multifaceted response to a complex situation, to provide a many-pronged attack to an accumulation of risk factors.

The government, however, appears not to have the political will to steer away from their ideological fixation on increasing diversification and marketization of educational provision, promoting an emphasis on (supposed) meritocratic individualism, whilst retaining a firm control over what constitutes legitimate knowledge and values within the education system. Were the political will to be found, it is still dubious whether the government would be able to find the funding needed to resource the schools sufficiently. Government reforms have, instead, further served to exacerbate the already difficult relationship between policy makers and teachers. Increased workloads, more frequent and tougher inspections and new benchmark targets for which they are accountable have increased the pressures felt by individual teachers, whilst the resources available to them have diminished. The resulting competition for resources is a further example of the government's neoliberal agenda, which, in combination with wider welfare and public service cuts, means that teachers and professionals on the ground have to pick up the shortfall in order to provide all students with an effective education.

## 10 – Conclusions

My doctoral study set out to examine the role of teachers in providing support to young people 'at-risk' of poor academic attainment. In so doing, I have provided a critique of the ubiquitous concept of 'resilience' – used as a policy buzzword by this and previous governments – and cast doubt over its purported ability to provide students with the key skills needed to achieve academic success, even when faced with adverse circumstances.

Drawing on an extensive amount of new survey data, I have been able to explore the relationship between students' perceptions of support and experiences at school. This is important as, beyond simply the *availability* of support, the ways in which young people interpret and respond to this support is crucial in understanding how they are able to activate these resources to shape their outcomes.

Furthermore, being able to link this dataset with official administrative records obtained from the Department for Education, has contributed significantly to the robustness of my analysis, enabling clear relationships to be established between perceptions of support and academic outcomes. Access to such a wealth of statistical information has strengthened my findings and has facilitated my engagement with previous academic studies in this field. My study adds, therefore, to the weight of evidence that exists pointing to a significant correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and educational non-attainment. Going beyond this, my thesis also makes a significant new contribution to understanding the mechanisms which underpin the role of positive social support networks in supporting young people at school.

The findings of my study have confirmed the well-established link in the literature between socio-economic disadvantage and educational attainment, with students from poorer backgrounds being shown to be less likely to achieve good academic results than those from more well-off households. Using eligibility for free school meals as a proxy to identify students most 'at-risk', my results highlight that this marker remains an important indicator for disadvantage beyond simply being a measure of economic hardship. These students are likely to be the ones with access to fewest resources, not only financial (e.g. paid tutoring or extra-curricular activities) but also in terms of social and cultural capital.

However, my study also shows that students from poorer backgrounds who do achieve positive academic outcomes do not differ significantly from their more affluent peers in

terms of their overall levels of perceived support. This is important, as the strong correlation between perceived support and educational attainment appears to imply that – at least to some extent – positive social relationships can overcome some of the disadvantage associated with low socio-economic status. Moreover, it is clear that having access to a number of different sources of support can provide a mutually reinforcing network that, working together, has a positive effect on young people’s educational outcomes. Engaging with the literature on risk and resilience, the processes involved in promoting support for students who might otherwise be expected to struggle academically can be framed in terms of ‘buffering’ them against adverse circumstances to promote resilience.

Whilst, this might imply that all one requires is sufficient levels of support to be able to demonstrate resilience, this is clearly too simplistic a view to take. Moreover, constructing resilience as an individual trait is also problematic, and placing sole responsibility at the feet of the individual overlooks the importance of structural factors. The key argument underpinning my critique of the government’s focus on resilience, is that wider structural factors need to be addressed so that all students can have access the same an opportunity for success. A reliance on a discourse that individualises academic success and failure – i.e. if you succeed, it is because you are resilient; if you fail, you did not demonstrate enough resilience – is harmful and patronising to young people experiencing very real adversities far beyond their control.

To this end, I have been clear in my research to construct ‘resilience’ in reference to young people’s attainment of what can be seen as a resilient *outcome* – that is, achieving a positive result, where a negative one might have been more likely. This is consistent with a number of academic writers, who espouse an outcome-based definition of resilience (Masten, 2009; Olsson *et al.*, 2003).

By contrast, I am highly critical of the policy discourse that has come to pervade successive UK governments’ education strategy, which places the individual student at the centre of a deficit model of resilience. ‘Character education’ initiatives seek to instil the ‘right kind’ of traits in students, believing that if only they had certain key skills or attributes, they would be able to overcome any and all setbacks to succeed and thrive. Whilst I am clear that teaching young people key life skills is of course important, it is I believe a necessary but not sufficient condition in supporting the academic success of all students. Initiatives that

centre on students' ability to 'learn' resilience reinforces the idea of a deficit model and attributes the academic shortcomings of students to their own internal deficiencies. This thereby serves to individualise students' own ability to succeed or fail, consistent with a neoliberal discourse of meritocratic individualism.

It is important for government ministers to recognise that students' outcomes do not develop in a vacuum and can be seen as a symptom of wider issues within their lives. It is clear that the use of 'resilience' in this way forms part of a neoliberal political agenda that individualises success and failure whilst at the same time providing cover for widespread 'austerity' policies and cuts in funding for services that would support young people most in need of additional help.

My thesis challenges, therefore, the salience of the concept of 'resilience' as a personality trait that can be taught through 'character education' initiatives. Indeed, I argue that such initiatives are inevitably destined to be fruitless without government, teachers and curricula taking a much more holistic 'whole-child' approach in schools, with complementary social policies that seek to mitigate the structural inequalities that disadvantage students from backgrounds without access to capital being valorised by the mainstream education system.

Furthermore, what is meant when we talk about resilience is open to a high degree of interpretation. Even as constructed within the government's discourse, it is not clear that initiatives to promote resilience will be consistently applied in schools. This emerged clearly from the focus groups with teachers, who interchangeably talked about resilience as a personal characteristic, part of a process, something that can be instilled and something that must be nurtured and developed. This places resilience within as fluid an educational discourse as, say, 'learning', and thus as open to lack of rigour in defining or creating strategies to enhance it.

Adopting a mixed methods approach allowed me to take into account the perspectives not only of the students but also of the teachers, eliciting significant insights into how they interpret and enact their role in relation to the government's character education and resilience agenda. Within such an environment, interpretations of resilience and how these are implemented in practice by teachers is highly variable and inconsistent. Whilst in some schools strategies seek to teach young people how to fail well (e.g. learning from mistakes,

etc.), in others the focus is on reframing failure – effectively a downwards revision of what constitutes ‘success’ for an individual experiencing a perceived academic ‘failure’.

Teachers and students alike are both navigating the system and seeking to achieve ‘success’ and avoid ‘failure’. The use of mixed methods has afforded me the opportunity to examine the important student-teacher relationship from the perspective of both participants. In particular, this methodological approach has highlighted key gaps in the academic research with regards to promoting resilience in schools. Importantly, the focus on students’ ability to learn and acquire resilience fails to take sufficient account of the resilience capacity demonstrated by their *teachers*.

The findings of my study conclude that teachers are self-reflective and seek to improve their own practice for the benefit of their students. In particular, they are self-aware about their own levels of resilience and recognise that they, too, must develop their capacity for dealing effectively with setbacks in their professional life. This demonstrates, perhaps ironically, that in order to promote resilient outcomes for students, there need to be resilient teachers, and it is the responsibility of the government to improve teacher retention and provide educational professionals with the tools required to perform their jobs effectively.

Teachers are clearly uniquely placed to provide pivotal support for those students who are most at-risk of poor educational outcomes. Combining Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems model with Bourdieusian notions of capital and habitus, I have shown how teachers operate within a key proximal relationship of a young person’s microsystem, and have a profound opportunity to shape and guide the development of their students. In this way, teachers are able to overcome structural risks by actively fostering ‘buffers’ or protective effects that enable disadvantaged students to successfully adapt to the extant socio-cultural environment, providing the social and cultural resources not available from other sources.

In many ways, the teachers who participated in my study perhaps underestimated the influence they do actually have on the young people in their charge. Whilst teachers are keen to shift responsibility for academic ‘difficulties’ to parents or structural disparities – far beyond their sphere of influence as teachers – they may in fact risk reinforcing the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage. It is important for them to recognise what they can and cannot achieve with regards to individual students, acknowledging that, whilst

there are factors beyond their sphere of control, they are nonetheless in a unique position to effect positive and transformative change.

This being said, of course, what also came out of the focus groups was the intense pressure that teachers felt they were under from all directions. A constant squeeze on resources and a culture of inspection and mistrust from above (the government and inspection culture) and below (parents and governors) means that teachers are being held accountable for educational outcomes, even as they have fewer tools at their disposal. This promotes a risk-averse school culture that discourages pedagogical risk taking, which in turn can hinder schools' ability to keep up with and adapt to specific changes in circumstances.

Thus, I would argue that students would benefit from teachers adopting a more holistic approach, equipping young people with the resources and tools they can employ to overcome the adversities they may face. This should also include collaboration with a range of stakeholders – not just parents, but community organisations, faith groups and other extra-curricular agencies – which can support teachers to implement such an approach. In this way, students' capacity for resilience at school can be best promoted through consistent relationships with their teachers and others as part of a long-term process of development.

### ***Future research***

This, then, points to several areas that provide rich seams for future research. In particular, the extent to which teachers – albeit unwittingly – contribute to the persistence of structural inequalities within the system merits further examination. It is important to ensure that teachers do not underestimate the huge influence they have on their students and explore further the real effects of such influence.

Beyond the role of teachers in mainstream schools, the influence of other institutions and individuals on young people's access to support and the effect this can have on promoting positive academic outcomes warrants further investigation. This, of course, must include parents, family members and friends – but also organisations, such as community schools, after-school clubs, faith organisations and other agencies with which young people come into regular contact.

Additionally, from a policy perspective, a more extensive evaluation of how the government's resilience agenda is being interpreted and implemented on-the-ground could

provide further insights into how coherent a policy this is, in reality. Given my investigation of two schools located within the same local setting produced a wide variety of interpretations and strategies, it is highly likely that different institutions across the country will be employing very different approaches, yielding vastly different results. A wider evidence base for the success of these initiatives is also needed, although how positive outcomes could meaningfully be attributed to increased 'resilience' once again relies on how the concept is interpreted. Other contemporary factors, such as rising mental health concerns for staff and students, may be affecting both resilience-capacity and achievement at school

Whilst this study has focused on students who are most 'at-risk' – those eligible for free school meals and, therefore, at the greatest socio-economic disadvantage – it would be interesting to investigate at what point one's socio-economic background is no longer associated with less favourable educational outcomes. In addition, the role of gender and ethnicity may provide a rich seam for further research and, whilst unable to be fully explored here, these factors undoubtedly have a profound effect on young people's experiences, interactions and trajectories – within education and beyond.

As highlighted in my analysis, the crude distinction employed to differentiate between those who are 'disadvantaged' (i.e. those eligible for free school meals) and those who are not belies the diversity that inevitably exists within this 'not disadvantaged' group. Whilst the correlation between disadvantage and attainment is indeed a worrying trend, this is not necessarily an issue affecting only the most disadvantaged in society. Many 'middle class' students may also be being held back by a lack of access to resources that are increasingly in the hands of only a small self-perpetuating elite. Further research might point to what is needed to break open the monopoly of this group and to highlight where social *advantage* might be as detrimental as *disadvantage* to perpetuating structural inequalities. Indeed, research focusing on the role of elites has the potential to expose the tangible effect that these invisible but highly-influential people have on ordinary people and to highlight their seeming imperviousness to new entrants hidden beneath the smokescreen of 'meritocracy'.

To conclude, the term 'resilience' has emerged as a popular buzzword in education policy. However, the government's focus on resilience as a key skill or attribute that young people need to acquire in order to thrive in today's world means that it cannot simply be

disregarded as meaningless jargon. Students' futures are at stake and adherence to a discourse of individualised success and failure risks perpetuating, if not worsening, the structural inequalities that exist in our society.

From its origins in the field of mechanical science, 'resilience' has extended into the social sciences through the metaphor of being capable of springing back into one's original shape following exposure to considerable stress. In this way, it was first employed with respect to disaster management in development to explore how communities could anticipate, withstand or mitigate the effects of natural disasters or catastrophic events. Building resilience was seen as a way to avert disaster by resisting damage and responding quickly to catastrophe. Such metaphors are now being employed with regards to young people's personal development and academic attainment. Within such a context, it could be argued that schools are also operating a form of 'disaster management', seeking to overcome the odds to meet the needs of all their students.

Interestingly criticism of the resilience agenda in disaster management has increasingly characterised the concept as part of a wider neoliberal discourse. It focuses on how 'building resilience' tends towards reproducing pre-existing vulnerabilities, inequities and marginalising processes whilst shifting responsibility away from the state. Academic research must, therefore, engage head-on with the government's adoption of the resilience agenda in education, to provide strong evidence that a focus on individualised success is likely to fail a section of young people by doing nothing to ameliorate the wider inequalities inherent in the system.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – University Ethics Committee Risk Assessment and Ethical Approval

### Middlesex University

#### School of Law

#### Social Sciences Academic Group

(Subject areas other than Sociology and Criminology)

#### Application for Research Ethics Approval

Name of principal researcher: Neil Kaye

Address: Social Policy Research Centre, Dept of Social Sciences, Middlesex University, Hendon Campus, NW4 4BT

Phone Number: 0208 411 5826

Email address: n.kaye@mdx.ac.uk

Name(s) / positions of staff and/or other collaborators. (if applicable):

Prof Louise Ryan, Co-director, SPRC; Alessio D'Angelo, Senior Lecturer, SPRC; Magdolna Lorinc, Research Assistant, SPRC

Are you: Undergraduate  Postgraduate  Staff

Students only: Name of supervisor(s)/tutor(s): Prof Louise Ryan; Lucy Neville, Victoria de Rijke

Proposed title of study:

***"The effect of teacher support on promoting resilience amongst young people 'at risk' of early school leaving"***

1. Has ethics approval been obtained from a Research Ethics Committee external to the University? (e.g. NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee)  
YES  NO

**If 'yes' please attach copy of letter granting ethics approval, sign on page 3 and submit through usual process.** You may not need to complete the rest of this form.

2. Please give a brief description (50-100 words) of the proposed study, including planned methods

(e.g. observation, postal questionnaire, in-depth interviews, etc.); **main characteristics of research participants** (e.g. NHS hospital out-patients; care workers; service managers); intended **sample sizes**

RESL.eu analyses Early School Leaving (ESL) from a holistic perspective, by evaluating the complex interplay of factors influencing ESL on a structural, institutional and individual level. The project is funded through the EU Framework 7 programme and will take place in nine European countries, including the UK, over a period of five years.

The first stage of this project has already received ethical approval from the Middlesex University School of Law ethics sub-committee. Data collection for the RESL.eu project has therefore already begun.

This specific PhD project embedded within the wider RESL.eu research plan focuses on the role of teacher support in promoting resilience amongst young people 'at-risk' of early school leaving in the UK. This will be investigated through the analysis of data obtained through the two student surveys (the first in Spring/Summer 2014, and a follow-up survey in Spring/Summer 2016) and the teacher survey (Spring/Summer 2015) to be carried out under work package 3 (WP3), but will also be supplemented by qualitative interviews with teaching personnel in those schools and colleges that have already agreed to take part in the surveys.

My PhD thesis will focus on two specific aspects, undertaking secondary analyses of the empirical data collected as part of the quantitative part of the RESL.eu project: firstly, data will be collected from students to assess the extent to which they can be identified as being 'at-risk' of early school leaving. Important socioeconomic and demographic variables will be drawn from the current academic literature on ESL and from the preliminary analysis of the first data collection in the RESL.eu project. From the 3,000 students participating in the survey, I will look more in-depth at the sub-sample of students who fit this 'at-risk' profile, I will then use the quantitative data collected to assess their levels of resilience, their perception of support given by their teachers and their perception of support given through alternative social resources at their disposal (i.e. parental support, peer support, other community networks).

