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Title:

**The perceptions of secondary school leaders on reducing or preventing exclusions
and suspensions for persistent disruptive behaviour**

A reflexive thematic analysis

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The perceptions of secondary school leaders on reducing or preventing exclusions and suspensions for persistent disruptive behaviour: A reflexive thematic analysis.

Hannah Lithgow

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.

September 2023

Word Count: 44,933

Abstract

Each year, thousands of students in England are affected by school exclusion, most commonly for the reason of 'persistent disruptive behaviour' (PDB). Despite research indicating the potential negative and long-lasting impact of exclusion, and considering approaches to prevent exclusions, rates have remained relatively consistent. The present research aims to explore approaches to reduce and prevent exclusions for PDB, by considering, how school leaders inform their practices, the potential facilitators and barriers to successful implementation of approaches, and what might support schools further. Ten secondary school leaders in Southwest England participated in a semi-structured interview, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Key findings relate to the importance of knowing the school community, including through understanding student contexts, thorough assessment of student needs and positive relationships. The perceptions of the school community relating to constructions of behaviour and investment in approaches are also suggested as important in determining outcomes. School leaders appeared to be engaging in a complex balancing act, evaluating multiple forms of information and balancing these with a range of demands and purposes. Support which provides greater access to external professionals and provision, including through early intervention, was highly valued. The findings are framed through application of personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1980) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1995) and used to provide consideration for researchers, school staff, educational psychologists and local authorities. These relate to considering the accessibility and availability of information and support for schools, supporting understanding of students' needs and behaviour, and facilitating investment in approaches to reduce and prevent exclusions for PDB.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the ten school leaders, without whom this research would not have been possible, for engaging with the research and providing such honest, considered and thought-provoking responses. I hope that I have done justice to your contributions.

I also extend my thanks to the Bristol course tutors and particularly to my thesis supervisors Professor Pauline Heslop and Dr Mary Stanley-Duke for their guidance and support throughout this research project and for providing me with a safe, reflective space in which to develop as a researcher.

To my educational psychology colleagues and supervisors, I thank you for your understanding, advice and wisdom throughout the research process. To my fellow trainees, it has been a pleasure to share this journey with you and I am so grateful for your friendship and support.

Finally, I would like to thank all the family and friends who have encouraged, helped and supported me throughout this course. In particular, my thanks go out to my parents for their ongoing and unwavering support which I have drawn on heavily in the past three years.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:



DATE: 29.08.23

Glossary of Acronyms and Terminology

ACES	Adverse Childhood Experiences
AP	Alternative Provision*
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills *
PCP	Personal Construct Psychology
PDB	Persistent Disruptive Behaviour
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trials
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
UK	United Kingdom

* *Defined in the glossary*

Alternative Provision: "Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour." (DfE, 2013, p.3).

Exclusion: Temporary or permanent action to prevent a child from attending (DfE, 2023c).

Managed Move: A planned process for supporting a child to transfer to another school permanently on a voluntary basis where this is felt to be in the best interests of the child (DfE, 2022a).

Ofsted: Ofsted are the service responsible for inspecting educational settings (and other children's services) with the aim of raising standards and ensuring that children are kept safe (Ofsted, 2023).

Permanent Exclusion – A headteacher's decision to prevent a child from attending a school on a permanent basis where it is felt that their behaviour cannot be 'amended or remedied by pastoral processes, or consequences within the school' (DfE, 2022a, p.11).

Progress 8: A measure of pupil progress based upon Key Stage 4 (end of year 11) attainment that indicates the 'value added' by a school in comparison to other schools, for pupils with similar Key Stage 2 (end of Year 6) attainment scores (DfE, 2023b).

Suspension: A headteacher's decision to prevent a child from attending school for a temporary period of up to five days at a time (totalling no more than 45 days per year) in response to their behaviour where this is seen to prevent a school maintaining a 'calm, safe and supportive environment' (DfE, 2022a, p.11).

Suspensions is the current language used within government literature; however, previous publications and legislation have also used the phrase fixed term exclusion (DfE, 2022a).

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1. Introduction

This introductory chapter provides an overview for the context of school exclusion in England. I will begin by clarifying key terminology and situating this within its legislative context. I will then consider exclusion data covering trends over time, rates of exclusion for different groups, and outcomes for excluded students. I will consider issues around unofficial forms of exclusion and introduce some research addressing school exclusion. I will discuss my professional and personal motivations for this research and outline the key aims. This chapter will conclude with an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

1.1. Key Legislation and Terminology

Exclusions from school are governed by five key legislations (listed below and detailed in Appendix A) with government guidance 'Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement' (Department for Education (DfE), 2022a) providing advice on how to apply these.

- Education Act 1996
- Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2011
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations 2012
- The Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended by the Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014.

(DfE, 2022a, pp. 6-7)

Section 51A (1) of the Education Act (2002) states that headteachers of maintained schools in England 'may exclude a pupil from the school for a fixed period or permanently'. DfE guidance (2022a) describes exclusion as a 'last resort' to be used when 'approaches towards behaviour management have been exhausted' (p. 3).

Headteachers can temporarily exclude (suspend) students for up to 45 days per academic year (DfE, 2022a). This is described within the guidance as an 'essential behaviour management tool.' (p.3) which can be used to communicate to children

when their behaviour is perceived as unacceptable within the school's behaviour policy and their risk of permanent exclusion.

Headteachers also have the power to permanently exclude a child, meaning that they are not permitted to return to school (Education Act, 2002). DfE guidance (2022a) provides the following criteria for this decision: 'in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others such as staff or pupils in the school' (p.13).

Within education and wider society, the word 'exclusion' is used broadly. Throughout this research, the term 'exclusion' refers to formal school exclusions as described above. The word 'exclusion', as used by the author, should be taken to cover both permanent and fixed period exclusions (suspensions). If differentiation is required, the terms 'permanent exclusion' and 'suspension' will be applied. The phrases 'fixed period exclusion' and 'suspension' are equivalent. 'Suspension' will be used in this research in line with language currently applied within government guidance.

Persistent disruptive behaviour (PDB) is the most common reason for suspension and exclusion in England (DfE, 2022b) however this term is not utilised or clearly defined within DfE guidance (2022a). Although 'persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy' (p.13) are discussed within the guidance as part of the justification for permanent exclusion, this is the only time the word 'persistent' is used (DfE, 2022a). The document does not define what is meant by persistent, for example how many times or over what period. Similarly, the meaning of disruptive behaviour is also not explored within this or other relevant guidance (DfE 2015a; 2022a; 2022c).

1.2. Current figures and trends

In the 2020-2021 academic year, 3928 children were permanently excluded from schools in England with 352,454 suspensions in the same period (DfE, 2022b). A helpful metric for considering rates of exclusion within England is to explore comparative data across the UK. In the same period, in Scotland one student experienced permanent exclusion (Scottish Government, 2021), in Northern Ireland 25 students (NISRA, 2022) and in Wales, 127 (Welsh Government, 2022). From the published figures, it was possible to calculate approximate comparisons between the countries of the UK (see Appendix B); permanent exclusions in England were around

1.6 times higher than Wales, six times higher than Northern Ireland and 350 times higher than Scotland suggesting comparatively high exclusions in English schools.

Interpreting recent exclusion rates and trends is challenging. Due to significant disruption to education throughout the Covid- 19 pandemic, comparison between datasets requires caution (DfE, 2022b). As illustrated in Figure 1, in the academic years prior to the pandemic, rates of permanent exclusion had been relatively stable. Figure 2 shows continuation of a historical trend (since 2012) of increasing suspensions until the academic years affected by Covid-19. The 2018-2019 academic year represented the highest suspension rates in fifteen years of published data (DfE, 2010a, 2015b, 2019a, 2020, 2021a).

DfE guidance (2022a) provides possible reasons a school might use exclusion including behaviours such as bullying, verbal abuse, physical assault or use of prohibited items. However, this does not represent an exhaustive list. Surprisingly, PDB, consistently the most frequent reason for exclusion (DfE, 2023a), is not listed. In the 2020-2021 academic year, around 40% of suspensions and permanent exclusions were for PDB (DfE, 2022b). The lack of shared definition may result in subjective application (Williams, 2018) and PDB becoming a catch all term for a range of behaviours, possibly explaining its association with such a high proportion of exclusions (Binner, 2011).

Figure 1: DfE (2022b) data on rates of permanent exclusion (per 100 students) in English schools (September 2016 – August 2021).

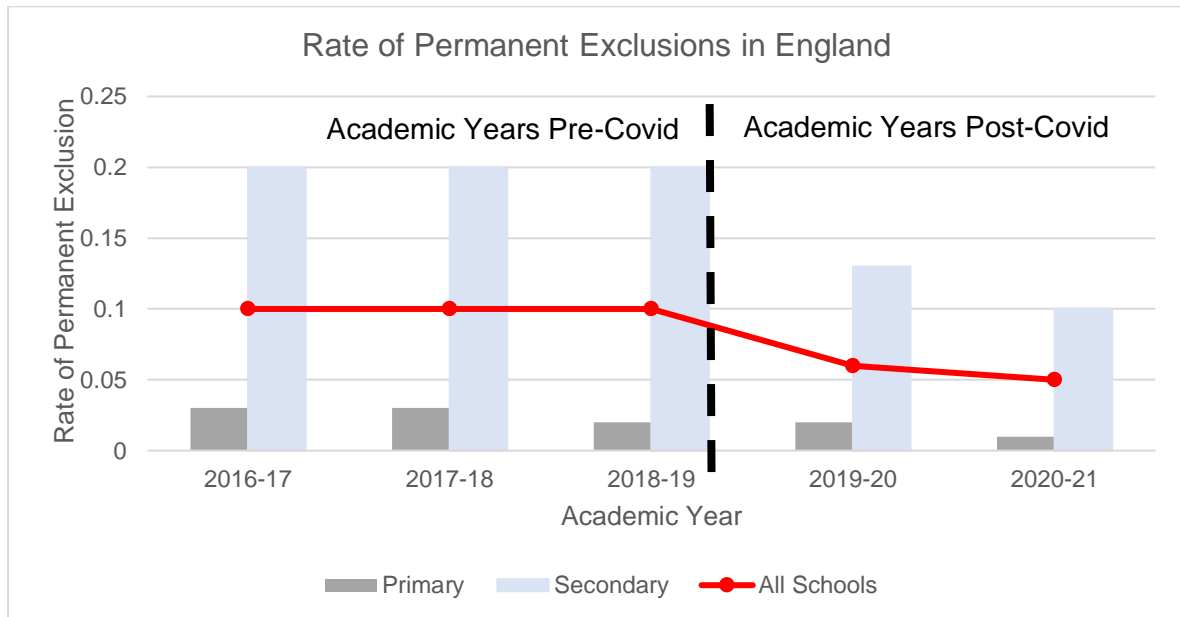
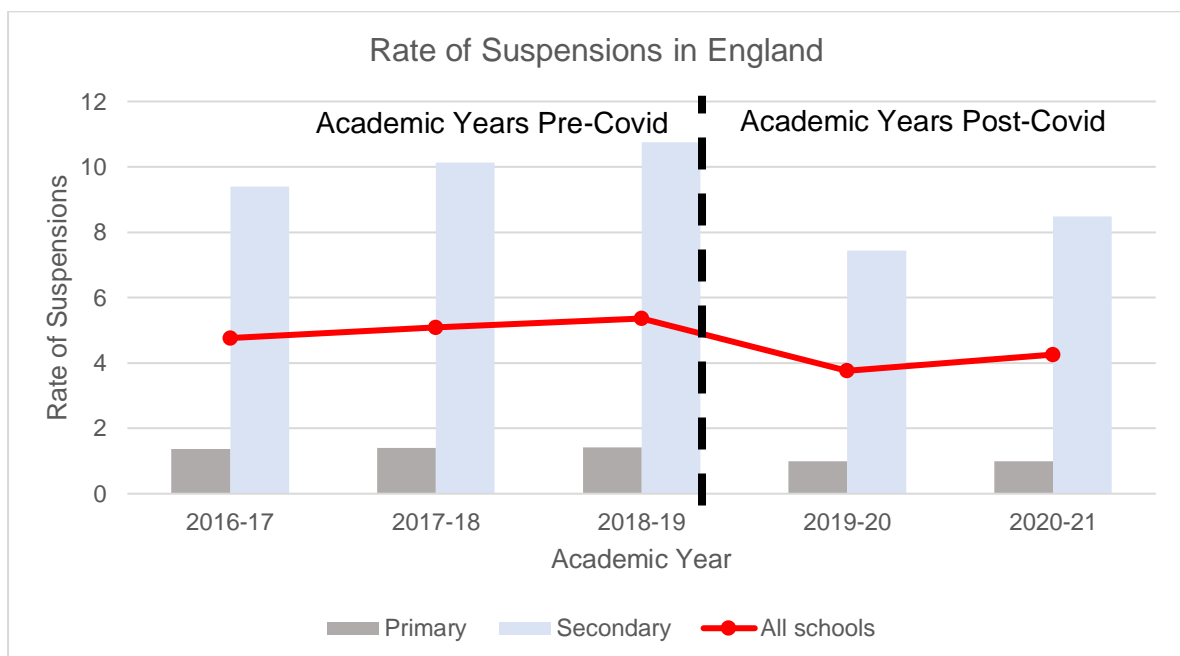


Figure 2: DfE (2022b) data on rates of suspensions (per 100 students) in English schools (September 2016 – August 2021).



1.3. Who is being excluded?

Large-scale longitudinal studies such as the UK Millennium Cohort Study (Villadsen et al., 2022) and the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020) have tracked the characteristics of children excluded from school and their trajectories. Additionally, a DfE commissioned literature review (Graham et al., 2019) explored the disproportionate exclusion of specific groups. Data from these and other studies will be presented here to consider some of the risk factors for exclusion.

Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are disproportionately affected by exclusion. Between 2018 and 2021, students with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were around 2.5 times more likely to be permanently excluded and 4.5 times more likely to be suspended than those without recognised SEN¹ (DfE, 2022b). Students receiving SEN support, without an EHCP, experienced rates of permanent exclusion around five times as high as for students without recognised SEN. Government guidance discourages excluding students with EHCPs (DfE, 2022a), which may help explain variations (Day, 2022). Particularly high rates of exclusion were experienced by children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, specific/moderate learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder (Graham et al., 2019) with students with language and communication difficulties and low academic attainment, especially in writing, also at greater risk (Paget et al., 2018).

Students with mental health needs have been identified as being at particularly increased risk of exclusion (Parker et al., 2019; Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020; John et al., 2022). This includes both diagnosed mental health needs (including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety and self-injury) (John et al., 2022) as well as undiagnosed and subclinical levels of need (Parker et al., 2019). Poor mental health has been suggested to be a predictor for exclusion when other associated factors (such as income, parental mental health and recognised learning disabilities) were controlled for (Parker et al., 2019; Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020).

Gender has also been found to influence exclusions, with boys consistently overrepresented within statistics (Parker et al., 2016; Paget et al., 2018; Graham et

¹ Those recorded on the school's register as having a special educational need.

al., 2019). Graham et al., (2019) presented hypotheses for this disparity including the increased propensity of boys to express emotional needs through externalising behaviours and gendered norms within schools.

Another group of factors linked to rates of exclusion include social influences such as socio-economic status (Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020). In 2020-2021, students eligible for free school meals were over three times more likely to experience suspension, rising to four times for permanent exclusion (DfE, 2022b).

Ethnicity has also been associated with variation in exclusion rates (DfE, 2022b). Students of Gypsy/Roma, Traveller of Irish Heritage, White and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean backgrounds experienced particularly high rates of suspension and permanent exclusion (DfE, 2022b). The causal factors underpinning differences are complex. However, some possible influencers include institutional racism in schools (including attitudes, languages and practices), social exclusion, attendance difficulties and socioeconomic status (Graham et al., 2019).

The data presented within this section highlight the disproportionate impact of exclusionary practices on certain groups. However, Gazeley et al. (2015) cautioned against interpreting exclusion data without the relevant contextual information. Additionally, summary data do not account well for intersectionality of identities for example with boys from Black Caribbean backgrounds showing particularly high risk of exclusion (Graham et al., 2019).

1.4. Unlawful exclusions

Unlawful exclusion practices include sending children home early without recording a suspension and inappropriately reduced timetables (DfE, 2022a). Recent years have seen an increased focus on 'unofficial' exclusions and 'off-rolling' (McShane, 2020, p.260). Off-rolling is where a child is removed from a school's register following unlawful exclusion practices (DfE, 2022a). This might include pressuring parents to remove a child with threat of permanent exclusion (DfE, 2022a); teachers have suggested this can be in response to behavioural issues or concerns over academic league tables (Ofsted, 2019a). Machin & Sandi (2020) analysed data from 2001-2015 and found 80% of exclusions in Year 11 occurred in the autumn term, prior to the point a student's GCSE results would count towards school attainment data. This pattern was not replicated for other year groups suggesting some schools may be

acting to manipulate academic results. Local Authority (LA) officers have even indicated that some schools may perceive fines for unlawful exclusion to be more financially beneficial than paying for the provision required to successfully include that child (Thompson et al., 2021). Caution should be applied in assuming that schools with higher rates of exclusion are inherently less inclusive, since data may be skewed by unofficial practices (Gazeley, 2010).

1.5. Why does exclusion matter?

Exclusion from school presents risks both in the short and long term. Educationally, exclusion is associated with poorer academic outcomes (Rosenbaum, 2020) and perhaps unsurprisingly impacts are also significant for unemployment (Sutherland & Eisner, 2014). Excluded children have an increased risk of criminal exploitation (Longfield, 2019) and involvement in the youth offending system (Skiba et al., 2014; Day, 2022). In addition, to social outcomes, school exclusion can have health implications. Exclusion within secondary school has been linked to decreased mental health (Ford et al., 2018; Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020). Obsuth et al. (2022) found these patterns persist into adulthood, with 25–26 year-olds who were excluded at secondary school reporting higher levels of longstanding mental illness and reduced life satisfaction. The negative impact of exclusion linked to physical health, including poorer sleep, reduced levels of exercise and increased smoking, was also notable (Obsuth et al., 2022).

Exclusions may also affect young people at vulnerable points in their life. King (2016) explored the timing of exclusions, identifying their association with significant trauma and disruption in the child's life such as separation and/or reconstitution of families, parental substance misuse, domestic violence and bereavement. Exclusion therefore has the potential to compound some of the challenges that young people are already experiencing (Gazeley, 2010).

1.6. Addressing school exclusion

Further to exploring the incidence and impact of exclusion, literature has also explored approaches to addressing suspensions and exclusions. The following section will provide a summary of two recent projects as well as key findings from academic reviews in this area before briefly discussing LA guidance. A more in-

depth exploration of approaches to address exclusion can be found in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

'The Timpson Review of School Exclusion' (Timpson, 2019) outlined a government commissioned project exploring the differing use of exclusion between UK schools. Practices were described as variable and four key areas were suggested to improve consistency:

- 1) ambitious leadership across education systems
- 2) ensuring staff have appropriate skills, and systems sufficient capacity, to deliver support
- 3) ensuring systems incentivise inclusion
- 4) improving safeguards.

Another recent project, from the Royal Society for Arts, used case studies and interviews with key stakeholders to help address exclusions (Partridge et al, 2020). Several recommendations were put forward including strategies for engaging families, building positive relationships and improved pastoral support, ensuring inclusive cultures which effectively assess and meet students' needs and better systems for ensuring fair access to education. Although recommendations were primarily for schools, broader systemic influences were also recognised.

Three academic reviews have also been conducted in recent years. Valdebenito et al. (2019) undertook a meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials (RCTs), identifying four key types of successful approach (counselling, mentoring, upskilling staff and academic support). However, the authors also identified that long term impacts were not consistent. Mielke and Farrington (2021) undertook a similar meta-analysis, focusing on studies using official exclusion data as outcome measures, which did not find a statistically significant reduction in suspensions following school-based interventions. This was indicated to be related to programme implementation and school type. Positive results in individual studies were linked to changing whole-school cultures and individual interventions using cognitive-behavioural or social/emotional literacy-based approaches. Most recently, Dean (2022) reviewed whole-school approaches to reducing exclusions providing limited support for positive behaviour and restorative approaches. Dean concluded the evidence was insufficient to draw firm conclusions, given small effect sizes. However, successful

approaches appeared to create positive environments bounded with clear rules and were sustained over several years. Most of the research within these reviews took place outside the UK, frequently within the USA.

Some LAs have issued explicit principles around exclusion practices. Readily available examples include, the 'No Need to Exclude' practice guide published by Hackney Services for Schools (2015) and Oxfordshire County Council's coproduced 'Reducing Exclusions' guide (2020). Such documents provide guidance on local priorities, ways of working and support services.

1.7. Aims of the present research

Within this chapter, I have provided an overview of the data and context surrounding exclusions within English schools. I have discussed the high number of children who continue to be affected by exclusions and have presented some of the risk factors for exclusion and the potential impact upon children's outcomes. I have also briefly discussed some of the projects and reviews which have been undertaken to explore approaches to reduce exclusions. However, exclusions continue to play a significant part in English education systems. The present research aims to explore some of the potential reasons for challenges in reducing exclusions through exploration of the perceived factors influencing approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions. It is hoped that this research might help to provide a better understanding of how schools are informing their practices and what might support them in endeavours to reduce or prevent exclusions. Such findings might hold importance for school staff, LA services including educational psychologists (EPs) and researchers.

1.8. Personal and Professional Motivation and Positioning

Clough & Nutbrown (2002) suggested that all social research is positional, and that the researcher's context shapes decision-making throughout. To support readers in making judgments (Yardley, 2000), I believe it is important to be explicit around my own positioning.

The motivation to explore a research topic around exclusions came through professional experiences as a teacher and as a Trainee EP (TEP). Working as a TEP in an LA with very high rates of exclusion, I became intrigued as to what might underlie these figures, particularly as this was not an issue shared with close

statistical neighbours (other English LAs with similar demographics and characteristics; DfE, 2021b). At the same time, I was involved in some work where I encountered the stories of young people who had been permanently excluded from school. I heard stories which troubled me and where exclusions felt potentially preventable had initial situations been approached differently.

From a personal perspective, I have approached this topic from a position of questioning the necessity or utility of exclusion as a behaviour management approach. For example, I would argue exclusion does little to support the young person’s underlying needs and primarily serves others within the school, who likely already hold greater power. I also view preventing exclusion as a matter of social justice and hold concerns about the way school exclusion may perpetuate disadvantage. I am aware however that these views come from my own values and are not universally shared. I have tried to remain aware of my ideals in this area throughout all stages of this research to either minimise or recognise their impact through application of reflexive processes.

1.9. Structure of the Dissertation

Table 1 provides an overview of the dissertation to follow which will be presented across six chapters.

Table 1: Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter	Title	Purposes
Chapter 1	Introduction	Situates the research in the context of school exclusions in England and provides rationale for further study in this area.
Chapter 2	Literature Review	Explores and evaluates the outcomes of a systematic search to answer the question: “What can schools do to reduce and/or prevent exclusions on the basis of PDB?”
Chapter 3	Methodology	Clarifies the research focus and questions. Outlines the epistemological, ontological and theoretical positioning of the research (constructionism, relativism and interpretivism).

		Describes the selection and application of reflexive thematic analysis to 10 semi-structured interviews with school leaders.
Chapter 4	Findings	Describes and exemplifies the themes developed through the analysis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A focus on understanding: knowing individuals and communities. - A question of interpretation: perceptions matter - A balancing act: prioritising information, purposes and demands. - A blurred picture: constructing boundaries, roles and responsibilities.
Chapter 5	Discussion	Contextualises the findings in relation to the research questions and prior literature. Grounds findings in the theoretical context of personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1980) and an eco-systemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; 1977).
Chapter 6	Conclusion	Summarises and evaluates the research project. Provides implications for future research and practice.

1.10. Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter has provided context surrounding exclusion within English schools through considering guidance, data and research to present an overview of terminology, use and effects of exclusion and practices which may prevent exclusions. I have provided an indication of my positioning and described the aims of the research before discussing the structure of the dissertation to follow.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Chapter Overview

The following chapter will present the literature review. I will start by outlining the purpose and focus of the review before describing the processes and approaches involved in its implementation. I will present the key findings from the review across four key themes. I will then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the included research. Finally, the implications of the literature review for the current research and resulting research questions will be presented.

2.2. Approach to the Literature Review

This literature review has followed a systematically informed methodology (Randolph, 2009). To reach the presented literature review, the stages outlined in Table 2 were followed, the specifics of which will be expanded on in the following sections. Given the limited scope of the project and the single researcher involved, to conceptualise this as a full systematic literature review would not be justified. Instead, the literature review followed a systematically informed methodology whereby the approaches of a systematic review were adhered to as closely as possible given the practical constraints.

Table 2: Stages and processes of the literature review (adapted from Randolph, 2009).

Literature Review Stage		Key processes
Stage 1	Problem Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formulate literature review question
Stage 2	Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine inclusion/exclusion criteria• Electronic search of academic databases• Appraisal of articles for inclusion/exclusion• Hand search of reference lists/relevant literature reviews
Stage 3	Data Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apply appraisal tools to systematically evaluate included research.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extract research outcomes data and integrate thematically.
Stage 4	Data analysis and interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate data to form the basis of the literature review.

Rationale for the systematic approach

Utilising a systematic literature review provides transparency within the search methodology through carefully defined criteria and search terms, reducing the impact of potential selection biases and providing the opportunity for replication (Torgerson, 2003). The use of appraisal frameworks within this methodology also allows for systematic reflection upon the literature quality (Nelson, 2014).

Some authors have argued that narrative reviews, particularly when built upon the experiences and knowledge of experts, can provide value through deepening understanding of a topic (representing a fuller realisation of an evidence-based as opposed to research-based approach; Greenhalgh et al., 2018). However, given my relative inexperience within research and the educational psychology profession, a systemic approach was decided to be more appropriate.

Systematic reviews can be particularly useful where there is not a clear and well understood answer to a question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). This literature review aims to explore such a question (how schools can effectively reduce and prevent exclusions). The current evidence would suggest that this is an area requiring greater exploration or synthesis, since exclusion rates continue to remain high despite drives within policy and practice towards reduction and prevention. This would seem to suggest there is not, at present, a straightforward answer to this question, or if there is, that there are unacknowledged factors influencing the success or implementation of approaches.

2.21. Stage 1: Problem Formation

2.211. Deciding upon the topic area

As discussed within the previous chapter, exclusions in England are comparatively high with some upward trends in the years unaffected by the pandemic. Given the potential negative effects of exclusion, this should arguably be an area of concern for professionals working across education contexts. The most recent Ofsted inspection handbook for England, while recognising the rights of schools to exclude, states that ‘*Inspectors will consider whether the school is developing the use of alternative strategies to exclusion,*’ and will consider whether ‘*...schools are doing all that they can to support pupils at risk of exclusion*’ (Ofsted, 2022, para. 280).

PDB is consistently the most frequent reason provided for exclusions in England (DfE, 2022b). Unlike some other exclusions which may represent a single and unpredicted infringement of a school’s expectations, by its very definition (although not clearly outlined within policy), PDB indicates an ongoing problem. It could be argued therefore that schools have a reasonable opportunity to intervene to support students showing disruptive behaviour and prevent this from becoming persistent. Given that this is both the most prevalent and potentially intervenable reason for exclusion, the literature review will focus upon this area.

2.212. Designing the Literature Review Question

I began by carrying out broad scoping searches exploring the area of school exclusions to determine the extent of the literature and begin to understand key issues and recommendations. These were not conducted systematically since the main purpose was to gain an overview of the literature. These searches took place over several months from Autumn 2021-Spring 2022 and involved using Google Scholar, searches in key journals, snowballing from reference lists, trialling search terms and exploring both peer reviewed and ‘grey’ literature. This process helped shape the draft literature review question.

Initially a literature review question of ‘What constitutes best practice in preventing school exclusions?’ was considered. However, upon scoping the literature and seeing the range of recommended approaches and limited research on each, it was decided it would not be justified to make firm judgments on which of these were most

effective. The literature review question was therefore shifted from a question focused on best practice and what 'should' be done to a question considering the approaches available and therefore what 'could' be done. The question was also specified to focus upon approaches which were in the direct control of school. There were several papers making recommendations for changes in political and societal cultures and policies or which pertained to the actions of external services and arguably were not directly applicable to school staff. The question was therefore adapted to reflect this variation in audience. The literature review question was amended to 'What can schools do to reduce and/or prevent exclusions on the basis of persistent disruptive behaviour?'.

2.22. Stage 2: Data Collection

2.221. Determining Search Terms and Processes

Once the literature review question had been decided, I began to determine the literature search terms and filters through trial scoping searches. I looked at the keywords used in the literature I had already engaged with, to support development of the search terms and try to ensure that articles were not excluded because of linguistic differences. For example, where early scoping searches looked for papers with variants of 'exclusion' in the title, this was expanded to include alternative terms such as 'suspension', 'expulsion' and 'expel'. Making this change increased results in one scoping search by approximately 50%. Other changes in search terms were trialled and not found to be supportive of creating a relevant and manageable body of literature. For example, the phrase 'persistent disruptive behaviour' was not included within the search. Although this phrase is used within government reporting, it is not applied universally within the literature and incorporating this as a search term reduced results unhelpfully. However, separating these terms out and including the word 'behaviour' within the search terms led to a significant increase in irrelevant results to levels which would not have been practical to screen. Language within the search was therefore carefully selected to cover the range of phrasing which might have been used whilst also trying to avoid general terms which could lead to impractical numbers of research articles from other fields. The final search terms and filters applied can be found in Appendix C.

The search was filtered to only include research published from 2011 onwards. The year 2010 saw a shift in approach from the outgoing Labour government to the coalition government and now current Conservative leadership. This change was marked by the introduction of austerity measures, affecting funding for public services, including education (HM Treasury, 2010), and publishing of the Education Act (2011). This act made changes to disciplinary powers in schools (amongst other systemic changes) altering the processes around school exclusion. Schools were given greater power and influence around behaviour management, with teachers having the right to issue detentions without notice and search students (Education Act 2011, Part 2, Sections 2 and 5). Review panels replaced appeals panels with reduced power to directly reinstate children to education settings following a permanent exclusion (Education Act 2011, Section 51A,) aiming to provide greater authority to headteachers (DfE, 2010b). The past ten years have seen multiple publications and updates around behaviour and discipline for schools to adhere to (DfE, 2012; 2014a; 2015a; 2018; 2022c) as well as curricular shifts (DfE, 2014b) and guidance around supporting young people with SEND (DfE & DoH, 2015). While important to ensure a large enough timeframe to obtain sufficient research, this was balanced against the risk of including research conducted within a very different political and financial climate. The early 2010s also saw an initial plateau in previously falling exclusion rates followed by a steady increase suggesting this to be a period worthy of investigation.

Three searches were conducted covering a total of seven different databases. Web of Science Core Collection was chosen as a starting point, since this is a multi-disciplinary database and therefore helpful for scoping literature from a range of fields. Next, specific databases were also chosen to ensure that research from both educational and psychological disciplines could be screened. The second database selected was PsycInfo since this is a large, international database covering a broad range of psychological topic areas (Harari et al., 2020). The final search was run through EBSCO Host and comprised of databases containing literature from both British and international education and child development contexts (British Education Index, Educational Resources Information Center, Child and Adolescent Development Studies, Educational Abstracts and Educational Administration

Abstracts). It was important to ensure that British databases were included given the propensity of PsycInfo to generate American results (Harari et al., 2020).

2.222. Determining Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed prior to conducting the literature review search to generate a relevant and manageable body of research for review. An overview of these criteria is presented in Appendix D with more detailed explanation in the paragraphs below.

Only research involving participants and/or settings from England was included. There is a large quantity of international research regarding approaches to reducing and preventing exclusions particularly from the United States. This international literature is contextually useful, however, given the scope of this project, research conducted outside of the UK was not included. There is disparity in rates of exclusion across the UK leading to the decision to focus on English research.

Both quantitative and qualitative research studies were included within the literature review. Hierarchies of evidence are sometimes applied to evaluate the strength of evidence in a particular area with RCTs being considered the gold standard of research before other quantitative and then qualitative approaches (Sackett et al., 2000; Hariton & Locascio, 2018). However, this could be understood to be an oversimplified conception of knowledge and evidence (Evans, 2003). Boyle and Kelly (2017) argue that 'typologies of evidence' which focus on the appropriateness of the methodology to the research questions may be more useful. In some cases, this may be through RCT, and in others the richer picture provided through qualitative designs may be relevant (Clark et al., 2021). For this reason, studies were not excluded based on their methodologies but were appraised for their credibility regarding the questions they sought to answer.

Commentaries, systematic reviews and meta-analyses were excluded from the literature review. While commentaries have been a highly useful resource in informing this research, due to their reliance on opinion-based interpretation of pre-existing literature and policy, they were not considered for the literature review. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses were excluded from the review as they do not constitute primary research. In the case of commentaries, reviews and meta-analyses, it was expected that any relevant primary research within these papers

would be located independently through the database searches. However, to ensure that key research was not missed, all relevant systematic reviews and meta-analyses resulting from the database searches were also hand searched. No additional studies were identified through this process.

2.223. Search Outcomes

The three database searches were conducted in June 2022 and elicited 815 results (reduced to 490 following the removal of duplicate records). Each record was screened at the title level to exclude any literature pertaining to other academic fields, or which was not relevant to the literature review question (275 articles were removed at this stage). The remaining articles were then screened at the abstract level where 94 articles were excluded. The most common reasons for exclusion at this stage were research conducted outside of England; research relating to unofficial forms of exclusion, including social exclusion by peers; and research not relevant to the research question. Following this stage, the articles were briefly scanned for any clear indicators that they would not meet the inclusion criteria, for example to confirm a non-English sample, leading to the exclusion of a further 61 articles. As a result of these screening processes, 60 records were identified for further exploration. These articles were read in full (or until the point they met the criteria for exclusion), starting with the methodology. The most common reasons for exclusion at this stage were articles measuring the prevalence of exclusion or those which focused upon actions beyond the control of individual schools, for example changes within national policy. Thirteen articles were identified to satisfy the specified inclusion and exclusion criteria. Information surrounding the decision-making for each of these 60 papers can be found in Appendix E and an overview of the search process can be found within the PRISMA diagram in Appendix F.

I hand-searched the reference lists of the 13 identified articles for any potentially relevant research. From this search, 11 further articles were identified for review however none of these satisfied the inclusion and exclusion criteria so were not included in the literature review (see Appendix G for details). Two of the articles identified through the hand-search were literature reviews and one a meta-analysis; the individual articles reviewed/analysed within these papers were also checked, however again, no article met the inclusion criteria.

A further search for research published in 2022-2023 was conducted in June 2023 to ensure that an up-to-date picture could be presented. This follow-up search elicited 107 results with one new study (Hulme et al., 2023) meeting the criteria for inclusion. As this study was not published at the time of the initial search and analysis, it was not incorporated into the development of themes described in section 2.23. However, the key findings aligned well with these themes and have been included where appropriate.

2.23. Stage 3: Data Analysis

After identifying the articles for inclusion, I read each several times to ensure a good level of familiarity. The initial reading was to ensure suitability for inclusion where informal and unstructured notes were made around anything that stood out. Following this, the papers were read with a specific focus upon recording any findings which could be considered relevant to the literature review question (see Appendix J for a summary of the research). Once all papers had been read for this purpose, these findings were then grouped together into codes and themes which began to form the basis of the literature review structure. Several iterations of themes were considered before developing the structure to be used. Once the themes had been developed and I was writing the literature review, I referred back to the papers frequently to ensure that findings had been appropriately encompassed and communicated through this structure.

I critically appraised each paper to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their methodological underpinnings. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP; 2022) checklist was selected to support appraisal of qualitative studies. This tool is given as an example by the Cochrane review as a validated tool capable of assessing the methodological rigour of qualitative studies (Noyes et al., 2019). In addition, the CASP has been found to be effective for supporting inexperienced researchers, such as students, to critically appraise qualitative research articles effectively (Nadelson & Nadelson, 2014; Long et al., 2020).

Since the CASP did not provide tools to assess all forms of quantitative research, the Health Care Practice Research and Development Unit (HCPRDU) critical appraisal tool (Long et al., 2011a; 2011b) was used to appraise papers with a quantitative

element. This tool was selected as it offers both a quantitative and mixed methods version which allowed for greater consistency.

The tools were not used to create numerical scores for the quality of research. I believed this approach would be somewhat reductionist and minimise the reasoning behind the figures (Kuper et al., 2008). Jüni et al. (1999) suggest that creating summary scores to assess research may lead to an overgeneralised understanding of the research and potentially conceal significant weaknesses. Long et al. (2020) highlight that when using the CASP, the 'yes', 'no' or 'can't tell' responses to questions can lack the nuance needed to fully comprehend the research. For these reasons, the qualitative responses to appraisal questions were relied upon more heavily. Both the CASP and HCPRDU appraisal tools included open-ended questions which allowed for more thorough consideration of the papers alongside closed questions which can support comparison between research studies (Crowe & Sheppard, 2011). Examples of the appraisal conducted using these tools can be found in Appendix H. Whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of categorical decision-making, in the interest of transparency, Appendix I provides an overview of outcomes for each appraisal tool. Later in this chapter, section 2.4 will provide a qualitative summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the included literature.

2.24. Stage 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

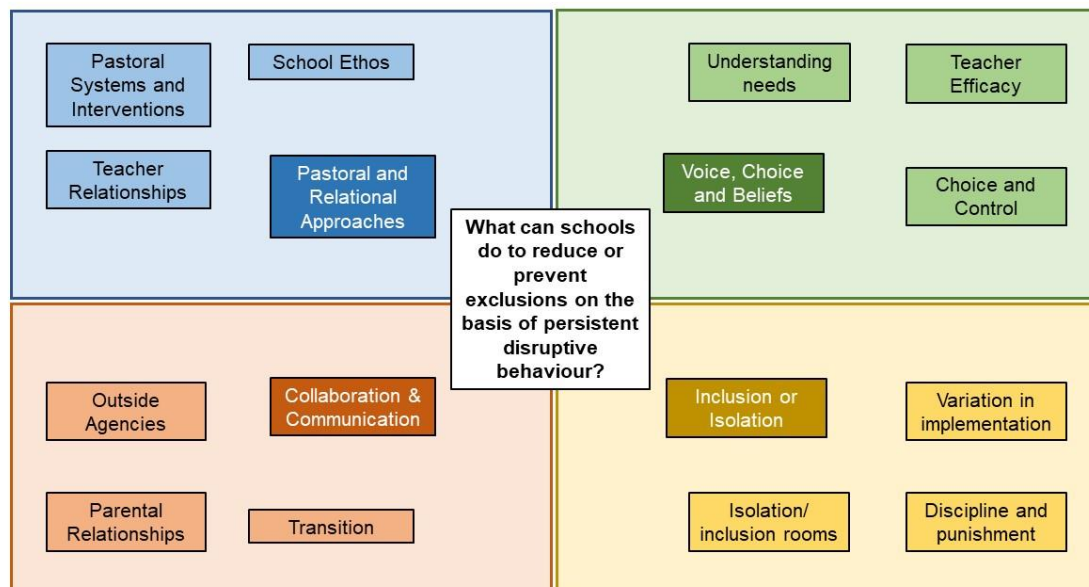
The thirteen papers included in the literature review ranged in date of publication from 2012 to 2022. Six of these followed a qualitative methodology, (Gilmore, 2013; Tucker, 2013; Rechten & Tweed, 2014; Trotman et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021); four utilised quantitative methodologies (Gibbs & Powell, 2012; Obsuth et al., 2016; Obsuth et al., 2017; Toth et al., 2022); and three followed mixed methods designs (Hatton, 2013; Waters, 2015; Farouk & Edwards, 2021). Represented across this research were the views of students, school staff and LA officers. In six of the papers, interventions and approaches were compared directly to rates of exclusion, whereas other papers focused on the perceptions of those within school systems. A more detailed overview of the papers can be found in Appendix J.

The following section will present key findings from the literature review to answer the question 'What can schools do to reduce or prevent exclusions for persistent

disruptive behaviour?'. The main ideas from the papers were arranged thematically (see Appendix K) into four key categories (Figure 3) which will be used to structure the following section.

- Relational and Pastoral Approaches
- Voice, Choice and Beliefs
- Collaboration and Communication
- Inclusion or Isolation

Figure 3: Thematic Organisation of Key Literature Findings



2.3. What can schools do to reduce and/or prevent exclusions on the basis of persistent disruptive behaviour?

2.31. Pastoral and Relational Approaches

Support based around pastoral care, intervention and relationships was identified within the included research to affect reduction or prevention of exclusions. These ideas will be considered in relation to the overall school ethos, the influence of teacher relationships and specific pastoral systems and interventions.

2.311. School Ethos

The cultures and values which schools created had the power to significantly shape young people's school experiences, feeding into behaviour management systems as well as approaches to and rates of exclusion (Hatton, 2013; Tucker, 2013, Martin-Denham, 2021; Hulme et al., 2023). Hatton (2013) compared practices in high and low excluding primary schools to explore which factors within a school's ethos might influence their exclusion rates. The author emphasised the importance of schools developing clear and consistent behaviour policies which were well understood by the school community. In general, there was lower consistency between the responses of staff at higher excluding schools, perhaps suggesting the importance of all school staff sharing similar values, beliefs and approaches for creating a united school ethos (Hatton, 2013). Cole et al. (2019) presented the views of LA officers who identified that cultures which were built upon the values of empathy and understanding tended to decrease the likelihood of schools excluding for PDB. Instead, such cultures were suggested to relate to a focus on supporting and mentoring young people to develop. The development of inclusive cultures was understood to start at the top of the school with the attitudes and approaches of senior leaders, although some concerns were raised that current legislation and government guidance may not wholly encourage inclusive practice (Cole et al., 2019).

Staff in 'non-excluding' schools were found to be more likely to place importance on approaches to behaviour management which focused on prevention and were implemented at the whole-school level than those in higher excluding schools who focused on individual interventions and strategies (Hatton, 2013). Schools with low rates of exclusion reported using more rewards than sanctions, leading Hatton to

highlight the importance of schools developing a culture of celebration and positivity suggesting this may prevent PDB from developing.

2.312. Teacher Relationships

The way in which students perceived their teachers could impact upon their classroom behaviour. Trotman et al. (2015) found that where students liked their teachers, they were more likely to engage positively; students appreciated tolerance, openness and flexibility. Students also favoured teachers they believed could 'teach well' and whose styles included collaborative and open approaches to learning (Trotman et al., 2015). The lack of close relationships with teachers, in comparison to the security of a single class teacher in primary school, was identified by young people at risk of exclusion as a barrier for effectively managing the secondary school environment (Farouk & Edwards, 2021).

Obsuth et al. (2017) highlighted that teacher relationships did not affect the outcomes of the measured intervention suggesting limited evidence of their facilitatory effect in reducing exclusions. However, teacher relationships in this study were measured using four scaled questions which appeared to be posed generically and therefore may not have been sensitive to variation in relationships with different teachers. As the relationship with the adult leading the intervention was not scaled specifically, this could explain the lack of association found.

2.313. Pastoral Systems and Interventions

Pastoral systems which promoted a caring and nurturing environment, particularly for vulnerable young people, influenced behaviour and exclusions. In Tucker's (2013) research, young people at risk of, or having experienced, exclusion shared the importance of building trusting relationships with adults and having safe physical spaces in which to express themselves. The young people also stressed the importance of adults who demonstrated genuine care and responsiveness and who were open, available, respectful and non-judgemental.

LA officers reported that children were more likely to remain included at school when school staff were supported to develop effective behaviour and pastoral systems (Cole et al., 2019). These systems aimed to understand children's needs, provide space for staff self-reflection and utilised a preventative approach to managing

disruptive behaviour. Conversely, where systems focused on setting targets and collecting evidence of negatively perceived behaviours, staff were more likely to view the school as unable to meet their needs, potentially leading to exclusions (Cole et al., 2019).

Pastoral support targeted at specific groups, has been suggested to be helpful for providing young people with the space and time to talk, as well as to share experiences and feel less isolated in their situation (Tucker, 2013). However, within such groups, it was found to be important that young people did not feel pressured to join and were given support to participate.

A range of specific pastoral interventions have been suggested to support schools in preventing exclusions for some of their most vulnerable students (Trotman et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021; Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Toth et al., 2022). Farouk and Edwards (2021) found that a narrative counselling intervention² led to increased behavioural engagement and a reduced number of reported negative incidents. However, the long-term impact upon exclusion was not recorded. In a larger study, Toth et al. (2022) found that school-based counselling sessions led to a significant reduction in suspensions in the year that counselling took place, with most participants experiencing no further instances. Interviews with school staff, students and LA officers also highlighted other interventions associated with preventing exclusions including nurture groups, forest school, anger management sessions and mentoring (Trotman et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2019; Martin-Denham, 2021). Rechten and Tweed (2014) explored the potential benefits of a social communication intervention involving role play, feedback and rehearsal of skills for young people at risk of exclusion. However, the intervention was only demonstrated to participants and not implemented actively, providing only tentative evidence for its application and no clear indication of any actual impact upon exclusions.

It should not be assumed that all interventions designed to support learning and behaviour will be helpful for young people at risk of exclusion. A social-communication intervention, aiming to reduce secondary school exclusions, was

² Narrative counselling draws upon narrative psychological approaches where it is considered that an individual's sense of self is related to the stories (narratives) they construct about themselves and their experiences which in turn affect their interactions (Farouk & Edwards, 2021). Within the specific intervention, students were supported to create an autobiography used as a basis for reflection on school experiences (Farouk & Edwards, 2021).

found, through cluster-RCTs, to have no effect on behavioural outcomes and a potential negative effect on exclusion rates (Obsuth et al., 2016). The authors hypothesised that it was possible that ‘deviancy training’ effects, whereby young people ‘learned’ poor behaviours and created unproductive group norms, may have influenced these results especially since increases in exclusion appeared more likely for participants with fewer teacher rated ‘behavioural problems’ at baseline measurement. However, it was also recognised that there were multiple issues with the implementation of the programme, including low attendance and engagement, lack of adherence to programme systems and low-quality delivery of content which may have caused poor outcomes (Obsuth et al., 2017). It should perhaps be noted that within this study, data were collected dichotomously on whether a child had or had not experienced exclusion since the intervention, so gradients of impact regarding numbers of exclusions may have been missed. While difficult to isolate the exact causes which led to negative outcomes from this intervention, what can perhaps be taken from the findings is the importance of considering the implementation of interventions for example regarding how, by whom, and for whom, content is delivered.

The school ethos and values not only impacted upon behaviour and exclusions in school but could also affect the outcomes of interventions. For example, Farouk & Edwards (2021) found that where staff were under pressure to promote high academic achievement and results, the outcomes of pastoral interventions were less effective. This was hypothesised to be firstly related to the low importance given by teachers to collaborating with pastoral staff. Secondly, reluctance to prioritise time and support for students displaying behaviour that challenges, where this might detract from performance related concerns, was discussed (Farouk and Edwards, 2021). Measures such as Progress 8³ were suggested to contribute to a curriculum encouraging exclusive disciplinary measures (Cole et al., 2019). Trotman et al. (2015) noted that students’ accounts appeared to indicate a separation between academic and pastoral features of education, which was suggested to impede supporting improved classroom behaviour. LA officers have suggested that this may not be helped by the apparent disconnect between government SEND, behaviour

³ A measure of pupil progress based upon Key Stage 4 (Year 11) attainment that indicates the ‘value added’ by a school in comparison to other schools, for pupils with similar Key Stage 2 (Year 6) attainment scores (DfE, 2023b).

and mental health policies (Cole et al., 2019). When evaluating the outcomes of their narrative counselling-based intervention, Farouk and Edwards (2021) highlighted that the success of the programme was dependent upon support from classroom teachers to help the young person implement agreed changes, providing evidence for the importance of such links.

2.32. Voice, choice and beliefs

The perceptions of students and staff within the school system may also influence school exclusions. This section will explore the influence of teacher efficacy, understandings of students' needs and student voice and choice.

2.321. Teacher efficacy

Efficacy beliefs relate to people's conceptualisation of their ability to produce a particular action or outcome successfully (Bandura, 1994). The beliefs which individuals hold about their own and others' efficacy influence how they think and behave, their motivations and feelings (Bandura, 1994). Collective efficacy refers to the beliefs of individuals within a group that together they can achieve positive outcomes (Goddard et al., 2000).

Gibbs and Powell (2012) administered questionnaires to primary and nursery school teachers measuring efficacy beliefs and compared these to school data. While individual efficacy beliefs did not relate to exclusions, aspects of collective efficacy beliefs were linked. Specifically, when staff believed that they could manage the effects of environmental factors, exclusions were likely to be lower. This collective efficacy was hypothesised by Gibbs and Powell (2012) to motivate staff to engage in problem solving and support for these young people. It was suggested that this collective belief might be facilitated through the example of school leaders, professional development foci, and the school ethos, however, this was not measured directly. Hatton (2013) found that staff in low excluding schools were less likely to believe additional funding or support would facilitate a reduction in exclusions, instead appearing to hold greater confidence in the abilities and resources of their staff to make these changes.

In addition to teachers' efficacy beliefs around classroom behaviour, their sense of ownership may also be influential. Participants in Tucker's (2013) research

suggested that a shared responsibility for pastoral care is essential for effectively meeting the needs of young people. However, it was suggested that there could be resistance from some teachers, particularly where approaches were perceived to undermine more traditional, behaviourist approaches to discipline and behaviour management. Hatton (2013) found that teachers in low excluding schools were more likely to demonstrate a collective responsibility for the behaviour of students whereas those in higher excluding schools tended to focus solely on their own group of pupils. This sense of shared responsibility across the school was believed to create a more inclusive culture thus reducing exclusions.

2.322. Understanding needs

Interrelated needs across multiple areas of school life could underpin disruptive behaviour (Tucker, 2013). LA officers in Cole et al.'s (2019) research suggested that effective provision for young people with SEND was essential (amongst other provisions and services) for reducing school exclusions. Hulme et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of united SEND and behaviour structures within schools. Staged intervention approaches ranging from whole-school approaches to more targeted or individualised interventions were recommended to achieve inclusivity (Cole et al., 2019). However, specific evidence for effective SEND provision for young people at risk of exclusion beyond pastoral approaches, were not clearly detailed. Headteachers also identified the importance of reasonable adjustments for young people with SEND (a key aspect of the SEND Code of Practice; DfE & Department of Health (DoH), 2015) to support them with their behaviour (Martin-Denham, 2021). Examples of reasonable adjustments such as adult support and environmental adaptations e.g., fidget toys, wobble cushions and sand timers, were highlighted (Martin-Denham, 2021).

Information surrounding young people's needs was suggested by Tucker (2013) to come from a variety of sources, for example, attendance data, behaviour logs and child protection concerns; careful monitoring and sharing of this information was highlighted as important for developing responsive actions and supports. Within schools with lower levels of exclusions, staff were more likely to understand behaviour needs as SEND and to address them accordingly without the use of exclusion (Hatton, 2013). Crucially, early identification of needs was essential to

allow for timely, targeted and relevant intervention to prevent escalation in needs and behaviours (Tucker 2013; Hulme et al., 2023).

2.323. Choice and control

Secondary school students in Trotman et al.'s (2015) research expressed how gaining greater control and independence over their learning could impact upon behaviour. Year 9 pupils discussed how they valued achieving well in exams and believed that beginning Key Stage Four⁴ would mark a turning point in their behaviour. Choosing their own subjects appeared to provide a greater sense of control and responsibility for their future. Interestingly, DfE data (2022b) suggested that rates of exclusion peak at the age of 14 which could support this view however this is only a correlational relationship. Behaviour coordinators within Trotman's study were less optimistic suggesting that young people's disruptive behaviours were ingrained, and that change would be difficult, particularly alongside increased academic demands. Whether these behaviour coordinators' views represented a direct relationship or one mediated by external factors, such as staff expectations and efficacy, was unclear from the data. Interestingly, pupil behaviour was suggested to be linked to students' liking of teachers as opposed to subjects (Trotman et al., 2015) indicating that curricular choice alone may not be sufficient to reduce exclusions. The importance of choice and control was also highlighted by young people in Tucker's (2013) research. Students felt it important that they were provided with options around how they were supported with their behaviour and wider needs, with adults willing to listen to their views. Students emphasised the importance of meaningful contribution arguing that some established systems, such as school councils, could be tokenistic.

2.33. Collaboration and communication

The following section of the literature review will explore the theme of collaboration and communication between school, home and wider professionals. This will be discussed in relation to transition, parental relationships and outside agencies.

⁴ Key Stage Four is a phase of secondary education encompassing Years 10 and 11 and where the students are typically engaging with GCSE (or equivalent) courses.

2.331. Transition

The way in which young people were supported to transition between different systems both within and between settings could also influence behaviour and exclusion. Trotman et al. (2015) suggested that disparities between levels of support at primary and secondary phases could leave some pupils feeling lost, vulnerable, and struggling to manage the physical, cognitive and emotional demands of secondary school. These unmet needs were suggested to then be communicated behaviourally as students tried to understand and establish relationships within the new system (Trotman et al., 2015). School staff within Trotman's research suggested that approaches which aimed to make this transition more gradual could increase the likelihood of success.

2.332. Parental relationships

Early involvement of parents and regular communication, such as through weekly phone calls, was viewed by headteachers as important for building relationships and keeping communication open (Martin-Denham, 2021). However, Martin-Denham (2021) found that only a small number of primary headteachers and no secondary representatives cited collaboration with parents as an effective strategy for reducing exclusions. On the other hand, those that did share this approach indicated that consultation between parents and school staff allowed shared planning for strategies and approaches to ensure effective partnerships and consistency, a finding echoed by Tucker (2013). Interestingly, Hatton (2013) found that low excluding schools tended to show less concern for the views of parents around policies and practices and that it was staff in higher excluding schools who placed more importance on building positive relationships with parents. Possible reasons for this difference were not discussed within the research however it may have been due to school staff in lower excluding schools holding higher confidence in their own ability to meet pupil's needs effectively. Some young people also expressed frustration about their own lack of involvement in discussions, for example feeling as though adults patronised them, talked about them as if they were not there, dominated conversations and did not allow them opportunities to express their views openly or fully (Tucker; 2013; Trotman et al., 2015).

Schools were also presented as well positioned to coordinate support for families whose children were at risk of exclusion for example through training programmes and personal support (Martin-Denham, 2021). Waters (2014) outlined a joint story-making intervention, which involved shared sessions with primary children, parents, teachers, teaching assistants and other key adults. Within these sessions, the participants worked to develop a story which was based, metaphorically, on a current difficulty within the system. The outcome measures indicated that most pupils showed lower emotional stress following implementation of the programme alongside an improvement in behaviour. None of the children were reported to receive a suspension during the programme (follow-up data were not provided) however given the short length of the intervention and relative infrequency of exclusions for these pupils prior to the programme, it is difficult to determine the implication of this finding.

Farouk and Edwards (2021) argued the importance of involving and communicating with parents, as well as school staff, as part of interventions for young people, recognising that while adolescence is a time of increasing independence, young people still experience regulation from adults around them. Involving families was suggested to ensure that all adults were aware and supportive of proposed changes resulting from the intervention and could support their implementation both at home and school.

The social communication intervention described by Obsuth et al., (2017) aimed to work across the home and school environment. Despite the expectation that parents would be contacted regularly through phone calls and home visits, these were rarely executed. It was hypothesised that this lack of family engagement may have contributed to the low levels of engagement from young people and lack of positive outcomes from the intervention in terms of impact upon behaviour and exclusion (Obsuth et al., 2016). This finding may also illuminate difficulties for some secondary schools in involving families, for example due to time limitations or perceptions of value. However, young people in Tucker's (2013) research spoke of feeling pressurised into attending interventions they did not enjoy or want to engage with highlighting the importance of balancing both parental and young people's views.

2.333. *Outside Agencies*

Collaboration between different schools was also indicated to be important to help prevent exclusions (Tucker, 2013; Cole et al., 2019). LA officers suggested that dual registration, for example in specialist settings, pupil referral units (PRUs) or further education colleges, could lead to positive outcomes due to more tailored provision (Cole et al., 2019). In addition, specialist school staff could support mainstream teachers through outreach work which identified and addressed unmet needs (Cole et al., 2019). Mainstream settings could also collaborate to share services, staff or training for example, learning mentors or behaviour specialists (Tucker, 2013). In some instances, low levels of exclusions have also been sustained when clusters of schools worked together to support one another to prevent exclusions for example through behaviour partnerships (Cole et al., 2019). Schools in Hulme et al.'s (2023) research had entered a service level agreement with the LA whereby they received additional funding on the condition that they would not permanently exclude more than three pupils annually which was suggested to increase inclusion. Data around pupil movement was also shared between schools within the project to promote shared responsibility.

Increasingly however, in response to austerity measures, school staff described reduced access to professionals such as EPs and behaviour therapists (Tucker, 2013). Some schools moved towards attempting to meet more of their young people's needs 'in-house' for example by upskilling staff or adapting their systems (Tucker, 2013; Hulme et al., 2023). However, this was perceived to add additional financial and time pressure and for some schools to be potentially difficult to sustain (Tucker 2013; Hulme et al., 2023). Nevertheless, headteachers reported continuing to draw upon external support, both through free and traded services, sharing the value of agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and autism advisory services (Martin-Denham, 2021). Engagement with local systems to promote multi-agency collaboration was perceived to help schools prevent exclusions for example working with social services through early help strategies (Cole et al., 2019).

2.34. Inclusion or isolation

The final section of the literature review will discuss the use of approaches to reducing exclusion with a disciplinary or exclusionary focus. A commonly cited approach to preventing exclusions was the use of 'inclusion' or 'isolation' rooms (Gilmore, 2013; Trotman et al., 2015; Martin-Denham, 2021). These spaces in schools can vary both in terminology and nature however generally consist of a separate room within which students access their learning away from their class on either a prearranged or more reactive basis (Sealy et al., 2021).

Isolation rooms and booths were the most identified alternative to exclusion described by secondary headteacher's in Martin-Denham's (2021) research. The headteachers tended to frame this approach as a punishment for those young people who were perceived not to conform. The social isolation and lack of direct teaching within these spaces was hypothesised to create a negative environment for the young people aiming to act as a deterrent. Notably, secondary headteachers viewed exclusionary practices, such as the use of isolation, to be a useful and necessary approach to preventing exclusions (Martin-Denham, 2021). However, some leaders in Hulme et al.'s (2023) research suggested that such an approach does not represent inclusion and can perpetuate disruptive behaviours.

Gilmore (2013) undertook research with students who accessed an isolation space within their secondary school. The students generally assumed that punishment was needed in school and felt that the reasons they were sent to the inclusion room were typically fair. While they felt it acted as a punishment and possible deterrent, some also expressed the potential detrimental impact on their academic learning due to the lack of teacher and learning support. While the space was framed as providing opportunity for reflection, Gilmore suggested that the data did not seem to provide clear evidence that it had any impact on subsequent behaviour. In general, however, the students felt it was a positive alternative to formal, external exclusions and Gilmore presented that the provision may communicate to students their belonging and create a relational space.