The second aspect of the thesis will be to look at teacher support strategies to promote resilience from the point of view of individual school and teachers. This part of the PhD will use the empirical data collected through teacher surveys (approximately 100 surveys to be conducted as part of the RESL.eu project – yet to be design, ethical approval will be sought for this stage of the project at a later date) to assess quantitatively the levels of support teachers have of existing school policies, the importance and level of support teachers give to students they feel are particularly vulnerable and further information relating to classroom practices and strategies of engagement. The quantitative data collected as part of the RESL.eu project will be supplemented by a small number (8-10) of qualitative interviews, which I will conduct

with members of staff in schools participating in the wider research project (see indicative topic guide attached).

3. Is the study to be based entirely on published secondary sources<sup>1</sup>?

YES  **Please sign on page 3**  
**Students must have the form countersigned by their tutor**

NO  Please complete all remaining questions

4. From what population will your participants be drawn?

Student survey participants will be young people currently in Years 10 and 12 attending schools and FE colleges that have agreed to take part in this research project. The two research areas are the Barnet and Enfield, and Tyne & Wear.

Teacher survey participants and interviewees will be drawn from amongst the teaching staff (including teaching assistants) currently employed in schools and FE colleges in the two research areas.

Will participants include children?

YES

What ethical issues are raised by the characteristics of participants?

Fieldwork to be conducted in schools and FE colleges has already received ethical approval as part of this phase of the wider RESL.eu project.

Ethical approval for the follow-up survey with young people in the Spring/Summer of 2016 will sought separately in Autumn 2015 as part of this stage of the RESL.eu project. The survey be conducted online and sent to all participants in the initial survey by email. The survey is fully voluntary and participants will not be required to respond to any question they do not want to. Privacy can be ensured once the data has been collected by separating any personal identification data from respondents' answers in the rest of the questionnaire.

The teachers survey will also be designed by the wider RESL.eu consortium as part of this stage of the project. As such, ethical approval for this instrument will be sought in the Autumn of 2014, ahead of the commencement of this stage of data collection. The survey will be conducted with participants, and seek to elicit information from them in their professional capacity. This survey will be fully voluntary, and participants will not be required to respond to any question they do not want to. As the questionnaire is focused on teaching staff as educational professionals, only minimal personal information will be sought and any identifying data will be removed at the analysis stage.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. library study; published statistics

Interviews with teaching staff will take place face-to-face on the premises of the schools and colleges where they work. Participants will be given clear information on the project and the PhD thesis for which this interview data will be used, and informed consent will be sought before the commencement of any data collection. Interviewees will be anonymised at the data analysis stage and participants will be assured of confidentiality so as to encourage them to be as discreet as possible.

**NB You should check whether external ethics approval is required for research involving any of your participants.**

5. Where will data gathering take place?<sup>2</sup>

Data gathering for the first stage of the RESL.eu project has already received ethical approval. Empirical data collection will also take place at later stages and ethical approval for this will be sought at a later date, as outlined above.

My PhD thesis will primarily involve the secondary analysis of empirical data along with a small number of qualitative interviews with teachers in the two research areas. The interviews will be conducted on the premises of the schools and colleges where they work during normal working hours. They will be conducted on a face-to-face basis with the prior consent of participants and the institutions for which they work.

What ethical issues might this raise for you and/or for your participants?

As the majority of the research undertaken for my PhD thesis will involve secondary analysis of data, ethical issues of primary data collection are reduced. In analysis and dissemination, however, great care will be taken to anonymise respondents and data will be reported in a generic way to reduce the likelihood of being able to identify any participant. Statistical analysis of the data will seek to uncover general trends and generalizable themes relating to resilience and support structures available to young people in a school environment.

Qualitative data collection will be undertaken with teaching staff during working hours at the schools and colleges where they work and with the permission of the schools and colleges as well as the participants themselves.

Issues around confidentiality will be discussed with participants before the interviews and participants will be assured that they will be anonymised at the data reporting stage. This will be discussed in detail at each stage of the ethical approval process running in parallel with the design of the wider RESL.eu project. Detailed information about the RESL.eu project and the PhD thesis will be given to interviewees beforehand

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<sup>2</sup> This might include specified location(s) e.g. geographical area(s); participants' school(s) or workplace(s), etc. Alternatively, you might indicate who will choose the location, e.g. at a suitable location chosen by the participant(s).

and their informed consent to participate in the study will be sought. Teachers will be interviewed in their professional capacity with a focus on their relations with students – particularly those perceived as ‘at risk’ of early school leaving, classroom practices and strategies for support and engagement. For this reason, only minimal personal information will be sought and any identifiable data will be removed to ensure confidential disclosure of sensitive information regarding any individual students or other teaching staff.

6. Will you be obtaining written informed consent? YES  NO

Will you be obtaining verbal informed consent? YES  NO

If ‘no’ to both questions for any class of participants, please explain:

7. Will payment or an incentive be offered to participants? YES  NO

Please explain rationale in either case:

Student survey participants will be entered into a prize draw to win a touch screen tablets. Ethical approval has already been received for this.

Teaching staff will not be offered any material incentives to participate in the research.

8. Will your participants be guaranteed: (a) confidentiality? YES  NO

(b) anonymity? YES  NO

If more than one class of participant and/or ‘no’ to either question, please explain.

9. Are there other ethical and/or legal issues raised by this research? YES  NO   
(e.g. relating to methods of access, informed consent, or any other aspects)

If ‘yes’, please specify:

---

**Please attach (if available):**

(a) draft of any interview schedule or questionnaire you propose to use.

(b) any information sheet and/or consent forms for participants

**Researcher's Statement:** I believe the information given above to be true. The methodology outlined above will be that used for this research project. **I will notify my supervisor (students) / Social Science Academic Group Ethics Subcommittee<sup>3</sup> (staff) of any proposed change to this methodology.**

I have read and understood one of the following:

- |  |   |                          |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| The Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines<br>(available at: <a href="http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics.htm">http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics.htm</a> )<br>NO | YES <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice<br>NO<br>(available at: <a href="http://www.britisoc.org.uk">www.britisoc.org.uk</a> )            | YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The Political Studies Association ethics guidelines<br>NO<br>(available at <a href="http://www.psa.ac.uk">www.psa.ac.uk</a> )  | YES <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Another set of ethics guidelines appropriate to my research topic<br>NO<br>(Please specify)  | YES <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Signature of Researcher(s): 

Date: 11/03/2014

**All Students:** Signature of Supervisor(s)/Tutor(s):

Date:

**Undergraduate/taught masters students who have answered Questions 4-9**

Name of member of Programme team who has reviewed this form:

Signature:

Date:

**You may commence fieldwork only after your supervisor and another member of the programme team have signed this form.**

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**BPhil/MPhil/PhD students and staff**

Passed by Social Science Academic Group Ethics Subcommittee (SSAGES)

<sup>3</sup> C/o Ruth Turze, Research Administrator

Middlesex University  
Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics Sub-Committee

**INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FORM  
UNDERGRADUATE AND POST-GRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENTS, CONTRACT RESEARCHERS**

**1 TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL PARTICIPANTS**

This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following fieldwork situations:

1. All fieldwork undertaken independently by individual students or small groups of students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).
2. All fieldwork undertaken by undergraduate and postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).

**APPLICANT DETAILS:**

<b>Student Number:</b>	M00325970
<b>Supervisor:</b>	Prof Louise Ryan

**Is your research**

- 1)  **PRIMARY (it involves engaging with participants)**
- 2)  **SECONDARY (it involves engaging with the literature and secondary data)**

**If your research is 1) PRIMARY complete sections from 1 to 7**

**If your research is 2) SECONDARY go to section 7**

**1.1 PROJECT TITLE:**

*"The effect of teacher support on promoting resilience amongst young people 'at risk' of early school leaving"*

**1.2 LOCALITY OF RESEARCH**

**Locality of research (City, Area of city, Country and Region)**

Research area 1: London boroughs of Barnet and Enfield

Research area 2: Tyne & Wear

**Travel Arrangements (e.g. How will you travel to the area where you are conducting your fieldwork? What is the setting?)**

Fieldwork will be conducted in a number of schools and FE colleges identified in the London Boroughs of Barnet and Enfield, on the one hand; and Tyne & Wear, on the other. These will be reached by public transport or by own means of transport.

**What are the potential risks you may be exposed to, and how will you address them?  
(Think carefully: Will you be conducting your fieldwork at night? Will the research be conducted in a high crime area? Will you be causing an offence?)**

Primary data collection for the PhD thesis will take place through face-to-face interviews with teaching staff. They will take place on school premises during normal working hours, with the permission of the participants and the schools and colleges in which they work.

**NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas fieldwork. Please note that the University of Middlesex does not cover any accidents during fieldwork.**

## **2 RISK TO RESEARCHERS**

**2.1 Will you be working with any of the following people? Please tick relevant box:**

- Prisoners or Arrestees
- Children/young people under 18 years
- Persons with health problems (physical, psychological or other)
- Others, if so please state

**2.1 Will you be collecting data in sensitive or potentially dangerous environments? If so, please state:**

.....  
NO  
.....

## **3 RISK TO PARTICIPANTS**

**3.1 Describe any potential physical/ emotional discomfort to participants during the research process**

Risk assessment has been completed and approval granted for the first stage of data collection in schools and FE colleges. All fieldwork will be carried out with the consent, and under the supervision of the schools and FE colleges involved, which have already agreed to take part in this project.

Taking part in this research is fully voluntary: all potential participants will be informed about the research project and will receive all necessary information about its aims, methods and confidentiality measures in advance.



Interviews with teachers will seek to elicit information from them in their professional capacity. Minimal personal details will be sought and any sensitive information will be handled with utmost care and confidentiality. Additionally, the permission of the institutions in which the teachers work will be sought so as to ensure the compliance and cooperation of the schools and colleges taking part in the project. Semi-structured interviews will focus on teachers' relationships with students, school policies and individual teacher strategies to support students and examples of good practice. Any personal details or identifiable information will be anonymised and removed in the data reporting stage.

Therefore, with these cautionary measures taken, it is not expected that taking part in this research will harm research participants physically, psychologically, legally or financially.

**3.2 How are you minimising the risk of causing any physical/ emotional discomfort to participants during the research process?** (e.g. What type of questions are you planning on asking? Are these intrusive? For example, you may want to formulate your questions in a sensitive style. How will you respect gender, culture or age related norms?)

The interviews with teachers will be conducted with the informed consent of the participants on the premises of the school or college where they work. The face-to-face interviews will be carried out by an experience researcher and questions will be focused on teachers' professional strategies to support students and promote resilience. The interviews will not seek to elicit any personal data (such as home contact details) and participants will remain anonymous, with any sensitive information kept confidential. Participants will be informed about the nature of the research project in advance and be made aware of their ability to withdraw from the project at any time.

#### 4 PUBLISHING INFORMATION

**4.1 Are you planning to make public photographs or videos of participants?** (e.g. using social networking sites such as Facebook, tweeter or any other form of media)

Individuals: Yes  No

If yes to either of these, please provide a copy of the consent form which participants will be asked to sign for this purpose.

#### 5 PARTICIPATION

**5.1 Are all the researchers students of Middlesex University?**

Yes  No

If no, please provide evidence of insurance cover, including:

- a) list of all people involved in the investigation: University's members of staff
- b) details of the form this cover will take.

**6 COSTS**

**6.1 Will your research increase work/cost to any Department or School of the University of Middlesex ?**

Yes (If yes, obtain and include the name and signature of the relevant Heads of School(s) concerned:


Name	Signature

No

**7 DECLARATION**

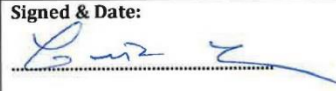
**To be completed by all applicants**

Please Read and Sign: The information I have given on this form is true and to the best of my knowledge correct:

Signed:  Date: 07/03/14

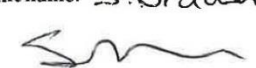

**Give the completed and signed copy to your supervisor.**

**SUPERVISOR APPROVAL (FOR BOTH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH)**

<b>Print Name:</b> LOUISE RYAN	<b>Signed &amp; Date:</b> 
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**ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL (FOR PRIMARY RESEARCH ONLY)**

LEVEL OF RISK:  LOW (one signature is required)  HIGH (two signatures are required)

<b>Member of the Ethics committee</b> <b>Print name:</b> S. Bradshaw 	<b>Signed &amp; Date:</b> 
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## Appendix 2 – RESL.eu students' questionnaire



### AA – Introduction and prize draw

This questionnaire is part of the Reducing School Leaving in the European Union project about the educational and career decisions of young people. The study is being undertaken in the UK by Middlesex University as part of a nine-country collaboration, funded by the European Commission.

We would like to hear from you about the decisions you have made and the plans you have for your future. This is an important opportunity for you to **have your voice heard and to share your experiences** with policy makers and educational experts.

The survey will last for approximately **30 minutes**. All the answers you give in this study will be confidential and will not be shown to anyone that you know, so please be honest with your views. Your answers will be collected with the views of other young people and be used to help shape programmes and policies for people like you in the future.

As part of the project we would like to contact you again in Spring 2016 to follow up on the information we collect today and to find out about your experiences in school, work, and further training. To ensure that we are able to keep in touch with you, we will be grateful if you will supply the following contact information. **Completion of your contact details will confirm your entry into a prize draw with the chance to win a touch screen tablet.** Your details will be used solely for the purposes of the prize draw and database for this project and will not be passed to any third party.

<b>Reference code:</b> _____	
<b>Surname</b> _____	<b>Telephone number</b> _____
<b>First Name</b> _____	<b>Mobile phone number</b> _____
<b>Email address</b> _____	<b>Social media ID</b>
<b>Alternative email address</b> _____	Twitter: @ _____
<b>Home Address</b> _____	Facebook: _____
<b>Home Address</b> _____	http://www.facebook.com/ _____
<b>Town/City</b> _____	Website/blog: http://www. _____
<b>Postal Code</b> _____	Other 1: _____
	Other 2: _____

**A – Personal information**

**A1 – What is your date of birth? (e.g. 16/04/1994) \_\_\_\_\_**

**A2 – Are you...?**

- Male
- Female

**A3 – Where were you born?**

- United Kingdom [Go to **A5**]
- India
- Poland
- Pakistan
- Republic of Ireland
- Another country (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**A4 – How old were you when you came to live in the UK? \_\_\_\_\_years**

**A5 – What religion, if any, do you belong to?**

- No religion [Go to **A7**]
- Christian – Catholic
- Christian – Protestant
- Christian – Orthodox
- Christian – Other
- Jewish
- Islamic
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Other religion

**A6 – How important would you say your religion is to the way you live your life?**

- Not at all Important
- Not very Important
- Fairly Important
- Very Important

**A7 – To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> White – English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish/British | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British – Indian      |
| <input type="radio"/> White – Irish   | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British – Pakistani   |
| <input type="radio"/> White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller                      | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi |
| <input type="radio"/> White – Other   | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British – Chinese     |
|   | <input type="radio"/> Asian/Asian British – Other       |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed – White and Black Caribbean                     | <input type="radio"/> Black/Black British – African     |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed – White and Black African                       | <input type="radio"/> Black/Black British – Caribbean   |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed – White and Asian                               | <input type="radio"/> Black/Black British – Other       |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed – Other   | <input type="radio"/> Arab                              |
|   | <input type="radio"/> Any other ethnic group            |

**A8 – What citizenship do you hold? (e.g. which country do you have a passport from) Select all that apply in case of dual or multiple citizenships.**

- United Kingdom
- India
- Poland
- Pakistan
- Republic of Ireland
- Another country (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**A9 – When you are talking at home to other members of your family do you regularly use any language(s) other than English?**

- Yes
- No [Go to **A12**]

**A10 – Apart from English what language(s) do you regularly use? Select all that apply.**

- Bengali
- Gujarati
- Panjabi
- Polish
- Urdu
- Another language (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**A11 – How well can you speak English?**

- Not at all well
- Not well
- Well
- Very well

**A12 – Do you have any longstanding illness or disability, infirmity or mental health condition that affects your daily activities in any way?**

	No	Yes, to some extent	Yes, a lot
Physical illness, disability or infirmity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health condition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**A13 – Outside of school lessons, do you take part in any of the following activities? If so, please state how often you attend them**