School staff have described multiple purposes for inclusion/isolation rooms from providing a place in which to regulate and reflect, creating a deterrent, a way to exclude without impacting official figures, or serving the rest of the school community

as a form of respite (Trotman et al, 2015; Martin-Denham, 2021). This variety of purposes may feed into the diversity in values placed on these spaces by young people (Trotman et al., 2015). LA officers raised concerns about increasing moves in some schools towards behaviourist approaches to managing behaviour suggesting that punitive measures such as isolation rooms and zero-tolerance policies fail to recognise behaviour as a communication and facilitate understanding the young person's needs (Cole et al., 2019). Concerns were also raised around the rigidity of behavioural systems and their inability to adapt to a range of SEND leading to arguably avoidable exclusions (Cole et al., 2019). Hulme et al., (2023) suggested that where leaders conceptualised disruptive behaviours as representing unmet needs, they showed increased likelihood to focus on the inclusiveness of whole-school systems rather than individualised behavioural intervention.

2.4. Strengths and Limitations of Current Research

While some context to the included research has been provided within the presentation of literature themes, this section will focus specifically on the strengths and limitations of the research to help consider its quality. Within this section, the quality of research designs including the range of approaches and populations, sampling strategies, ethical issues, quality of analysis, appropriateness of measures and implementation of approaches will be discussed.

2.41. Breadth of Approaches

A strength of the literature was the creative use of a range of approaches to support young people at risk of exclusion. Several of the studies trialled a new form of intervention for the population and were able to either report positive initial outcomes (Waters, 2014; Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Toth et al., 2022) or indicate challenges with an approach (Obsuth et al., 2016; Obsuth et al., 2017). However, this also presents limitations as there was not significant depth or breadth to the evidence for each approach. Studies which aimed to replicate findings in another context would be helpful to reinforce the reliability and generalisability/transferability of findings.

2.42. Samples

Throughout the research, a range of groups were involved including LA officers, school staff, parents, and young people. A general strength of the studies was the

appropriateness of the selected sample to share views relating to the research question. Several studies utilised multiple groups of informants for example, Waters (2014) explored the views of parents, pupils and a range of school staff allowing for a broader understanding of the impact of the intervention. However, in some situations where multiple groups were involved, the voices of all participants were not given equal weight. For example, despite making up over 80% of the sample, young people accounted for just one of the six substantial quotes presented in Tucker's (2013) findings.

Some of the studies used mixed methods designs to evaluate interventions (Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Waters, 2015; Hulme et al., 2023) whereby outcomes could be measured quantitatively alongside qualitative experiences. This provided depth of understanding around these approaches and their impact. However, in some cases, to accommodate the multiple methods of data collection, sample sizes were small. Studies which applied a purely quantitative approach to measuring intervention outcomes, were informed by greater sample sizes (Toth et al, 2022; Obsuth et al., 2017) although in these specific cases this may be due to research's association with larger projects.

While the aim of qualitative research is not always generalisability, it is still important to consider the characteristics of the sample and the resulting implications for transferability. Convenience samples were applied within some of the research (Gibbs & Powell, 2012; Rechten & Tweed, 2014; Waters, 2014) which may have led to potential biases. Cole et al. (2019) recruited using known contacts. This study involved participants providing their views on local and government policies and it is conceivable that the participants may have shared similar political leanings. Waters (2014) selected the first 12 pairs of parents and children to complete an intervention following training of a group of school staff. This may have reduced the representativeness of the sample as these pairs may have shared some key characteristics for example around commitment, organisation and availability within the school and/or family context. Participants in Rechten and Tweed's (2014) research had just received training in the approach and were then asked their views in focus group situations. This could have led to response and social desirability biases, reducing the strength of the evidence.

Other studies (Gilmore, 2013; Tucker, 2013; Farouk & Edwards, 2013) provided very little information around how settings and samples were selected, perhaps implying that these were not methodological strengths of the research. This led to challenges in drawing explicit conclusions from the research. For example, while Gilmore (2013) provided rationale for the characteristics of the chosen school, why or how this particular setting was selected was not mentioned. Again, how the five students from all those using the inclusion room were selected was not shared leaving open the potential for bias. Trotman et al. (2015) for ethical reasons did not know the background of students and therefore relied on schools to select these, again creating potential selection biases. The issue of saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was not addressed within any of the qualitative papers. While the use and definition of this measure are not universally agreed (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013), it would have been helpful for researchers to provide some form of justification for their chosen sample sizes.

2.43. Ethics

It has been very challenging to appraise the ethical decision-making of several researchers due to the limited information provided in relation to their considerations. Where papers mentioned having received approval from another committee, group or board (Obsuth et al., 2016; Obsuth et al., 2017; Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Martin-Denham, 2021; Toth et al., 2022; Hulme et al., 2023), reassurance was provided that significant efforts had been made to act in an ethically informed manner. Rechten and Tweed (2014) discussed gaining ethical approval but did not mention where from, creating an additional layer of ambiguity. Other studies briefly discussed ethical considerations, sometimes mentioning measures around consent and confidentiality, but did not extend beyond this, presenting an arguably simplified view of ethical practice (Gibbs & Powell, 2012; Gilmore, 2013; Hatton, 2013; Waters, 2015). Given that these studies represent peer-reviewed research, largely conducted in association with academic institutions, it is perhaps unlikely that ethical issues have not been considered. Rather, this may reflect an issue of reporting rather than practice. For example, Cole et al. (2019) made no mention of ethical considerations however other papers from the same project provide details of ethical committee approval (McCluskey et al., 2019).

2.44. Quality of qualitative analysis

Within the qualitative studies, while the basic methods for data collection tended to be discussed, for example use of focus groups, interviews etc, there was often limited information on the content of such stages. In some cases, this was due to the unstructured approach taken (Hatton, 2013) and may be in part a reflection upon the strict word limits assigned by academic journals, however this information would be helpful in terms of transparency for how responses were elicited.

In many cases, the methods followed were not clearly defined and there was little explanation of their application in practice. For example, Tucker (2013) described that themes 'emerged' from the data with no mention of a specific method of analysis and vague information on the thinking and processes involved in the construction of these themes. A similar lack of transparency was presented by several other authors with many relying on a few short phrases such as 'identifying themes' or citing an analytic method to describe the analysis as a whole (Hatton, 2013; Gilmore, 2013; Waters, 2015; Cole et al.; 2019; Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Hulme et al., 2023). This made it very challenging to determine the quality of analysis requiring the reader to trust that the researcher had followed a rigorous approach. I wonder if this was an oversight in reporting as opposed to practice since many papers alluded to steps to ensure appropriate analysis. There were some exceptions where the processes and theoretical underpinnings involved within the qualitative analysis were described in more detail, which was helpful when interpreting results (Rechten & Tweed, 2014; Martin-Denham, 2021).

The role of the researcher, their positioning and perspectives, was not clearly communicated across the qualitative studies. Although some spoke of the importance of reflexivity (Hatton, 2013), how this was conducted was not transparent. Some studies aimed to take measures to increase the trustworthiness of outcomes however even this had limitations without justification from reflective practices. For example, Cole et al., (2019) discussed using a group of researchers to analyse data however, this in itself would not ensure a balanced and critical analysis of data. This lack of openness around the potential influence of the researcher seemed particularly surprising within those studies reporting to use an ethnographic approach (Tucker, 2013; Trotman et al., 2015) which often involves longer-term

involvement in settings to gain a rich picture of cultures and practices, arguably further increasing the need for reflexivity.

The lack of openness around the researcher's positioning was problematic. For example, Gilmore (2013) presented contrasting viewpoints around the impact of isolation rooms on academic progress within the findings. However, the subsequent conclusion seemed to side with one of these viewpoints without clear justification. In the absence of information on the researcher's personal perspectives, it was hard to discount the possibility that the conclusions were unrepresentative. This coupled with no acknowledgement of any limitations of the research by the author could raise concerns around the trustworthiness and transferability of findings. Similarly, Trotman et al. (2015) presented a contrast in the views of students and school staff surrounding the fresh start which might be made at the commencement of Key Stage Four. However, ultimately staff views were highlighted within conclusions, despite statements within the paper arguing for greater inclusion of young people's voices. Increased discussion around the reflexive and decision-making processes throughout the qualitative research might help readers to understand justifications and to be assured that conclusions were robust.

2.45. Appropriateness of measures

The chosen measures within quantitative and mixed methods studies tended to be appropriate for the research questions, frequently relying upon official data and well-validated research tools. In some cases, the specifics of how these were collected created limitations.

In some studies, the crudeness of measures led to issues interpreting findings. Hatton (2013) classified schools as excluding or non-excluding dichotomously based on whether they had implemented at least one suspension in the previous year. This meant that a school excluding in a single exceptional situation was categorised identically to those where exclusion was a regular occurrence. The consistency in responses from excluding schools was much lower than with non-excluding schools suggesting this categorisation may have been insufficient to fully understand the variation in practices within these settings. Gibbs and Powell (2012) recorded the number rather than rate of exclusions within schools over a period of time and compared this to efficacy beliefs of staff in those settings without accounting for

variations in school size. Some studies, by their own admission, had significant methodological limitations. For example, Rechten and Tweed (2013) did not actually trial the intervention with young people at risk of exclusion and instead asked professionals whether they believed it would be viable. While this provided some suggestion of the potential of the approach, it did not evidence its efficacy.

In some studies, the use of multiple outcome measures might have been useful. For example, Farouk and Edwards (2021) measured student engagement through a scale, which the young people completed, but did not triangulate this with perceptions of school staff or observational data. At times, questions might be raised around whether the correct respondents were chosen. For example, Toth et al. (2022) used the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997), completed by parents/carers and school staff, as a measure of young people's mental health. Arguably, talking to these young people, or utilising a questionnaire they could complete, might have allowed for a more rounded picture. Gibbs and Powell (2012) measured collective efficacy for a setting through the responses of school staff choosing to participate. It is arguably challenging to gain a true sense of the collective efficacy of staff through a small (and potentially unrepresentative) sample. Obsuth et al. (2017) used multiple measures of exclusion as outcomes. This included formal exclusion data and student/teacher report measures. However, conclusions around negative effects of the intervention were based only in student reports as teacher report and formal data did not reach significance, however this difference was not emphasised.

In all studies evaluating the impact of an intervention (Waters, 2014; Obsuth et al., 2017; Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Toth et al., 2022) the follow up measures were taken either during or very soon after the end of the intervention. This raises questions around the longer-term impact. Obsuth et al. (2017) collected data around exclusions from the nine months prior to the intervention and then follow-up data from 4-6 weeks afterwards. This difference in time scales leads to a clear disparity since measures were collected as a frequency and not rates. Hulme et al. (2023) assessed the quality of a project partly through analysis of exclusions pre and post the project. However, the project was implemented between 2019 and 2021 and was therefore affected by the COVID pandemic which was likely to skew the collected data.

2.46. Controls, causation and implementation

Where research utilised correlational designs (Gibbs & Powell, 2012; Hatton, 2013) difficulties arose in determining causation. While Hatton identified rewards as a factor associated with low excluding schools, the direction of this relationship was not certain. Similarly, the mechanisms by which efficacy beliefs and discipline interacted were unclear through Gibbs and Powell's research. Since much of the research into specific interventions in this area lacked control conditions (Waters, 2015; Farouk & Edwards, 2021; Toth et al., 2022; Hulme et al., 2023), it was uncertain which aspects of the programme, if any, led to positive changes. For example, in the pastoral type interventions, the individual attention and support provided through a therapeutic, helping relationship may have facilitated a reduction in exclusions, as opposed to specifics of the programme itself. Hulme et al. (2023) also acknowledged that other schemes were running concurrently to the target project reducing the power of conclusions. The only trial which did use a control group found mostly null effects with some suggestion that the intervention had led to negative impact (Obsuth et al., 2016; Obsuth et al., 2017). Even in this study, questions remained over the reasons, and authors were only able to present potential hypotheses despite an additional paper to explore the results. The included qualitative studies also explored different approaches within schools to reduce or prevent exclusions and while this again has presented multiple suggestions, the mechanisms by which these are successful, the facilitators, barriers and implementation factors were in general less well explored, often presented as suggestions within conclusions as opposed to a central aspect of data and analysis. Cole et al. (2019) considered some of the possible systemic barriers whilst exploring what constituted good practice in relation to low levels of exclusion however much of this analysis considered the impact of local and national policies beyond the control of schools.

2.5. Rationale for current research

Despite slowly growing research, across the past decade, surrounding approaches schools might use to reduce or prevent exclusions, there has not been a concurrent significant impact upon exclusion rates. As can be seen within this chapter, the quality of evidence for schools to draw upon is mixed. It is perhaps important

therefore to understand not only what schools are doing to reduce or prevent exclusions, but also how these approaches are being informed and how schools might be better supported within their approaches and practices.

Martin-Denham (2021) explicitly highlighted the lack of qualitative research exploring approaches used as alternatives to exclusion. While Martin-Denham, explored some of these approaches, factors affecting their efficacy were not considered. The findings of Obsuth et al. (2016) highlighted that the implementation of an approach could affect its outcomes in relation to reducing or preventing exclusions, a finding also supported by Farouk and Edwards (2021). For this reason, alongside exploring what approaches schools might use to reduce or prevent exclusions, there also remain questions around how such approaches might be optimally implemented. A key issue highlighted across the research above was that even where approaches had appeared to be effective, the reasons behind this were not clear and factors around successful implementation of approaches were only partially explored. Daniels et al. (2022) highlighted the need for contextualised research on exclusion with Joyce and Cartwright (2018) emphasising the importance of research which explores how successful approaches are implemented and what supports this.

The following research questions will therefore be explored within the current research.

Research Questions

- 1) What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?
- 2) What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?
- 3) What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/ preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?

2.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the approach to the literature review, the findings of this literature, alongside consideration of its strengths, weaknesses and implications. Thirteen studies were initially identified through a systematic search, and met the inclusion and exclusion criteria, with a further study later added. The literature review sought to answer the question 'What can schools do to reduce and/or prevent exclusions on the basis of persistent disruptive behaviour?' Several approaches were presented and arranged across four themes. Firstly, schools might employ relational approaches, including whole-school preventative approaches and cultures alongside targeted pastoral support and intervention. Secondly, schools might consider how beliefs and understandings held across their setting might impact upon behaviours. Thirdly, schools could work to collaborate effectively both within their settings and with other stakeholders to support young people. Finally, more traditional approaches to discipline such as the use of internal exclusion may prevent the use of formal exclusions. The range of research types and breath of approaches was identified as a strength of the literature. Limitations based around samples, qualitative analysis, appropriateness of measures and causality were discussed and led to development of the focus of the current research. The following chapters, informed by these findings, will outline the present research design and implementation to attempt to build upon understanding of approaches to reduce and prevent school exclusions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Chapter Overview

Within this chapter, I outline some of the thinking behind the decision-making and implementation of the research project. I will discuss my positioning regarding personal experiences alongside epistemological, ontological and theoretical approaches. I will describe the recruitment process and data collection methods before explaining the data analysis. Finally, I will present some key ethical considerations.

3.2. Research Aims

The aim of this research was to explore the social context, practices and perceptions surrounding consistently high rates of permanent exclusion and suspension for PBD in Southwest England. It was hoped that this understanding might help towards bridging some of the gap between research about approaches to reduce exclusions and the realities of their implementation in practice. Three specific research questions were developed to help achieve these aims:

- 1) What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?
- 2) What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?
- 3) What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?

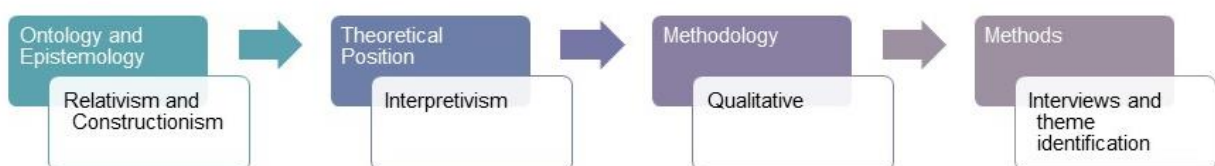
3.3. Positioning

The beliefs and positioning of the researcher have the potential to shape all parts of the research process affecting how they understand, interpret and decision make (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002; Baert, 2005). For this reason, it is important to outline my own positioning both in relation to epistemology and ontology but also how my personal and professional beliefs, experience and values might feed into this research. Throughout the research I have endeavoured to remain aware and

reflexive. However, my positioning is such that I do not believe it is possible, nor profitable, to eliminate any influence of the researcher (Braun et al., 2022). Although this chapter contains aspects of reflexivity, it should not be seen as a summative and contained account of the reflexive processes involved in the project since these are ongoing and essential to the active and subjective role of the researcher (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Further reflexive accounts can be found in Appendices P and Q.

Crotty (1998) highlighted the importance of clarifying four foundational elements of research (methods, methodology, theoretical perspective and epistemology) upon which the project is based. A further key foundation of research is ontology (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clark et al., 2021). Ontology, suggested to be intertwined with epistemology, was excluded from Crotty's model due to arguments around its level of separation from epistemology and the typical effectiveness of its application. However, ontology and epistemology are not identical and address separate issues around reality and knowledge (Brinkmann, 2017). In the interest of transparency and comprehensiveness, both will be considered in relation to the present research (Terry & Hayfield, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The directional arrows within Crotty's model are arguably simplified however, I found this model a helpful structure for the purpose of presenting some of the thinking underpinning this research (Figure 4). The following section will therefore outline ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological positionings and decision-making. The methods chosen will be covered later in this chapter alongside discussions around research design.

Figure 4: Research Positioning and Approaches (adapted from Crotty, 1998).



3.31. *Ontology and Epistemology*

3.311. Ontology

Ontology concerns the study and nature of being: how we understand our 'reality' (Clark et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Realist ontologies suggest there is an objective reality which exists outside of our social world and understandings (Clark et al., 2021). The aim of research within this ontology is to access this reality (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Relativist ontologies approach the world from the perspective that reality is not static or singular but dependent upon our understanding; it is linked intrinsically with social interpretation. No one reality therefore is seen as 'truer' than another (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The current research has ascribed to a relativist ontology. However, it can be helpful to consider ontology continuously as opposed to categorically (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). While the present research sits within a relativist ontology, it does not perhaps occupy the extreme of the continuum. Principles of bounded relativism have been applied to the research in that it is accepted that while reality is socially situated, it may be shared by members of a group (Moon & Blackman, 2014). It is not expected that members of separate groups would share the same reality nor that members of the same group must, but rather it is acknowledged that there is potential for a reality to exist outside of a single individual (Willig, 2012; Moon & Blackman, 2014).

3.312. Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the study and nature of knowledge. Epistemological positionings provide information on what might be possible to know and how knowledge can be either uncovered or generated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Objectivist epistemologies hold that objects have meaning independent of human perception (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Following such an epistemology would suggest that, with sufficiently careful design, research can uncover absolute truths (Crotty, 1998). Conversely, subjectivist epistemologies suggest that meanings exist within an individual as opposed to the object itself (Moon & Blackman, 2014). An intermediary epistemology to these positions is constructionism which has formed the basis for this research.

Constructionism suggests that meanings are created (constructed and reconstructed) in the context of interactions (Clark et al., 2021). Such interactions can occur within the natural or social world however meaning is constructed and communicated socially (Clark et al., 2021). From this perspective, while objects can exist outside of human consciousness, any of their meaning cannot (Crotty, 1998). Although subjectivism and constructionism both understand meaning to be linked to human consciousness, constructionism differs in that meanings are constructed not created; meanings are based both within the object and experience and constructed through interaction (Crotty, 1998). Crotty points to the influence of social and historical factors in building such constructions which cannot be separated from the individual and their own sense-making.

3.313. Implications of ontological and epistemological foundations within the research

Given the relativist ontology, the findings presented within this research are not understood to represent a single reality. Another researcher analysing the same data set may not reach the same conclusions and replicating the research with the same or similar participants would not be expected to necessarily lead to the same or similar findings. This could be argued to suggest a lack of reliability or validity within the research however these are constructs created within a quantitative paradigm (Yardley, 2000). To accept that multiple realities exist, is to accept that multiple truths can be constructed for the same research topic or question (Yardley, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2022a). However, that should not be considered to suggest a lack of methodological rigour (Braun et al., 2022). Braun & Clarke (2022a) suggest that while research conducted within such a framework cannot be classified as objectively right or wrong, its strength can be evaluated in relation to the quality of research design and analysis. Within a qualitative framework, the constructs of credibility and trustworthiness become more salient (Cope, 2014). Yardley (2000) suggests that the quality of qualitative research can be appraised through consideration of four key factors: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance. While I will briefly outline some of the salient methodological features of the research in relation to these factors within this chapter, further reflection upon the quality measures can be found within Chapter 6: Conclusion.

Throughout this project, reflexive processes have been followed to support consideration of my own positioning and influence (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Braun et al., (2022, p.441) describe all individuals as 'blinker' with regards to reflexivity suggesting it is not feasible to identify all of one's own influence. For this reason, through supervision, I also engaged in discussions to consider my analytical constructions and reflect upon their basis, a process which allowed space for considering alternative interpretations and constructions. This collaboration should not be confused with attempting to achieve 'inter-rater reliability' (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). Given that meaning making is not considered to represent single truths, agreement from another researcher should not be understood to make interpretations anymore 'true' or 'objective'. Instead, the process aimed to support reflection and awareness around interpretations.

The constructionist epistemology applied to this research has implications for the understanding of the data. Not only should participants' accounts be understood as constructions of knowledge within their social world so equally should the accounts of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022b). Since the data were collected in a social interaction between the participant and researcher, the meanings created can be understood as a co-construction (Clark et al., 2021, Braun & Clarke, 2022a). The responses of both individuals will have been affected in a continuous and interdependent cycle by the interactions of the other (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For example, while an interview guide was followed, the semi-structured nature of the interview meant that the questions asked aimed to follow on from what had been shared so far (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). In doing so, I will have communicated something of what might be perceived as significant, interesting, surprising, useful etc. and as such, will have influenced the participant's response (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Looking further than this, and even if a highly structured interview format had been followed, elements of tone, facial expressions, gesture, posture, and external environment will have influenced the process of constructing meaning within and beyond the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

3.32. Theoretical Perspective

The research study was approached from an interpretivist theoretical perspective. Clark et al. (2021) explain interpretivism as requiring 'the social scientist to grasp the

subjective meaning of social action,' (p.609). The authors present interpretivism as the antithesis of positivism, a position whereby research aims to uncover objective truths in a way which is 'value free' therefore revealing scientific facts. Within interpretivism, there is understood to be a clear distinction between the natural and social world with each requiring its own approach to research methods and approaches (Clark et al., 2021).

A key thinker in the development of interpretivism was Max Weber (Baert, 2005; Clark et al., 2021). Baert (2005) summarised some of Weber's views as follows: Weber posited that design and analysis within research is bound in the values, interests and norms of those involved. Studies of the social world are interpreted from the small window of understanding of culture held by the researcher and participants and therefore represent partial understandings. The social world was considered too vast and complex for research to uncover concrete laws, or for this to be a meaningful or helpful approach. Likewise, existential and normative knowledge were viewed by Weber as separate entities, with social research therefore being limited to the purpose of suggesting as opposed to evaluating ideas. However, since different researchers will focus on different aspects, based upon their own interests, values and norms, taken together such research can support understandings of phenomena of cultural significance within the social world (Baert, 2005).

Within this research, I explored the individual experiences of participants whilst also acting reflexively to attempt to understand the influence of my own experiences. Taking an interpretivist approach involved recognising that the ideas presented by participants represented their interpretation of experiences and perceptions of the social world. Part of the analysis process concerned therefore not only looking at what had been said but also reflecting on how and why ideas had come to be interpreted in a particular way and the potential impact of this whilst also reflecting on the influence of my own interpretations (Clark et al., 2021).

3.33. Methodology

Applying a relativist ontology, constructionist epistemology and interpretivist theoretical positioning led logically to a qualitative methodology (Willig, 2012). Qualitative research, at its simplest level, involves using words (rather than numbers) as data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Research following this approach explores detailed

accounts of experiences, perceptions or beliefs to generate rich and contextualised understandings (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Typically, such research might aim to answer questions concerning the 'how' and 'why' of the social world, including interpretations and meanings, as opposed to the 'what' (Silverman, 2017). Within qualitative research, findings are rarely conceptualised as representing a single truth but rather as reflecting one of many realities (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Given this contextualised understanding of knowledge, qualitative methodologies tend to aim to collect more 'natural' forms of data based upon 'real-life' as opposed to experimental contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The contextualised nature of qualitative research can be viewed by some as problematic since the meanings identified are specific to a particular time and place; qualitative research can sometimes therefore be criticised for its reduced generalisability (Atieno, 2009; Willig, 2012). However, such arguments tend to be based around applying limited typologies of generalisability, typically statistical-probabilistic generalisability, which lack congruence with qualitative approaches (Smith, 2018). Generalisability is a multifaceted construct which can be effectively applied to qualitative research but only when viewed through the appropriate lens (Smith, 2018). Crucially, within qualitative research, the role of determining generalisability shifts to be shared by the researcher and reader (Smith, 2018). In the case of the present research, natural, inferential and analytical (vertical) generalisability (Yardley, 2000; Smith, 2018) will be considered and discussed in more detail within Chapter 6: Conclusion.

McQueen & Knussen (2002) cautioned against presenting qualitative and quantitative methodologies as direct opposites as though the strengths and flaws are entirely separate. Issues of objectivity and generalisability can be found in both forms of research and instead it may be helpful to understand these approaches as complementary. Different research methodologies are suited to different research questions and purposes (Silverman, 2017). The aim therefore within chapter has not been to provide justification for a particular methodology itself but rather justification as to the methodological choices in relation to the research context. A qualitative approach was selected since it allowed effective exploration of the research questions in a way which aligned with the positioning discussed. The process allowed consideration of the experience, complexity and nuance of the social context

around exclusions within schools in a way which would likely have been difficult to capture numerically (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.4. Research Design and Methods

3.41. *Determining the research focus*

Within Chapter 1: Introduction, I presented comparatively high rates of exclusion within the English education system and evidence for the negative impacts of exclusion and the disproportionate effect upon certain groups of young people. This discussion aimed to highlight the importance of practices to reduce or prevent exclusions. Within Chapter 2: Literature review, I presented research papers which explored approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions and provided an overview of the key themes of these approaches. Despite a body of evidence providing suggestions around reducing or preventing exclusion, exclusion figures have remained relatively stable (allowing for the impact of school closures during 2020 and 2021). While the papers evaluated approaches to reducing or preventing exclusion, the practicalities of their implementation, and the perceptions of those implementing them, were generally not as well explored. This research project therefore aimed to explore the perceptions of school leaders involved in planning for and implementing approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions to understand how approaches were informed, the facilitators and barriers to their implementation and potential future support.

I decided to focus the research on exclusions based on PDB. The term 'persistent disruptive behaviour' is not defined within government publications where it is used (DfE, 2022a; 2022b) despite being the most commonly provided reason for both suspensions and permanent exclusions. PDB differs from many other reasons given for exclusions in that it represents an ongoing behaviour, perhaps providing great opportunity for intervention. However, given the lack of clear definition, schools may differ in their conceptualisation of the term 'persistent' in terms of both duration and frequency. The approaches which schools use to reduce or prevent exclusions are likely to differ in response to the behaviour displayed. By narrowing the research focus, it was hoped that a more nuanced understanding might be achieved to allow more targeted outcomes and support for this group of young people given the frequency of exclusion for this reason.

I decided to focus on secondary schools. Rates of exclusion are significantly higher in secondary education compared to primary schools. In the 2020/21 academic year, the rate of exclusions in state-funded secondary schools was 0.1 for permanent exclusions and 8.48 for suspensions in comparison to 0.01 and 0.99 in state-funded primary schools (DfE, 2022b). These data would suggest that there is a greater need for research into the cultures and practices of secondary schools where children are more likely to be affected by school exclusion.

I could have also narrowed my research focus to consider either suspensions or permanent exclusions. However, I wondered whether the approaches employed by schools to reduce and prevent exclusions would vary significantly based on the type of exclusion. Within my professional experience, approaches to address PDB and reduce suspension or permanent exclusion may not differ significantly. I recognised however, that this could vary between schools and left space to explore both suspensions and permanent exclusions in the interviews.

The research was conducted in the Southwest of England. The Southwest region has consistently held the third highest rate of suspensions across England with permanent exclusion rates at or above the national average (DfE, 2019a; 2020; 2021a; 2022b). These statistics acted as a motivator for the project in terms of attempting to understand some of the context surrounding these numbers. In addition, in terms of practicality, since I wished to conduct in-person research, the areas chosen were realistically commutable in terms of time and financial considerations. Of the studies identified within the literature review, none reported to have recruited participants from the Southwest providing an additional justification for exploring practices in this area.

The research aims and questions are influenced by my positioning in that they are built around the assumption that school settings would firstly be aiming to reduce and prevent exclusions and secondly that leaders in these settings would have considered and actioned approaches to address this. The limitations this may have led to are considered within Chapter 5: Discussion. However, it felt important to focus on this due to the negative impact that exclusions can have, alongside research supporting the potential preventative role of schools.

3.42. Recruitment Approaches

Initially, schools were recruited from an LA in the Southwest of England with consistently high rates of suspension and exclusion in comparison to both the national and regional averages as well as their closest statistical neighbours. In the first round of recruitment, the headteachers of fifteen secondary schools were approached. For this round, I attempted to balance the schools contacted based on a range of factors (see Appendix L for details) however due to the challenges in recruiting school leaders, this was not possible to sustain. Once the first set of schools had received initial contact, follow up and had been given three weeks to respond, the remaining secondary schools in the LA were contacted in the same way. The recruitment from this process was very low (two participants) so at this point further extensions to recruitment procedures were considered.