	Never	Less than Once a Week	Once a Week	Twice a Week	3 Times a Week or More
Being active in a sports club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Arts classes (e.g. art/music/dance/speech & drama)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Activities organised by religious groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Activities organised by community / cultural groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spending time at a youth club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meeting up with friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting with friends through social media sites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being active in a social or political organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**A14 – Do you currently, or have you ever worked in a spare-time paid job?**

- Yes, I currently work more than 20 hours per week
- Yes, I currently work 20 hours per week or less
- No, I do not currently work, but I have done in the past
- No, I have never worked in a paid job [Go to **A16**]

**A15 – What is the main reason why you work (or did work)? (Select one answer)**

- I have to work to finance my studies
- I have to work to provide financial support to others
- I need money to pay for my personal expenses
- I want to get work experience
- I prefer working to studying
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**A16 – Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement:**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
On the whole, I am satisfied with my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At times I think I am no good at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I certainly feel useless at times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take a positive attitude towards myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B – You and your family**

**B1 – How many people usually live at home with you (not including yourself)? \_\_\_\_\_**

**B2 – Who usually lives at home with you? Select all that apply.**

- Mother
- Father
- Stepmother or father's partner
- Stepfather or mother's partner
- Brothers/Sisters (including step-brothers, step-sisters, half-brothers and half-sisters)
- Any other relatives (e.g. grandmother / grandfather)
- Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**B3 – How many brothers and sisters do you have?**

- None [Go to **B6**]
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- More than four

**B4 – How many of your brothers and sisters are older than you?**

- None [Go to **B6**]
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- More than four

**B5 – Thinking about your older sibling(s), which of these best describes their educational status(es)? (Select as many as applies)**

- No qualifications
- Less than 5 GCSEs (A\*-C); no longer studying
- Less than 5 GCSEs (A\*-C); still in education
- 5+ GCSEs or equivalent (A\*-C); no longer studying
- 5+ GCSEs or equivalent (A\*-C); still in education
- Completed NVQ / BTEC / City & Guilds / OCR / Trade apprenticeship; no longer studying
- Completed NVQ / BTEC / City & Guilds / OCR / Trade apprenticeship; still in education
- Completed AS / A levels; no longer studying
- Completed AS / A levels; still in education
- Completed university degree; no longer studying
- Completed university degree; still in education
- I don't know

**B6 – Do you ever have to undertake any of the following activities to support your family?**

	Never	Sometimes	Regularly
Caring for a disabled or sick family member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Household activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working in a family business (whether paid or unpaid)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language assistance for family members (e.g. at the doctor's or with official paperwork)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify) _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**The next few questions are about your parents. By "parents", "mother" or "father", we mean whoever you consider your parents to be. They could be your birth parents, adoptive parents, step-parents or guardians.**

**B7 – Where were your parents born?**

	Father (or step-father, etc.)	Mother (or step-mother, etc.)
United Kingdom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
India	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pakistan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Republic of Ireland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Another country (please state) _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B8 – Which of these best describes the highest qualification achieved by your parents?**

	Father (or step-father, etc.)	Mother (or step-mother, etc.)
No qualifications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
GCSEs / O levels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trade Apprenticeship, BTEC, NVQ, RSA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A levels, or equivalent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University degree (including doctorate)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other qualifications (e.g. foreign qualifications)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't know	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B9 – Which of the following is the main activity each of your parents is doing at the moment?**

	Father (or step-father, etc.)	Mother (or step-mother, etc.)
Working full-time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working part-time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-employed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unemployed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Retired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Looking after the home/family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Long-term sick or disabled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please state) _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Don't Know	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B10 – What is your father's main job (or most recent job if not currently working)?**

Please write in the job title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please use a sentence to describe the kind of work he does (e.g. teaches high school students, manages a sales team, helps the cook to prepare meals in a restaurant):

\_\_\_\_\_

**B11 – What is your mother's main job (or most recent job if not currently working)?**

Please write in the job title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please use a sentence to describe the kind of work she does (e.g. teaches high school students, manages a sales team, helps the cook to prepare meals in a restaurant):

\_\_\_\_\_



**B12 – Overall, how well can each of your parents read English?**

	Not at all well	Not well	Well	Very well
Father	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mother	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B13 – Overall, how well can each of your parents speak English?**

	Not at all well	Not well	Well	Very well
Father	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mother	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B14 – Do you have a quiet space at home where you can study?**

- Yes
- No

**B15 – How many bedrooms are there in your home? \_\_\_\_\_**

**B16 – Do you own or have regular access to any of the following items at home?**

	Yes	No
Smartphone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tablet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computer or laptop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet connection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B17 – The following questions are about how you feel about talking to your mother or father. Answer for the parent you talk to the most.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I can trust my parent as someone to talk to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I tell my parent about a problem, they will probably blame me for it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I talk to my parent, I think they will try to understand how I feel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my parent for help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm having a social or personal problem, my parent would have advice about what to do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel bad about something, my parent will listen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B18 – The following questions are about your parents and their involvement with your schoolwork. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My parents make sure that I do my homework	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents make sure that I go to school every day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents praise me when I do well in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents believe that education is important to succeed in life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents talk to me about my future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents give me the support I need to do well in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B19 – The following questions are about your parents and their involvement with your school. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My parents attend regular meetings with my teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents have attended school events and activities in the last year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents encourage me to be involved in school activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B20 - How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My parents want to know who I am going out with when I go out with other kids	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In my free time away from home, my parents know who I'm with and where I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parents want me to tell them where I am if I don't come home straight after school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B21 - What are your parents' expectations for your education?**

- To complete school/college without 5 GCSEs A\*-Cs and leave education after that
- To complete school/college having achieved 5+ GCSEs A\*-C and leave education after that
- To complete school/college having achieved vocational qualifications (level 2 or above) and leave education after that
- To complete school/college having achieved AS / A levels and leave education after that
- To complete school/college and continue on to university
- I don't know; I don't think they have any expectations for my education

**C – At school**

**C1 – Did you attend kindergarten or pre-school (e.g. nursery school)?**

- No
- Yes, for one year or less
- Yes, for more than one year
- I don't know

**C2 – C4 – These questions intentionally left blank**

**C5 – Have you changed secondary schools since you started?**

- Yes, once
- Yes, twice
- Yes, more than twice
- No [Go to C7]

**C6 – Why did you leave your previous school?**

- Your family moved out of the area
- You were permanently excluded from the school
- Your parents wanted you to move school
- You did not feel good at that school
- You could not choose the courses you wanted / had to enrol in
- You could not keep up with the pace or level of teaching
- For another reason (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

***Please remember that your answers will be treated in strict confidence and no one other than the researchers will have access to your answers. Please answer as honestly as you can.***

**C7 – In the current school year, have you ever skipped school without permission, even if it was only for half a day or a single lesson?**

- Yes
- No [Go to C9]

**C8 – How frequently, on average, have you done this in the current school year?**

- 5 or more days per month
- 3-4 days per month
- 1-2 days per month
- Less than 1 day per month
- I don't know

**C9 – Since you have been at secondary school, have you ever missed school for longer than one month at a time?**

- No
- Yes, due to a long-term illness
- Yes, due to a suspension or disciplinary action
- Yes, because I could not find a school to enrol in
- Yes, for another reason (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**C10 – How much did each of the following influence your subject choices for GCSE (or equivalent)?**

	Not at All	A Little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much
Your parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teachers/other school staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone else (please specify) _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C11 – Which type of primary school did you go to?**

- Faith school
- Other state school
- Private school
- I don't know

**C12 – What grades did you get at the end of the last school year? (Select one answer)**

- Mostly As
- Mostly Bs
- Mostly Cs
- Mostly Ds
- Mostly Es and Fs
- Don't know / Not applicable

**C13 – Are you currently studying for any of the following qualifications? (Select all that apply)**

- GCSEs
- NVQ (level 2 or above)
- BTEC / City & Guilds / OCR (level 2 or above)
- AS / A-levels
- Trade Apprenticeship
- Other qualifications (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**C14 – How many GCSEs did you get / do you expect to get at the end of Year 11?**

Grade A\*-C \_\_\_\_\_

Grade D-G \_\_\_\_\_

**C15 – Thinking about how you feel you do at school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am good in most of my school subjects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I usually do poorly in tests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to do better than my friends in most subjects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to help my classmates in their schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can follow the lessons easily	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often have trouble paying attention to the teacher in class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get frightened when I am asked a question by the teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often find it hard to keep my mind on my work at school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C16 – Thinking about how you do your schoolwork: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I put a lot of effort into my schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spend a lot of time on my schoolwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I usually get my schoolwork done on time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>When I do my homework...</b>					
... I try to decide what I am supposed to learn, rather than just read the material	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... I try to plan what I have to do before I get started	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... I make sure that I get started on it early	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C17 – Thinking about how you cope with things that happen at school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe I am mentally tough when it comes to exams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think I am good at dealing with schoolwork pressures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am good at dealing with setbacks at school (e.g. bad marks, negative feedback on my schoolwork)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am good at figuring out problems and planning how to solve them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often try to learn from my mistakes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C18– Thinking about your performance in school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The more effort I put into my classes, the better I do in them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No matter what I do, I can't seem to do well in my classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my grades reflect directly on my academic ability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I receive bad grades, it is because the teacher marks me unfairly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C19–Thinking about your school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think that this is a good school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like a real part of this school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend to other kids that they go to my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C20—Thinking about your time at school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Trying hard at school will help me to get a good job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School has been a waste of time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy learning new things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schooling is not so important for kids like me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trying hard at school will help me to go to college/university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn more useful things from my family and friends than I learn in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting a good education is the best way to get ahead in life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C21 – Thinking about the teachers at your school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Most of my teachers at school are good teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers feel that my work is poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers try to help me do well in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers respect me as a person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers <i>do not</i> treat me fairly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My teachers don't care if I fail or succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C22 – Thinking about the teachers at your school: to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I can trust my teachers as people to talk to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I tell my teachers about a problem, they will probably blame me for it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I talk to my teachers, I think they will try to understand how I feel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel bad about something, my teachers will listen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my teachers for help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm having a social or personal problem, my teachers would have advice about what to do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**C23 – To what level of education do your teachers expect you to achieve? (Select one answer)**

- To complete school/college without 5 GCSEs A\*-Cs and leave education after that
- To complete school/college having achieved 5+ GCSEs A\*-C and leave education after that
- To complete school/college having achieved vocational qualifications (level 2 or above) and leave education after that
- To complete school/college having achieved AS / A levels and leave education after that
- To complete school/college and continue on to university
- I don't know

**C24 – Thinking about the learning environment in your classes: to what extent to you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>In class...</b>					
... the teacher has to wait a long time for students to quieten down	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... students do not listen to what the teacher says	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... there is noise and disorder	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Please remember that your answers will be treated in strict confidence and no one other than the researchers will have access to your answers. Please answer as honestly as you can.**

**C25 – Do you feel you are treated unfairly or discriminated against at school...?**

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
By the teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[If both ticked go to C27]

**C26 – On what grounds? (Select all that apply)**

- Colour or race
- Nationality
- Religion
- Language / accent
- Ethnic group
- Gender
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**C27 – Does your school provide additional tutoring / learning support outside regular classes?**

- Yes
- No [Go to C30]
- I don't know [Go to C30]

**C28 – In the last 12 months how many times on average have you been involved in tutoring / learning support at school?**

- 3 times a week or more
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once a week, on average
- Never [Go to **C30**]

**C29 – What kind of tutoring / learning support have you been involved in at school? (Select all that apply)**

- Additional lessons in school subjects which go beyond what you have learned in class
- Catch-up lessons to help you in school subjects
- Lessons to improve your study skills
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**C30 – In the last 12 months have you received any tutoring / learning support outside of school in subjects also taught at your school?**

- Yes
- No [Go to **C33**]

**C31 – Who, or what organisation, provided this tutoring / learning support? (Select all that apply)**

- A family member or friend
- A private tutor
- A neighbourhood/community based organisation
- Another person or organisation (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**C32 – What kind of tutoring / learning support have you been involved in? (Select all that apply)**

- Additional lessons in school subjects which go beyond what you have learned in class
- Catch-up lessons to help you with school subjects
- Lessons to improve you study skills
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**C33 – As part of your studies, have you undertaken an internship or work experience placement?**

- No, internships/work placements are not part of the course
- No, I was not interested in undertaking an internship/work placement
- No, I was not able to find a suitable internship/work placement
- Not yet, but I will undertake an internship/work placement as part of this course
- Yes, I am currently undertaking an internship/work placement
- Yes, I successfully completed an internship/work placement

**C34 – Do you currently receive any scholarships, study loans or other financial assistance to study?**

- Yes
- No



**D – Your friends**

The following questions are about your relationships with friends and other students at school.

**D1 – How many of your friends...**

	Very few or none of them	Less than half of them	About half of them	More than half of them	Most or all of them
...are the same gender as you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...are about the same age as you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...are from the same ethnic or cultural background as you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...live in the same neighbourhood as you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...are in the same school as you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...have left secondary education without getting 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...have left education and are unemployed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...have left education and have a job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**D2 – Thinking about how you feel about talking to your friends, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I can trust my friends as people to talk to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I tell my friends about a problem, they will probably blame me for it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I talk to my friends, I think they will try to understand how I feel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I feel bad about something, my friends will listen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my friends for help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I'm having a social or personal problem, my friends would have advice about what to do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**D3 – Thinking about the friends you hang out with, how important is it to...:**

	Not at all important	Not very important	Neutral / Don't know	Fairly important	Very important
...attend class regularly?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...study?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...get good grades?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...finish secondary school?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...continue education GCSEs?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...make money?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...start a family / settle down?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Please remember that your answers will be treated in strict confidence and no one other than the researchers will have access to your answers. Please answer as honestly as you can.**

**D4 – At school, how often do each of the following things happen to you?**

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite often	Very often
How often have you hit someone for what they said/did?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often have you been involved in a physical fight?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often have you been sent to office for doing something wrong?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**D5 – In the last 12 months, how often have each of the following happened to you?**

	Never	Once a Month or Less Often	A Few Times a Month	A Few Times a Week	Every day
Been upset by being called hurtful names by other students (including getting text messages or emails from them)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other students at school made you give them money or personal possessions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other students <b>threatened</b> to hit you, kick you or use any other form of violence against you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other students <b>actually</b> hit you, kick you or use any other form of violence against you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**E – Your neighbourhood**

**E1 – How long does it take for you to get from home to your school?** approx. \_\_\_\_mins

**E2 – How long have you lived at your current address?**

- Less than 12 months
- Between 12 months and 2 years
- Longer than 2 years [Go to **E4**]

**E3 – From where did you move?**

- Another place nearby
- Somewhere else within this country
- Another country

**E4 – How would you describe the area where you currently live?**

- An area where **almost nobody** belongs to a minority cultural or ethnic group
- Some people** belong to a minority cultural or ethnic group
- Many people** belong to a minority cultural or ethnic group

**E5 – The following are a list of statements about your neighbourhood. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each one.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel like I belong to this neighbourhood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel safe walking alone in this area after dark	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The friendships and associations I have with other people in my neighbourhood mean a lot to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe my neighbours would help in an emergency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People are often drunk or using drugs in public places in your neighbourhood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a lot of graffiti or vandalised property/vehicles around your neighbourhood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People are often attacked or harassed on the street	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other young people in your area have harassed or attacked you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**F – Your future plans and aspirations**

**F1 – What is the highest level of education you are aiming to achieve before leaving full-time education?**

- 0-4 GCSEs (grades A\*-C)
- 5+ GCSEs (grades A\*-C)
- Vocational qualifications (Level 2 or higher)
- A-levels
- Degree (including post-graduate qualifications)
- I don't know

**F2 – When you have finished full-time education, what would you like to do next?**

- Start working full-time [Go to **F4**]
- Start learning a trade / work-based learning (or other part-time vocational qualification)
- Move into part-time education, studying whilst also working in a paid job
- Move into part-time education, studying whilst also looking after family/home
- Look after family full time [Go to **F4**]
- Something else (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_ [Go to **F4**]

**F3 – What is the highest level of education you are aiming to achieve before leaving part-time education?**

- A levels / AS levels at Sixth Form
- A levels / AS levels at FE College
- Vocational course(s)
- HE access course
- Undergraduate degree course
- I don't know

**F4 – How likely do you think it is that you will achieve your desired level of education?**

- Not at all likely
- Not very likely
- Fairly likely
- Very Likely

**F5 – In five years' time, what job or occupation would you like to be doing?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION! WE WILL KEEP YOU UP TO DATE ABOUT  
OUR PRIZE RAFFLE**



This Project is funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme

## Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu)

### What is this research about?

The RESL.eu project is seeking to understand the **educational and career choices of young people** living in two areas of England: the **London Boroughs of Barnet and Enfield** on the one hand; and **Gateshead and South Tyneside**, on the other. It is also exploring possible **causes and consequences of early school leaving**, and looking to identify examples of **good practice** currently being implemented in English schools.

The project has been given **ethical approval** by the Middlesex University Ethics Committee.

### Why should I take part?

This is an opportunity for you to **have your voice heard, share your ideas and raise concerns about education, careers and aspirations for the future**.

Those who fill out the survey will be entered into a **prize draw** to win **one of XX touch screen tablets**.

### Who is being invited to participate and what will it involve?

We will be conducting surveys, interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders in education: policy makers, teachers and school administration staff, parents, and of course, young people who are still in or already had left the education system.

The **survey** we are asking you to take part in will be administered to **3000 young people in England**, across the two research sites in London and North East England. Several schools are participating in this research project at both sites. Survey respondents are coming from two year groups: **Years 10 and 12**.

In 2016, the same participants will be approached for a **follow-up survey** to find out about their educational and career experiences during the intervening period.

### What I will be asked about?

The survey will last for approximately **30 minutes**. It contains general questions about you, your family and friends, such as your age, interests, educational and career plans, etc. We also ask for your name and contact details, so we can contact you again in two years time, and to send you an XX touch screen tablet if you are the winner of the prize draw. Your personal information will be stored securely by the research team and no-one else will have access to it.

### Will you tell anyone what I say?

**Your identity will be protected** at all times and everything you say will be **kept confidential**. When we write up the study, all information will be presented in **anonymised aggregate form**, for example: '40% of young people who took part in this research agree that...' Therefore no-one can be identified personally from any published work.

### Will my teachers know what I have said?

No. You will complete the questionnaire online. The information you provide will feed directly into our database. Only the research team will have access to it.

### Do I have to say 'yes' to talking to you?

No, it is your choice. But we would appreciate your contribution to this study.

### Who are we?

The research project is managed by **Prof Louise Ryan** and **Alessio D'Angelo** from **Middlesex University London's Social Policy Research Centre**. The UK team also includes **Neil Kaye** and **Magdolna Lorinc**.

The **Social Policy Research Centre** (SPRC) is a dynamic research centre which draws together a range of staff with expertise in education, social policy, the needs of families, women and children, migration, welfare and service provision, religion, culture and identity. To view reports from our recent research projects visit our web page: [www.sprc.info](http://www.sprc.info).

### Who is organising and funding the study?

This work has been funded by the **European Commission**, through the **EU Framework 7 Programme**. Nine European countries are involved, including the UK.

### How to contact us?

If you would like more information about the research, please contact us: **Prof Louise Ryan** ([l.ryan@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:l.ryan@mdx.ac.uk)), **Alessio D'Angelo** ([a.dangelo@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:a.dangelo@mdx.ac.uk)), **Neil Kaye** ([n.kaye@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:n.kaye@mdx.ac.uk)) or **Magdolna Lorinc** ([m.lorinc@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:m.lorinc@mdx.ac.uk)).

### Informed Consent Form

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet enclosed and had any questions about the research answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I can withdraw from the survey at any time or will have the option of not responding to any questions that I feel uncomfortable about.

I understand that I will remain completely anonymous throughout this research project, and all my personal details will be stored securely and handled with utmost confidentiality.

I give my consent to take part in a survey for this research study.

If you however, **DO NOT want to participate** in this research, please fill out the form below and return it to school in the attached envelope by .....(date).

I .....(print name)  
confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet enclosed and **DO NOT want to participate in this research study.**

Signed:

Date:



Department  
for Education

# **The National Pupil Database, Individual Learner Records and/or HESA Student Record**

**Linked data request application form**



## Introduction

### Linked NPD, ILR and HESA Data

This application form should be used for requesting linked National Pupil Database (NPD), Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and Higher Education Statistics Agency Ltd (HESA) data. This means any combination of the following:

- NPD data linked to ILR data;
- NPD data linked to HESA data;
- NPD data linked to ILR and HESA data; or
- ILR data linked to HESA data.

Before making an application, please make sure that you have read the relevant guidance for the linked NPD, ILR and HESA data (hereafter referred to as “**Linked Data**”) you require, which is set out below:

**NPD data** - [GOV.UK NPD webpages](#) including the [NPD User Guide](#).

**ILR data** - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr>

**HESA data** - [www.hesa.ac.uk/linkedata](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/linkedata)

Please note that we will **NOT** consider applications for Linked Data more than three months in advance of the data being required by the “Requester” or applications for Linked Data more than three months in advance of its release on the Linked Data process (see ‘Timetables’ worksheet in [NPD Data Tables, HESA Data Tables and ILR Data Tables](#)). Additionally, only forms that are **completed in full** will be considered so please ensure every question is answered in full in order to avoid unnecessary delays.

This form and the [Information Security Questionnaire](#) should be filled in electronically and emailed back to the NPD requests mailbox ([NPD.REQUESTS@education.gov.uk](mailto:NPD.REQUESTS@education.gov.uk)).

### Applications for standalone NPD, ILR and HESA Data

If you are applying for NPD data only, you need to apply using a different form (the NPD data request application form). Further guidance about this form and how to request an extract from NPD can be found on the [GOV.UK NPD webpages](#).

If you wish to apply for ILR data only, further guidance about how to request an extract from ILR can be requested by e-mailing [Data&MI@sfa.bis.gov.uk](mailto:Data&MI@sfa.bis.gov.uk) If you wish to apply for HESA data only, further guidance about how to request an extract from HESA can be found at [www.hesa.ac.uk/IP](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/IP).

## Who can request access to the data?

There is specific legislation which allows the Department for Education (DfE) to share individual pupil data with persons named in the [Education \(Individual Pupil Information\) \(Prescribed Persons\) \(England\) Regulations 2009](#). This includes schools, local authorities and some named agencies. These regulations also allow the department to disclose individual pupil data to persons who, for the purpose of promoting the education or well-being of children in England are conducting research or analysis, producing statistics, or providing information, advice or guidance.

To enable Linked Data to be requested from and provided by DfE, the Department acts as data processor in relation to ILR and HESA data.

To be granted access to the Linked Data extracts, requesters must comply with strict terms and conditions covering the confidentiality and handling of data, security arrangements, and retention and use of the data. They will have to demonstrate that they comply with all relevant requirements of the [Data Protection Act 1998](#), including that they:

- Are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office to process personal data or fall within an exemption;
- Have appropriate security arrangements in place to process the data (by completing the Information Security Questionnaire);
- Intend to use the data only for the specified purpose in their request;
- Will keep the data only for the specified length of time;
- Will not share the data without prior written approval of DfE.
- Will not further disclose, publish or pass on the data without the prior written approval of the DfE.

Requesters will need to sign an agreement to confirm this.

Any reports, papers, statistical tables, or other products published or released, must fully protect the identity of individuals.

## Processing of Linked NPD, ILR and HESA data request applications

When you make a request for Linked Data the NPD element (where applicable) will be considered by DfE's Data Requests Team with the exception of tier 1 data requests which will be assessed by DfE's Data Management Advisory Panel (DMAP). Your application will also be forwarded by DfE to the following (where applicable):

- The Department for Education ("DfE") is data controller of the ILR and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), an executive agency of DfE, is the information asset owner; and/or
- Higher Education Statistics Agency Ltd (HESA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) who are Joint Data Controllers of the HESA data for the purposes of responding to such requests.

These bodies will decide whether to release their data to you. They will communicate their decisions to DfE (including specifying any special terms for the release of their data) who will inform you of the outcome of their decisions.

Where it is agreed to provide you with data, you will be provided with a [Schedule to the Agreement for the supply of linked data](#), which you will be required to sign and return. By signing this you will be agreeing to the terms and conditions set out in the [Agreement for the supply of linked data](#), which you will also be provided with. A signed [Linked data individual declaration form](#) will need to be signed and returned for each permitted user.

Please keep a copy of all the documents, including completed forms, for your own records.

## Publication of details of requests

DfE has a policy of publishing details of all requests it receives for Linked Data on the [GOV.UK NPD webpages](#). The information published will include the following:

- Name of the requesting organisation;
- A summary of the aims of the project or research being carried out;
- Tier of NPD data requested (recorded from 1 August 2012 onwards)
- Whether or not it is a Linked Data request; and
- Details of the outcome of the application.

For the avoidance of doubt, no personal data will be published by DfE.

## Application Form

<b>1</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
<b>Contact Name (only one contact name to be provided)</b>	
Dr Alessio D'Angelo	
<b>E-mail Address</b>	
<a href="mailto:a.dangelo@mdx.ac.uk">a.dangelo@mdx.ac.uk</a>	
Please tick here if you do not want your E-mail Address to be shared with the <a href="#">Pupil Level User Group (PLUG)</a> or carefully selected third parties (for the purposes of promoting research relating to education and child wellbeing).	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Telephone</b>	
020 8411 4818	
<b>Name of organisation (including Department)</b>	
Social Policy Research Centre, Criminology and Sociology Department, Middlesex University	
<b>Position in organisation</b>	
Senior Lecturer Social Science	
<b>If you are a student, please specify your supervising tutor and their telephone number and e-mail address</b>	
N/A	
<b>Name of organisation (or person) who will be entering into the Agreement for the supply of Linked Data (the "Requester")</b>	
The "Requester" will be the organisation (or person) who will be entering into the Agreement for the supply of linked data and to whom it will be agreed to supply the Linked Data under this agreement.	
Middlesex University	
<b>Address of Requester (including postcode)</b>	
The Burroughs, Hendon, London, NW4 4BT	
<b>Name of organisation (or person) who will be responsible for processing the data (the "Processor") (only required if different from "Requester" organisation (or person) above)</b>	
The "Processor" will be any organisation (or person) other than an employee of the "Requester" who will be processing the data on behalf of the "Requester".	
Neil Kaye	
<b>Address at which the data will be processed (only required if different from "Requester" address above)</b>	
As above	
<b>2</b>	<b>Details of DfE, SFA, HESA or HEFCE involvement</b>
<b>a</b>	<b>Have you discussed your request in advance with DfE, SFA, HESA or HEFCE? (Please insert X if 'No')</b>

<b>Yes</b> – provide details of the member(s) of staff who have assisted you.	
<b>No</b> X	
<b>b</b>	<b>Has the project or research been sponsored / commissioned by DfE, SFA, HESA or HEFCE?</b> (Please insert X if 'No')
<b>Yes</b> - provide details of the DfE, SFA, HESA or HEFCE project sponsor(s) and their involvement in the project or research.	
<b>No</b> X	
<b>c</b>	<b>Has the project or research been sponsored / commissioned by another organisation?</b> (Please insert X if 'No')
<b>Yes</b> – provide details of the individual(s), organisation(s) and their involvement in the project or research.	
Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) project, commissioned by the European Commission (FP7, 2013-18)	
<b>No</b>	

<b>3 Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Registration</b>	
<b>a</b>	<b>ICO Registration Number or Exemption Ground</b> It is mandatory to provide a registration number unless you have a valid exemption.
Z5439728	
<b>b</b>	<b>ICO Registration Expiry Date</b> It is mandatory to provide this where an ICO Registration Number has been provided above. Where your ICO Registration is due to expire within the next 3 months, please give details of what plans you have to renew this.
21 <sup>st</sup> June 2018	

<b>4 Previous applications to use or access NPD or Linked Data</b>				
<b>a</b>	<b>Do you (or your organisation) currently have access to NPD or Linked Data?</b> (Please insert X if 'No') To add an additional row to the table below, click to the right of the bottom row in the table and press 'Enter'.			
<b>Yes</b> - provide details (as shown) of previous applications.	<b>DR Reference</b>	<b>NPD/Linked request</b>	<b>Name of contact</b> (responsible for submitting request)	<b>Summary of data provided</b>
<b>No</b>	X			
<b>b</b>	<b>Are you requesting approval to reuse any of the NPD or Linked Data you've previously been granted access to as part of this request?</b> (Please insert X if 'No / Not applicable')			

<b>Yes</b> - provide full details of what NPD or Linked Data you wish to re-use (including the DR Reference(s) under which you were granted access to the data).	
<b>No / Not applicable</b>	X
<b>c</b> <b>Are you requesting any additional NPD or Linked Data to that you currently have access to?</b> (Please insert X where relevant)	
<b>Yes</b> – Please insert an X and go on to <b>section 5 (Enquiry details)</b> .	
<b>No</b> – Please insert an X and move straight onto <b>section 6 (Intended use of Linked Data)</b> .	X

5 Enquiry details		
<b>a</b>	<p><b>NPD - Specify which NPD datasets, academic years and versions are required.</b></p> <p>Please refer to the <a href="#">NPD user guide</a> and <a href="#">NPD data tables</a> for what is available from NPD. Requirements relating to data linking (how NPD data will be linked to any ILR and/or HESA data) and coverage must be included in section 5f.</p> <p>T4 KS4 Pupil and Exam plus T1 Variable below for a list of pupils to be provided.</p> <p>T4 KS5 Student and Exam plus T1 Variable below for a list of pupils to be provided.</p> <p>T4 Pupil Level Spring Census for 2013/14 to 2015/16 including T1 and T2 Variable listed below.</p> <p><b>Tier 1</b> Unique ID</p> <p><b>Tier 2 Variables from Census</b> SENprovisionMajor FSM eligible Ever FSM 3 Ever FSM 6 Ever FSM All</p>	
<b>b</b>	<p><b>NPD - Specify which Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 NPD fields are required, explaining on a field by field basis why each item is required and why the same research outcome cannot be achieved by using less sensitive or disclosive data.</b></p> <p>Please refer to the <a href="#">NPD user guide</a> and <a href="#">NPD data tables</a> for further details of what Tier 1 and Tier 2 fields are available. To add an additional row to the table below, click to the right of the bottom row in the table and press 'Enter'.</p>	
<b>Data item</b>	<b>Tier (1 or 2)</b>	<b>Reason data item required</b>
SENprovisionMajor	2	This indicator has been shown to correlate highly with academic achievement on an individual level
Free school meals (FSM) eligibility, including Ever FSM indicators	2	This indicator, as a proxy for socioeconomic status, has been shown to correlate highly with academic achievement on an

		individual level
<b>c</b>	<p><b>ILR - Specify the academic years and each individual field that is required.</b></p> <p>Please refer to the <a href="#">ILR data tables</a> for what is available from ILR. Requirements relating to data linking (how ILR data will be linked to any NPD and/or HESA data) and coverage must be included in section 5f.</p> <p>To add an additional row to the table below, click to the right of the bottom row in the table and press 'Enter'.</p>	
	<b>Data item</b>	<b>Year(s) required</b>
	L_ACTIVEJAN	2015/16
	PRIORATTAIN	2015/16
	L_EMPSTATFDL	2015/16
	L_RISKOFNEET	2015/16
<b>d</b>	<p><b>HESA - Specify the academic years and each individual field that is required.</b></p> <p>Please refer to the <a href="#">HESA data tables</a> for what is available from HESA. Requirements relating to data linking (how HESA data will be linked to any NPD and/or ILR data) and coverage must be included in section 5f.</p> <p>To add an additional row to the table below, click to the right of the bottom row in the table and press 'Enter'.</p>	
	<b>Data item</b>	<b>Year(s) required</b>
<p>HESA is a charity and charges for the time taken to administer requests for Linked Data. Please tick here to confirm you have read their <a href="#">pricing policy</a> and understand that there will be a charge for the HESA element of the data.</p>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>e</b>	<p><b>Do you require the Linked Data you are requesting be matched with any other personal data you hold?</b> (Please insert X if 'No')</p>	
	<p><b>Yes</b> - Please give details of the personal data you hold and propose to match to the Linked Data. Additionally, please signify whether (and if so when) you will be able to provide any data to the department to enable us to match the data you hold to the Linked Data, or whether you intend to match the data yourself.</p>	<p>Name, Date of Birth, Institution URN (2013/14)</p> <p>- <i>We can provide data to you on approval to enable you to match the data requested with our own data</i></p>
	<b>No</b>	
<b>f</b>	<p><b>Specify any requirements relating to data linking and coverage of the Linked Data you require.</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. HESA 2012/13 linked to prior attainment in ILR, KS5, KS4 and KS2.</li> <li>2. ILR 2009/10 linked to future attainment in HESA.</li> <li>3. KS4 Candidate/Indicators 2007/08 linked to future attainment in KS5, ILR and HESA.</li> <li>4. For a list of pupils which we will provide (as outlined in section 5e above): KS4 Candidate/Indicators 2007/08 linked to Spring School Census 2007/08 (plus the sensitive fields listed in section 5e above) and future ILR and HESA attainment</li> </ol>	