The first phase of recruitment occurred in the summer term. I reflected that this is a busy time for schools with exam and end of year arrangements. Headteachers were therefore contacted again at the beginning of the autumn term recognising potential changes in their capacity. Link EPs were also asked to advertise the research to their schools. This round of recruitment was eventually more successful than in the summer term (five further participants) but did not yield sufficient participants for the project. Given the fixed time constraints for the project, concurrently, I extended recruitment approaches. Three further LAs in the Southwest with high rates of suspension (within the top 25% nationally) were chosen. Headteachers from these authorities were approached sequentially across the autumn term, following approval from principal EPs within each LA. In total the recruitment process resulted in ten participants. For a more in-depth timeline of recruitment, see Appendix M.

I initially contacted headteachers, who acted as gatekeepers, by email. The headteachers were asked to confirm approval for the research to take place in their school as well as pass information onto potential participants. I did not specify a particular job title for participants. I recognised from my professional experience that leadership structures vary between schools. As a result, schools were instead asked to identify a participant who had had an instrumental role in developing the school's approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions. A set of suggested criteria were provided to help in defining this (see Appendix N). The decision to speak with staff

members occupying this role was to ensure that participants had a sufficient level of knowledge surrounding rationales behind approaches, as well as an overview of what had been successful and where challenges had arisen.

3.43. Data Collection Approaches

I used semi-structured interviews to generate data from participants. Qualitative interviews allow participants to speak in detail, drawing upon their lived experiences, and provide a depth of data which can be hard to achieve through less interactive forms of data collection such as written surveys or scales (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). While I created a guiding set of questions and topics for discussion, these were tailored within the interview, providing the potential to build upon the responses of participants and contextualise the questioning (McQueen & Knussen, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Semi-structured interviews can provide space for flexibility whilst still allowing researchers to ensure that the data remain relevant to research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Interviews were planned to be limited to between around 30-45 minutes. Many school staff have reported to experience high levels of stress (NASUWT, 2022) particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (Fotheringham et al., 2022) so ethically, I did not wish to take any more of participants' time than necessary. From a pragmatic perspective, to recruit participants, the interviews needed to appear manageable. In practice, the interviews ranged in length from just over 30 minutes to just under 60 minutes with most interviews lasting around 40 minutes.

Interviews took place in person on the school site. Face-to-face communication has been suggested to lead to richer data through increased rapport and familiarity (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Lofland et al., 2006). Within in-person interviews, information can be gained through not only interpretation of the individual's words but also aspects of the broader situation which can provide helpful context (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006; Opdenakker, 2006). Some of these aspects for example, non-verbal cues and gestures, may remain more hidden when interviews are not conducted in-person (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Contingency plans were made for online interviews if this had been required, for example, due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time.

Holding the interviews at participants' schools meant that interviewees were in a familiar and convenient setting. This can lead participants to use aspects of their

setting to ground, stimulate and illustrate their statements (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006). Examples of this within the interviews included pointing out areas of the school through the window and pulling out books to which they had referred. This perhaps allowed for a greater contextualisation of the information shared within the interviews and it may be that meeting in this setting generated prompts for participants when answering questions leading to a greater breadth of information.

I tried to be aware of factors which could influence the openness and comfort of participants. As I held a dual role as a TEP undertaking research, I was aware of the potential for power differentials and assumptions. I conducted recruitment activities from my university account, wherever possible, and wore my university lanyard to interviews to distance myself from my position in the LA. I was also clear within written and spoken communications that the research was separate from the LA and that I would not communicate with LA representatives around which schools had taken part. I was aware that if I were perceived to be representing the interests of the LA, participants may have been more selective around what was shared due to concerns around potential repercussions.

When interviewing individuals in positions of leadership or expertise within their communities, the power asymmetries sometimes experienced within interviews can be balanced out (Kvale, 2007). In this situation, by demonstrating sufficient knowledge and/or experience of the topic area, researchers can promote greater respect and create an effective space for conversation as equivalents (Kvale, 2007). As I was working with senior leaders within their schools setting, another key aspect to be considered was how I might be perceived as an individual. I was open around having experience in education both as a teacher and TEP and referred to this at times. By showing familiarity with certain education systems and vocabularies, I attempted to promote confidence in my knowledge and credentials to be asking questions and understanding responses (Kvale, 2007; Levitt et al., 2017).

3.44. Developing interview questions

I developed an initial interview guide by creating groups of questions linked to each research question. This was then updated following a pilot interview (see Appendix O for the interview topic guide). The pilot interview was conducted with a secondary school teacher. This teacher was not in a relevant leadership role eligible for the

study but was an experienced teacher who could talk from an educational perspective. The participant in the pilot interview struggled to answer some questions – I reflected that this was partially due to their role being distanced from the topic area. However, I also made sure to consider any assumptions or wordings which may have affected the accessibility of questions. I tried to break some questions down and had alternative wordings or angles on the same topic planned such that I could draw on equivalent questions based upon the interview discussion so far. I also felt that parts of the interview had the potential to be perceived as judgmental or testing. I was therefore mindful of this in future interviews and tried to be reflective about how I might be perceived. This required flexibility in the moment to choose the right way or moment to ask potentially more challenging questions based on the preceding interactions. I also tried to soften some of my language and increased low demand, ‘descriptive’ questions at the start of the interview designed to put the participant at ease and build rapport such as asking the participant about themselves and practices in their school. Following this, I was then able to move onto ‘generative’ type interview questions (Tracy, 2013). I also adapted the questions to provide more opportunities for participants to tell stories which can act as an effective probe and allowed participants to speak in a rich, real and detailed way (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Tracy, 2013). When reflecting on early interviews, I noticed a tendency to ask too much at once and thus either receive a shallow response on several topics or a response which only partially answered the question. Tracy (2013) advised against ‘double-barrelled’ questions instead recommending simple, more specific lines of inquiry. At the end of the interview, all participants were offered the opportunity to share anything they felt was important or to ask any questions (Kvale, 2007).

3.45. Alternative forms of data collection considered

Focus groups were considered for data collection. Within focus groups, participants can discuss key ideas with the benefit of generating broad, passionate and spontaneous responses (Kvale, 2007). However, in this research, focus groups might have led to some limitations. Focus groups are generally more effective when participants can speak honestly without fear of judgement (Lofland et al., 2006). Where schools had high rates of exclusions or had struggled to implement approaches to reduce exclusions, discussing this with peers who had not

experienced the same challenges may have felt uncomfortable. This could have impacted upon openness and interest in participating. In addition, the range of approaches which schools use can vary significantly and therefore it may have been challenging to explore these fully within a single focus group.

Email or telephone interview approaches can be useful when participants are drawn from disadvantaged or isolated groups and in-person interviews may lead to self-consciousness and interviewer effects (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006). Given that participants within this research held leadership positions within their setting, this was not thought to be a significant enough concern to discount in-person interviewing and its associated benefits.

3.46. Determining Participant Group Size

I aimed to undertake between ten and fifteen interviews. Deciding upon the number of interviews is influenced by multiple factors including the quantity and quality of data collected from each participant, the practicalities of the research project, and the research purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Vasileiou et al., 2018). The decision-making process is personal to the researcher and may change during the project (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Vasileiou et al., 2018). It was for this reason that a range was considered more appropriate than a single figure as a guide.

Engaging with the relevant literature provided some recommendations which were helpful in developing this range. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that six to ten interviews may be sufficient for a small research project using RTA extending to ten to twenty for a medium sized project (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Importantly, the data set must provide sufficient depth and breadth to identify patterns and facilitate a rich story (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

Some approaches to qualitative research, such as grounded theory (GT) methodologies, apply the concept of 'saturation' to decisions around sample size (Clark et al, 2021). In this approach, data collection should continue until new accounts or participants do not bring data which changes the properties or patterns of categories understood to underlie the theory being developed (Charmaz, 2014). While the use of saturation principles has extended beyond studies using GT (Henninck et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021), it was decided not to be appropriate in the present research. Charmaz (2014) suggested that saturation is often

misunderstood to simply represent the point that participants discuss similar topics thus becoming removed from its theoretical position. To apply saturation principles in such a way creates distance from guiding principles leading to variability in application (Henninck et al., 2017). Saturation can also be argued to be methodologically incongruent with reflexive thematic analysis (RTA); since knowledge is constructed and not discovered, the addition of further data must always hold the potential to generate new meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Clark et al., 2021). Malterud et al. (2016) advised instead, the principle of 'information power'. This concept requires the researcher to reflect upon the factors contributing to their study and consider their potential impact upon the quality and richness of data. In the case of the present research, the specificity and homogeneity in participant role and location and clear research questions are relevant factors which have been suggested to reduce the required sample size (Malterud et al., 2016; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Conversely, an inexperienced researcher and inductive approach may have had an opposing effect (Malterud et al., 2016). The research interviews were designed to be relatively short in length. For this reason, suggestions on the lower end of Braun & Clarke's recommendations were felt to present a risk to data quality. However, the maximum participant pool was relatively small and recruiting 20, the upper boundary suggested, was considered to be both unlikely and perhaps unnecessary to achieve the research aims. To allow time and space for the deep level of reflection required to develop high-quality, latent themes, researchers should ensure their sample size is not too large (Vaseleiou et al., 2018). The figure of 10-15 was therefore selected due to hopes of generating sufficient depth and breadth of data whilst also maintaining a manageable dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.5. Approach to Data Analysis

RTA was chosen as the method for analysis. The following section will initially explain what is understood by RTA including defining key terms and acknowledging associated assumptions and values. The rationale for this method for analysis will then be explored. Finally, the processes involved in the analysis will be outlined.

3.5.1. What is understood by reflexive thematic analysis?

RTA is not tied to a specific theoretical framework however all research is theoretically informed whether explicitly or implicitly (Braun & Clarke, 2006;

Brinkmann, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021) label thematic analysis as 'theoretically flexible', not 'atheoretical', arguing that the responsibility for outlining the theoretical underpinnings lies with the individual researcher. Although I have discussed explicitly the methodical, ontological, epistemological and theoretical positioning of the present research, it is hoped that their influence will be seen in the processes employed to generate a coherence and transparency in analysis (Yardley, 2000; Levitt et al., 2017).

A theme can be defined as 'patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.593). Themes should not be confused with domain summaries which draw together ideas around a topic but do not typically create a shared sense of meaning with a central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). Themes are multifaceted (made up of several ideas and observations) and are the result of organising multiple codes to construct a meaning which can be applied to the data and research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2021a). The data linked to a theme may not necessarily pertain to similar topics, however constructed from this data and the associated codes is a shared idea which is understood by the researcher to unite these extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Codes are small units of meaning, a thought related to the data, which have been constructed by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021a).

Through the research, I was interested in exploring both semantic and latent codes and themes. Semantic themes build directly on interpreting the words of the participant and understanding their meaning; latent themes aim to look beyond the words spoken and interpret their potential underpinnings for example, in terms of assumptions, perceptions and ideologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within RTA, themes are not perceived as an inherent feature of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Instead, the role of the researcher is active and generative in noticing ideas and applying meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021b). Semantic codes and themes therefore also involve interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021a; Braun et al., 2022).

The active role of the researcher necessitates a high level of reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Within RTA, themes are understood to result from a combination of the data, analytic skills and process, and the

researcher's positioning and subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Subjectivity is sometimes regarded as problematic in research particularly within quantitative, positivist paradigms; however, within RTA subjectivity is an asset when carefully applied (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; 2022b). Through reflexivity, subjectivity is transformed from a bias to a resource (Terry & Hayfield, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Reflexivity allows the researcher to engage actively and thoughtfully with the data in a way which is characterised by greater awareness of their own position and influence (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexivity can be described as 'the researcher's insight into, and articulation of, their generative role in research' (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.9).

Clark et al. (2021) described that research can take an inductive or deductive approach to theory. An inductive approach is data-driven with theory applied following data collection and analysis. Conversely deductive approaches are 'theory-driven' with previous ideas, research and theory shaping the process (Clark et al., 2021). However, Braun & Clarke (2021a) argued this may be an oversimplification suggesting that no research can be considered truly inductive since researchers do not approach their topic with complete naivety. Categorising research in this way may reflect a false dichotomy and suggest that induction and deduction cannot be applied simultaneously (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). The research focus has been determined by specific research questions and guided by a systematically informed literature review both indicative of a deductive approach to research. However, the analysis aimed to be data driven with regards to coding, creating themes late in the analytic process, reflective of a more inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). While the approach to analysis might be seen as broadly inductive, since the aim was to generate data-driven themes (Terry & Hayfield, 2020) and was not driven by a specific explanatory theory, aspects of the research may also have been influenced by elements of deduction.

3.52. *Why reflexive thematic analysis?*

A key process in deciding upon analytical methods was considering a complementary approach to the research questions. Levitt et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of methodological integrity within qualitative research. A key aspect of constructionist-interpretivist approaches to research is the importance of exploring

meaning making and transparency around interpretive process throughout the analysis. The central role of reflexivity and openness within RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019) made this analytical method a helpful structure for fulfilling this goal. Levitt et al. (2017) indicated that research methods should enable the researcher to effectively engage with the specific research questions, aims and purposes of the project in a way which aligns with the research paradigm and underpinnings. The flexibility of RTA made it an effective method for exploring the research questions within this project (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Methods of analysis which emphasise aspects of data most relevant to the research purposes can be seen to promote utility - a key tenet of methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis is presented as 'an accessible and robust method for those new to qualitative analysis' due to the structures but also the flexibility it provides (Braun & Clarke, 2022b, p.4). While I have conducted small-scale qualitative research projects previously, I would not consider myself well-experienced and therefore chose a method which was accessible and manageable whilst also allowing for in-depth and high-quality analysis. Since RTA is an analytic method as opposed to a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2019), I have been facilitated to reflect upon the theoretical, epistemological and ontological positions of the project and make decisions from this, for example in considering the role of language and context and the way in which meanings are generated. The emphasis within RTA upon acknowledging the interactive role of the researcher both necessitates and provides space for reflexive practice (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and aligns well with the theoretical approach of the project.

3.53. *Alternative Approaches Considered*

3.531. *Grounded theory*

GT applies to a set of research methods in which theories are constructed through ongoing collection and analysis of data (Charmaz, 2014). GT was considered as an analytical method including in the initial research proposal. However, upon deeper reading and discussion with researchers experienced in this method, I decided that this approach was less suitable in this context. The approach to analysis in GT is structured and systematic (Walker & Myrick, 2006). As a relatively inexperienced

researcher, this structure was appealing for the guidelines and focus this approach might provide (Charmaz, 2014).

GT looks to develop an explanatory theory (Charmaz, 2014) however this was not a key aim of the present research which took a broader, more exploratory approach. Research questions within a GT approach tend to be focused upon the social processes underlying a particular practice or occurrence (Charmaz, 2014). I considered adapting my research questions to align them to this purpose however I found that this significantly changed the purposes of the research from the original rationale and was therefore not an ideal approach.

GT applies the principle of theoretical saturation to data collection (Clark et al., 2021). This can make predicting the necessary sample size challenging and a large sample size can be required to convince the researcher of theoretical saturation (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Given that this project was limited in time and scope, and provided potential for recruitment challenges, this approach was perceived to bring practical risks.

3.532. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) aims to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022). While the interpretative aspect of sense making was pertinent to this research, the focus upon the individual's lived experience (Smith & Nizza, 2022) was less relevant. My research questions were designed to look beyond an individual's experiences and explore constructions at a broader level. It was not so much the individual stories which were of particular interest but the patterns of meaning across the accounts and the information that these might provide in relation to the socio-cultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). IPA is an example of an experiential method, and the focus of analysis therefore is upon the ideas presented by the individual within their accounts of experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This perhaps would not have provided sufficient space within the present study for exploring from a constructionist perspective, the social influences underpinning accounts of practice (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.54. The process of analysis

The six stages of RTA outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), alongside subsequent updates (2019; 2021a; 2022b), were used as the basis for the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2021a) made clear that these stages should not be viewed as prescriptive nor a guarantee for analytical success but rather provide a structure to support researchers in navigating their own process of RTA. The stages are recursive, with potential overlaps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, considering these stages helps the researcher to approach the analysis systematically and reflexively (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Application of the six stages, as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006), will be outlined below. In addition, what this 'looked like in practice' including some reflections and specific actions will be described to try to elucidate not just what has been done but how (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.541. Stage 1: Familiarisation

The first stage of analysis involved familiarisation with the data. Qualitative researchers often aim for immersion in their data to create space to build understandings. I decided to transcribe the data manually. This time was felt to be worthwhile as it allowed me to hear back multiple times not just what had been said by my participants and myself but also how. Whilst transcribing, I recorded any thoughts that came to mind within my reflexive diary to return to when I began coding. Due to the close proximity of some interviews, it was not always possible to have transcribed one interview prior to completing the next. The data collection spanned across eight months which led some transcripts to feel more familiar than others. I therefore re-read each data item at the beginning of the analysis process, again noting any thoughts within my reflexive diary, until I felt ready to move onto coding. Although there is no clear marker for when to end the familiarisation stage, Braun and Clarke (2022b) suggest that when key features, patterns and critical thoughts are forming, it may be helpful to start the process of coding.

3.542. Stage 2: Generating initial codes

The next stage of analysis was coding the data. My process involved making handwritten notes on printed versions of the transcripts. I coded each transcript multiple times such that thoughts and ideas from coding other interviews could equally be applied to earlier transcripts. For each round a different colour pen was

used to support me in my reflection of when ideas were generated and what might be influencing how I was coding. When I was initially satisfied with these codes, I transferred them into NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2017) to collate the data extracts.

5.543. Stage 3: Generating initial themes

To begin generating themes, I printed the codes on strips of paper and physically moved and grouped these. I continued this process over several weeks, photographing the groups to track changes in my thinking.

Where potential theme ideas had occurred to me earlier in the process, I had recorded these within my research diary. While I was aware of these, I tried to remain open when looking at the data. I also tried to keep my research questions in mind when developing the themes.

3.544. Stage 4: Reviewing themes

I aimed for themes to provide a deep description of the meaning constructed within/from the data and not purely summarise a topic (Levitt et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019). When reviewing some themes/subthemes, I decided that I had constructed them around codes which answered a particular research question but did not perhaps share any deeper meaning. For example, I had a working subtheme title of 'Limiting systems' which summarised barriers but did not have a clear central organising concept. This subtheme was therefore rearranged, and I looked again at the codes to consider the key meaning I felt was relevant to convey.

I also returned to the data to check that the extracts underpinning the code related clearly to the meaning of the subtheme or theme. I realised that some of my codes were too descriptive and topic based. I therefore split several codes into smaller more specific units of meaning. For example, the original code 'Consistency' was split into four new codes differentiating between settings and impact of consistency. For some codes, I also found that the extracts did not match the way I had later interpreted the code title and these codes were therefore renamed and/or removed from the theme.

3.545. Stage 5: Defining themes

For each theme a short overview was produced to explain the boundaries of the theme and to ensure that it was clearly conceptualised (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I arranged these against the narrowed codes from the previous stage and again checked that these were sufficient to tell this story.

3.546. Stage 6: Writing the report

Braun & Clarke (2006) describe producing a written account of the RTA should be a continuation of the analytic process. On a practical level, I had to make decisions during the writing phase around how to prioritise codes within the written account. This decision-making in part was determined by codes and extracts I felt would most clearly communicate the key messages of the research and provide something interesting beyond existing research. Additionally, messages which related most closely to the research questions were prioritised.

When writing, I have used quotes to illustrate key findings; this approach was recommended by Levitt et al. (2017) to promote methodological fidelity through 'groundedness' whereby readers are supported to understand how meanings have been constructed from the data. I was also careful during writing to continue to check the extracts from which codes were developed to ensure that the meaning conveyed in my written work was representative not just of the selected extracts but also of the code itself. Where meaning was drawn from the words of one or two individuals within the research, I was careful to define this.

Having written the findings and discussion in quick succession, I took time to return to the data during the editing phase to ensure that my writing had remained faithful. I reread all transcripts, marking with post it notes extracts which related to key ideas to assess the quality of evidence. While I was satisfied that my themes and codes told an accurate story of the data, I did edit some parts to ensure that the emphasis on different ideas was proportionate.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Early in the research, I created a proposal which I discussed with an independent reviewer including exploring some of the methodological and ethical implications. Subsequently, I submitted an application (Appendix N) to the University of Bristol,

School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee. Following amendments, ethical approval was granted in April 2022. Included within this application were measures to ensure compliance with data protection guidelines including the UK Data Protection Act (2018) and General Data Protection Regulations.

All participants were informed what data would be collected and how this would be stored. Recordings of interviews were made on a password protected, encrypted device and then transferred to a university server. Any personal data, such as copies of consent forms, were stored securely in a separate location.

Given the close relationship between the research data and the approach of the schools, it felt respectful to seek permission from headteachers. Assistant Principal/Principal EPs within each of the LA areas were also contacted for approval. All participants completed a signed a consent form however additional actions were also taken to ensure that consent was informed and participation voluntary (British Psychological Society, 2021). Although headteachers acted as gatekeepers to distributing research information, communication occurred directly between the participant and researcher. Headteachers were not informed whether a member of staff from their school had taken part. This was to help ensure that participants did not feel compelled to participate through management structures. All participants were sent an information sheet and confidentiality protocol and given opportunities to ask questions. Consent forms were sent in advance of meeting. In some cases, these were completed and returned and in others were completed in person on the day. Regardless, prior to each interview, key ethical points including around the limits of confidentiality, how data would be stored, participants' rights to withdrawal and the voluntary nature of participation were reiterated.

To support participants in feeling prepared for the interview, further information surrounding what to expect was sent to participants within the week prior to meeting. Following the interview, participants were provided with a debrief document which included signposting to information and support services and contact details participants could use if they had questions or concerns after the interview.

3.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented my positioning alongside the rationale behind and influence of, a relativist ontology, constructionist epistemology, interpretivist

theoretical position and qualitative methodology. Specifics of the data collection (semi-structured interviews with secondary school leaders) have been outlined alongside recruitments practices. An explanation surrounding the application of RTA has been provided including in terms of assumptions, positions and practices. Finally, some of the salient ethical features considered in the conception and implementation of the research project particularly around ensuring informed consent, have been discussed. The next chapter will go into further depth surrounding aspects of the analysis and participants before presenting the themes constructed through the analytical process.

4. Findings

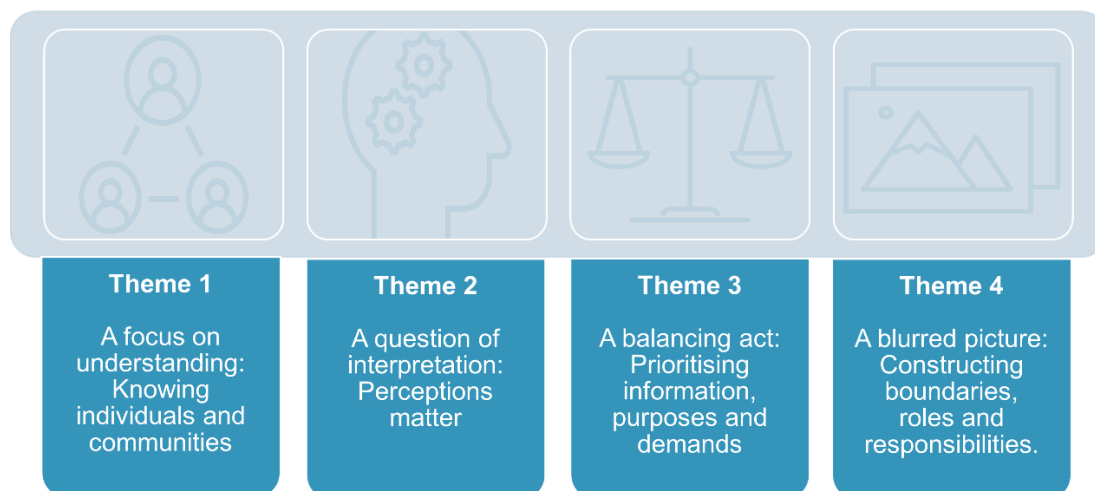
4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore the four themes (Figure 5) developed through the RTA process. Following a brief introduction, the findings in relation to each theme will be presented with illustrative quotes. At the beginning of each theme, a separate diagram and overview will be provided to outline the theme and any applicable subthemes.

The research questions guiding the theme development were:

- 1) What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?
- 2) What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?
- 3) What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/ preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?

Figure 5: Overview of Themes



The ideas presented by the participants throughout the interviews were rich and nuanced and it was not possible to share all their insights. At some points, I have commented upon the linguistic choices of participants, however mostly, my focus has been on considering broader meanings. The extracts shared are exemplars as opposed to single units of meaning and therefore I tried to maintain focus upon the key point with regards to the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

4.11. Summary of Participants

I interviewed ten participants across four neighbouring LAs in the Southwest of England. The balance of participants across the LAs was not even, as can be seen in Table 3. Some participants related views to previous experiences in other LAs within their interviews.

Eight of the ten participants were male which, although skewed is perhaps not significantly inconsistent with the demographics of school leaders within the area. For example, in the LA from which most participants were drawn, around 25% had a female headteacher or principal⁵.

Although the role titles of the school leaders varied (these have not been shared to protect anonymity), participants broadly held roles either as headteacher/principal of their school or as a deputy, assistant or vice principal/headteacher with an even split between these positions. Participants frequently referred to their previous in-school roles which had helped inform their current ways of thinking, including as deputy heads, SENCOs, teachers and behaviour leads.

Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of participants. Within quoted extracts, some details have been removed or generalised where this could identify a school. For clarity of reading, some minor changes have been made to the extracts including removing some repeated or stuttered words or non-verbal utterances.

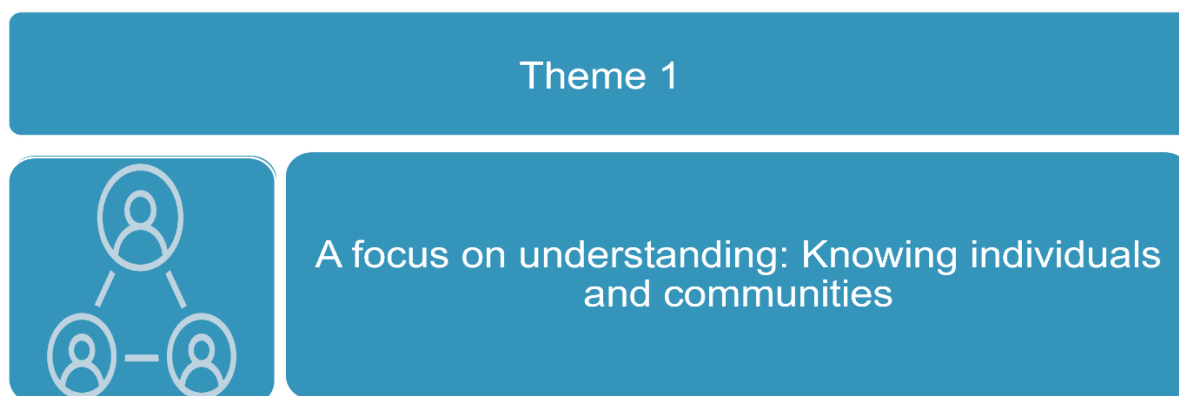
⁵ Data collected through individual school websites.

Table 3: Participant Characteristics

	Number of Participants	
LA Area	LA 1	7
	LA 2	1
	LA 3	1
	LA 4	1
Role	Headteacher or Principal	5
	Deputy/Vice/Assistant Headteacher or Principal	5
Gender	Male	8
	Female	2

4.2. Theme 1 - A focus on understanding: Knowing individuals and communities.

Figure 6: Overview of Theme 1



4.2.1. Overview of Theme 1

Theme 1 elucidates the importance of knowing and understanding the young people that schools were working with, as well as situating this within a broader understanding of their families and communities. Knowing students allowed school staff to adapt their responses and interact in a way which avoided potential escalation of disruptive behaviours. Clear information sharing both between home and school, within school and between schools, was highlighted as important for

facilitating understanding. Finally, knowing students was presented as a way to demonstrate care and investment and support behaviour needs.

4.22. Presentation of findings: Theme 1

Many participants spoke of the facilitatory effect of knowing and understanding students, families and wider communities in reducing or preventing exclusions. This was often linked to whole-school cultures affecting how individuals understood and related to one another, as opposed to specific approaches or interventions.

4.221. Understanding and personalised practice

Participants reiterated the importance of knowing their students and wider community well so that approaches could be effectively personalised. Staff also reported to then be able to notice changes or patterns in behaviour allowing support to be implemented quickly. By knowing and understanding young people, school leaders identified that the reasons behind disruptive behaviours could be recognised and supported. In the extract below, Brian illustrated how an event within a child's family life affected their behavioural presentation in school.

Brian: You'll see a student who's behaving badly, but you don't have to dig too far to find out there's something behind that behaving badly [...] We've got a boy at the moment who's coming in [...] he's not getting sleep, he's not eating properly, he looks grey. And then we find out that his dad's just had, you know, a serious sort of heart attack [...] and he's probably worried his dad's going to die. And you know surprise, surprise, he's not behaving quite as you'd expect him to.

A lack of understanding of needs and context was suggested to increase the likelihood of more significant incidents of PDB. The interactions between school staff and students were highlighted as having the potential to affect a pattern of disruptive behaviours. Knowing the student and therefore the best way to communicate with them in response to their behaviour was described by several participants to impact upon behaviour change in the moment. For example, speaking to some students in private as opposed to publicly, providing space for students to speak first, use of humour or adapting the tone of voice were all suggested as strategies which could help de-escalate perceived disruptive behaviours. However, these suggestions were not always presented as universal strategies but rather responses which had been

developed in response to understanding individuals and their needs. In the extract below, selecting the right response to student behaviour was suggested to allow classroom teachers to manage behaviour and avoid confrontation within the context of the lesson, preventing the need for the involvement of senior staff members or more significant disciplinary consequences.

Adam: A lot of these issues that we have later up the school, when we get there, could have been stopped at the source, if we had been more understanding or more restorative in our approach to that student that's come in and had a really bad morning. And you've gone straight on them period one and they've blown up.

Understanding students therefore was presented as an effective preventative strategy in relation to exclusion.

4.222. *Sharing Information*

To understand the needs of students, several participants emphasised the need for effective information sharing and collaboration between home and school as exemplified in the following extract from the interview with Harvey.

Harvey: They [parents] play a massive role in understanding and supporting the school and in supporting them [young people], communication lines you know [...] when everything works really well, it's when that kind of triad of child, parent and school works seamlessly.

Information sharing was also indicated to be key within schools. Many participants highlighted the importance of sharing knowledge so that all staff could understand each student's needs and to promote greater consistency in practice. Some participants indicated that this could be challenging within a busy school environment.

Clear communication was presented as extending beyond current students and into preparing for and supporting upcoming cohorts as part of transition procedures. While some schools already had enhanced transition projects set up, others identified this as an area which could help them to better understand and support students. Communication and understanding of needs across the primary to secondary school transition was identified by two of the school leaders as having been made more challenging following the COVID-19 lockdowns.

4.223. Demonstrating care and investment

Knowing students was also presented by some school leaders as a way to communicate care, investment and compassion. For example, one participant spoke about being able to engage with students through personal conversations relating to their interests. This was indicated to have the potential to create a positive working environment and reduce the risk of disruptive behaviour. This level of knowing students however required a time investment both to build ongoing rapport and to be available to respond when disruptive behaviour occurred.

For many of the school leaders, focusing on a caring and relational type approach rooted in understanding students and aiming to de-escalate disruptive behaviours was presented as a shared responsibility across the school. David, when discussing relational practice, explained how it 'fitted the ethos of the school'. He gave an example of the power of relationships in how a new teacher to the school had influenced the reputation of their subject and behaviour within lessons.

David: She's absolutely fantastic with students, and they've taken over from the previous teacher in that subject where relationships weren't so good and it really sort of spelled out to me that it doesn't, it's not about your length of experience, it's about your attitude you know.[...] It's completely transformed, people want to be in that lesson.

Similarly, Evan explained how a shared approach between staff, focused on caring relationships, underpinned their practice.

Evan: I am really, really lucky to have, you know, a staff group that care about children. They really do you know, we don't really have shouting at all in school and that's not because I've instructed that, it's just because the staff are very caring. [...] as a small school, [...] staff know the children well. That's always been the case so I think, we've always had quite a good base I would say.

The way in which Evan speaks here about the caring ethos of the school and understanding of students is as a 'base'. From this base perhaps other approaches such as the specific interventions identified within the literature review and across the interviews, could be implemented more successfully in an environment where staff knew students and where students felt cared for and understood.

While the importance of school staff demonstrating care and understanding was discussed by many participants, for some, this partially depended upon an individual's role either in relation to their job title or purpose within an interaction. Holding a leadership position relating to behaviour management was indicated by two of the participants to affect how their relational qualities were perceived. Frances suggested that while nurturing relationships were important within the school, this fell within the role of the pastoral team and not as part of the behaviour lead.

Frances: The year teams are amazing, they're an incredible bunch of people, so they are the complete opposite of me, so we have this really interesting balance. They are nurturing, really warm, really authentic, really patient, whereas I come in and my job isn't to be that [...] I'm your last resort. They'll call me in when there's a problem [...] because I was in behaviour for so long, so you have this reputation.

Having a role associated with managing behaviour ('*in behaviour*'), and therefore discipline structures, within the school was suggested to lead to a construction of that individual as less relatable or warm to students. The influence of reputation, how a school leader was perceived by students, was echoed by Ian. However, he emphasised the duality of his role with regards to the perceptions of the wider student body in comparison to individuals he worked more closely with on a 1:1 level.

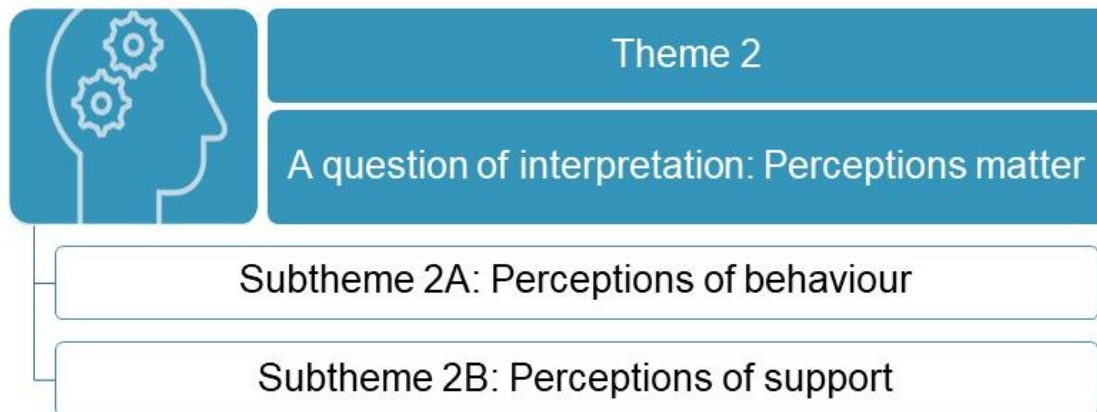
Ian: Most the children, if you went and asked them, would not say they particularly want to spend very much time with me in an office because I'm not, I'm seen as like the behaviour per[son]...But the children that I'm working with, [...] we've also got a really good relationship, so that I think they would say they'd be quite happy to come and sit in the office and have a conversation with me.

4.23. Summary of Theme 1

This theme has presented the perceived impact of investing in knowing and understanding students and communities. An understanding of student needs was suggested to allow tailored communications and approaches as well as support relationships and collaboration. Knowing students was linked to building caring and nurturing interactions. However, the time investment in fully understanding individuals, challenges due to Covid-19 and potential variation in relation to role were also indicated to affect practice.

4.3. Theme 2 - A question of interpretation: Perceptions matter

Figure 7: Overview of Theme 2.



4.31. Overview of Theme 2

Theme Two considers the way in which perceptions and understandings can shape practices around exclusions. This has been split into two subthemes, the first exploring perceptions of behaviour and the second perceptions of support. The implications of conceptualising behaviour as a communication, need or choice will be discussed. The influence of investment, purpose and attitudes to support will also be considered in facilitating its success.

4.32. Subtheme 2A: Perceptions of behaviour

The following subtheme seeks to explore how the way in which perceptions of behaviour are constructed, could influence upon a school's practices with regards to PDB. Behaviour was presented at times, both explicitly or implicitly, as a communication: a way to understand underpinning needs and to address these. The construction of behaviour as a communication was expressed by Jane in the extract below as a fundamental assumption.

Jane: Because if you look at persistent disruption to learning, it is a communication of something. We always know a behaviour is a communication of an unmet need for example, and whether that is emotional, physical, whether that's you just fell out with your friends, whether that's your parents are getting divorced, whether that's just you got out of bed on the wrong side.

In the extract above, understanding behaviour as a communication was indicated to be particularly pertinent for PDB in comparison to other reasons for suspension or exclusion. The persistence of the behaviour was seen to be suggestive of a more fundamental, inherent need requiring intervention as explained in the extract below.

Ian: It's not often you get a child repeatedly fighting [...], repeatedly bringing alcohol into school [...], but you will get repeated persistent disruptive behaviour because there's normally some kind of underlying need that's, you know, needs to be addressed.

PDB was frequently presented as representing or reflecting an unmet SEND need. The relationship between how well a student could access their curriculum and their subsequent engagement and behaviour was acknowledged by several participants. In the extract below, David explicitly linked the learning needs of students, and their ability to access school curricula, with their likelihood of experiencing exclusion for PDB.

David: I think the vast majority of the PExs [permanent exclusions] I've done, it's where the students have been behind in their learning, particularly for persistent disruptive behaviour, they're just not able to access it [learning], so therefore they mess around.

In this extract, alongside others, behaviour was presented as a product of SEND and not a SEND need in itself. Other accounts presented a more complex relationship. The construction of behaviour was not consistent across the accounts of school leaders. At times within the same interview, participants appeared to fluctuate between language which framed behaviour as a need or as a choice, perhaps highlighting the complexity and uncertainty of constructions. Some participants explicitly described a need to separate causes of behaviour to determine the appropriate response from the school. For example, Ian highlighted the importance of avoiding the use of exclusionary approaches where behaviour represented a SEND need.

Ian: The number of children with SEMH that actually are falling into the behaviour system, you're looking at it and going there is clearly a SEND need. There are choices being made as well, but are we addressing the SEND need sufficiently before we're saying 'Right and now you're going to be suspended'.

In the above extract Ian presents a perceived responsibility on school staff to ensure that suspensions were not a consequence for unmet SEND needs. However, Adam highlighted the complexity of making these distinctions, suggesting perceived limits to what support was reasonable.

Adam: Some students need some more support and some more help, but there comes a line where you have to accept the poor behaviour's poor behaviour, regardless of your background and the support you're getting. I think sometimes there's a crossover with that especially sometimes with SEND students; sometimes an SEND need can be kind of masked by poor behaviour but actually, there are other SEND students with the same needs that aren't behaving poorly.

This distinction in constructions of disruptive behaviour resulting from SEND needs or other factors was presented as important within some of the interviews and perhaps held the power to guide school responses around support or discipline.

The described role of the EP when working with students at risk of exclusion or suspension, was often centred around helping to clarify their needs and consequently inform development of support strategies. In the extract below, Jane described how through working with their school EP, the constructions around a particular student's behaviour were changed. Identifying an underlying SEND need led to alternative interpretations of the student's behaviour, and additional support to be put in place for the student, with subsequent impact upon her risk of suspension or exclusion.

Jane: They'll give us a different perspective so you know, we've got one girl in particular whose suspensions were really high [...] it's come to light that her, verbally she can do anything, comprehension wise, she's not comprehending, so what we've been able to do is extract her for absolute targeted intervention for that comprehension, and that has been supported by the EP.

Some participants identified that through involving EP services, they felt better able to understand a young person's needs and to plan appropriate support. School leaders appreciated the time that an EP could devote to observation and consultation across the child's system to 'unpick' behaviours and needs.

4.33. Subtheme 2B: Perceptions of Support

Within this subtheme, I will discuss how the success of approaches aiming to reduce or prevent exclusions were suggested to be affected by the perceptions of school staff, parents and students. Specifically, buy-in across the school system, resulting from understanding of the reasoning or benefits of an approach, was key to successful engagement. However, challenges to this level of investment, including alignment with personal values and perceptions of capacity for change, were also acknowledged.

Key to the success of any approach appeared to be a sense of investment. Leaders suggested that where school staff bought into an approach, it was more likely to be consistently applied between staff, supporting successful implementation. This point tended to be made in relation to whole-school approaches, such as relational practice⁶ or emotion coaching⁷ which perhaps required an ongoing shift in the actions of teachers throughout the day as opposed to when delivering a one-off intervention. Investment was also perceived as more likely when the change or expectation for staff matched with their values. In the extract below, Evan shared the positive reception he received from staff to making changes to SEND and behaviour approaches within the school.

Evan: It was pushing at an open door, yes definitely. People have always cared, people have always known students, people have always chosen to work in a school of this size, because they believe in [...] inclusive practice and caring.

⁶ Relational practice is an approach linked to Gergen's relational theory (2009) which highlights the interactive nature of meaning making (Vasilic, 2022). The specifics of relational practice are often related to a school's values but typically are characterised by prioritising building and maintaining positive and responsive relationships and utilising restorative over punitive approaches (Dunnett & Jones, 2022).

⁷ Emotion coaching is an approach to supporting students to manage their emotional regulation and behavioural responses through recognising, empathising with and validating emotions, teaching emotional vocabulary and understanding, and problem solving around appropriate responses (Gottman et al., 1996).

The values and beliefs of staff at the school were presented as a facilitator of the intended changes, highlighting the power in working with staff.

Working with students and families and ensuring community buy-in was also suggested to shape the success of an approach. When asked what helped to facilitate success in their approaches, Jane answered '*Getting parents back on board and the community back on board.*' Across the interviews, this engagement was suggested to allow school leaders to listen to views and use these to shape approaches. Some school staff described a careful framing and communication of approaches to help the community to understand the benefits of an approach and understand how the school was aiming to support a child. The quoted extracts below exemplify the impact that school leaders perceived working with families and communities could have upon the success of their approaches.

Adam: The fact that we serve the community we have, you know we have a lot of engagement with the community, means that we've got that buy-in already and that's half the battle sometimes. If you can get in with the families or the carers, a lot of the time that's the main part.

For young people, a clear sense of purpose and motivation within support was also suggested to help their engagement. For example, Graham explained how involvement in a creative writing project, delivered by an external charity, where students produced a book, had helped these students to believe that school had something to offer them. Additionally, Brian shared the way in which helping students to believe in their academic potential in subjects of interest promoted a 'vested interest in the system'.

However, school leaders also recognised challenges in developing investment within the school community. Some school leaders perceived a breadth of parental views and expressed difficulty in implementing systems and approaches which were universally appreciated. Similarly, variation in the pedagogies and values of staff within the school were also perceived by some school leaders to present challenges to consistency.

Staff investment was suggested by some teachers to be a particular issue when approaches could be interpreted to present a challenge to justice or equality. For example, some leaders suggested that staff had differing views on appropriate

consequences and found it hard to accept approaches they perceived to be overly tolerant. In the extract below, Graham highlights the variation amongst staff in their propensity to adjust their expectations for certain students.

Graham: Some staff are still probably more reluctant to give students that extra opportunity and you know and a bit of thought. And perhaps when you would have hoped that they might have just said 'Well just go and stand outside for five minutes,' all of a sudden, they're sent off to the Head of Department, and so things can escalate a bit quicker.

Staff members' investment in changes and new approaches could also be affected by their perceived capacity. Some school leaders noted that at times, staff could reach a saturation point and that adding in further expectations may not be productive. However, some participants did suggest that by providing justification, such as by presenting the evidence base, relating research to their context or outlining the benefits, buy-in could be increased.

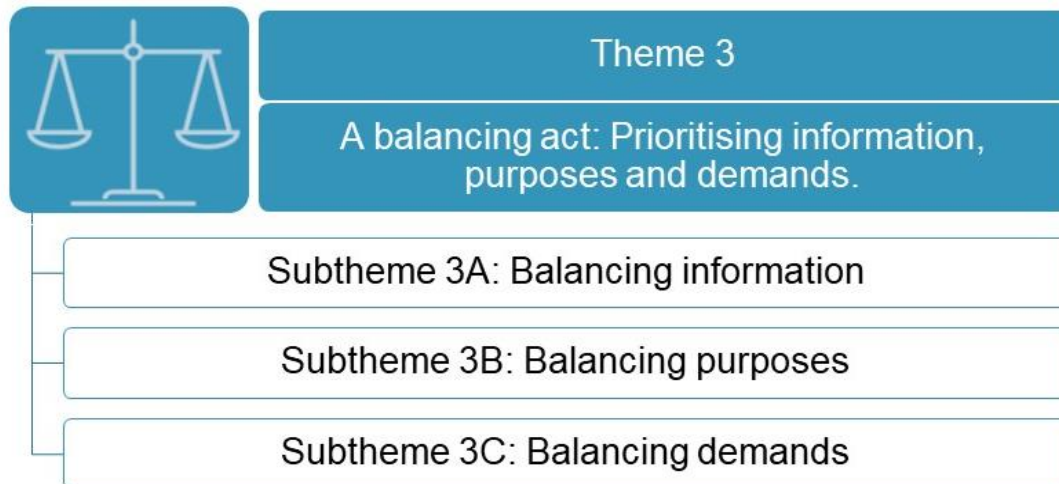
Evan: I think we are probably at the point of saturation with our staff in terms of what we are asking them to do, but that does come down to a certain extent explaining the benefits. [...] The benefits of children engaging and behaving in the classroom are huge and people feel that [...] so that can be overcome to a certain extent, I think it's about finding the right way of delivering it.

4.34. Summary of Theme 2

The second theme has considered the implications of perceptions across the school community on exclusionary practices and the success of approaches to prevent this. The way in which school staff understood behaviour as communication, choice or need had the potential to influence their response. Additionally, the perception of staff, families and students was suggested to affect motivation and investment and therefore potential success of approaches to support. School leaders indicated that alignment with values, perceptions of benefit, understanding of reasoning and perceived capacity all had the potential to influence engagement with, and outcomes of, support.

4.4. Theme 3 – A balancing act: Prioritising information, purposes and demands

Figure 8: Overview of Theme 3.



4.41. Overview of Theme 3

Theme Three pertains to the way in which school leaders described a balancing act of managing the range of information, purposes and demands which underpinned their decision-making processes around supporting those at risk of suspension or exclusion.

4.42. Subtheme 3A: Balancing information

Participants spoke about a wide range of sources of information which informed their approaches to reducing or preventing suspensions and exclusions. This included books, academic research, social media and government policy alongside experience, data and perceived expertise within schools and the LA.

While many school leaders discussed engaging with literature, this took different forms. Some participants spoke of specific books or authors who had been influential in guiding their approaches. When school leaders talked about referring to academic research, this often linked to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Charles: The EEF are the place where they synthesise the actual research itself, so we're not going directly to academics which is really helpful for us.

The limited time available to find, read and evaluate literature was mentioned by a few school leaders as a barrier to engagement, such as in the quote from Ian below. This perhaps highlights why the EEF toolkits and summaries were such a highly utilised resource.

Ian: There is reading, you do sit there and read, well teachers, yeah, well, I do, but only in the summer holidays.

The challenge of having time to not only effectively engage with but also apply research across the school was noted by Charles who indicated the importance of providing information in a way which was easily digested.

Charles: You have to give individual teachers who've got no time, you have to buy some time in there, to actually give them often brief summaries or synopses of what's going on and the range of strategies. And then you have to support them through an implementation part [...] because otherwise it will die, otherwise they will revert to old habits immediately.

Alongside information from literature, some school leaders also talked about information gained through professional connections both with other schools, as well as external professionals within the LA and private sector. Several school leaders discussed the value of sharing practice with schools either locally or further afield through visits or regular conversations which provided inspiration and guidance.

Ian: There's like a wealth of resource in schools and there are people you know, people have been doing this for like 30, 40 years, [...] you've got to work with them and understand what they're doing, what works, what doesn't work, and I think that could be local authority led, and it's not at the moment particularly well.

Ian indicated that systemic structures might support more effective sharing of information between schools highlighting the collective experience and knowledge available to be harnessed. However, Evan identified that there could also be limits to knowledge within the local area which might restrict the success of collaboration.

Evan: I meet regularly with the [LA] headteachers association, [...], the schools there, we share strategies and offer ideas there. It's difficult because [the LA], [...], is notoriously high for permanent exclusions, so we are talking amongst a group of headteachers who are all permanently excluding a lot of students.

Evan suggested that the information available within a particular group, in this case local headteachers, influenced practices. In a similar way, the experience and knowledge of the staff bodies within each school also influenced approaches. Several of the school leaders spoke of their own previous roles and how these had informed actions within the school alongside the specific knowledge of other key staff members.

When working with external professionals, approaches were sometimes informed through written advice but often also involved training both through projects and school commissioned professional development sessions. These were presented by some school leaders as a way to gain access to up-to-date ideas or evidence. Some projects also provided support to disseminate and/or implement approaches across the school. However, projects were sometimes time limited, which could lead to inconsistency of approaches without the resources or capacity to continue this work.

In addition to external sources of information, participants also discussed utilising their own data, for example collected through observation, shared meetings and data logging systems to determine approaches on a more individualised basis. Harvey highlighted how staff were able to regularly monitor this data and respond quickly.

Harvey: That [behaviour, rewards and safeguarding] is all logged there [...]. The year leaders, pastoral support workers will look [...] and then on a daily basis we'll make decisions on [...] any potential actions that need to be taking place for tomorrow, which I think is really important, because sometimes it can be too late.

Charles explained how this type of data also then fed into their planning as a form of active, practice-based research specific to their school setting:

Charles: We [the leadership team] go out every week [...] and we do learning walks⁸, to constantly feed into the loop of what we are finding. [...] it's an evidence-based loop, we're trying to be an evidence informed school, including generating our own evidence.

⁸ Learning walks are a series of 'classroom visits or walkthroughs' (Stephens, 2011, p.118) with the purpose to "gather data about teaching and learning through observation and interaction with students... designed to support professional learning for educators," (Baker and King, 2013, p.35).

In addition to student level data, Jane also highlighted that there is a balance to be made between the broad findings of research and the views of the wider school community.

Jane: We do a lot around the EEF, we did parent voice, student voice, teacher voice, support staff voice as well [...]. It wasn't just the national research; we knew what the national research was going to tell us, and we could look at those strategies. But what was actually going to work for the school?

Jane suggested that an approach supported by research evidence would not necessarily be successfully applied across all schools. Instead, school leaders were often looking to contextualise approaches for their setting. In addition, deciding how to balance the wealth of information available required careful planning and consideration as illustrated in this quote from Graham.

Graham: I think one of the hard things that we've found is over the last year, there's been so much thrown at schools [...] and though lots of it is good training [...] I think we but we've got to a point where I think we've kind of skilled our staff up about as much as we can [...] actually it's at the point now where I think that perhaps that money would be better spent on providing people to do the roles.

4.43. Subtheme 3B: Balancing multiple purposes

Although the focus of this research project has been to consider approaches to reduce and prevent exclusions, this represented only one priority within the larger school system. Throughout the interviews, the school leaders shared a range of values and purposes to their work, which in turn had the potential to influence upon their practices around exclusions. School leaders appeared to be engaged in a delicate balancing act between their multiple purposes and the needs of the school community and education system.

Decision-making around support for students at risk of exclusion was often purpose or outcomes driven. On an individual, student-level basis, this related to academic needs, for example, completing a range of GCSEs or receiving a high-quality education, as well as more holistic purposes including being prepared for the future, either in terms of employment or wider adult responsibilities. In some cases, this purpose was simply to ensure that students remained in education. In the extract

below, Ian described how he aimed to ensure approaches to managing disruptive behaviour did not impede upon the main purpose of providing a good education to all students.

Ian: Why would we take away someone's maths lesson because they behaved poorly in English, that doesn't make any sense [...] behaviour management had to protect the curriculum, not detract from it.

School staff were also considering a range of purposes, not only for those who were showing PDB, but also for others across the school community. In particular, minimising disruption to other students' learning and ensuring their safety was raised as a priority in determining actions around PDB. At times however, this balancing was perceived to result in challenges. One example of this was where the support needed by an individual student had the potential to be detrimental to other students. Charles illustrated this dilemma in his response to advice as part of the EHCP assessment process.

Charles: Those assessments came back and said 'Well he needs to be gradually socialised by firstly going into a class of one and then going into a class with two and then three etcetera over a period of time,' to which my problem is twofold, a) I don't have classes that are that big, and b) Who are these sacrificial lambs that I am supposed to be putting this poor child in with?

In balancing the needs of all students, some school leaders acknowledged approaches to addressing PDB could compromise upon their values and not represent the ideal support they would like to be able to offer.

Brian: I know a lot of schools use sort of isolation rooms or things like that. We have a tendency, ideologically, theoretically, philosophically, I don't much like them. But I think at the moment, there probably is a need for something like that, [...] you don't want to suspend them, and what's going to be the thing in the middle?

Above, the use of an isolation room was described as a short-term solution to ensuring that a child was not suspended. However, this was presented as a last resort due to a perceived lack of alternatives. Participants mentioned the influence of accountability systems including around academic results such as Progress 8

measures, Ofsted assessments and exclusion figures. Some school leaders suggested that these systemic drivers could lead to practices and approaches which did not best meet the needs of the individual young person but instead those of the wider school. Approaches to reducing and preventing exclusions could therefore be considered in different ways. While some approaches aimed to support young people to manage their learning and behaviour, others focused on reducing the number of exclusions. This could involve, for example, removing students from situations in which behaviour might escalate or changing thresholds to ensure that suspensions and/or exclusions became less likely. Brian described this difference and the complexity in assessing schools by exclusion rates, suggesting this measure to be somewhat arbitrary without also considering the practices and behaviour within school.

Brian: Some schools, for example, decide, we can't have any more suspensions, and so for tactical reasons if someone goes up and calls someone an effing whatever, they won't suspend. But not because it's anything do with [...], educational provision or whatever, but just because they don't want their rates to go up.

However, systemic drivers for exclusion practices were often spoken about in relation to other schools. When speaking about their own setting, the most frequently shared purposes behind practices related to individual and community values and beliefs. Several participants explicitly shared their school values when explaining the approaches they had implemented, and justification frequently referred to school or personal beliefs, values or aims, such as in the examples below.

David: We've gone down a relational practice route. We want students to be here and be happy and succeed and to really celebrate the positives.

Harvey: We absolutely believe in, you know, we're a community school, we're an inclusive school, and then that we believe that everybody should be given every chance to make education successful for them.

Evan shared that reflecting upon their developing school systems, it was not the success of a particular approach which led them to make changes but instead their morals and beliefs around what was right for their students and school:

Evan: Students would spend five lessons in isolation, [...] we really looked at the isolation room and thought 'What on earth have we done there? That's a horrible, horrible thing to be doing,'

Where approaches were led by values, other measures or outcomes appeared to be perceived as less significant. For example, Adam acknowledged the negative impact that their approaches may have upon their academic results however maintained that this was the right approach to take regardless.

Adam: They have their own little room, and they do the core subjects, and they come in really late starts, early finishes, and we as a school take a huge hit on our results and outcomes. But morally, it's the right thing to do for those students and we're really comfortable with that, whereas other schools will play the data cards.

4.44. Subtheme 3C: Balancing demands

Although school leaders were open around the beliefs which drove their practices, they also discussed several demands within their school including relating to curricula, staffing and funding. At times, these demands had the potential to compromise their values and to lead to practice they perceived to be problematic. Many of these barriers were related to wider systemic issues which, either directly or indirectly, impacted upon their ability to promote and fulfil their ideal purposes through their practice. This again required school leaders to find a balance between maintaining practices that matched their beliefs, whilst also managing the realities of practical constraints.

Curricular expectations were suggested to pose challenges to meeting the needs of some students. Providing the right curriculum to engage and meet the needs of students was presented by several participants as a way in which the likelihood of suspension or exclusion could be reduced. While some school leaders presented adaptations and options within their curricular offer to support students, at times the scope of these was perceived to be limited either by funding, resourcing or broader education systems themselves. David discussed how a more flexible school system with a wider range of pathways might better support students through their educational journey.

David: For some students [...] they want to be out in the wider world. I think that is something, you know, we've got ourselves fixated in this country about: you must be in education until you are eighteen. [...] You would be in education, but you'd be in an applied education, and you'd probably be in a different environment, and I think that would suit students better. Then a knock-on impact would be that you wouldn't have that sort of disruption.

The structure of curricula was presented here to limit options and perhaps prevent some students from reaching their potential, both academically and more holistically. There was a sense from Brian that this was an issue which had worsened over recent years:

Brian: When I was a deputy head in a previous school, [...] we had a really high rate of suspensions, we brought it right down because the curriculum was more suitable for them [...] They'd have maths, they'd have science, they'd have English, [...] and then they might do like an ASDAN course and then they'd go to college for a day a week. And I can straight away now, I'm thinking of two names who I would guarantee these days would get permanently excluded, but they didn't, because that was quite good for them.

Alongside challenges within the expectations of the curriculum itself, school leaders also discussed wider issues with resourcing and staffing the curriculum they would ideally like to offer. Participants presented that they were keen to adapt their practice and systems, and put in place more approaches across their school to help reduce or prevent exclusion, but that this at times required investment to achieve.

Evan: We don't want to force children down an EBacc curriculum⁹ that's not going to work for them. You know we're happy to have children going out for a morning to do this, having children going out for an afternoon. We've introduced animal care and hair and beauty qualifications that aren't Progress 8 applicable, but just to meet the needs of some of our children. So we're happy to do all of that, but give us the, give us the facilities, give us the people to do it and we can.

Staffing needs were consistently perceived to present challenges to successful implementation of support. When discussing their dreams and hopes for their

⁹ EBacc (English Baccalaureate) is a set of core academic subjects considered advantageous for future study; schools are measured on the engagement and achievement of their students within the EBacc (DfE, 2019b).

schools' approaches, school leaders frequently mentioned having a greater number and range of staff to provide more consistent and individualised support across a wider group of students. School leaders identified that the approaches discussed in theme one, including investing time in students, understanding their needs and being available pastorally required a high level of staffing. Some school leaders discussed the difficulty of balancing staffing across the school to ensure the right body of staff overall to meet all the school's purposes. In this extract from the interview with Frances, a lack of staffing particularly whilst also trying to balance the range of purposes described in Subtheme 2B, was perceived to limit the school's ability to fully support a young person in the way that might be hoped.

Frances: Sometimes, we can grab them and we can wrap them round with care and we can get them back on track but it, that doesn't happen overnight [...] it's a long term investment and actually we don't have enough staff to long term invest, because we expect kids to come in, sit down, do their lessons and be ok but that, in reality that isn't the situation.