For a list of pupils which we will provide: KS4 Candidate/Indicators 2015/16 linked to Spring Census for same year and linked to Spring Census for 2013/14, including FSM eligibility and SEN provision (major);

For a list of pupils which we will provide: KS5 Candidate/Indicators 2015/16 linked to Spring Census for same year and linked to Spring Census for 2013/14, including FSM eligibility and SEN provision (major);

<b>6</b>	<b>Intended use of Linked Data</b>
<b>a</b>	<b>What are the aims of your project or research? Is there a specific question you are seeking to answer?</b>
	<p>The aim of the Reducing School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) project is to provide insights into the processes and mechanisms influencing students' decisions to leave education or training early. It aims to develop conceptual models based on research to predict and tackle early school leaving, or educational underachievement, and to disclose these insights to various target audiences at local, national and European level to inform policy and practice</p>
<b>b</b>	<b>Why do you need the Linked Data requested to complete the aims of your project or research? If you are requesting NPD data you must also ensure you specify whether you are conducting research or analysis, producing statistics or providing information, advice or guidance and how this work will promote the education or well-being of children in England.</b>
	<p>We have already conducted a large survey with almost 20,000 young people (over 3,000 in England) over two time points. Linking their responses to administrative data on attainment outcomes will enable our research to produce robust models, inferring a causal relationship between attitudes and other factors with educational outcomes. The ultimate aim is to provide a foundation for future changes in policy and practice to prevent early school leaving, dropout and academic underachievement amongst future generations of school children.</p>
<b>c</b>	<b>For processing of personal data, you must inform us of the condition(s) for processing on which you intend to rely on from Schedule 2 of the DPA. Where you also intend to process sensitive personal data, you must also inform us of the condition(s) for processing on which you intend to rely on from Schedule 3 of the DPA. <u>Please note: If you require the Linked Data you are requesting be matched with any personal data you hold (section 5e), you must specifically reference how the condition(s) for processing on which you intend to rely extend to cover this.</u></b>
	<p>The Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998 requires that data controllers have a fair and lawful basis for processing personal data. As existing controller(s) of the data, the Linked Data organisations require an understanding of the basis on which the requester considers their processing will be fair and lawful. Part of that includes the requester explaining the condition(s) for processing on which they intend to rely. For the purposes of the Linked Data process, sensitive personal data is personal data consisting of information as to the racial or ethnic origin of the data subject, their physical or mental health or condition, or their convictions, proceedings and criminal acts.</p> <p>We rely on the condition for processing data covered under Schedule 2, condition 6(1) of the Data Protection Act 1998. That is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>The processing is necessary for the purposes of legitimate interests pursued by the data controller or by the third party or parties to whom the data are disclosed, except where the processing is unwarranted in any particular case by reason of prejudice to the rights and freedoms or legitimate interests of the data subject.</i></li> </ul> <p>For sensitive data processing, we rely on the condition covered under Schedule 2, condition 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998. That is: - <i>The data subject has given his consent to the processing.</i></p> <p>And on Paragraph 7 of the Schedule to the Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) Order 2000. That is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>(1) Subject to the provisions of sub-paragraph (2), the processing—</i></li> </ul>



<p>(a) is of sensitive personal data consisting of information falling within section 2(c) or (e) of the Act;</p> <p>(b) is necessary for the purpose of identifying or keeping under review the existence or absence of equality of opportunity or treatment between persons—</p> <p>(i) holding different beliefs as described in section 2(c) of the Act, or</p> <p>(ii) of different states of physical or mental health or different physical or mental conditions as described in section 2(e) of the Act, with a view to enabling such equality to be promoted or maintained;</p> <p>(c) does not support measures or decisions with respect to any particular data subject otherwise than with the explicit consent of that data subject; and</p> <p>(d) does not cause, nor is likely to cause, substantial damage or substantial distress to the data subject or any other person.</p> <p>(2) Where any individual has given notice in writing to any data controller who is processing personal data under the provisions of sub-paragraph (1) requiring that data controller to cease processing personal data in respect of which that individual is the data subject at the end of such period as is reasonable in the circumstances, that data controller must have ceased processing those personal data at the end of that period.</p>		
<b>d</b>	<b>Who is the intended audience?</b>	
<p>Policy makers and practitioners on a local, national and European level, as well as academics and researchers in the field of education and social policy</p>		
<b>e</b>	<b>If the data is to be published or reproduced (where agreed disclosure control measures (see section j below) have been applied) what format will this be in? (Please insert an X for all that apply)</b>	
Academic research paper		X
Internal publication or report		X
Commercial publication for which no charge will be made		
Commercial publication for which a charge will be made		
Website general access		
Website with restricted access for which no charge will be made		
Website with restricted access for which a charge will be made		
Other (please give details)		PhD research/thesis
<b>f</b>	<b>DfE has a policy of publishing details of all requests it receives for Linked Data on the <a href="#">GOV.UK NPD webpages</a>, including a summary of the aims of the project or research being carried out. Please summarise your responses to 6a and 6b above (in no more than 150 words) for inclusion in this publication.</b>	
<p>The Reducing School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) project aims to provide insights into the processes and mechanisms influencing students' decisions to leave education or training early. It aims to develop conceptual models based on research to predict and tackle early school leaving, or educational underachievement. Large-scale survey data of almost 20,000 young people (over 3,000 in England) over two time points and linked administrative data on attainment outcomes will enable our research to provide a foundation for future changes in policy and practice to prevent early school leaving, dropout and academic underachievement amongst future generations of school children.</p>		

<b>g</b>	<p><b>Details of all individuals who you propose to have access to the Linked Data extracts including their name, job title, organisation and why it is necessary for them to have access. Individuals only seeing the aggregated results of any analysis (where agreed disclosure control measures (see section j below) have been applied) do not need to be listed.</b></p> <p>Please note that for all Linked data requests which include Tier 1 or Tier 2 NPD fields, a valid 'basic disclosure' certificate is required for each individual listed. This can be requested online from the <a href="#">Disclosure Scotland</a> website (you don't have to be from Scotland to do this). Each individual listed will be required to sign and return an <a href="#">individual declaration</a> and a valid 'basic disclosure' certificate upon approval of a request.</p> <p>To add an additional row to the table below, click to the right of the bottom row in the table and press 'Enter'.</p>			
	<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Reason for access to Linked Data</b>
	Dr Alessio D'Angelo	Senior Lecturer in Social Science	Middlesex University	Work Package co-ordinator, RESL.eu project
	Neil Kaye	Research Assistant	Middlesex University	Research assistant, RESL.eu project
	Magdolna Lorinc	Research Assistant	Middlesex University	Research assistant, RESL.eu project
	Dr Lucy Neville	Senior Lecturer in Criminology	Middlesex University	PhD Director of Studies for Neil Kaye
<b>h</b>	<p><b>Where the individuals listed in "g" are from a different organisation to the "Requester" organisation, is there a contract in writing between the "Requester" organisation and the "Processor" organisation(s) and does this cover data protection and information security arrangements? (Please insert X if 'Not applicable')</b></p> <p>All organisations responsible for processing the Linked Data will be required to complete the <a href="#">Information Security Questionnaire</a>.</p>			
	<p><b>Yes</b> - Provide a summary of the contractual relationship and the data protection and information security arrangements in place.</p>			
	<p><b>No</b> - Explain why no written contract is required and provide us with a summary of the data protection and information security arrangements in place?</p>			
	<p><b>Not applicable</b> - No additional organisations are listed in "g".</p>			X
<b>i</b>	<p><b>When will you commence using the Linked Data? How long are you seeking to retain the Linked Data for? Why is this period necessary?</b></p> <p>Please note: The maximum licence period we permit is 3 years. Should you wish to retain the data for a longer period, you can apply for an extension at the earliest a period of 3 months before the Licence End Date and this may be extended at the discretion of the Disclosing Parties.</p>			
	<p>We intend to use the linked data as soon as it becomes available and seek to retain the dataset for 1 year to ensure that we have sufficient time to carry out the necessary analysis</p>			
<b>j</b>	<p><b>Are you proposing to use the Standard Disclosure Control as set out in the <a href="#">NPD User Guide</a>? (Please insert X if 'Yes')</b></p>			
	<p><b>Yes</b></p>			X
	<p><b>No</b> - How will you ensure that the confidentiality of individuals is preserved in any outputs arising from your use of the Linked Data?</p>			
<b>7 Format of Linked data extracts</b>				
<b>a</b>	<p><b>What is your preferred file format for any Linked Data extracts that you may receive? (Please insert X against your preference)</b></p>			

<b>SPSS</b>	X
<b>Tab-delimited text file</b>	
<b>SQL database</b>	
<b>b</b>	<p><b>Which decryption / zip tool will you be using for any Linked Data extracts you may receive?</b> (e.g. WinZip, 7-Zip)</p> <p>Please be aware that any Linked Data extracts that are provided will be encrypted and zipped using WinZip in a <b>.zipx</b> file format. If this will be an issue then specify whether <b>.zip</b> would be a suitable alternative.</p> <p>Winzip (.zip extension is preferable)</p>
<b>c</b>	<p><b>Name and e-mail address of individual responsible for picking up Linked Data extracts</b> (Must be a named individual in section 6g)</p> <p>Please be aware that once any Linked Data extracts are created, they are uploaded to DfE's secure web transfer system where individuals are then set up with the relevant permissions to gain access to these extracts.</p> <p>Dr Alessio D'Angelo</p>



**Department  
for Education**

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This document is also available from our [GOV.UK NPD webpages](#).



# **The National Pupil Database and/or Linked Data**

## **Information Security Questionnaire**

## NPD and/or Linked Data Information Security Questionnaire


Request details	
Data Request Number (for DfE use)	

Please complete the boxes below.

Contact details
<b>Name of Applicant</b>
Neil Kaye, Alessio D'Angelo
<b>Name of person / organisation who will be entering into the Data Sharing Agreement ("the Requester")</b>
Middlesex University Higher Education Corporation
<b>Name of Responsible Individual</b>
Richard Comley
<b>Email Address</b>
R.Comley@mdx.ac.uk
<b>Telephone</b>
020 8411 6061
<b>Name of person to whom the data will be transferred to</b>
Neil Kaye, Alessio D'Angelo
<b>Email Address</b>
<a href="mailto:N.Kaye@mdx.ac.uk">N.Kaye@mdx.ac.uk</a> , <a href="mailto:A.Dangelo@mdx.ac.uk">A.Dangelo@mdx.ac.uk</a>
<b>Telephone</b>
020 8411 5826, 020 8411 4818
<b>Name of organisation's IT Security Officer</b>
Paula Vickers, Director of Computing and Communications Systems Service
<b>Email address</b>
<a href="mailto:P.vickers@mdx.ac.uk">P.vickers@mdx.ac.uk</a>
<b>Telephone</b>
0208 411 5187

## NPD and/or Linked Data Information Security Questionnaire

Please answer all questions


Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
<b>a) Information Security Policy</b>			
<p>1. Does your organisation have an up-to-date information security policy which will be adhered to in relation to all NPD / linked data?</p> <p>Please provide a copy.</p>	<p>Your evidence should be able to demonstrate that your security policy is both in place and enforced and this should be accompanied by a statement of support from a senior manager.</p> <p>Organisations that are unable to provide a sufficient information security policy should provide a statement of support from senior management. This statement should describe the measures taken to ensure data will be secure.</p>	<p>See embedded document</p>  <p>security policy v7.2.docx</p>	
<p>2. Are you certified to ISO27001, and does the scope of this certification cover all areas of your arrangements for handling NPD / linked data?</p> <p>Alternatively, if you are not ISO27001 certified, does your information security policy align with this standard and, if so, how is this alignment achieved?</p>	<p><b>ISO27001 certified</b> Please provide either a certificate reference or a copy of the certificate. Indicate the full scope of the certification and explanation of any exceptions in your Statement of Applicability that are relevant to your arrangements for handling NPD or linked data.</p> <p><b>ISO-27001 aligned or not</b> Please provide evidence to show how the alignment of the security policy has been achieved and its relevance to your arrangements for handling NPD or linked data.</p>	<p>Middlesex University is not ISO27001 certified. We are in the process of seeking Cyber Essentials accreditation for the University.</p> <p>Our Server Managed Service provider Exponential-e Ltd is ISO27001 certified.</p> <p>Our policy aligns with ISO-27001. It covers Compliance, Outsourcing and Third Party Compliance, Information Handling, User Management, Acceptable Use, System Management, Network Management, Software Management, Mobile and Remote Working, Encryption, Investigation of Computer Use, and Data Breach Policy.</p>	
<b>b) Technical System Description</b>			
<p>3. Give details of the type of network system and application you will use to process NPD / linked data. In particular, specify whether the system is stand-alone, attached to a corporate network or connected to the</p>	<p>Your answer should describe the technical environment within which data sourced from the department shall be hosted. This description should include details of any hardware shared with other parts of your organisation e.g. a shared</p>	<p>The data would be held on a system attached to university wide network, running Microsoft Windows 7. Within this system, the data would be held on a local drive.</p>	


Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
Internet.	storage device or database.		
4. Confirm the system is running currently supported versions of operating system and other software and that these are regularly patched as required.	<p>Your response should be sufficient to indicate that the software you are using to host NPD / linked data is not obsolete (out of vendor support) or subject to unpatched security vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Indicate how the patching regime works for your devices' operating systems and key software that will process NPD data. Is this an automatic or a manual process?</p>	<p>It is proposed that the NPD / Linked data will be held on a Middlesex University Windows desktop.</p> <p>Middlesex University patches all desktop and server infrastructure regularly. In the case of Microsoft desktops and servers these are patched monthly, or more frequently in the case of urgent security patches. Patches once approved for release are applied automatically.</p> <p>Windows Desktops/laptops are currently Windows 2007 32bit, plans are in place to update all Windows desktops and laptops to Windows 2010 by December 2017.</p>	
<p>5. Will the computer system hosting NPD information be accessible to remote users, such as via a dial-up modem or remote access over the Internet?</p> <p>If yes, please describe the requirement for remote access and whether any encryption over the link is in place (e.g. VPN, SSL/TLS). Indicate how remote users are authenticated to your system.</p>	<p>Your response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe any encryption algorithms used and associated key lengths for encryption of data in transit (e.g. VPN, SSL/TLS) and at rest on remote devices e.g. hard disk encryption.</li> <li>Describe the user authentication mechanisms used at a high level e.g. password, token-based or certificate-based.</li> <li>Indicate controls in place to prevent or secure the downloading of NPD / linked data to the remote devices (e.g. hard disk encryption, USB port control, any physical / personnel controls).</li> </ul>	<p>Windows desktops/laptops are protected by bitlocker and Sophos Antivirus. Passwords are a minimum of 8 characters in length and enforce complexity rules (using the Microsoft Standard – of at least two of uppercase, lowercase, numeric or special character).</p> <p>The computer system hosting NPD information will be a Windows Desktop. Middlesex operates Network Address Translation (NAT) on its internal network. NAT prevents machines on the Middlesex network being accessed directly via the internet. The only means by which remote access can be gained to the desktop is via the use of "Team viewer" software which is used to provide IT technical support. In such cases the user has to specifically agree to grant access to the University IT helpdesk staff and is able to observe all actions taken by the IT helpdesk staff member during the period in which they have "control" of the machine.</p> <p>User authentication is against the University's Active Directory. Active Directory accounts are only</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
		<p>issued to bonafide staff and students.</p> <p>Middlesex University has not enforced port control on its desktops/laptops.</p>	
<p>6. Confirm that appropriate security access and/or firewall controls are implemented on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The system hosting NPD / linked data.</li> <li>● Any LAN, WAN or Broadband / ADSL router to which it is connected (whether physically or wirelessly).</li> </ul>	<p>Your answer should describe the implementation of the safeguards below, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name the anti-virus products used and how new virus signatures are distributed.</li> <li>- Name the firewall products used.</li> <li>- Describe the user authentication mechanisms or gateway (e.g. email) controls in place.</li> </ul>	<p>SOPHOS AntiVirus is deployed on Windows desktops and the University's server infrastructure. New virus signatures are deployed automatically as soon as they are released by Sophos.</p> <p>The University operated a Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between the Internet and its Internal Network. The DMZ is protected by a CISCO Firewall.</p> <p>User Authentication is achieved through the use of Microsoft Active Directory (AD). Staff accounts are created and removed from AD automatically in line with staff changes made on the University's HR system (Oracle EBS). Staff email accounts are created and removed within Middlesex University's Microsoft O365 tenancy at the same time as the staff AD account</p> <p>See User Management – section 4 of the University IT Security Policy for further details</p>	
<p>7. Can you confirm (and provide evidence) that copies / backups of NPD / linked data will be subject to the same security standards as the systems holding the live data?</p>	<p>Answer Yes or No.</p> <p>Your evidence should refer to named policies in place and the encryption methods used for copies / backups.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>It is proposed the NPD / linked data will be held on a Middlesex University desktop. Middlesex University does not backup its staff desktops. Backup of staff desktops is the responsibility of the staff member and staff are advised to back data up either to an encrypted removable storage device or their O365 synchronised One Drive.</p> <p>O365 Encrypts data in transit using SSL/TLS connections and best-in-class encryption. It also encrypts data at rest using BitLocker disk-level encryption and per-file encryption of customer content.</p>	





Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
<b>c) Physical Security</b>			
<p>8. Describe the physical security arrangements for the location where the information is to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Processed</li> <li>● Stored (if these are different)</li> </ul>	<p>Your answer should describe how you prevent those who are not listed in this request as accessing the NPD / linked data from doing so.</p> <p>Examples include the use of separate locked rooms for analysis of NPD / linked data, locking away media containing the data etc.</p> <p>If you are processing NPD / linked data in an environment with layered physical security (e.g. a secure perimeter, CCTV, security guarding or a locked room) or in a container such as a locked cabinet, then please describe this environment.</p> <p>If you are storing NPD / linked data on a PC or laptop that is not located in an environment with layered physical security then please specify what type of hard-disk encryption you use and whether this product is FIPS 140-2 certified.</p>	<p>The hardware will be University-issued Windows machines, encrypted using bitlocker.</p> <p>The researchers' computers are in separate shared locked offices. The building is patrolled by campus security.</p>	
<b>d) Data Handling</b>			
<p>9. Where do you plan to store and/or process the data that we may provide?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● UK mainland with no IT connection to public networks (e.g. Internet).</li> <li>● UK mainland, but with accredited IT connection (e.g. GSI, JANET) to a public network.</li> <li>● UK mainland, but with non-accredited IT connection to a public network (e.g. Internet).</li> <li>● Accredited overseas offshore solution.</li> <li>● Overseas (including online services where our data is not guaranteed):</li> </ul>	<p>In answering the question please provide details of the actual site / location.</p> <p>As a rule, departmental policy does not allow for processing of data overseas but this may be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Requests to process the most sensitive data overseas must be cleared in advance by the department with the Office of the Government Senior Information Risk Owner (OGSIRO).</p>	<p>The NPD / linked data will be stored in the UK at Middlesex University's Hendon campus (NW4 4BT). The data will only be accessed locally.</p> <p>The machine on which the data will be stored is UK mainland, but with accredited IT connection (JANET) to a public network</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. EEA</li> <li>b. US</li> <li>c. Elsewhere</li> <li>d. Don't know</li> </ul>			
<p>10. What policies do you have in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dictating when NPD / linked data and or information can or cannot be printed in hard copy or written to removable media?</li> <li>● Covering the handling and control of any hard copy and/or removable media containing NPD / linked data?</li> <li>● Dictating when NPD / linked data and or information can or cannot be transmitted electronically e.g. e-mail?</li> </ul>	<p>Your evidence should refer to named policies (including links to the appropriate section in the policy) and note any encryption standards e.g. FIPS 140-2 or AES-256.</p>	<p>See policy attached</p>  <p>NPD data security policy.docx</p>	
<p>11. Confirm that NPD / linked data will be encrypted if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Electronically transmitted, copied or transferred outside your secure environment in its raw form or across an unsecured network.</li> <li>- Stored on a standalone PC in an environment without layered physical security.</li> </ul>	<p>Your response must confirm that encryption will always be used in these circumstances. You must provide details of the tools to be used and the encryption standards they meet (and, in particular, whether they are either validated to FIPS 140-2 or, as a minimum, implement AES-256 encryption).</p> <p>This requirement to encrypt data applies to any electronic transfer including e-mail, file transfer and saving onto removable media such as USB sticks, writable CD / DVD, or portable hard disks (including laptop disks).</p> <p>If you do not plan to transfer the NPD / linked data your evidence should still list the available encryption standards.</p>	<p>Yes – NPD/Linked data will be encrypted using Bitlocker</p> <p>BitLocker™ maintains FIPS 140-2 compliance on both Windows 7 Enterprise and Ultimate Edition, for both x86 and x64 processor architectures</p> <p>We do not plan to transfer NPD/linked data outside our secure environment in a raw form across an unsecured network</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
<b>e) Staff Awareness</b>			
<p>12. Does everybody in your organisation handling data know and understand when they can / cannot share information with other members of staff?</p>	<p>Your evidence should refer to where this guidance is documented.</p> <p>Confirm whether or not there is clear guidance highlighting that deliberate or accidental compromise of personal data may lead to disciplinary action and/or criminal proceedings?</p>	<p>Yes there is clear guidance</p> <p>See Section 5 of IT Security Policy (Acceptable use) which states</p> <p><b>"13 Data Protection</b>  <i>Any work involving processing, storing or recording personal data (information on an identifiable living individual) is governed by the Data Protection Act 1998. It is the User's responsibility to ensure that personal data is collected and used in accordance with the Act. Further information can be obtained from the University's <a href="#">data protection policy</a>. If you believe that your work involves the processing, storing or recording of personal data Users must first obtain confirmation from the Data Protection Officer that consent to such processing, storage or recording has been obtained."</i></p> <p><b>"17 Liability for Misuse and Disciplinary Action</b>  <i>The University considers failure or refusal to comply with this Policy to be a disciplinary offence which may lead to disciplinary action taken including dismissal without notice and/or withdrawal of services. Action will be taken in accordance with the Staff Regulations"</i></p> <p>See Section 12 of IT Security Policy (Breach reporting)</p>	
<b>f) Risk Assessment</b>			
<p>13. Do you have documented control measures in place to regularly review the people, processes and technology risks that may impact upon your arrangements for secure handling of NPD / linked data?</p>	<p>Your evidence should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicate whether your organisation has carried out a review in the last 12 months.</li> <li>Confirm when your last review took place.</li> </ul>	<p>The security policy (see attached) is reviewed and updated annually. The last review was carried out in June 2017.</p> <p>  security policy v7.2.docx</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirm whether all or some of the requirements for remedial action have been satisfied in a timely manner.</li> </ul> <p>If your process includes any element of periodic independent review then please indicate this in your response.</p>		
<b>g) Audit and Monitoring</b>			
<p>14. Are there arrangements in place to routinely monitor and audit access to the computer system and address any potential misuse / abuse or breaches of the agreed information security controls?</p>	<p>Answer Yes or No.</p> <p>If Yes, your evidence should be able to show that either documented procedures (please provide a copy) or effective logging and audit mechanisms are in place with regard to access to NPD / linked data.</p> <p>If No, indicate how you would know if a non-authorized person gained access to the data and/or what controls you have in place that would prevent access by such people. Indicate what you would do in the event of a security breach.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>The data will be password protected and stored locally on the two computers belonging to the researchers. These computers are in locked offices, in a building patrolled by security.</p> <p>In the event of a security breach being discovered the University would follow its the reporting process set out in Section 12 Breach reporting - of the University's IT Security Policy</p>	
<p>15. What are the System internal / external audit arrangements?</p>	<p>Your response should describe whether the system is subject to internal and/or external audits and by whom such audits have been conducted. Your response should also indicate when the last audit was conducted and to what extent the audit findings have been satisfactorily addressed.</p>	<p>Internal / external audits are determined through discussion with auditors and the University's Board of Governors. These audits do not provide routine scrutiny of NPD /linked data access arrangements.</p> <p>Middlesex University runs weekly vulnerability tests (using Tenable's Nessus Vulnerability Scanning tools) against internal and external facing server infrastructure and plans in due course to extend these arrangements to our desktop/laptop estate. If required the university could extend these vulnerability tests to machines holding NPD/linked data</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
<b>h) Sanitisation and Disposal</b>			
<p>16. Describe the method of data destruction you will employ when you have completed your work using the NPD / linked data.</p>	<p>Data should be deleted so it ceases to be copied to backups, and secure file deletion software should be used so that unerase / undelete utilities cannot recover the data. All media on which NPD / linked data has been processed should be shredded, destroyed using commercial best practice, de-magnetised, or securely erased. Any paper copies should be cross-cut shredded, pulped or incinerated. Describe the processes for controlling the re-use of ICT equipment including (where necessary) the secure deletion of NPD / linked data?</p> <p>Provide details of documented procedures in place and the tools used (including name of secure deletion product) for the controlled disposal i.e. secure destruction, overwriting, erasure or degaussing of electronic media used to store NPD / linked data on completion of your work.</p> <p>If you are claiming an exemption under the Data Protection Act 1998 which allows you to retain NPD / linked data indefinitely then provide details of the exemption and why it is applicable to your situation.</p> <p>If your organisation does not have a documented procedure then please describe your processes for ensuring that NPD / linked data will not remain on storage devices that will no longer be used for NPD / linked data.</p>	<p>We are not claiming exemption Desktops are securely wiped and disposed of through the University's Dell Managed Service in accordance with the Recycling data sheet, attached below:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Global Dell Asset Resale and Recycling</p> </div> <p>See IT security policy section 3) Information Handling – for further details of the University's equipment disposal</p> <p>The researchers will only be using electronic copies, and don't intend to print the data.</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
<p>17. If not securely destroying storage media holding NPD / linked data, name the product that you will be using to securely erase the media prior to it leaving your premises.</p>	<p>A simple "delete", for example, by sending a file to the Windows Recycle bin and then emptying the Recycle bin, does not actually remove the sensitive information from the file system. Secure erasure products will overwrite the information on the file system (usually multiple times) which makes it much harder for an individual to then retrieve the information from the hard disk without access to highly specialised equipment.</p> <p>Your response should name a product capable of providing secure erasure capabilities through multiple overwrites and state the number of overwrite cycles used.</p>	<p>In terms of data destruction, all university devices are wiped and disposed of through our Dell Managed Service in accordance with the attached Recycling data sheet.</p> <p>Asset Resale and Recycling (ARR) Service, provided by Dell.</p>  <p>Global Dell Asset Resale and Recycling</p>	
<p><b>i) Third Party Access</b></p>			
<p>18. If information sharing is expected, provide a full description of the relationship between yourself and the relevant third parties and the proposed arrangements and security measures imposed upon the relevant organisation(s).</p>	<p>Your evidence should explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why the information sharing is necessary.</li> <li>● Why the third party has not approached the Department for Education directly for access to the data.</li> <li>● How you will ensure that information sourced from the department shall be secured whilst in transit to the third party.</li> <li>● How you will ensure that</li> </ul>	<p>Information sharing is not expected.</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
	<p>information sourced from the department shall be secured whilst in the custody of the third party.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How you will ensure that information sourced from the department is only used for the purposes specified in this request.</li> </ul>		
<p>19. Do you have any agents such as sub-contractors or suppliers who are not directly employed by your organisation who assist in the delivery or support of your product or service who may access our data? For example, is management of your ICT systems outsourced to a third party?</p>	<p>Answer Yes or No.</p> <p>Your response should also list such suppliers and the nature of their involvement in your handling of NPD / linked data.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p><b>Dell</b> – provide managed desktop services to the university, this includes desktop/laptop hardware: supply, installation, break fix maintenance and secure wipe and disposal.</p> <p>Involvement in handling of NPD / linked data is limited to secure machine disposal at end of life or during break fix maintenance activities.</p> <p><b>Exponential-e Ltd</b> – provide data centre hosting and server managed services to the University.</p> <p>Involvement in handling of NPD/linked data is limited to ensuring secure data centre environment and patched server infrastructure for AD and ADFS services (patching and antivirus)</p> <p><b>Quscient Ltd</b> (Chennai India) – provide 1<sup>st</sup> line IT Helpdesk support.</p> <p>No involvement in handling of NPD/linked data, but may be called upon to provide 1st line IT support to staff responsible for accessing NPD/Linked data.</p> <p><b>Microsoft</b> – provide O365 email and OneDrive services to the University.</p> <p>No involvement in handling of NPD/Linked data unless information included in email or stored on OneDrive.</p>	

Question	Guidance	Answer and supporting evidence	Score (For DfE use)
20. Does your organisation have effective and accurate mechanisms in place to monitor the status of the control measures employed by your sub-contractors?	<p>Answer Yes or No.</p> <p>If Yes, your evidence should be able to demonstrate that processes for monitoring sub-contractors control measures are in place.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Detailed supplier contracts exist for Dell, Quscient, Exponential-e contracts. Arrangements include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documented Service Operation Manual</li> <li>• Agreement of Service Levels and metrics</li> <li>• Regular (Monthly/quarterly) review meetings with Service Managers</li> </ul> <p>Microsoft arrangements are governed by JISC negotiated Higher Education sector agreement</p>	

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## Appendix 6 – Focus group topic guide

### Focus group topic guide

- 1) In your experience, what are the most important factors in helping all students to achieve the government minimum standard of five good GCSEs?
  - a. (Prompt: academic support/pastoral support/school environment/home environment/parents/teachers/peer group/others?)
  
- 2) What do you think are the greatest challenges in guiding students through to their successful completion of secondary education?
  - a. Are there any barriers?
  - b. (Prompt: at school level? At systemic/policy level? Wider societal issues?)
  
- 3) How important can the role of teachers be in ensuring students achieve positive educational outcomes?
  - a. Under what circumstances might this be particularly true?
  - b. Can you think of an example?
  
- 4) 'Resilience' and 'character education' appear to be high on the current government's policy agenda: what do you understand by the term 'resilience' in this context?
  - a. (Prompt: grit, resolve, non-cognitive skills, soft skills, bouncebackability)
  
- 5) To what extent do you think that resilience and character education can be an effective tool to promote better educational outcomes for all students?
  - a. Within this school? In general?
  - b. What might work better?
  - c. To what extent is resilience a trait that can be learnt? Or the result of a complex process with a positive outcome despite the presence of adverse circumstances?
  
- 6) Do you think that the voice of teachers/educational professionals is being heard in the shaping of educational policy in this country?
  - a. Why/why not?
  - b. Any examples of where this has happened? Or where it should have happened but did not?
  
- 7) What kind of support strategies/policies are there in place **at this school** for students who might be struggling to achieving this minimum standard?
  - a. How does this work in practice?
  