To have the right staffing in place, required sufficient funding. School leaders frequently expressed feeling underfunded to be able to achieve the expected goals and measures. and suggested that additional funding would allow more flexibility within their staffing. With the current staffing levels, several school leaders explained that the conditions for staff could be challenging. Limited staff meant that teachers and support staff experienced a sense of pressure with only so much time to achieve competing demands.

Graham: I think the most important thing for all of the children isn't it is finding time, so we'd love to do more ELSA work so we've got three trained ELSAs¹⁰ but because they're TAs [Teaching Assistants] or have other roles in the school, they can't do as much time.

Funding was consistently identified as a concern for school leaders with one participant identifying it as a 'bleak picture'. Current financial pressures nationally

¹⁰ ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) are trained and supported by EPs to 'develop and deliver individualised support programmes to meet the emotional needs of children and teenagers in their care' (ELSA Network, 2017, para. 1)

were being felt equally by schools, and participants suggested this would impact upon the support available for students both within and beyond schools.

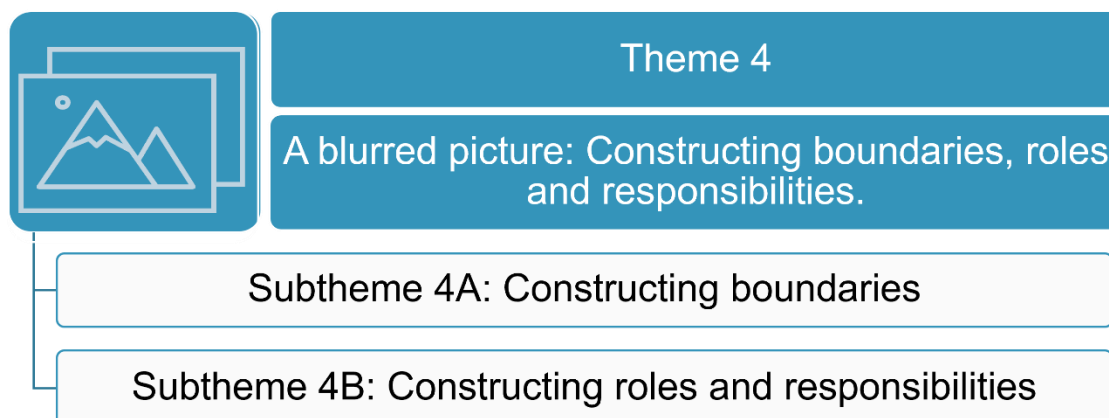
Ian: Money's a massive challenge, we've quadrupled our budget for alternative provision and SEND in the last four years and I think we're going to have to cut it now, because we're looking at money and we've been hit with gas bills, and electric bills, and all the rest of it, and wage hikes with no government funding.

4.45. Summary of Theme 3

Theme 3 has considered the balancing act which school leaders engaged in. This involved balancing multiple sources of information, multiple purposes within education and multiple demands. These balancing acts existed not only regarding provision for individual students at risk of exclusion but also for the needs of the wider school community.

4.5. Theme 4 - A blurred picture: Constructing boundaries, roles and responsibilities.

Figure 9: Overview of Theme 4



4.51. Overview of Theme 4

This theme discusses the way that participants were interpreted to be constructing boundaries, roles and responsibilities. Expectations within a school are not necessarily objective or shared and participants discussed how behavioural boundaries were constructed and reinforced within their settings, with the potential to influence exclusions and suspensions. Participants were also engaged in a process

of constructing the limits of their own role and those of wider educational professionals. Participants expressed a feeling of growing responsibility as accessibility of external support appeared to reduce. This prompted consideration of how the school could adapt or broaden its offer and meet this changing role whilst also questioning limits to their responsibility.

4.52. Subtheme 4A: Constructing boundaries

Throughout the interviews, I noticed that school leaders, when explaining their decision-making around exclusions or suspensions, were describing constructed lines, boundaries and expectations specific to their school. Often there was overlap in these constructions between schools, however, there were also suggestions of variation and subjectivity both within and between the interviews. As expressed explicitly by Brian, reducing exclusion figures depends partly on “*where they decide to draw the line*”. This subtheme considers the construction of these boundaries as school staff attempted to make black and white within grey contexts.

School leaders discussed the importance of establishing clear boundaries, expectations and consequences. Explicit articulation of expectations, applied consistently across the school, was suggested by some school leaders to support a reduction in PDB. However, several school leaders also suggested that these expectations were not inherently understood. Instead, they were constructed within school and needed to be communicated clearly to the school community. Without clear, shared expectations around behaviour, it was suggested to be hard to consistently enforce consequences, including suspensions or exclusions. Despite this, some participants indicated that the importance of clarifying expectations can be overlooked. In the extract below, Ian pointed to the importance of not assuming shared understandings when describing an intervention based around creating shared constructions of expectations.

Ian: I think there's often an assumption that children are being bad, but actually, children don't know what they're meant to be doing.

Such an intervention is underpinned by the idea that, where students understand what is expected, PDB will be reduced. However, this was not found consistently by all participants. David shared that despite clarifying expectations within assemblies, suspensions and permanent exclusions on the basis of PDB had risen. I wonder

whether this difference related to the level of control a young person has over their behaviour linking back to the way in which participants constructed behaviour as communication, choice or need in Theme 2. Some participants detailed the need for flexibility within expectations, in line with reasonable adjustments, to meet the needs of all students and promote equity. Even with clarity of expectations, school leaders recognised that some young people would need adjustments and support. On the other hand, school leaders also suggested that there were certain expectations and boundaries which must be fulfilled. Frances indicated that while schools may like to offer a high level of flexibility to students, at times this was not felt to be possible because of the number of students within a setting and the perceived need for structure and control.

Frances: You know it's normal teenage behaviour, but because of the operating scale [...], we just can't have that. [...] I think if we had like fifty kids in the academy, you could probably handle that a lot better but because there's so many kids, we have to be really strict with our rules and we have to have really strict routines and systems, because [...], once one person steps out, I guarantee to you, you'll have ten stepping out as well.

Exclusions and suspensions were presented as ways of communicating and maintaining boundaries within the school community. In some instances, these boundaries were suggested to be clearer. For example, some school leaders expressed that bringing illegal drugs onto the school site would not be tolerated and would therefore likely result in the child being permanently excluded. However, for PDB, these boundaries were indicated by some to be less concrete as suggested by Jane.

Jane: Some things are absolutely set in stone by policy and the trust and the board [...] if this happens, it is a suspension. I don't know, pick something out of thin air, like vaping for example, [...] Persistent disruption to learning, it is a bit different isn't it, but it is the biggest cause of suspension.

However, despite this ambiguity, school leaders discussed the need to try to construct boundaries around PDB. Suspension therefore appeared to be used at times to communicate a limit to tolerance.

Brian: It will often be something that has been rumbling for some time, either you get a student who's been going like that for a while and then we just get to a point where we think actually, we've got to put down a marker here.

Adam: As a school sometimes, you have to set, you know, draw a line in the sand and say that's, we're not going to accept that, so that's going to be a two-day suspension and then very quickly, everybody else overnight, there's no more truanting.

In the extract from Adam, suspension was used to not only communicate a limit to tolerance to the individual child but also to reiterate expectations and consequences to the wider school community. Participants used the language of 'drawing a line' or 'reaching a point' to describe this construction of boundaries. However, this construction also appeared to me through the interviews to be a complex process requiring subjective decision-making and the weighing up of multiple factors. For example, Frances in the extract below explained how a pupil's individual context and needs might be considered and how this could soften some boundaries around exclusion.

Frances: A student might have brought like a little small pocketknife in [...], we'd start by going well that's a PEx [Permanent Exclusion] and then we go well pedal back a little bit, let's look at the situation behind the student, let's look at their vulnerabilities. Because when you have a child with loads of vulnerabilities coming in, you then have kind of a different route to follow.

The decision-making process around exclusions was therefore not black and white even within a single school. Instead, these boundaries were presented in a constant process of reconstruction as school leaders attempted to evaluate contextual information. In part, a commitment to avoiding exclusion for young people could be the difference in reducing figures, whether or not associated with concurrent behaviour change as explained by Adam and Graham.

Adam: We had I think eight students, nine students this kind of academic year that all of them could have potentially been a permanent exclusion at some point in their school career and we haven't done that, we've kept them on school.

Graham: I think different schools have got different approaches [...] We haven't had a permanent exclusion for sort of over ten years. That's kind of been a sort of stance that we've tried to stick with you know, and that's certainly not the case everywhere.

Graham highlighted the variation between schools in their attitudes and approaches to exclusion which may account for some of the differences in exclusion levels regardless of other approaches utilised within the school.

Throughout the interviews, PDB was presented as complex and influenced by multiple factors, so it is perhaps unsurprising that the process of creating boundaries relied on subjective decision-making within schools. This process had the potential to create inconsistency as school leaders attempted to lineate a blurred and complex picture.

4.53. Subtheme 4B: Constructing Roles and Responsibilities

Whilst school leaders were constructing boundaries within school, they were also engaged in a process of co-constructing their own and others' roles and responsibilities around reducing or preventing exclusions. This subtheme will consider the way in which school leaders discussed their own roles in response to perceptions of changing external support and resources. The implications of these constructed roles will be considered in relation to a sense of loneliness expressed by school leaders as well as the challenges of meeting perceived increasing responsibilities.

Where schools were concerned a student was at risk of exclusion and felt they needed additional support beyond what could be offered within school, leaders looked to outsource some of this support. School leaders spoke frequently of utilising alternative provisions (AP) to provide respite for students as well as create a curriculum to best meet a young person's needs. In addition to AP, school leaders also spoke about drawing on the support of external professionals. This included a broad number of services including the police, social services, EPs, outreach from specialist settings, charities, CAMHS and health services. Some school leaders emphasised the importance of services and agencies working together to share information and plan support.

Jane: We have seen some real successes with that multi-partnership and that early help, looking at that team around the family, as early as we possibly can. And we're noticing younger down the school, so year seven, eight and nine, a dramatic reduction in suspensions.

However, other participants emphasised the challenges of working with other professionals. The input of external services was generally highly valued. Some school leaders made a point of praising the work of individuals within these agencies. Nevertheless, the systems within which they worked and the level of access to support were frequently identified as problematic. Issues with funding, capacity and staffing in external services were suggested to lead to less accessible support and increased feelings of responsibility amongst school leaders. External support from traded services, such as EPs, was perceived to be prohibitively expensive and alongside challenges with capacity and reliability, school leaders suggested that this support was often too little and/or too late.

Brian: Often when they [EPs] do get involved, it's so far down the track [...] it sounds weird, but sometimes, with those students that are most needy, it's almost gone past the point of an educational psychologist. What we want from an educational psychologist is probably to tell us the things that we don't know and the approaches that can work with students, not when it's all gone horribly wrong.

Due to the high demand for services and perceived lack of capacity, timeliness of support was raised frequently as an issue. Many of the school leaders attributed early intervention as a facilitator of effective support however felt that systems often did not allow for this. School leaders described that those with the most significant needs were prioritised, and long waiting times sometimes meant that needs had escalated by the point of intervention. School leaders expressed frustration at not being able to access the support they felt students needed and the difficult challenge of attempting to prioritise who received support as described by Frances in the extract below.

Frances: We have a list, where we have kids who we think, they need to be seen by the Ed Psych [...] you're going, oh god, they're all the same, they all have a really high, high different need [...] and that comes down to us to choose and it shouldn't be like that, everyone should be allowed to see the Ed Psych.

While school leaders shared a willingness to do what they could to support a student, some also expressed concern that at times they felt specialist support was required to fully meet a young person's needs but was not available.

Adam: We're fighting really hard to get more counselling hours but they're so expensive, more educational psychologist hours but there's limited amount of those in the county and you're all fighting for position [...] our pastoral systems across the school are fantastic, but you know, none of us are trained counsellors, none of us are trained psychologists, so we need those external professionals to support our systems.

When talking about the available support, school leaders indicated that accessibility seemed to be worsening with time. Funding was suggested to have decreased and public services were consistently identified as offering less or slower help than previously.

Charles: I mean the real barrier here is the extent of local authority support and wider help that is actually there. Because the options, the alternative options that exist have been significantly narrowed in the last few years and that's tricky when you are looking to say, I know this is going in the wrong direction and I need some support and help to get there.

This perceived limited support from external agencies appeared to be felt heavily by the school leaders who described the weight of responsibility they or their staff felt with some describing feeling alone as a school in managing students' need.

Brian: I think you feel as a school you really are on your own [...] we do feel like we're the last men and women standing.

Frances: Our external agencies who we would have referred to normally are just full full full full full so they're just batting everything back to us.

Schools in rural locations identified that there could be additional challenges in accessing support either from external provisions or other schools. The cost involved in organising travel, the need to schedule activities around school buses, and the proximity of services and other schools, were suggested to make logistics around collaboration more challenging.

Harvey: In an inner city [...] or a larger town where you may have three, four, five schools in close proximity, being able to share resources would be much easier I believe. Supporting behaviour by not going down a suspension route, and by them going to another school for a period of time, be it a day, I think would be easier to manage.

In response to challenges in levels of support from external agencies and provisions, several school leaders were looking for ways to expand their own provision to cover these areas of need. At times this involved employing members of staff to carry out specific roles, such as speech and language therapists, counsellors, restorative justice workers or youth workers. These professionals operated either within a school or across an academy trust which in turn reduced reliance on LA services. Some school leaders felt that external services would be best placed in schools to provide timely support more effectively. In the extract below, Charles suggests that such an approach might reduce the pressure felt by schools to manage complex needs without the support they would like.

Charles: My magic wand would say to government, give me all of the money [...] you want me to solve these problems, absolutely fine. Let me create the hub in my pastoral centre where the Social Worker and the Ed Psych and the everybody else is. I don't mind that. I need to have the money to do it, but you've given me the responsibility for it [...] the frustration is, as always, trying to resolve all of those problems, when you haven't been given those resources.

Some school leaders also described plans to expand their APs onsite to help meet the curricular needs of students at risk of exclusion or suspension.

Harvey: Do we look at having that, growing that number and having a pathway that looks a bit wider [...] that we've got specialism for onsite? You know we send children [weekly] to [a local] farm, ...which is a [journey] away.

David: A number of schools I know of, they have actually gone about setting up their own sort of little centres because they need something different for these students, and that's something that we've tapped into because we haven't got the resources to set up our own centre.

While school leaders expressed keenness to work creatively and develop their provision, the financial costs and staffing implications were suggested to either limit scope or prevent this growth. School leaders also appeared to question whether the level of responsibility they held for managing the needs of students was fairly placed. School leaders spoke frequently of their concerns around wider social issues which extended far beyond educational provision with which they nevertheless felt compelled to support.

Charles: Every school is a reflection of the of the community that they are in and the community's difficulties in the last three or four years clearly have been significant, [...] and I think are getting slightly worse and, because of the lack of external agency support for some of those community issues, all of them are feeding into school in some way or other [...] There's only so far my school budget will go on solving the rest of the world's issues and we need a bit more joined up thinking.

4.54. Summary of Theme 4

Theme Four has considered the way in which boundaries are constructed around PDB and the complexity and subjectivity of this process. In addition, the reconstruction of roles in response to changing support from external professionals has also been considered. This reconstruction has resulted in a potential shift in the perceived responsibilities of the school and adaptations of provision to attempt to meet needs.

4.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the themes constructed through interpretation of the data. Theme One, focused on the way in which individual relate to and understand one another within the school community and Theme Two explored the impact of perceptions within the school community particularly in relation to behaviour and support. Theme Three outlined the multiple sources of information and approaches available to schools and considered the process of balancing a range of purposes across the school within a context of multiple demands. Theme Four explored the way in which schools were engaged in a process of constructing boundaries and the relationships of this process to suspension and exclusion, then going onto consider the construction of roles and responsibilities within and beyond the school. The

following discussion chapter will look to situate these themes within the aims and questions of the current research as well as broader research and theory.

5. Discussion

5.1. Chapter Overview

The following chapter will discuss the findings presented within the previous chapter to consider their relevance in relation to both psychological theory and existing research and literature. Findings across the themes will be explored in relation to the three research questions to focus the discussion towards the research aims. For each research question, the key findings will be summarised and linked to relevant existing literature. The findings will then be considered together in relation to two overarching areas of theory: Personal Construct Psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1980) and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1977).

5.2. Informing Approaches: Findings in relation to the first research question.

The following section will present the key findings linked to the question: *What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?* The findings will be summarised and related to existing literature.

School leaders described using multiple sources to inform their approaches. They discussed accessing books, research literature and social media. Leaders also described receiving information through a range of channels such as government policy, LA communications and projects, wider projects including those with charities and universities, collaboration with other schools, as well as their own searching. However, in school leaders sharing where they gained information from, I was struck by the number of sources and pieces of information they were trying to balance.

5.21. Accessible and available information

Often when school leaders described accessing research literature, it was through the EEF, suggested to provide a helpful summary. Beyond the EEF, the overlap between literature (books or research) mentioned was relatively small. While several school leaders shared a key book, author or individual trainer they were drawing on at that time, there was variation from school to school. While this could be representative of differing needs and priorities within each school, the way in which some school leaders highlighted the limited time for additional reading and the

reliance on synthesised forms of research, or available projects and training, led me to wonder whether a factor in the information used by schools related to accessibility.

The accessibility of research has been suggested in previous literature to be a barrier to engagement for schools both in terms of content and publication format (Scott & McNeish, 2013; van Schaik et al., 2018). Fusarelli (2008) suggested that school leaders had little time to devote to reflective engagement in research literature amongst the busyness of the day-to-day running of a school.

Highlighting the potential need for increased accessibility of information should not be taken to indicate that schools were not working in evidence or research-based ways. Through the interviews with all school leaders, there were examples of drawing on data and research. Interestingly, previous research has suggested that teachers in the Southwest were more likely to report utilising research-evidence than other areas of England, which may have been relevant within the current findings (Walker et al., 2019). However, also evident in the leaders' accounts was the number of priorities they were balancing, even just in managing the needs of students at risk of exclusion. It is perhaps rational to consider how increased accessibility of information, in terms for example of physical access, support in evaluating findings, length and complexity, might support school leaders (Fusarelli, 2008).

Previous surveys have identified high workloads and resulting stress as problematic for school leaders (Savill-Smith & Scanlan, 2022). A key implication for professionals and academics looking to communicate information to school leaders might surround considering effective dissemination. An appreciation for the workload demands upon school staff might support the impact of key messages within education.

Professionals in roles relating to communicating educational research to practitioners have previously suggested that researchers should provide short summaries written in simple language where possible (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). However, Pegram et al. (2022) found that providing school leaders with evidence summaries for interventions led to limited changes in practice with school leaders emphasising the impact of financial factors in decision-making.

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of educational systems creating space and support for considering research (Fusarelli, 2008, Cordingly, 2012; Scott & McNeish, 2013). This ties to the ideas of one participant in the present research

who explained how their position as a 'research school' had helped them to establish systems to support application of research including through peer coaching. Analysis of a subset of 'effective schools' in England suggested a common feature of cultures promoting learning communities and engagement with research (Bernhard et al., 2020).

The information utilised by school leaders did not come solely through academic research or written literature. Approaches were in part dependent upon the experiences of individuals within the school and local area, and how knowledge had been constructed from these. This related to the information provided through current projects and training sessions available to schools, ideas shared between local schools formally or informally as well as the positioning of key individuals within the school. This aligned with the findings of Walker et al. (2019) who suggested that teachers were more likely to apply evidence from their own and others' experiences and training than research.

In this sense, approaches could be interpreted to be informed by the available information. This differed between schools based on the makeup of the staff body and between LAs based upon the services provided and focuses of current projects and ways of working. This perhaps presents an opportunity for EP services, and other external professionals, to consider the information and expertise already available within a school and to work with school leaders to plan targeted training and support. Hall and Kidman (2004) described using an ecological framework to map the teaching and learning context. While the examples in the paper related to students, such a process might also be helpfully applied when considering training and information sharing with school staff.

Some staff in the present research discussed capacity challenges for new approaches or information, with one headteacher describing staff as being 'at the point of saturation' (Evan). The long-term impact of sharing information, such as through one-off training sessions, has been questioned (Patel, 2013). Chidley and Stringer (2020) addressed this transfer issue and argued the importance of ensuring information shared is perceived as relevant and useful. In addition, the authors stressed the need for implementation planning to translate knowledge into action beyond the point of information sharing. Through carefully mapping out the context

and working with headteachers to plan for implementation, EPs may be better able to understand needs within a school and to work with school leaders to share information in a way which is relevant, focused and impactful.

5.22. Contextualising information

In addition to external sources of information, school leaders also described generating and applying their own data including around approaches, engagement and behaviour. This was suggested to help analyse which approaches were successful for a young person, track patterns of behaviour and respond, in line with the findings of Tucker (2013). Recent years have seen increased focus on data-informed practices in schools (Leithwood, 2011; Datnow & Hubbard, 2016; Young et al., 2018) and the current research would suggest this continues as a driver for decision-making around approaches to PDB. Murray (2014) cautioned that data use in schools can be overly focused on accountability regarding academic achievement, recommending schools also consider data surrounding demographics and the perceptions of the school community. There was some evidence that school leaders were acting in line with these recommendations, perhaps indicative of an expansion in the breadth of data use since the time of writing. However, as with other sources of information, school leaders in previous literature have indicated that the quantity of data available can be unmanageable (Murray, 2014) linking with the requirement of school leaders to balance information discussed within Theme 3. Wang (2019) suggested that while it is important school leaders consider data, education is primarily concerned with people, suggested to be more complex than any data system could capture. Wang highlighted that the data available to school leaders can often be incomplete and ambiguous concluding that such data should be held lightly.

When evaluating information, school leaders in the present research also considered its match with the school community and its needs. For example, one school leader explained that while they considered the findings of formal research, their actions were also determined by consultation with the school community. The importance of considering the views of the school community was explored in Subtheme 2B (Perceptions of Support). Such an approach links to models of evidence-based practice. Sackett et al. (1996) highlighted the importance of combining practitioner expertise with research evidence. Additionally, the values, beliefs and context of

those affected by decision-making have formed part of evidence-based practice models (Spring, 2007). Existing literature around evidence-based practice in schools has often focused on the application of research (Williams & Coles, 2007; Sheard & Sharples, 2016; Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020) as opposed to integration with practical knowledge, experience or perceptions. Despite this, the current research provides some evidence that school staff are looking both to research-evidence and beyond when informing their approaches.

5.23. *The influence of values*

When explaining their decision making, school leaders also appeared to draw upon their school or personal values or beliefs. Some school leaders spoke of a firm decision not to use certain approaches employed in other settings, due to a mismatch of values. Others explained how their values had driven their selection of current approaches and underpinned their ways of working. In attempting to meet a range of purposes, school leaders in the current research were involved in a process of balancing information and values. Potter and Chitpin (2021) emphasised the complexity of interpreting school data, suggesting this process may not encourage consideration of values regarding social justice, which could lead to challenges in balancing the needs of students in terms of equality and equity. The challenge of balancing multiple purposes across students was highlighted within the current analysis however, at times, school staff felt unable to implement the actions they believed to be morally right due to other constraints or barriers. Nevertheless, prior research has indicated that courageous, values-led school leadership has the potential to promote inclusive and sustainable practice, even where not aligned with external demands (Higham & Booth, 2018).

5.24. *Constructions of behaviour*

Throughout the interviews, school leaders conceptualised PDB in several ways. Many of the school leaders linked PDB to SEND needs, either comprising part of a young person's SEND, or as a communication of an unmet SEND need. An example of this was where unmet cognition and learning needs were suggested to cause difficulty in accessing classroom learning and as such trigger disruptive behaviours. However, some school leaders also perceived a necessity in separating SEND needs from behaviours that were seen to represent choice. There was a perceived

complexity to this as school leaders felt that individual students could behave disruptively for multiple reasons and there was inconsistency in constructions throughout individual interviews.

It is possible that the construction of SEND as separate to behaviour by school leaders has been influenced by the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). Within this guidance, it is stated that PDB does 'not necessarily mean that a child or young person has SEN' (p. 96), recommending early assessment to determine possible causal factors. Further to this, guidance regarding the relationship between mental health and behaviour (DfE, 2018) encouraged schools to avoid the use of exclusion where underlying causes, such as SEND or mental health difficulties, have not been addressed. Some previous research has indicated concerns about dividing SEND and behaviour suggesting it may lead to separation of SEND and pastoral processes within schools resulting in poorer communication and understanding (Cole et al., 2019; Hulme et al., 2023). The complexity and interconnectivity of students' needs has been suggested to illuminate the necessity for holistic approaches which may be hindered by such conceptual divisions (Tucker, 2013; Trotman et al., 2015). Hatton (2013) found that staff in lower excluding schools were more likely to understand behaviour as a form of SEND.

In the current research, where school leaders emphasised separating needs from choice, this appeared to be to differentiate responses. In answering the research question relating to how approaches are informed, the way in which school staff construct behaviour is therefore relevant. Where leaders viewed behaviour as a communication or need, they tended to speak of additional support a young person needed whereas a choice was linked to disciplinary measures including exclusion. If the way in which school staff perceive behaviour affects their response, then one approach to reducing exclusions might be through addressing the constructions of behaviour held by staff.

Since behaviours occur within a social context, to be labelled as disruptive, behaviour requires the interpretation of another social actor, typically a staff member, with the potential for bias (Lanas & Brunila, 2019). Millei and Peterson (2015) suggested that behavioural discourses rooted in the concepts of rational choice position the teacher's role as being to control and manage whereas discourses of

duration and meaning signify an enduring problem. Either way, Millei and Peterson suggested that both discourses positioned the problem within the child, and therefore suggested applying a perspective in which behaviour is not seen to be separate from learning but as learning. Through this approach, it was suggested that teachers become less inclined to judge, and more likely to analyse behaviour as a process of exploration. Hulme et al. (2023) indicated that where school leaders viewed disruptive behaviours in terms of unmet needs, they were disposed towards considering the inclusivity of whole-school systems, as opposed to targeting individual behavioural support.

Within the Timpson Review of School Exclusion (Timpson, 2019), debates about the cause of behaviour, for example as communication of needs or a choice, were described as 'deeply polarised' suggesting the 'truth' to be 'as ever more complex' (p.7). It was recommended that high expectations and robust behaviour management systems, alongside more individualised approaches, were necessary. This was an idea echoed amongst the responses of many school leaders in the present research, who recognised the multitude of factors which may be influencing PDB, but at times struggled to determine and separate these as easily as might be inferred from the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015). Similar to the present study, Stanforth and Rose (2020) suggested teachers held complex and at times apparently competing constructions of behaviour, oscillating between individualised and contextualised explanations. The authors suggested that despite this, the teachers tended to continue to promote exclusionary discipline approaches.

Where behaviour was understood as choice, some school leaders in the present research appeared to express greater confidence utilising disciplinary responses. One might therefore question whether treating all PDB as communication could have the effect of reducing exclusions. Scottish government exclusion policies have been found to emphasise behaviour as communication with a focus on prevention and intervention as opposed to English equivalents which positioned behaviour towards the individual child, with limited recognition of the influence of school-based factors (Tawell & McCluskey, 2022). Mills and Thomson (2022) similarly concluded that English policy lacked sufficient focus on how a school's actions might produce exclusion. Tawell & McCluskey (2022) posited that English policy may not facilitate

teachers to self-reflect on the impact of their own practice, potentially contributing to higher exclusion rates.

5.25. Summary

School leaders reported drawing on multiple sources of information and the process of determining approaches was complex. School leaders drew on accessible and available information, both in formal literature as well as professional knowledge within and beyond the school. Information was contextualised in school level data and perceptions. Beyond empirical information, approaches were also informed by school and personal values and constructions of behaviour.

5.3. Facilitators and Barriers: Findings in relation to the second research question.

The following section will discuss the findings in relation to Research Question Two: *What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?* This section will be divided into two parts, first exploring facilitators and then considering potential barriers. The key findings will be summarised and related to existing literature.

5.31. Facilitators

5.311. Knowing the school community

To facilitate effective support, several school leaders emphasised the importance of knowing their school community. Understanding a student's background, home situation and needs was suggested to influence how school staff responded to behaviour. Knowing students was proposed to allow school staff to respond to disruptive behaviours in a way which prevented escalation and avoided persistence. Knowing students and families was also presented to demonstrate investment and care to students and facilitate more positive relationships.

LA officers in Cole et al's (2019) research described that inclusive schools which effectively reduced exclusions were those who showed 'deep understanding and empathy' (p.378). This idea was echoed within the present research with school leaders seeking to understand the experiences of young people and recognise their

potential impact. A literature review (Quin, 2017) found that positive teacher-student relationships were associated with reduced disruptive behaviour and suspension, and increased engagement. Dean and Gibbs (2023) suggested that higher quality relationships may be related to increased collective efficacy (belief in shared ability to effectively support behaviour) which had the potential to reduce the perceived demand of addressing disruptive behaviour or change perceptions of student behaviour itself, hypothesised to help drive a reduction in exclusions.

The school leaders in the current research spoke broadly on the topic of including parents in discussions to help understand and meet the needs of students and reduce risks of PDB and subsequent exclusions. This contrasted with the findings of Martin-Denham (2021), where it was reported that none of the 10 secondary school headteachers interviewed mentioned parental engagement as an effective approach to prevent exclusions. Within the present research, all participants referred to working with families in some capacity. Several spoke specifically on the importance they had placed on engaging with families for example in hearing their views and explaining school approaches to support students at risk of exclusion. The significance of parental involvement is not clear-cut, with Hatton (2013) indicating that lower excluding schools placed less emphasis on the views of parents. These disparities may relate to the multiple ways in which parents can be engaged and involved, and perhaps more generalised statements, such as 'involving parents', are not specific enough to identify what is particularly effective (Goodall, 2013). Connecting to the current research question, the involvement of parents related to sharing information with school staff to better understand a student's needs or experiences, to adapt practice and support.