- 8) Are there any strategies you use in the classroom, beyond those implemented at school-wide level?
  - a. How did you develop/learn of these?
  - b. How effective have they been?
  - c. Is there a mechanism whereby you can share these ideas/strategies/experiences (e.g. community of practice)?

## Appendix 7 - Participants' Information Sheet and Consent Form (teachers' focus groups)



### Information about the research

#### MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

*Promoting resilience amongst 'at-risk' students: the role of teacher support*

*(Doctoral researcher: Neil Kaye)*

#### Background to the research

As part of my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to explore **role of teacher support for young people reaching the end of their secondary education**.

My research is embedded as a PhD Studentship within a wider project, funded by the European Commission on Reducing Early School Leaving across the European Union (project website: [www.sprc.info/reducing-early-school-leaving-in-europe/](http://www.sprc.info/reducing-early-school-leaving-in-europe/)).

The research I am undertaking focuses on young people in England and, in particular, the teacher-student relationships they encounter during their school careers. The project has been given ethical approval by Middlesex University's Ethics Committee.

My doctoral research is a mixed methods study, incorporating data from a large-scale survey of more than 3,000 young people in both London and the North East of England, and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with teachers, educational professionals and local policy makers.

#### Participation in research

The focus group will last for approximately 1-1 ½ hours and will be led by myself with the assistance of a colleague, who is also a research based at Middlesex University.

The questions will focus on the role of classroom teachers, your professional and pastoral relationship with students and how you feel this support is able to guide students through completion of their GCSEs and beyond. Attitudes and information around relevant policies at both school- and national-level will also be discussed.

#### Confidentiality

Your participation in the research is fully **voluntary** and you are able to withdraw from the research at any time. **Your identity will be protected at all times** and everything you say will be kept **confidential**. Names will be changed in all written material and all precautions taken to ensure that research participants are not identifiable from any published work.

The focus group will be digitally recorded. These recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study, whilst transcripts will be anonymised and securely stored.

#### Contact details:

If you would like any further details or you have any questions you can contact me:

**Neil Kaye** (n.kaye@mdx.ac.uk) or my Director of Studies:

**Dr Lucy Neville** (l.neville@mdx.ac.uk)

Thank you.

**Consent Form**

**MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY**

*Promoting resilience amongst 'at-risk' students: the role of teacher support*

*(Doctoral researcher: Neil Kaye)*

I **confirm** that I have read and understood the information provided, and the nature and purpose of the current research has been explained to me.

I understand that participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from the focus group discussion at any time, or may refuse to answer any questions, without having to give an explanation.

I understand that all information about me will be anonymised and remain confidential, and that I will not be named or identifiable in any written work arising from this study.

I agree to the focus group discussion being audio recorded. I understand that any digital recording of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of your research.

I understand that any information including direct quotes given by me may be used anonymously in future publications, reports, articles or presentations.

I understand that this project has been approved by Middlesex University' Ethics Committee.

I **agree to take part in a focus group discussion** for this research study.

**Participant's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



**[REDACTED] School**

Inspection report

---

**Unique Reference Number** [REDACTED]  
**Local Authority** [REDACTED]  
**Inspection number** [REDACTED]  
**Inspection dates** [REDACTED]  
**Reporting inspector** [REDACTED]

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,7[REDACTED]
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24[REDACTED]
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Headteacher</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>School address</b>	[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
<b>Telephone number</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Fax number</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Email address</b>	[REDACTED]

---

**Age group** 11–18  
**Inspection date(s)** [REDACTED]  
**Inspection number** [REDACTED]

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 50 lessons taught by 49 teachers, and meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised policies, exercise books, monitoring information, safeguarding procedures, data about past and recent performance, and the school's improvement plans. The team analysed 264 parental questionnaires, 43 completed by staff and 163 by students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The attainment, learning and progress of all students and their performance in different subjects.
- How effectively leaders at all levels are addressing school variation, particularly through tackling any inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment.
- The leadership, provision and the outcomes attained by students in the sixth form.

## Information about the school

[REDACTED] School is a larger-than-average-sized school, with languages specialist status. A well-above-average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is well above average, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average overall, with a well-above-average proportion having statements of special educational needs, mostly for hearing impairment. The school has a range of accreditations. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The school has a hearing impaired unit with space for 20 students and [REDACTED] resourced provision to support students with Autism Spectrum Conditions in a mainstream secondary school. A new sixth-form centre opened in [REDACTED] and the school recently converted to academy status.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

### Main findings

Since the previous inspection, this school has made rapid improvements in all aspects of its work and now provides an outstanding education for its students. The inspirational headteacher and his leadership team have excellent complementary leadership skills which they use to great effect in driving improvements rapidly and keeping all stakeholders motivated to always strive to do better. As one parent, representing the view of many, said, 'The staff are approachable, knowledgeable, open to suggestions and willing to listen to both myself and my child. The teaching is very sound and the pastoral care outstanding.' The school knows itself very well through rigorous self-evaluation. Clear priority setting has meant that there has been a sustained upward trajectory in students' attainment. Since the previous inspection, this has risen to high attainment and the rates of progress are now outstanding overall. Differences in performance across subjects are narrowing and more students gain higher grades. Excellent systems are in place for tracking students' achievements and well-being and for supporting those who are not meeting expectations. Senior and middle leaders support the teaching skills of staff very well. An excellent track record of rapid and continuous improvement in all aspects of students' learning and well-being, combined with the strong challenge and support offered by the governing body, demonstrates an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Students receive outstanding care and support. Consequently, they enjoy school and attendance is high. Key factors in this are an outstanding and innovative curriculum which meets the needs and aspirations of all students, the positive impact the areas of specialism have on provision and the wide-ranging enrichment programme. Excellent links with outside agencies and strong engagement with parents and carers contribute significantly to the strengths in students' personal development, well-being and academic achievement. Those students with hearing impairments, those on the autistic spectrum and those facing other challenging circumstances are fully included in school life and make similar outstanding progress to their peers. Students value the way they are supported and say they feel very safe at all times and that they are enabled to make well-informed choices about their futures and pursue healthy lifestyles. They make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community and have well-developed personal attitudes and engage positively with people of different faiths and cultures.

The quality of teaching is outstanding overall as teachers prepare a range of engaging activities that both challenge and support the full range of students' needs. Most teachers ensure that their students receive good guidance on how to improve

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

their work, but in a small minority of cases, guidance lacks adequate detail and insufficient opportunities are given to students to respond and follow up on teachers' comments and learn from their mistakes.

Since the previous inspection, the popularity of the sixth form has increased, as has the number of students opting to stay at the school for their post-16 education. Attendance has risen significantly, and leaders have introduced a broader curriculum offer to better meet the needs and interests of students. Owing to improved teaching, rates of progress have accelerated, especially during Year 13, but there remains a sizeable, if narrowing, gap between the performances of different subjects.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that marking of work at all key stages consistently gives students precise guidance about how to improve their work, and ensure that such guidance is regularly followed up.
- Raise attainment and narrow the performance gaps across the subjects in the sixth form by:
  - drawing on best practice in teaching to ensure that across all subjects activities are planned to challenge all students and that they are given plenty of opportunities for independent work
  - ensuring that leaders' monitoring and evaluation focuses sharply on improving further the learning and progress of all.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

Students are proud of their school and enjoy their lessons a great deal. The level of commitment to their work is very high and they collaborate extremely well when working in groups or in pairs. For example, in a Year 9 religious studies lesson, students sensitively discussed and debated the question of whether there is a moral equivalence between racism and homophobia. In a Year 12 sociology lesson, pairs researched information on either the functionalist or the Marxist view of education and then shared their findings and taught each other.

Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average. They make outstanding progress during their time at the school so that attainment at the end of Year 11 is high. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or facing other challenging circumstance, and those for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as their peers.

Students make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities by, for example, training to be peer mentors, subject leaders or year leaders. They readily





**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**  
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

and encourage students actively to lead their own learning and work collaboratively with their peers. For instance, in a Year 10 lesson on using spreadsheets accurately, instruction was given by a student, and the teacher allowed mistakes to happen so that students could learn by trial and error and then explain to each other how to formulate cells accurately. Inspectors observed some good use of self assessment and peer assessment, supported by effective feedback from teachers, though in a few cases this is not replicated in marking.

The curriculum is very well organised and offers excellent opportunities for learning and experiences that contribute considerably to students’ personal development and well-being. Students benefit from being able to make choices from a wide range of options so that learning programmes are well tailored to meet their needs and interests. Enrichment activities, such as students’ dramatic and operatic productions, which have been enthusiastically received by the local community, have widened their experiences. The broad extent of arts-related activities available is reflected in [REDACTED] and the school is sharing its expertise through its work [REDACTED]. The specialist language status, plus a range of regular opportunities for sport, visitors to the school and educational visits in this country and abroad, helps students to put their learning into context and make an excellent contribution to their outstanding learning, progress and personal development. Many opportunities across subjects and during tutor time to debate issues such as ‘Should Britain ban the burka’ and ‘Capital punishment’ ensure that students’ thinking skills and moral awareness are developed in an exemplary fashion.

The school provides an excellent learning environment. A strong sense of ambition is underpinned by a very caring ethos. Staff work collaboratively in providing the very best academic and pastoral support to students whose families may be facing challenging circumstances. That support, combined with well-established partnerships with agencies, ensures that students are known to all as individuals and appropriate support is forthcoming in a timely fashion, leading to outstanding outcomes for all. There are strong links with primary schools and the arrangements for transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 are very well developed. Sound advice is offered to students when choosing their Key Stage 4 and sixth-form options.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The school benefits from the dynamic and motivational leadership provided by the headteacher, who joined the school just before the previous inspection. Since then, the school has improved rapidly in all aspects of its work. Along with the governing body, all leaders communicate a shared vision that is ambitiously focused on raising attainment and opportunities for all. Staff feel valued and morale is high. As one teacher said, 'Staff and students' well-being is a priority alongside progress and achievement.'

A key driver in raising attainment has been the regular evaluation and development planning, which is driven by well-focused priorities and ambitious quantified targets for improvement. Additionally, leaders support the professional development of teachers well. For example, teachers welcome and benefit from the regular coaching that they receive from the school's behaviour and inclusion team and many are currently enrolled on either a Masters or Doctorate course through a partnership with [REDACTED] University. The regular student-progress meetings held with senior leaders, subject and pastoral leaders, and the resulting plans to remedy identified weaknesses, ensure that underachieving students are spotted quickly and that teachers are accountable for the outstanding progress of all. Leaders are very effective at monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, but there is still more to do in the sixth form to reduce the residual pockets of less effective teaching to bring about a greater consistency across the subjects.

Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is at the heart of the school's work and hence all achieve outstanding outcomes. This school is a harmonious community and discrimination is not tolerated. Recently, the school held its first of a series of planned conferences on diversity looking at issues of how to tackle all forms of discrimination and prejudice. Every effort is made to fully include all students in all aspects of school life and all students have equal opportunities to participate in activities. For example, vulnerable students are targeted, supported and encouraged to participate in activities that will improve their personal development and progress.

The school's commitment to community cohesion is exemplary. Students benefit enormously from the annual student exchange scheme with a school in Japan and current Year 10 students are raising funds to visit and support a school in an informal settlement in South Africa during a planned visit next year. The school runs an extremely well-attended Saturday School teaching a range of languages, some of which are accredited courses, for members of the school and local community. As a result of these and many other opportunities, students have a strong understanding of the diversity of religious, ethnic and cultural groups locally, nationally and internationally. [REDACTED]

The governing body brings a wide range of expertise, are highly supportive and effectively call leaders to account for the quality of all aspects of the school's performance. Members of the governing body regularly attend school events and are at an early stage of extending their monitoring activities through direct observation of the school's work via link governorship. There are effective measures in place to





### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at [REDACTED] School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 264 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1269 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	126	48	129	49	5	2	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	96	36	160	61	6	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	107	41	137	52	14	5	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	91	34	150	57	20	8	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	77	29	172	65	6	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	80	30	148	56	29	11	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	73	28	158	60	26	10	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	85	32	143	54	12	5	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	73	28	157	59	16	6	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	102	39	139	53	13	5	7	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	78	30	144	55	21	8	4	2
The school is led and managed effectively	108	41	135	51	11	4	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	123	47	126	48	12	5	2	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.



**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



[REDACTED] 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of [REDACTED] School, [REDACTED]**

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited your school. We greatly enjoyed talking to many of you. Yours is an outstanding school and these are some of the reasons why.

Your headteacher, staff and governing body are passionate in wanting to help you achieve excellence in all that you do. The curriculum and extended opportunities which the school provides for you ensure that you have the widest possible choices that give you exceptionally good and enjoyable learning opportunities and prepare you well for the future. You willingly take on a broad range of responsibilities in the school and in the community. Your charitable work is extensive and you have a real sense of what it means to be responsible citizens. Almost all teachers prepare high quality lessons and work with you to make your learning exciting. You agreed that you feel very safe and very well cared for and supported. You are confident, and you appreciate and celebrate difference so that everyone feels part of the school community.

Even outstanding schools have things that could be better.

We have asked the school to ensure that you always have an opportunity to follow up on your teachers' comments for improvement. Your school leaders are also going to work more with the teachers of sixth-form classes to make sure that you can make even better progress across the subjects by giving you more opportunities to research and work independently.

You can contribute to these improvements by working hard and responding well to all that the teachers ask you to do.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]  
Lead inspector

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Appendix 9 – Annual School Report – High Hill (anonymised)

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Quality Assurance Review Written Report

Name of School:	School
School Address:	
Hub:	

Telephone Number:	
Email address:	

Unique Reference Number:	
Local Authority:	
Type of School:	Academy
School Category:	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Number on roll:	17
Head teacher/Principal:	

Date of last Ofsted inspection:	
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding

Date of Quality Assurance Review:	2016
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## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – SUMMARY OF ESTIMATES<sup>1</sup>

<b>School Improvement Strategies:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Outcomes for Pupils are:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Area of Excellence:</b> [REDACTED] Autistic Resourced Provision [REDACTED]	Confirmed and valid for 3 years
<b>Previously accredited Areas of Excellence:</b> Community	

### Overall Review Evaluation

The Quality Assurance Review found indicators that [REDACTED] School appears to be just within the Outstanding grade as judged by Ofsted in the school's previous Ofsted report and action is required to ensure that it continues to meet Ofsted's criteria for that grade.

1. Please note that a [REDACTED] Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

## Information about the school

- [REDACTED] School is a larger than average 11-18 academy serving a diverse community.
- The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is consistently high at around fifty percent of the school population.
- The number of students for whom English is an additional language is well above the national average, as is the number of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, 6% of the school population has a statement or education health care plan (EHCP). This includes the 43 students who attend the onsite Provision for Deaf Students (PDS) and the [REDACTED] Autistic Resourced Provision (ARP).
- The school has a range of accreditations [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] In February 2016, the school received a letter from the Minister of State for Schools congratulating [REDACTED] on being one of the top 100 non-selective state funded schools in England. It has also received other awards in recognition of its strong value added progress and, during the review, the school won an award for financial and enterprise education.

## School Improvement Strategies

### What Went Well

- An ethos and culture of mutual respect and community cohesion are significant strengths of the school. This stems from the vision, drive and commitment of the Headteacher and the leadership team. There is a relentless focus on students' achievement, entitlement and personal development and the school provides the highest quality opportunities and support for all.
- Leaders know their school well and they are open and accurate in their assessment of strengths and areas for improvement. School self-evaluation links well with the school improvement plan and leaders have a strong understanding of their progress towards their targets through regular reviews. Middle leaders feel supported by the senior leadership team.
- Support for students' social and emotional needs is extensive and is an area of priority in the school. The student support systems permeate the school. Staff work collaboratively to ensure that students' needs are met and they are vigilant in identifying and supporting students' emotional and social needs. As a result, students are equipped to learn.
- The high quality provision and strong outcomes for students in [REDACTED] ARP reflect the school's commitment to inclusivity and opportunities for all. See Area of Excellence.
- Recent restructures in leadership have brought about clear systems to ensure greater accountability and this is driving further improvements. Leaders in the sixth form have identified the key priorities and actions required to improve both

provision and outcomes at post-16. A significant 'culture shift' has ensured that leaders are now focused on academic achievement as well as pastoral care across Key Stage 5.