Stanforth and Rose (2020) suggested that where staff could contextualise a young person's behaviours, through understanding their background, this led to increased propensity to adapt practice and avoid exclusionary approaches. However, some research has suggested that knowing a student's background is not always sufficient in changing responses from school staff. For example, Hatton (2013) found that staff in lower excluding schools were less likely to view external factors, such as home context, as predetermining behaviour. These staff indicated a higher level of perceived agency in addressing disruptive behaviours and bringing about change. This might suggest therefore that while knowing students well is an important part of

managing disruptive behaviour, the effectiveness of such an approach may also be determined by other factors for example surrounding teachers' perceptions of agency.

5.312. Promoting investment

Knowing the school community also allowed approaches to be tailored to the perceptions and motivations of those involved. Support approaches which students perceived as meaningful and beneficial were described by school leaders as being successful in influencing behaviour.

The relationship between students' motivations, educational experiences and outcomes has been well documented (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998; Collie & Martin, 2019). A lack of curricular interest or motivation has also been linked to increased disruptive behaviour within associated lessons (Granero-Gallegos et al., 2019). It is perhaps worth noting that motivation is a complex construct which does not exist on a single continuum; instead, it is multifaceted, situational and interlinked with other factors (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). However, when students perceive they have been listened to, their affective engagement (linked to interest and enjoyment) and acceptance, participation and understanding for approaches may be increased (Conner et al., 2022; Mitra, 2018). Increased voice and agency for students has been suggested to support behaviour and engagement (Tucker, 2013; Trotman et al., 2015).

The framing of approaches for parents was also discussed by some school leaders who emphasised the importance of explaining approaches and ensuring parents felt their child's needs were effectively understood and met. Government guidance on behaviour (DfE, 2022c) emphasised the role of schools in engaging with and encouraging the involvement of parents in behaviour policies and practice. Specifically, the advice indicated that school leaders should 'routinely' engage with parents around 'maintaining the behaviour culture' of the school (DfE, 2022c, p.11). Exclusion and suspension guidance (DfE, 2022a) also specifically highlights the need for regular reviews with parents following reintegration after suspension.

In the present research, several school leaders also described how variation in staff perceptions around the relevance of support approaches affected their implementation. This was discussed particularly in relation to whole-school or less

punitive approaches to behaviour management. Where there was a perceived mismatch between the perceptions of staff and school approaches, buy-in and fidelity were lower. This presented a challenge for school leaders in not only selecting effective approaches, but also ensuring that implementation was consistent enough for success. Some school leaders identified that the perceived capacity of staff had the potential to affect levels of buy-in; if staff felt already overwhelmed, introducing a new approach may not lead to the desired level of buy-in.

Previous research has outlined how a lack of consensus, collaboration and management can hamper the effective implementation of whole-school approaches (Ingemarson et al., 2014). Resistance to systemic change can result from staff perceptions around the value, necessity, and efficacy of an approach (Tucker, 2013; Feuerborn et al., 2015). To promote buy-in, Gutierrez (2022) emphasised the need firstly for incorporating teachers' views in decision-making processes. Secondly, it was recommended that school leaders consider the impact of implementation on staff carefully and explain their rationale. Providing rationale was also discussed by some of the school leaders within the current research with one suggesting that this helped teachers to invest in an approach, even when they felt close to capacity.

The level of buy-in from staff may be related partially to trust. Previous research has identified that where teachers trusted their school and its leadership, they demonstrated greater levels of engagement at work including in relation to enthusiasm, resilience, dedication and focus; engagement with and application of professional development and training; and motivation and commitment to implementing strategies (Leithwood et al., 2008; Brücknerová & Novotný, 2017; Gülbahar, 2017).

However, Lee and Min (2017) suggested that even with high levels of teacher buy-in, positive effects may not occur early in a new approach. In fact, negative impacts may occur initially and be most significant for teachers who exhibit high investment and as such make several changes in a short period of time. This perhaps emphasises the importance of considering implementation research when planning new approaches (Chidley & Stringer, 2020). Literature from this field has discussed the long-term nature of sustained change (Kotter, 1995) recommending at least two to four years to fully embed systemic developments (Blase et al., 2012).

5.32. Barriers

While participants offered suggestions around approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions, at times they also discussed barriers to implementation. Three key barriers (curricular demands, staffing and funding) will be discussed in this section.

5.321. Curriculum

Providing the appropriate curriculum for students, to support engagement and reduce the risk of exclusion, was mentioned frequently throughout the interviews, with participants looking to personalise timetables and extend vocational options. However, providing this more flexible curriculum was identified by school leaders to have a negative impact upon school accountability measures. This challenge was also recognised in Cole et al.'s (2019) research indicating concerns around perceived conflicts between the rigour of the academic curriculum and the more flexible tone of SEND and SEMH policies. Cole et al. (2019) argued that subjects likely to engage students at risk of exclusion more effectively are typically those which do not contribute significantly to Progress 8. However, while Cole et al. (2019) suggested this measure would lead to curricular narrowing and potential increase in disruptive behaviours, the findings of the current research do not fully support this assertion. Despite knowing that wider curricular offers would affect their progress scores, some school leaders still advocated for their implementation. For these school leaders, their values around inclusion appeared to outweigh the pressure of accountability perhaps providing some hope to Cole et al.'s (2019) findings. However, these tensions were present within the school leaders' accounts with some indicating difficulties implementing the full breadth of curriculum they would like whilst also balancing accountability, staffing and financial pressures. This echoed concerns raised by Hulme et al. (2023) around the potential incompatibility of demands placed upon schools.

5.322. Funding and Staffing

Staffing challenges were frequently referred to within the interviews. At times, school leaders felt they were not able to fulfil the breadth of staffing roles they would like across the school, with some explaining how this limited the provision they could offer. For example, some felt they would like more pastoral staff but needed to balance this against the requirement for teachers and teaching assistants.

Employing staff naturally requires funding which was frequently mentioned as a concern. The challenge of recruiting appropriately skilled staff into the right roles and retaining staff was also mentioned. Some school leaders identified that staffing cuts had led to increased responsibility for certain members of staff and less time to devote to parts of their role which might support those at risk of exclusion.

The impact of funding concerns was described by participants both within their own schools and wider public services. School leaders described the challenge of balancing the needs of the whole-school community and meeting a range of demands whilst also balancing the books. The participants in the current research shared concerns around levels of funding and their subsequent ability to implement support for students at risk of exclusion. Similar worries were raised in a 2022 survey of 630 headteachers which found that only 2% of headteachers did not expect to make cuts in the following academic year due to financial pressures; around two thirds planned to reduce their number of support staff, with some specifically mentioning counselling and mental health provision, and around 50% were looking to reduce teaching staffing (Bettsworth, 2022a). In addition, a similar survey of 766 headteachers suggested 95% experienced difficulties recruiting teachers and 92% difficulties recruiting support staff (Bettsworth, 2022b).

Given the reliance of many of the potential approaches to reducing exclusions shared within the interviews as well as existing literature upon appropriate staffing, the concerns expressed by school leaders are perhaps understandable. From delivering additional interventions, to ensuring sufficient pastoral support, approaches rely on the capacity of the staff body within the school both within teaching and support staff (Ofsted, 2019b). With proposed increases in funding for 2024/25 still looking to represent a real terms cut of 3% since 2010 - equivalent to around £200 per secondary student (Andrews, 2022) - this looks unlikely to be a temporary issue (Sibieta, 2022). While school staff may have in mind clear values and well-informed approaches, delivering these well without sufficient funding and capacity may be challenging. However, Hatton (2013) found that staff in low excluding schools were less likely to view funding as a solution to reducing exclusions and more likely to believe they possessed the required knowledge and resources within school. Conversely, Hulme et al. (2023) found that concerns around

future funding led school leaders to question the sustainability of current inclusive approaches.

School leaders did not identify funding directly as a factor in their own decision-making around implementing exclusions, although some did suggest potential variation in motivations within other schools around off-rolling or zero-tolerance approaches. Previous research has identified some concerns about the financial motivations around exclusion practices: LA officers suggested it may be more financially beneficial to schools to exclude a child with SEMH needs than to implement the required provision to meet their needs (Thompson et al., 2021). School leaders in the present research did at times raise concerns about the impact of funding and staffing upon the level of support they were providing for students. Previous literature has warned of the potential influence of financial factors on the inclusion of students with behavioural or SEMH needs (Ofsted, 2019b; Thompson et al, 2021). Around 60% of headteachers reported deterioration in student behaviour related to financial pressures (Ofsted, 2019b).

5.33. Summary

School staff spoke of multiple facilitators and barriers to approaches to reduce or prevent exclusion, the most pertinent of which have been discussed. In terms of facilitators, school leaders identified the impact of knowing students and ensuring investment in approaches across the school community. Key barriers included curricula, funding and staffing challenges.

5.4. Supporting schools: Findings in relation to the third research question

The following section will discuss the key findings linking to Research Question Three: *What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/ preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?* This section will consider the accessibility, availability, and timing of external support. In addition, the role of the EP in relation to understanding needs will briefly be discussed alongside potential changes in ways of working within schools.

5.41. Improved accessibility and availability of external support

School leaders generally spoke positively of the support provided by external professionals such as EPs, the police, charities and social workers. However,

several participants also identified that the accessibility of this support had either reduced over time or was not available at a level they felt was needed. School leaders were therefore left to make choices around which children received support. Several school leaders reported that they would like more EP hours but that this was not possible either due to capacity within the local area or prohibitive financial costs. Alongside challenges in accessing time from outside professionals, some school leaders also highlighted that processes for requesting support were at times lengthy, unclear or overly bureaucratic. While school leaders were prepared to invest this time, this was potentially frustrating when applications were met with a decision that a child did not meet a threshold or could not receive the desired support due to capacity issues or long waiting times.

In 2019, EP vacancies were reported to be rising with less than a third of services operating at full staffing capacity (Lyonette et al., 2019). EP services continue to report recruitment and retention challenges leading to difficulties fulfilling workloads and meeting timescales (Atfield et al., 2023). Access to EP services, particularly in the context of traded models of service delivery, has been raised as an ethical concern (Lee & Woods, 2017). Where schools cannot commission sufficient hours to meet the needs of their students, there is a risk of inequity. In recent years, closer attention has been paid within EP services to considering equitable service delivery, including, monitoring who is accessing their services, and challenging school priorities where needed (Kuria, 2022). Given the over representation of certain groups within exclusion figures, for instance according to race, socio-economic status and SEND (Graham et al., 2019), this is perhaps a risk factor worth considering.

Rurality was also perceived by some school leaders to impact their access to support. This tended to relate not to LA professionals but instead provisions such as external AP and PRUs, or opportunities to collaborate with other settings. Penuel et al. (2009) discussed how the social networks within schools affected how information was shared and changes implemented. Where social capital was higher, for example where staff perceived access to resources and expertise positively and where leaders facilitated communication and sharing through networks of staff, change was more likely. A similar understanding might be employed across schools with the contextual setting (for example in terms of location, size, academy chain or key staff)

affecting capacity for change. Chitpin (2021) suggested that networking between school leaders can be valuable, not necessarily due to the solutions provided, but instead, because it reduces isolation in problem-solving processes. This perhaps links to the sense of loneliness expressed by some school leaders within the research. I wonder therefore whether LAs might consider the way in which they could support schools to share ideas and resources effectively but also to assess whether there are certain schools who currently exhibit a lower social capital, who might need more targeted support. However, some research has suggested that the individualised accountability model within English educational systems may not incentivise schools to collaborate but instead promote introspection and competition (Armstrong et al., 2021; Hulme et al., 2023). In addition, schools may need to be matched based on their strengths and weaknesses to allow collaboration to provide 'mutual challenge and critical friendship' (Armstrong et al., 2021, p. 343).

5.42. Quicker support and early intervention

Several of the school leaders perceived an importance to early intervention. Some identified gaps in services at this level suggesting that professionals sometimes became involved once students were presenting with more complex needs when it was perhaps more challenging to have an impact. Some school leaders also perceived that external support was not always accessible in a timely enough way to match the child's need.

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of proficiency state that EPs should 'adopt a proactive and preventative approach' to 'promote the psychological wellbeing of service users' (HCPC, 2022, p.16). Staffing issues in EP services in recent years have been identified to lead to proportionally greater high needs, statutory workloads for individual EPs and as such reduced capacity for earlier intervention (Lyonette et al., 2019; Atfield et al., 2023). Capacity issues may also have been further exacerbated by rising rates of initial requests for statutory assessment¹¹, up 23% between 2020 and 2021 (DfE, 2022d). Similar capacity concerns have been raised in children's mental health services with concerns around long waiting times and limited access to services potentially leading to escalation in needs (Care Quality Commission, 2022). Although there has been some recent

¹¹ Assessment of Education, Health and Care needs as part of the EHCP process.

workforce growth (NHS, 2022), accompanying high levels of demand (NHS Benchmarking Network, 2023) may mean services have continued to be perceived as difficult to access. Early intervention in response to childhood disruptive behaviours has been suggested to positively impact upon adult mental health and criminal justice involvement (Dodge et al., 2015). An increased focus upon preventative and early intervention work to reduce the use of suspension was a key recommendation of Noltemeyer et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis exploring research into the use of suspensions and student outcomes. Hailes et al. (2021) suggested that preventative work is also an essential factor in ethical working practices for psychologists with regards to social justice. The authors argued that a proactive focus could reduce later and more significant issues likely to affect oppressed or marginalised groups.

5.43. Support to clarify needs and tailor provision

Linking back to the importance placed upon understanding student needs, school leaders often described the role of the EP as helping to increase this understanding. School leaders perceived that the observations or assessments carried out by EPs allowed them to begin to 'unpick' what might be going on for a child to ensure they had the right support in place. Some school leaders provided examples of how implementing this support and increasing their understanding had allowed them to reduce exclusions. However, some school leaders also mentioned that the advice from EPs did not always provide new information or was difficult to integrate into their current systems.

Ramsay et al. (2018) identified that school staff typically had greater confidence in assessing academic needs which may affect behaviour but required the expertise of external professionals for identifying broader needs, such as in relation to speech and language. The authors recommended a role for EPs both in supporting school staff to develop their skills in assessment and consider broader factors beyond academic education, as well as supporting multi-disciplinary assessment alongside other professionals. Hulme et al. (2023) identified cultures focused on assessment and support in response to emerging behaviour needs as promoting inclusion. Middleton and Kay (2020) highlighted the importance of partnership working with external professionals when supporting children at risk of exclusion. The authors

suggested this approach allows a more holistic assessment of needs and can lead to reframing of problems. Reframing may influence constructions of behaviour as discussed previously. Ramsay et al (2018) identified concerns with teachers' focus on behaviourist responses to disruptive behaviour where this was potentially rooted in a specific need. Middleton and Kay (2019) recommended that behaviour should be considered as communication to support intervention and reduce the risk of exclusion.

5.44. Support to develop and broaden within school provision

Perceiving reduced capacity in public services, some of the school leaders described a sense of loneliness, feeling responsibility for meeting the complex needs of students showing PDB without the support they believed necessary. There was a sense from some school leaders that the responsibility for managing social issues that went beyond the school's role was increasingly falling on their shoulders. However, some also expressed frustration at not having the right support or funding to manage this. Several of the school leaders described how they were continually looking to extend their school's provision to meet these needs such as through increasing their curricular offer or creating onsite APs where support was perhaps less readily available within the LA. However, this still presented challenges in terms of funding and capacity as well as staff's perceived competence to fulfil a wider range of roles.

The issues of loneliness in relation to headteachers has been identified in previous literature, particularly for those new to the role (Earley & Bubb, 2013). However, the loneliness expressed by the participants seemed to me to relate less to their individual role and more to a sense of having been left increasingly alone as a school community in managing needs, with shrinking external supports. The Timpson Review (Timpson, 2019) was clear in recommending 'It is not the job of schools alone to help children overcome the wider challenges they may face in their lives' (p. 10). The review indicated that schools should however help determine approaches to support due to knowing the students in their settings. Nevertheless, for some participants, this was a role they perceived they were being asked to fulfil. School leaders in the current research discussed attempting to broaden their in-house provision, such as through developing their own AP and support hubs, a trend which

has also been identified in previous research at times with support from external services (Tucker, 2013; Hulme et al., 2023). The growing sense of responsibility, exacerbated by reductions in LA support, was echoed by headteachers in an Ofsted report (2019b) exploring school responses to financial pressures. However, as discussed previously, it is not just LA services but also school budgets which have decreased. Some of the school leaders therefore felt as though they became responsible for filling the gaps but without sufficient resources. School leaders in Hulme et al.'s (2023) research shared these concerns surrounding sustainability of increased provision. However, where other services could adapt their timescales and thresholds to manage their workloads, school staff were perhaps not able to do this in the same way due to their daily contact with students. I wonder whether school leaders felt at times no other option but to use exclusion in a similar way to communicate their threshold for offering support.

5.45. Summary

With regards to support for schools, the need for more timely, frequent and early support from external professionals has been discussed. The role of EPs in terms of supporting schools to identify needs has also been considered, alongside some discussion around how school might look to expand their provision.

5.5. Theoretical framings

The following section will position the findings discussed throughout this chapter in relation to two key theoretical positions.

- Personal Construct Psychology
- Ecological Systems Theory

5.51. Personal construct psychology

PCP suggests that the way we interpret and interact with our environments is determined by our personal constructs (Fransella, 2015). The key postulate of PCP is that 'a person's processes are psychologically channelised in the ways in which he anticipates events' (Kelly, 2005, p.7). Kelly (2005, p.10) describes personal constructs as 'reference axes, upon which one may project events in an effort to make some sense out of what is going on'. These axes are individually constructed and seen as resulting from the individual not their environment (Kelly, 2005). At the

end of each axis are two labels which the individual construes as contrasting, and which enable differentiation of events. Kelly provided the example of a basic construct which might exist within an individual between good and bad (Kelly, 2017). To provide an example related to the focus of this research, in contrast to the label disruptive, different individuals within the school system might position the label compliant, well-behaved, polite or boring. The anticipation of events would therefore differ for each of these individuals based on the structure of this construct. Constructs are individually construed at a subconscious level and used to make predictions about our own and others' behaviour and help us to gain an understanding and sense of control of our world (Bannister & Fransella, 1971; Fransella 2015). These constructs do not exist in an objective reality but rather interlink in a hierarchical structure to create our own personal interpretative lens (Fransella, 2015).

The theory was initially utilised in relation to psychotherapy where it was proposed that to support change, the individual needed to be able to assimilate goals into their system of constructs (Kelly, 1980) however this theory also has relevance within the education system. Where a proposed change does not align with an individual's personal constructs, it is less likely to be well implemented and successful (Beaver, 2011). This has applications for all individuals within the school community. Where goals and actions are defined by school staff but do not make sense within a young person's construct framework, high levels of motivation or engagement are unlikely. Similarly, where school staff do not construe an intervention to be effective or valuable within their construct system, implementation will be affected. The variation in buy-in described around levels of support may therefore be tied to the personal construct frameworks of individuals within the education system. Within the current study, some school leaders discussed the importance of helping staff to understand the meaning or value of actions within the context of their construct system. This could help to frame some of the challenges presented by school leaders in reducing school exclusions. The personal constructs of school staff associated with their constructions of student behaviour also had the potential to influence their own predictions and behaviours. Some school staff specifically spoke of the need to separate behaviour determined by choice and need with each eliciting separate sets of responses.

Constructs are not fixed but instead are constantly evolving as new information is interpreted within the framework. Kelly describes a creativity cycle in which constructs are tested through loosening and tightening: opening constructs to questioning and exploration before reattributing meanings and borders (Kelly, 1980; Džinović, 2015). The process of reconstruing presents an opportunity for change. Olson (1984) suggested that to change their practice, teachers needed to engage in a process of examining and re-evaluating their own core beliefs. By making personal constructs more explicit, staff were then encouraged to reflect and respond. However, this process was recognised by Olson (1984) to be potentially confronting perhaps indicating a key role for school leaders in facilitating supportive, safe and non-judgmental spaces for such exploration. In discussing Kelly's theory, Pope and Denicolo (2015, p.319) wrote 'If we are courageous in experimenting with alternative conceptions to shape our futures, we need not be victims of our biographies,' highlighting the potential power of understanding the impact of personal constructs. However, to do this may require staff to not only explore and challenge their own constructs, but also to translate the student's personal constructs to plan actions; through the process of making construing more explicit, individuals are able to interact with contexts to test and potentially adapt their constructs (Fromm, 2015). Hardman (2001) explored how PCP might be applied to reduce the risk of exclusion in a case study example concluding PCP could facilitate greater understanding of the meaning of behaviours, pertinent for planning support.

When planning approaches, school leaders therefore may benefit from considering the constructs of both the staff involved in implementation and students in participation (Fromm, 2015; Pope & Denicolo, 2015). School leaders may need to consider how to empower their staff, to help them explore their own constructs, and reflect upon these, in relation to students and approaches to facilitate change. This may involve providing experiences which allow for testing of personal constructs and subsequent reconstruing (Džinović, 2015; Pope & Denicolo, 2015).

5.52. An ecological approach

Although exclusion could be conceptualised as a direct result of an individual's PDB, the factors affecting the use of suspension and exclusion extend far beyond the individual. As has been illustrated through the findings discussed throughout this

chapter, reducing or preventing exclusions is complex and involves interactions between a range of individuals, settings and systems. For this reason, an ecological framework will be applied to the findings to consider the interplay of factors operating at a range of levels in relation to reducing or preventing exclusion. Before applying this framework, a brief overview of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach (1974) will be provided.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of development emphasises how research, policy and theory are often designed and conducted within artificial or narrow constraints and without appreciation for the complexity of the physical and social world, arguing this leads to a lack of ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). The ecological environment is conceptualised as a set of nested structures (as shown in Table 4).

Table 4: Overview of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

System	Description	Examples
<i>Microsystem</i>	Interactions between the person and their environment in immediate settings	Activities and relations at school (such as with school staff, peers or the classroom environment) or at home (such as with immediate family members and the home environment).
<i>Mesosystem</i>	Interactions between immediate settings such as through participation or communication.	Communication between parents and school staff. Transition from home to school. Communication between primary and secondary school settings.
<i>Exosystem</i>	Social structures which affect but do not include the individual.	Local authority exclusion or behaviour policies. Educational research. Health services.

<i>Macrosystem</i>	Overarching general cultural systems, both explicit and implicit, which are not specific to the individual's context.	Dominant constructions of pupil behaviour. National economic systems.
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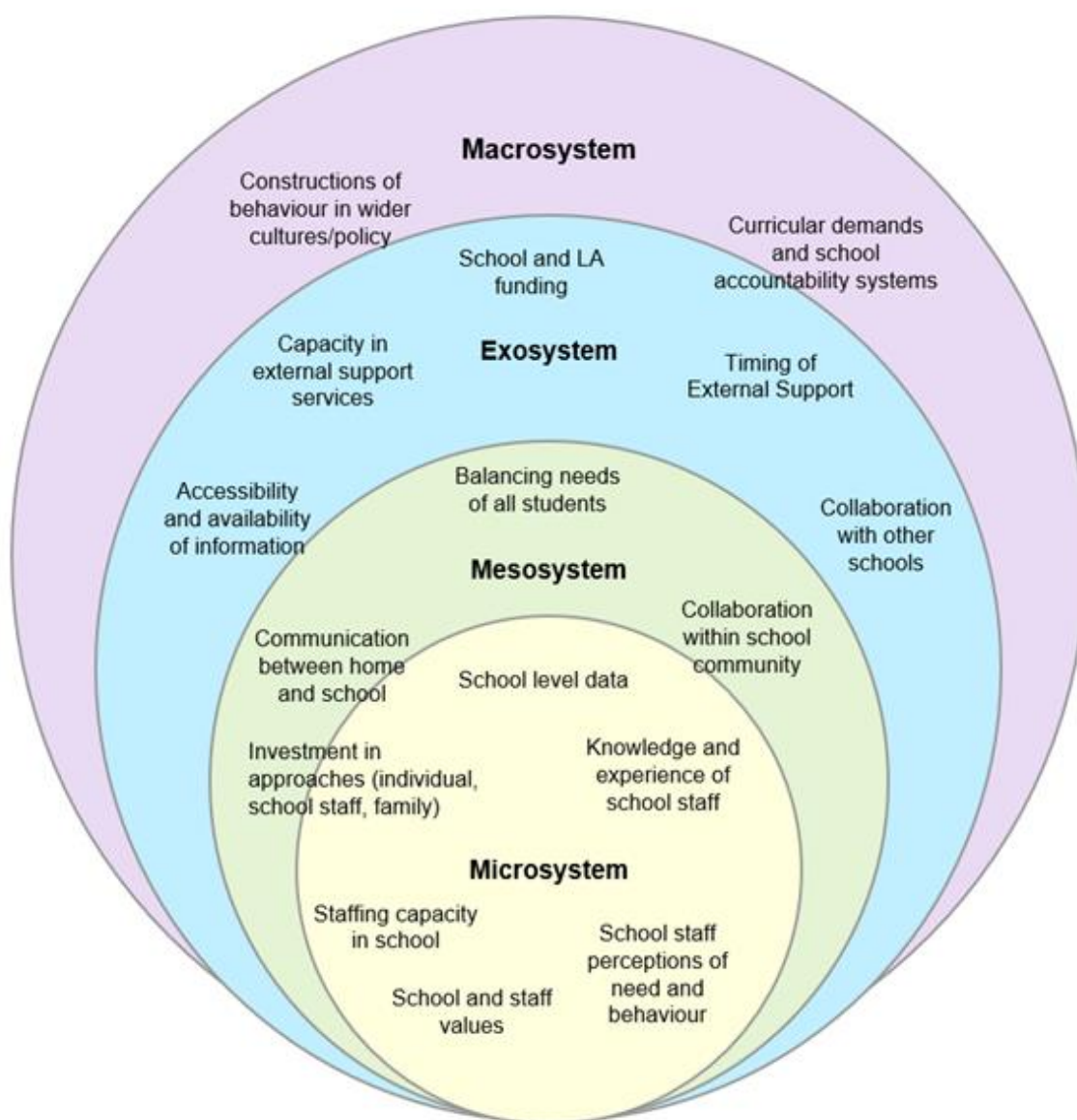
(Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979)

Each setting can be viewed along three dimensions: physical (spaces and objects), people (roles and responsibilities), and activities and their social meaning (both involving and external to the individual). Surrounding systems then limit and shape these settings on physical and institutional levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory developed over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2000), and assessment of its application to research has suggested that consideration of later conceptualisations which include the interactions between systems had the potential to lead to more useful recommendations (Eriksson et al., 2018) and will therefore be considered within the current research. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's focus on proximal processes (reciprocal interactions between the child and their immediate setting), argued to be a significant predictor of behaviour and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), will be considered in relation to the findings across the contextual levels of the model (Eriksson et al., 2018).

Ecological orientations consider not only interactions within settings but between them with the levels of the model linked through their nested structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1995). Although much of this discussion has considered the practices within schools, the influence of wider systemic factors has also been considered in relation to the success of approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions. The remainder of this section will briefly summarise some of the key findings of this research in relation to ecological systems theory. Figure 10 presents Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a model to unite findings from the four themes in relation to reducing and preventing exclusions.

Figure 10: Key findings in relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.



At the level of the microsystem, the perceptions of school staff could affect both their interactions with students and implementation of approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions. This related to understanding of students' needs, constructions around behaviour, and values and perceptions in relation to specific approaches. While these factors have been presented within the microsystem due to their operation within one of the child's direct settings, the development of these perceptions was likely influenced by factors within wider systems. At the level of the mesosystem, school leaders discussed how information shared between home and school settings could affect understanding of a child's behaviour. Assessment of a

young person's wider needs (at times influenced by the input of external services such as EPs) may also have affected perceptions and approaches. The construction of student behaviour across the macrosystem and exosystem within educational and wider cultures, including key policies and the school or broader community may affect the way in which school staff understand and therefore respond to disruptive behaviour.

At the microsystem, knowledge and experience of school staff influenced upon the development of approaches to reduce and prevent exclusions. This related to previous experiences and the way which these influenced values and practices. However again, wider factors had the potential to influence upon the knowledge of school staff. At the level of the exosystem, this included the availability and accessibility of information both in terms of written literature but also information and support from LA services and projects. However, the integration of this information was then affected by contextual factors within the micro and mesosystems for example regarding the perceptions within the school community and school data. The responsibilities and workload of school staff also influenced upon their capacity for engaging with new information which arguably links to structural and funding factors across the exo and macrosystems. Practical factors within the microsystem, such as staffing capacity and curriculum offers were also linked to national factors in relation to government policies and systems.

In understanding how exclusions might be reduced or prevented, reflections on factors and interactions across the child's ecology may scaffold targeting support effectively. Bronfenbrenner (1974, 1977) emphasised that ecological variables are not pre-determined but modifiable factors with the potential to impact upon the development of the individual. This provides opportunity for change if these factors can be understood and considered in planning around exclusions.

5.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed key findings in relation to the research questions and positioned them within previous literature and theory to begin to explore their implications. The research has been contextualised through the application of PCP and ecological approaches. The following chapter will discuss the key conclusions as

well as exploring considerations for professionals, alongside reflecting upon the quality of the research as a whole.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will consider the main conclusions of the current research. I will begin by briefly recapping key findings in relation to the three research questions. I will then discuss some considerations for professionals. Finally, I will evaluate the research in relation to its strengths, weaknesses and rigour before considering future implications. I will provide a brief reflection on the research process before offering concluding comments.