- A new assessment system has been introduced into Year 7 and leaders have recognised that this is not yet embedded consistently in classroom practice across all subjects. There are already plans in place to address this through additional staff training and monitoring. Leaders realise that the urgency in ensuring that this is addressed before the system is extended to Years 8 and 9 in September 2017.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is highly effective. Monitoring and evaluation by all leaders informs Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and best practice is shared and celebrated at the weekly teaching and learning briefings. The school is outward looking in its desire to improve further and links have been made with other schools to share best practice and collaborate, including a leading independent school to share approaches to teaching Japanese. Middle leaders link with awarding bodies and subject associations in order to keep abreast fully of the changes to GCSE and A Level specifications. This is evident in lessons as teachers confidently guide students through the requirements of their courses.
- The curriculum offers students a broad range of experiences, both within and outside lessons. Projects and initiatives such as exchanges overseas, outdoor education, visits to the Globe Theatre and cultural enrichment days ensure that students' horizons are broadened. All students study a language to GCSE and outcomes for a number of those languages are impressive.
- Leaders offer students a broad range of opportunities to take on responsibility in their school. Students' independence in leading community developments is exceptional and their strong sense of belonging and working together for the benefit of all is impressive and moving. A lunch to welcome Syrian refugees to the [REDACTED] community and a student-led campaign to raise the profile of looking after one's mental health demonstrate students' commitment to looking after others. Many alumni return to share experiences and raise aspirations. For example, one former student is now a school governor; others work as mentors and give talks about careers.

#### **Even Better If...**

...middle leaders were empowered to lead on key areas for improvement such as written feedback on students' work and the use of SIMS to track students' progress.

...continue to accelerate progress in the sixth form through the well-defined strategies being put in place and ensure that the impact of these is monitored closely.

#### **Pupil Outcomes**

- Students enter [REDACTED] School with attainment which is below and well below national expectations. However, there is some fluctuation in the profile of students' ability upon entry to the school; for example, there is a higher proportion of more able students in Year 9 but this is still below national averages.
- Overall, in 2015, attainment in 5A\*-C, including English and mathematics, was significantly above the national average. This sustained the three-year trend of being significantly above the national average. A\*/A grade attainment in geography, English language and literature, drama, biology, chemistry, physics, sociology and history was strong. This is particularly impressive given students' attainment upon entry. However, German and aspects of design technology in 2015 performed significantly below national averages.
- In 2016, although students attainment in 5A\*-C, including English and mathematics, fell slightly, it remained above national averages. The performance of disadvantaged students in 2016 matched that of non-disadvantaged pupils in school and nationally.
- In 2015, the overall value added progress measure was well above average, as was pupils' progress in Best 8, English and mathematics. Boys and girls made similar progress, with both making progress well above expected levels. Disadvantaged students achieved well above the national average.
- In English, students' expected and above expected progress, including for disadvantaged students, were well above the national average. In mathematics, students' expected and above expected progress were well above and broadly in line with the national average respectively. The progress of disadvantaged students was less strong in mathematics than in English and it was in line with national for expected progress and below for above expected progress.
- Progress in 2016 was less strong than in previous years. However, the Progress 8 score of +0.29 places the school in the top 25% of schools nationally. Leaders are aware of the need to improve this for 2017 and action planning addresses this.
- Students who attend [REDACTED] ARP score up to half a grade above their target grades, based on their Key Stage 2 levels. Outstanding progress for this group has been highlighted in RAISEOnline 2015 and they did well in 2016 also. Observations during the review confirmed this high achievement. Some [REDACTED] ARP students progress to post-16 study, and with much success.
- Lesson observation, a book scrutiny and the school's assessment data indicate that current progress is strong across all key stages as students travel through the school. Issues in some but not all underperforming subjects have been addressed. It is important that leaders now embed fully the different assessment systems across the key stages to ensure that students' current progress is clear.
- Post-16 progress data shows that the school is improving its outcomes at A2 although these are still below national expectations. Progress at AS level remains below national averages and progress in 2015/16 declined further. Post-16 retention rates are high and attendance is now improving.

- Current progress evident in two post-16 lessons seen showed strong progress and attainment.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

### What Went Well

- High quality lessons are characterised by teachers' detailed planning for stimulating learning. Teachers know their students' academic, social and emotional needs well. This enables them to plan learning which is pitched precisely and which uses resources and activities which spark students' interests. In one history lesson, students were gripped by the 'detective' roles they were playing in order to investigate an archaeological dig [REDACTED] in an English lesson, a silent clip from 'A Christmas Carol' encouraged students to observe the detail of Dickensian England. Some teachers have the confidence to adapt learning in response to students' questions or equipment issues and students appreciated this diversion.
- Most teachers use data skilfully to plan differentiated lessons where pathways for all students are clear. Attention to detail is a feature of this high quality planning and, in the best lessons, teachers moved students to more complex tasks according to their ability.
- Most teachers use questioning well to challenge, check and deepen students' understanding. There were examples seen of high quality written feedback on students' work and this led to good and better progress. However, this was not consistent across all subjects.
- Students have the desire to do well, are inquisitive and want to learn more. They work well together to deepen their learning, challenging and guiding each other to improve their work. High levels of collaboration and pair work support writing through explorations and discussion.
- Positive relationships in lessons play a significant part in effective learning. Students care for each other and support each other without prompting from the teacher.
- Classroom cultures are nurturing yet challenging and collaboration is a matter of course. Teachers focus on the use of positive language and value all responses. This approach encourages students to take risks and become resilient to making mistakes. Classroom routines are well-established and, as a result, transitions between learning phases are smooth and students make good and better progress.
- Lessons are highly inclusive and teaching assistants (TAs) support students skilfully whilst ensuring their developing independence in their learning. As a result, all students, including those with complex needs, are fully involved in learning and motivated to do well.
- Where teachers give subject specific guidance and follow up questions on their written work, students make very strong progress. In these cases, students take action to push their learning further forward based on the steer from their teachers.



### **Even Better If...**

...all teachers provided written feedback which offered students clear 'next steps' guidance to embed consistent practice and progress across the school.

...high expectations of what students can achieve permeated all lessons by encouraging students to take risks, challenging the most able and deepening learning through differentiated questioning.

### **Quality of Area of Excellence**

██████████ Autism Resourced Provision (ARP)

#### **Why has this area been identified as a strength?**

██████████ Autism Resourced Provision (ARP) covers Key Stages 3 to 5 and caters for approximately 21 students. It is oversubscribed and parental and community feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

ARP is devised to meet the academic, emotional, social and behavioural needs of students with autism. The provision is highly inclusive. Students are engaged in mainstream lessons and supported by a team of specialist TAs who have developed expertise in adapting the curriculum and ongoing lessons for students. The Head of ARP relentlessly drives forward this high quality provision. Leaders are now moving to SCERTS, an autism specific approach to assessment programme planning and intervention, to plan and monitor students' development.

#### **What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?**

ARP opened in 2008 and extended its provision in 2012. The HARP area is a haven where students can learn and be independent. The outdoor area is peaceful yet stimulating and has been created from a flat roof area so that students have space to relax and reflect. Mainstream students visit ARP during lunch and break times to socialise and take part in clubs with ARP students.

Highly specialised training of staff is at the heart of ARP's success, led by the Head of ARP. The school works with a range of external professional to enable staff to keep up to date with developments in the autism field.

The school receives visitors regularly from outside ██████████ to show its high quality provision, recognised as an area of good practice by the SSAT Leading Edge.

#### **What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?**

Students who attend ARP develop from being: school refusers, withdrawn and unable to interact with others; on medication to relieve anxiety and contingent disruptive and challenging behaviour; extremely angry; physically weak with poor core stability and muscle strength. They develop into young people who are emotionally resilient, socially confident, independent, proud of their accomplishments and excited about their futures. The work of the ARP team goes on beyond the school when students leave.

● ARP students make significant progress throughout the school. By the end of Key Stage 4, they achieve on average half a grade higher than their target grades, set using their Key Stage 2 scores. In 2016, two students in post-16 left school with A levels at grade B and distinctions and merits in BTEC diplomas. Students' pathways beyond ● School include places at both college and university.

**What is the name and email address of the staff lead in this area?**

● Assistant Headteacher  
●

**What additional support would the school like from the ● network, either locally or nationally?**

Following discussion with the headteacher, the school would like to reflect further about what support they might like.

**This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.**

## Appendix 10 – Ofsted report for Slopewood (anonymised)

School report



**[Redacted] School**

**Inspection dates** [Redacted] 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

### Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

#### This is a good school.

- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection. The inspirational headteacher, the associate headteacher and other leaders are determined to ensure that all students can achieve very well.
- From low starting points, students make good and often exceptional progress so that they achieve very well in their GCSEs, including in English and mathematics.
- The sixth form is good and improving. As a result of changes made since the previous inspection, students now make good progress in the range of courses available to them.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. Teaching is good and improving because teachers work well together to provide the best possible learning for their students.
- Students are very proud of their school. They enjoy coming to school and they behave well. They want to learn and they work hard in lessons.
- The school is a harmonious and happy community in which adults and students show high levels of courtesy and respect for each other. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding.
- Governors have a very good understanding of the school and provide highly effective support and challenge to ensure it continues to improve.

#### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not make as much progress in some other subjects as they do in English and mathematics.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching and too much variability in the quality of marking across the school.



## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after students and children with parents in the armed service) is much higher than average. Currently in the school there are a few looked after students.
- Close to 20 Year 7 students are eligible for catch-up funding which is for students who did not attain Level 4 in English or mathematics at the end of primary school.
- The school is ethnically very diverse. Most of the students come from minority ethnic groups. The largest groups are from several non-British White and Black African backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is very high.
- A larger than average proportion of students joins the school part way through their education.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- A small number of students currently attend courses off site for all or part of the week. Either one or two students attend a course at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
- The school is a member of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
- The school meets the government's current floor target, which sets the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
  - the effective strategies in place to improve literacy are used consistently by all teachers
  - marking is regularly good across the school and all teachers give students clear guidance about how to improve their work and opportunities to read and respond to their comments
  - all students present their work neatly and in a well organised way.
- Raise achievement further by:
  - ensuring that students make as good progress in all subjects, particularly science, as they do in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages
  - providing high levels of challenge for all sixth form students so that results continue to improve and more students achieve higher grades at A level.



- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and teachers know their students well. Students want to learn and are very appreciative of the way teachers give freely of their time to help them.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and in many lessons use a variety of teaching methods and interesting resources which motivate students well. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson on the understanding of transformation, the teacher used the principle of a satnav to help explain the concept. Students gave a sharp intake of breath as they grasped it! In a Year 9 religious education lesson a moving DVD clip about the murder of a teenager prompted students to reflect on ideas of forgiveness in different religions.
- Teachers check learning well during the lessons and talk to students about how they can improve their work. Many teachers mark work well, giving students clear advice about what they need to do to improve. When students respond to their teachers' comments in writing, a valuable learning dialogue between student and teacher is created. Although improving, the quality of marking is not yet consistently good across the school.
- Some good examples of students effectively assessing each other's work were seen during the inspection when students tried hard to improve the work of others and thus understood the ingredients of good answers.
- There are good strategies in place to teach literacy and numeracy but these are not used consistently well by all teachers.
- Teaching in science is not as good as it needs to be to ensure students make good progress.
- Some students do not present their work neatly and a few teachers do not insist that they are more careful.
- Additional adults in the classroom usually make an effective contribution to students' learning because the students are supported to develop their skills and knowledge.
- Homework is purposeful and contributes to students' good progress.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- The behaviour of students is good. They behave well in lessons and they want to learn. Their positive attitudes contribute to the good progress that they make. Very little time is wasted in lessons in managing behaviour because students are very clear about the school's expectations.
- Staff, students and the vast majority of parents agree that behaviour in the school is good and well managed.
- Students generally behave sensibly moving around the school and are polite and respectful to each other and to adults; they are welcoming to visitors. Students from many different backgrounds get on exceptionally well together. They enjoy school. One student, exemplifying this said, 'I feel happy when I am in school.'
- A number of students in wheelchairs are well supported by other students so that they can join in happily in activities inside and outside of the classroom.
- The excellent behaviour of sixth form students makes a strong contribution to the school's positive ethos. They lead by example and are very positive role models for the younger students.
- The school has reviewed its systems for managing behaviour, and exclusions have significantly reduced. Effective support is provided to those who have difficulty managing their own behaviour. The school's multi-agency inclusion team helps these students most effectively, so they improve their behaviour and succeed.
- The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now above average. The number of students who miss too much school has been reduced. There are strong systems and structures in place to ensure that the improvements continue. Students are generally punctual to school and to lessons.
- Behaviour is not yet outstanding because in a few lessons some students allow themselves to

be distracted and are not focused on their learning. A few students are a little boisterous at lunch and break times, although they respond quickly to requests from teachers.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. All students report that they feel very safe in school and parents and staff agree that the school is a safe place. Students feel very well cared for by their teachers.
- Students report that there is hardly any bullying in school and if it does happen it is dealt with quickly and effectively. The school is very pro-active in ensuring that bullying or name calling of any kind does not take place. Students have a good understanding of different types of bullying, such as cyber, homophobic or racist bullying. They are taught to keep themselves safe through assemblies and lessons.
- The school has a high level of mobility and there are many students who start at the school at other than normal times, often with very different prior experiences and sometimes with little understanding of English. The school quickly makes them feel welcome and secure.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The headteacher and associate headteacher lead by example and consistently reinforce the school's very high expectations and ambitions for the students. They are ably supported by a strong, new senior leadership team.
- Staff and students are very proud to be part of the school. Staff, students and parents all agree that the school is very well led.
- The school makes an accurate analysis of its own performance and leaders correctly identify where improvements need to be made, taking decisive and focused action to bring these about.
- There is a determined focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This is brought about by rigorous monitoring and by sharing good practice. Effective training in evaluating the quality of teaching empowers leaders, including subject leaders, to provide a range of appropriate support. Staff are very appreciative of the professional development opportunities they are given.
- Performance management has recently been reviewed and it is linked to aspirational targets for teachers to raise the achievement of their students. The relationship of performance management to teachers' progression within the salary structure is very clear.
- The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is broad and balanced. The curriculum in the sixth form has been reviewed and now better prepares students for their next steps. Students of all ages take advantage of the wide variety of extra-curricular and enrichment activities on offer. These are thought provoking, relevant and inspiring assemblies and lessons help to promote students' outstanding social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The school works hard to involve parents in their children's learning, including parents who might be less confident about working with the school. Staff make considerable efforts to ensure that attendance at parents' evenings is high. The school regularly carries out surveys of parents' views. These are to provide opportunities for parents to attend workshops and courses on a useful variety of topics, for example computing skills, parenting or learning English.
- The school's commitment to equality of opportunity is shown by the high expectations of all staff and the strong inclusive ethos. Students receive helpful and useful careers advice both before deciding where to study, or what to do after their GCSEs, and in the sixth form.
- The headteacher and associate headteacher both provide regular support for headteachers in other schools. The school also hosts visits from other schools to see its good practice.
- New and highly effective leadership in the sixth form has brought about recent rapid improvements.
- Safeguarding and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**



- Governors have a clear understanding of their strategic role in improving the school. They know the school’s strengths and areas for development very well. They have a good understanding of how to use information about students’ achievement to judge how well the school is doing compared to national performance and how to evaluate the quality of teaching.
- Senior leaders regularly attend governing body meetings and give informative presentations about their work. Governors ask challenging questions and hold senior staff firmly to account. They have received relevant training to enable them to carry out their statutory duties effectively and they have conducted a self-review to evaluate how they could improve the impact of their work.
- Governors understand how performance management is being used to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school and are involved in discussions about the links between performance management and salaries. They closely monitor the use and effectiveness of resources, including the funding allocated for students eligible for the pupil premium.



### School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Local authority</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Inspection number</b>	[REDACTED]

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	7 [REDACTED]
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	1 [REDACTED]
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Headteacher</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Telephone number</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Fax number</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Email address</b>	[REDACTED]

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