6.2. Summary of findings according to research questions

What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?

- School leaders described using a range of sources to inform their approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions for PDB. These included formal academic research, books, social media, LA or government publications, training delivered by external providers, specific projects, conversations with colleagues in other schools, previous experiences and school level data. The accessibility and availability of information was suggested to affect its use. School leaders emphasised engaging with available projects and drawing on synthesised forms of research alongside their own data. However, when rationalising their approaches, school leaders also spoke of their own beliefs and school values as key drivers for their decision-making around approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions.
- The way in which disruptive behaviour was perceived could also inform the types of approaches utilised by school staff. Behaviour was constructed as a communication, need or choice at different points within the conversations with the school leaders and this had the potential to affect their response. Where behaviours were perceived to be related to a need, approaches tended towards support whereas disciplinary measures were more likely to be discussed when behaviour was perceived to be a choice or not related to a particular need.

What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?

The key facilitators to approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions identified through the analysis included knowing the school community well and understanding their needs as well as ensuring good levels of investment in approaches.

- Knowing students was suggested by school leaders to support reduction in suspensions and exclusions. Where school staff knew students well, they were able to tailor their practice including adapting their responses to avoid escalation of potentially disruptive behaviour. Devoting efforts to knowing students holistically, was also suggested to demonstrate care and investment to students and their families, which supported more positive working relationships.
- The level of investment or 'buy-in' for a particular approach was perceived to have the potential to facilitate or impede successful implementation. This operated across the school community for students, parents and staff. Where approaches were not perceived to be relevant, useful or worthwhile, students were suggested to be less likely to engage, parents less likely to support and staff less likely to consistently implement. Providing clear explanation for the reasoning behind an approach and highlighting and personalising potential benefits was suggested by some school leaders to increase potential for buy-in.

The key barriers to approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions identified through the analysis entailed balancing multiple demands across the school community including relating to curricula, staffing and finances.

- School leaders were identified to be balancing multiple demands both for students at risk of exclusion and within the wider school community. This included ensuring that approaches designed to support one group did not adversely impact upon another, managing a limited staffing capacity and consideration of curricular, financial and accountability demands. Balancing these demands simultaneously meant that, at times, although school leaders might have held an ideal around what would best support a

young person at risk of exclusion, this was not always practically possible to implement.

What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/ preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?

- School leaders generally valued additional support from external professionals. However, at present this support was not perceived to be accessible enough, with school leaders suggesting that improved efficiency of processes for accessing support would be helpful. In addition, school leaders suggested that they were not able to access sufficient time from external professionals, such as EPs, to adequately meet the needs of their students, either due to financial or capacity barriers or high thresholds, but several felt that these services needed a higher presence within their school. School leaders described a sense of increased pressure and responsibility being placed upon schools due to reductions in levels of external support.
- Several school leaders identified the importance of early intervention in support but felt that this was lacking at times in terms of support from external services. Some school leaders described valuing support which helped them to specifically identify young people's needs so that these could be targeted effectively through their in-school provision to reduce or prevent disruptive behaviours.
- School staff were open to increasing their own, onsite provision in response to challenges with capacity in external services, with several already offering or looking to offer alternative forms of provision. However, school leaders also acknowledged that such approaches required investment in terms of additional funding and appropriately qualified staff.

6.3. Professional considerations

The following section will outline some potential considerations for a range of professionals based on the findings of this research. I have constructed these implications from findings of the current and previous research. Any recommendation would need to be sensitive to the specific individual and school context and as such, these implications represent some points for consideration as opposed to explicit

advice for implementation (Yardley, 2000). Appendix U provides an overview of findings and associated reflection questions to support readers.

6.31. Considerations for Researchers

A key implication for researchers relates to considerations around how research findings can be made available and accessible to school staff. School staff within the current research drew on easily synthesised forms of research and information readily available within their systems (such as through available trainings or projects, link professionals and previous experience and expertise within their own and other schools). Researchers might therefore give thought to both the presentation and dissemination of findings to ensure that they are effectively reaching and engaged with by school leaders. School leaders shared the multiple demands they were balancing, and researchers may need to remain aware of these, both when conducting and presenting research. Given that school leaders were also contextualising information in terms of the values and experiences of the school community, researchers might also consider how they can support school staff to evaluate information and determine its potential applications.

6.32. Considerations for School Leaders

Many of the implications for school leaders and staff relate back to the importance of knowing and understanding the community. For students this means investing in knowing them holistically and building cultures for positive relationships (Quin, 2017, Cole et al., 2019; Dean & Gibbs, 2023) as well assessing their needs comprehensively (Hulme et al., 2023) and being aware of their context (Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Information sharing with parents was interpreted as a key channel for building this understanding and therefore school leaders may give thought to how their systems and cultures facilitate openness and communication within and between school and home. Appropriate assessment of needs was identified within the interviews as helpful for responding to PDB. Previous research has identified that school staff tend to feel less confident in assessing students' needs beyond academic learning (Ramsay et al., 2018) and school leaders in the current research discussed this as a key role for external professionals. School leaders may therefore consider upskilling staff in a wider range of assessment forms, potentially through collaboration with external professionals, to support this understanding and ensure

effective application of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) particularly in the context of current capacity challenges for EPs (Lyonette et al., 2019). Where school staff understand students' needs and context, their constructions of behaviours may change and responses to disruptive behaviour may become more supportive (Millei & Peterson, 2015; Middleton and Kay, 2020, Stanforth & Rose, 2020; Hulme et al., 2023).

A key factor in the success of approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions was interpreted to be the level of buy-in across the school community but particularly from the staff implementing them. Within the interviews and previous research, including staff in discussions around the implementation of approaches has been suggested to facilitate buy-in. This includes rationalising approaches in terms of the evidence base, application for the school context and potential benefits (Gutierrez, 2022). Understanding of the perceptions and values of school staff may also help with implementation planning (Tucker, 2013; Feuerborn et al., 2015; Chidley & Stringer, 2020). Without buy-in from staff, approaches were suggested to be met with potential resistance and inconsistent application, highlighting the importance of school leaders reflecting upon how to work with staff and promote investment.

PCP (Kelly, 1980) may provide a helpful model for exploring the constructs of the school community and considering their impact including in relation to buy-in for approaches and response to behaviour. Kelly's repertory grid technique (Kelly, 1963) may provide a helpful structure for such reflection and has been usefully applied in educational contexts previously (for example Donaghue, 2003; Touw et al., 2015). However, to allow for such exploration and potential reconstruing, school leaders may need to create an environment in which staff feel safe and supported to openly reflect upon their personal constructs over time as well as maintaining awareness of their own constructs (Olson, 1984; Donaghue, 2003).

6.33. Considerations for EPs

When working with schools and families, EPs might remain attuned to how behaviours are constructed in language and actions and the potential impact of this. This might include awareness of the influence of their own constructions in communications but also noticing the constructions of others and potentially

supporting reframing. The skills applied within consultative approaches (Nolan & Moreland, 2014; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020) may be relevant for this.

Some school leaders identified a useful function of EP services as assessment to inform in-school support. Given current issues with capacity in EP services (Lyonette et al., 2019), reported gaps between desired and actual support, and the emphasis of school leaders on the importance of early intervention, there may be a role for EPs in building capacity for assessment in schools (Ramsay et al. 2018). This could allow school staff to more effectively identify and address students' needs and prioritise where EP support would be most beneficial. While this may not represent an ideal situation, and the expertise of EPs may still be needed for some children, this may be a pragmatic approach to supporting schools to manage students' needs within current systems.

School leaders in the present research described an increased sense of responsibility and reduced support from external services. Some school leaders described considering measures to extend their own provision, a pattern also recognised in previous literature (Tucker, 2013; Hulme et al., 2023). Since this provision marks a potential extension from the expertise of school staff, EPs might work with schools to consider how best to meet changing demands, drawing upon knowledge gained across a range of educational provisions. Through this process, EPs may help school staff to identify key evidence and evaluate information to ensure that approaches are well matched to the needs and values of the school community. However, while schools were open to extending their provision, they also acknowledged challenges with funding and staffing to deliver their current support. Any planning may need to hold practical implications in mind.

6.34. Considerations for LAs

School leaders identified challenges in accessing support including relating to capacity, timescales and processes. Some school leaders felt that processes were bureaucratic, time consuming, and that the best way to access support was not always clear. LAs might therefore work with schools to consider how to streamline and ensure clarity within processes so that these are not perceived as a barrier to support. School leaders also expressed concerns around the need for quicker support and earlier intervention. Given evidence and guidance for the importance of

early intervention, proactive and preventative working (Dodge et al., 2015; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; HCPC, 2022), LAs might work, in collaboration with professionals such as EPs, to consider how systems might better support early intervention across services.

Finally, some school leaders identified the importance of collaboration between schools in sharing information and resources. However, other school leaders acknowledged challenges to these approaches. LAs may be well placed to implement systems which support collaboration between schools (Chitpin, 2021) and to work with schools to identify gaps in knowledge and strategically plan projects and support. This may be particularly important given findings from literature which suggest that current systems do not incentivise inter-school collaboration (Armstrong et al., 2021; Hulme et al., 2023).

6.4. Strengths, limitations and future considerations

This research has explored how secondary school leaders informed their practices around reducing or preventing exclusions, the perceived facilitators and barriers to such approaches and potential supports. While previous research has considered the efficacy of individual approaches for reducing or preventing exclusions, research into what may support or hinder such approaches from the perspective of the school leaders implementing them has been limited. As such, the current research has provided some insights into some of the opportunities and challenges faced by school leaders in managing exclusions from school.

The research questions and purposes were built upon the assumption that schools would be aiming and acting to reduce their exclusions. However, in some schools this may not represent their reality. This may have led to limitations within the sample. For example, the school staff who participated may have represented schools with more established cultures and approaches around reducing exclusions. Additionally, participants were not evenly distributed between LAs. As such, thematic findings may be of greater relevance in the LA from which most participants were drawn.

Due to challenges with recruitment, the interviews took place over a period of around seven months creating potential strengths and limitations. Participants' views were collected at different points within the school year (spanning the summer, autumn

and spring terms) and covering four separate government education secretaries. This may have led to variation in the views presented based on specific contextual challenges relevant to school leaders at that time. The data collected represent the positions of schools at a particular point in time and the views of school leaders in response to current education systems and cultures may differ from those presented in research. However, that is a limitation applicable to most educational research and should not be reason to discount findings but instead a prompt to awareness of the broader context of findings.

This research has focused upon the voices of school leaders in considering some of the facilitators, barriers and needs around reducing or preventing exclusions. From this, general considerations have been provided for EPs supporting schools. To further develop these implications, future research might explore examples of effective support from EP services to schools in reducing or preventing exclusions such as through case studies or appreciative inquiry. Although some previous research has explored this area (Waite, 2014; Gould, 2018) this has been based on the work of a very small number of EPs and further research might update and expand upon these views, particularly in relation to secondary level education settings. I decided early in the research process not to focus upon the voices of young people within this research as this had been the focus of multiple doctoral dissertations (for example, Feingold, 2020; Thomson, 2020, Bovell, 2022; O'Lynn, 2022). While most qualified to speak on their experiences, young people perhaps would not have sufficient oversight of school systems relevant to achieving the aims of this research. However, from a personal perspective, I think it important to highlight that young people are arguably most affected by school exclusions, and research which elevates their voices should remain prominent. School leaders in the current research also frequently spoke around the perceived impact of the views and actions of individual school staff on the successful implementation of approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions. Further research might therefore explore these school staff perceptions directly.

This research has taken a small-scale qualitative approach, decided to be most appropriate for exploring the research questions. Alternative research designs utilising larger scale data collection methods, for example in analysing the features of schools which have successfully reduced exclusions, might complement the findings

through a triangulation approach (Boyle & Kelly, 2015). This research has been based upon perceptions and as such caution should be applied in extrapolating findings definitively to questions of causality.

Educational systems are highly complex and even with a relatively small group of school leaders, it was not possible to consider all the ideas raised within the interviews in depth within this research. Of particular interest to me was the way in which school leaders described the process of deciding to exclude a young person. Although touched upon within the findings, as this did not directly answer the research questions and was not the focus of the interviews, it was not possible to fully explore this idea. However, future research might consider a more systematic exploration of the process by which school leaders make decisions around school exclusions, building on the work of Williams (2022); it seemed to me that a better understanding of this process might be one route to considering how to reduce exclusions.

6.5. Quality and Impact of the Research

Within the following section, I will reflect upon the research process with regards to how the research findings might be generalised before considering the quality of the research.

6.51. Generalisability

I begin this section by considering the relevance of the research findings through application of Smith's (2018) types of generalisability. Within qualitative approaches to generalisability, the reader is required to take a more active role in evaluating the relevance and utility of research and considering its applicability (Smith, 2018). This ties with the constructionist and interpretivist approach outlined within Chapter 3: Methodology.

6.511. Naturalistic Generalisability

Naturalistic generalisability refers to how research generalises to a reader's experiences for example, the way in which it allows them to make links to their own life (Smith, 2018). The present research attempted to support naturalistic generalisability through the inclusion of participant quotes (Smith, 2018). Quoted extracts were selected to help 'bring to life' the findings aiming to allow readers to

connect with the participants on an emotive and academic level, to appreciate more of their experiences and notice parallels and contrasts to their own. The interpretative suggestions also aimed to support this process of reflection.

6.512. Inferential Generalisability

Inferential generalisability (transferability) considers whether the findings of the research allow the reader to usefully apply the presented ideas accounting for the constructed nature of knowledge (Smith, 2018). Within this chapter, I have outlined potential considerations for a range of professionals. It is hoped that these will provide prompts for reflection, discussion, and future action. Some findings could conceivably be applied beyond the area of preventing exclusions. For example, educational researchers may consider the findings relating to how schools inform their actions. It is also likely that the perceptions of current support may extend beyond meeting the needs of students at risk of exclusion and apply more generally.

6.513. Analytical Generalisability

Analytical generalisability is the application of findings to pre-existing theories or concepts (Smith, 2018). Throughout Chapter 5: Discussion, I have attempted to link key findings into existing literature. It is hoped that this supported the reader in making sense of the research and in considering how the findings and linked theories might extend to their own context.

6.52. Research Quality

In the remainder of this section, I will assess the research against four key characteristics of high-quality qualitative research as defined by Yardley (2000). An overview of quality assurance measures can be found in Appendix T.

6.521. Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context refers to ensuring that research is well situated in prior theory and literature and the socio-cultural contexts of participants and their data. In constructing the research project, I drew on professional and academic experiences. While the topic area for the project was personally motivated through my own values and interests, the specific focus came from exploration of existing literature both through early scoping searches and a systematically informed literature review to

ensure relevance. Findings were related to existing literature within Chapter 5: Discussion.

The prior knowledge developed through my own experiences both as a teacher within an all-through school (ages 4-18) and as a TEP working within LAs and across schools, perhaps provided me with some understanding of the contexts of school leaders. However, while this had the potential to act as a benefit in terms of connecting sensitively with participants, this also required careful reflection. Since I arrived at the topic with my own preconceptions, I needed to intentionally apply reflexive systems to ensure that I monitored my influence throughout.

Within the data analysis, I was also conscious to interrogate assumptions/concepts (Yardley, 2000) including through latent and semantic coding to consider underlying meanings. For example, in the current research this involved not only considering how school staff reported to respond to PDB but also the influence of how these behaviours were constructed, upon these actions. I was also careful to consider the assumptions of my research questions and resulting data. Some findings therefore answer the questions in a way which less direct and 'neat' than I might have predicted but perhaps more relevant to the complexity of the research context.

6.522. Commitment and Rigour

The methodological approach was carefully considered to meet the aims of the research, but also maintain integrity to my own positioning and skills. My interest in this area of practice extends beyond this research and into my own professional experiences. This has enabled commitment to the topic over time. I intentionally planned significant time for the analysis stage to support extended engagement and immersion within the data and allow time for my thinking to develop (Yardley, 2000). However, to support rigour, I was also careful to frequently return to the data within and beyond the analysis process to ensure I had remained true to accounts of the participants.

6.523. Transparency and Coherence

When writing the research, I spent significant time on redrafting in response to my reflections and others' feedback to create a sense of clarity and coherence throughout this written presentation of research. At times this process was perhaps

harder than the initial writing as the process of restructuring led to messiness before newfound clarity. However, I hope that I have been able to guide the reader gently through my thinking across the research project to make sense of how conclusions were reached. A key part of this has been to try to remain transparent surrounding decisions and actions to support readers' evaluations. The reflexive element of the research methods has been crucial to achieving this and I have tried to incorporate elements of this thinking in my explanations throughout.

6.524. Impact and Importance

Yardley (2000) argued that the most important measure of research is its usefulness in terms of enacting change either in beliefs or actions. However, Yardley acknowledged that would differ according to the aims and context of the research. The aims of the present research were to explore the context around continuing high rates of permanent exclusion and suspension in English secondary schools. I aimed to achieve this through analysing the perceptions of secondary school leaders around the facilitators and barriers of their approaches to reduce exclusions as well as how these approaches were informed and might be better supported. While I would not suggest that this research has the potential to easily solve large and systemic issues around exclusion, I believe that the key findings and themes have contributed to knowledge and begun to illuminate some of the challenges and supports experienced by school leaders. This research has specifically explored exclusion for PDB in a more focused way than previous research, which has tended to consider exclusion or behaviour more broadly. Crucially, this research has gone beyond exploring what 'can' work to reduce exclusions, to consider some of the factors which may affect 'how' such approaches work through the eyes of school leaders implementing them in practice. In addition, the research has provided further information on the types and sources of evidence which school leaders reported to be drawing upon, relevant to researchers and practitioners aiming to support schools to develop their practices around reducing or preventing exclusions.

Given the constructed nature of knowledge and absence of a single, objective reality, further research in this area may provide additional perspectives on what is an undoubtedly complex issue. It is hoped that the findings will be of particular use to school leaders both in seeing some of their experiences reflected and shared, as

well as in considering their own practice. Additionally, many of the challenges and suggestions identified by participants related to processes and actions beyond their schools. At the LA level, it is hoped that individuals and services will be better able to understand the perceptions of school leaders and adapt their own practices to provide effective support.

Research is only useful where it is engaged with. It would therefore be remiss of me, particularly considering findings around the first research question, to not consider dissemination. While useful for explaining the research process and outcomes in detail, the format and length of this dissertation is likely to prohibit easy access, particularly from practitioners. I will therefore distribute a short overview of the research (a draft version of which can be found in Appendix V) to all participants along with details of how to access the full write-up. This summary will be sent to the principal EPs of all participating LAs. I will also try to present the findings in person to the LA in which I work, and in the future, will consider taking steps to publish the findings such as in the form of an academic paper.

In terms of considering the importance of this research, I return to reflecting upon the exclusion data and trends shared within Chapter 1: Introduction, where the persistent challenge of school exclusions in England was presented. Exclusions are recognised to disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups of students (Graham et al., 2019) and the detrimental short and long-term impacts of permanent exclusion are well documented (Sutherland & Eisner, 2014; Rosenbaum, 2020; Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020; Obsuth et al., 2022). From a social justice perspective therefore, I believe professionals and researchers within the field of education hold a responsibility to continue to consider how to prevent school exclusions. This research has provided additional perspective upon not only what schools can do to reduce exclusion but what might support or inhibit them in achieving this. In my view, it is important that these conversations continue both at the research and practice level to ensure that wider systems support school leaders in reducing their exclusion rates.

6.6. Reflections on the research process

The development of this dissertation has represented a significant learning experience for me. I have been pushed to extend my thinking and reflect upon myself as a researcher and practitioner. While I already knew school exclusions was

a complex area, following this research I have, perhaps paradoxically, left with an increased sense of the complexity. This does not mean that I have not developed knowledge but rather that I have simultaneously developed a deeper appreciation for the multiplicity of systems which interact to affect exclusion rates. This has perhaps increased my empathy for excluding school leaders, and softened my positioning, however also increased my determination that more action is needed across policy, research and practice to make significant changes in cultures of exclusion. I remain confident in the belief that for change to be meaningful it is not only needed at the school level but within wider education systems and supports.

I think my experience working within a school perhaps drew my attention towards systemic factors within education, often beyond the school's full influence, which might affect the support for students at risk of exclusion. Having experienced the pressures within a school, I was perhaps particularly sensitive to some practical challenges and tried to highlight these whilst also remaining balanced. I was conscious not to overfocus on government policy factors which are important to me but represented only a portion of the discussion with participants. Conversely, working in an EPS in recent years has also affected my perspective. Studying for a course which focuses on inclusion within education has encouraged me to reflect upon my values. Through this process, I have perhaps developed more rigid boundaries and personal ethical judgments around what education should provide for students. I therefore have approached this topic with a dual appreciation for some of the potential barriers within schools, but also some firm views around what is 'right' for students at risk of exclusion regardless of some of the challenges in achieving this. I wonder whether this is reflected within my findings through the focus on more practical factors, as explored across the levels of the child's ecosystem, as well as considering personal constructs which link to such underlying values and their influence.

6.7. Concluding Comments

The key aims of this research project were to generate findings which could contribute to supporting schools to reduce or prevent exclusions through understanding how practices were informed, their facilitators and barriers and perceptions of relevant support. The study achieved these aims through using RTA

to analyse the data from ten semi-structured interviews with secondary school leaders in Southwest England. The key findings described have provided an ecosystemic perspective upon some of the factors affecting exclusion practices within secondary schools. Key facilitators of approaches to reduce or prevent suspensions or permanent exclusions included ensuring investment from individuals across the young person's ecology and cultivating effective relationships and understanding of students. School leaders perceived limitations from a complex balancing act of information, purposes and demands including relating to the broad needs of all students, staffing capacity, accountability systems, curriculum offers and school funding. Difficulties in accessing external support, such as EP services, were identified by school leaders who expressed challenges in their growing responsibility alongside diminishing resources. The influence of constructions, particularly in relation to understandings of disruptive behaviour, have been considered including in relation to the subjective nature of boundaries around exclusion. Such constructions have been suggested to hold the power to influence practices around support and exclusions beyond the specific approaches employed by schools. It is hoped therefore that these findings will support understandings of how schools can be supported to reduce or prevent exclusions and some of the potential facilitators or barriers to effective implementation.

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8. Appendices

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Appendix A: Key Legislation for Exclusions

Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement Guidance for maintained schools, academies, and pupil referral units in England (DfE, 2022d, pp.7-8) lists the following legislation as relevant to guidance:

The Education Act 1996

The Education Act 1996 is relevant to exclusion guidance through its defining of roles, terminology and statutory expectations within education systems. In particular, Section 19 provides detail on the responsibility of Local Authorities to provide education to excluded students. Sections 154-160 of the act which focused specifically on school discipline, including exclusion, have since been repealed and superseded by more recent legislation.

The Education Act 2002, as amended by the Education Act 2011

Section 51A of the Education Act 2002 outlines the powers of schools and pupil referral units to exclude students on disciplinary grounds. The section also covers the rights to review and the powers of the review panel as well as regulations around the reinstatement of students. Part 2 of the 2011 Education Act covers school discipline with Section 4 reviewing and amending exclusion legislation (including the addition of section 51A) with section 52 amended to apply to Wales.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006

Part 7 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 covers 'Discipline, behaviour and exclusion'. Of particular relevance, Chapter 1 covers school discipline and outlines responsibilities in relation to determining behaviour policies (Sections 88-89) and defines and describes 'the enforcement of disciplinary penalties (Sections 90-91). Chapter 2 of Part 7 covers exclusions detailing the duties of governing bodies, local authorities and parents (Sections 100, 101 and 103 respectively).

The School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations 2012

A set of statutory regulations with regard to the aforementioned Acts. Particularly relevant to the topic of this research are Part 2, Sections 4-9 which outline the

regulations for providing notice of exclusion, the role of governing bodies, regulations for reviewing and reconsidering exclusions and the responsibility to follow exclusion guidance in maintained schools. Part 3 and 4 cover similar areas for pupil referral units and academies respectively. Schedule 1 provides further regulations on the constitution and procedure of review panels.

The Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended by the Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014.

These regulations outline the duty to provide education for excluded pupils. Sections 3 and 4 describes the requirement for governing bodies (or equivalent) and/or Local Authorities to provide education on the sixth day following five consecutive days of exclusion with section 5 outlining exceptions to this requirement. Sections 6-9 outline regulations with regards to providing notice of exclusions.

Appendix B: Comparing Rates of Permanent Exclusion

Rates of permanent exclusion in the United Kingdom (2020-21 academic year)

England

In the 2020-2021 academic year, 3928 students were permanently excluded in England (DfE, 2022c). The rate of permanent exclusions was reported as 0.05, described to represent 5 students per 10,000 (DfE, 2022c).

This is equivalent to 0.05% of the school population ($5/10,000 \times 100$).

Northern Ireland

In 2020-2021 academic year, 25 students were permanently excluded in Northern Ireland; this is described as representing 0.008% of the school population (NISRA, 2022).

Scotland

In the 2020-2021 academic year, 1 student was permanently excluded in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021). A rate was not provided for permanent exclusions. However, the same document stated that there were 704723 school pupils in Scotland in this year.

From these figures, the percentage of pupils permanently excluded can therefore be calculated ($1/704723 \times 100$) = 0.0001419%

$$= 0.000142\% \text{ (3 significant figures)}$$

Wales

In the 2020-2021 academic year, 127 students were excluded from school in Wales reported to represent a rate of 0.3 per 1000 pupils (Welsh Government, 2022).

This is equivalent to 0.03% of the school population ($0.3/1000 \times 100$).

Comparing exclusion rates in England to the rest of the United Kingdom

With exclusion rates as a percentage, it is possible to approximately compare rates between the countries of the UK whilst accounting for the size of their school population.

England and Northern Ireland

Rate per 100 in England = 0.05

Rate per 100 in Northern Ireland = 0.008

$$0.05/0.008 = 6.25$$

Permanent exclusion rates in England were approximately 6 times higher than in Northern Ireland.

England and Scotland

Rate per 100 in England = 0.05

Rate per 100 in Scotland = 0.00014

$0.05/0.000142= 352.112676$

Permanent exclusion rates in England were approximately 350 times higher than in Scotland.

England and Wales

Rate per 100 in England = 0.05

Rate per 100 in Wales = 0.03

$0.05/0.03=1.6$

Permanent exclusion rates in England were approximately 1.6 times higher than in Wales.

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Welsh Government. (2022). *Permanent and fixed-term exclusions from schools: September 2020 to August 2021*. Available from: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2022/10/4/1666254621/permanent-and-fixed-term-exclusions-schools-september-2020-august-2021.pdf> [Access 28 January 2023].

Appendix C: Literature Search Terms and Results

Database	Web of Science
Title	exclud* OR exclusion* OR expel* OR expulsion OR suspen*
Title	school OR educa* OR classroom OR student* OR pupil* OR teacher*
Title, Abstract, Keyword	preven* OR reduc* OR manage* OR change OR support OR decreas* OR minimis* OR improv* OR minimiz* OR interven* OR approach*
All fields	uk OR united AND kingdom OR great AND britain OR gb OR engl* OR wales OR scotl* OR northern ireland OR northern irish OR welsh OR britain OR british
Limit	Since 2011
Refined	Articles and early access
Total Results	380 (09.06.22)

Database	PsycInfo
Title	exclud* OR exclusion* OR expel* OR expulsion OR suspen*
Title	school OR educa* OR classroom OR student* OR pupil* OR teacher*
Keyword	preven* OR reduc* OR manage* OR change OR support OR decreas* OR minimis* OR improv* OR minimiz* OR interven* OR approach*
All fields	uk OR united AND kingdom OR great AND britain OR gb OR engl* OR wales OR scotl* OR northern ireland OR northern irish OR welsh OR britain OR british
Limit	Since 2011
Refined	Peer reviewed journal
Total Results	178 (09.06.22)

Database	EBSCO Host (British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, ERIC, Educational Abstracts, Educational Administration Abstracts)
Title	exclud* OR exclusion* OR expel* OR expulsion OR suspen*
Title	school OR educa* OR classroom OR student* OR pupil* OR teacher*
Abstract	preven* OR reduc* OR manage* OR change OR support OR decreas* OR minimis* OR improv* OR minimiz* OR interven* OR approach*

All fields	uk OR united AND kingdom OR great AND britain OR gb OR engl* OR wales OR scotl* OR northern ireland OR northern irish OR welsh OR britain OR british
Limit	Since 2011
	Scholarly (peer reviewed) journals
Total Results	366 (257 with exact duplicates removed) (09.06.22)

Appendix D: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature search

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Reviewed. • Published in or after 2011. • Relates to school age students (4-16). • Relates to mainstream schools or equivalent. • Conducted (at least partly) in England. • Focus is on approaches to reduce or prevent permanent or fixed term exclusion which can be implemented/coordinated by school staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not peer reviewed. • Reviews, meta-analyses and commentaries. • Research published prior to 2011. • Relates solely to students in preschool, further or higher education. • Research based in pupil referral units, alternative education or specialist education settings. • Not written in English language. • Research outside of UK. • Focus on Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish context. • Focus is solely on exclusion for reasons other than persistent disruptive behaviour. • Focus is on broader systemic issues beyond the responsibility of schools. • Research relating to grey/unofficial/illegal forms of exclusion.

Appendix E: Decision-making During Final Stage of Literature Searches

Search 1 (June 2022)

Reference	Decision	Reason
(2013). Pupil vulnerability and school exclusion: developing responsive pastoral policies and practices in secondary education in the UK. 31: 279-291.	Include	
Arnez, J. and R. Condry (2021). "Criminological perspectives on school exclusion and youth offending." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 26(1): 87-100.	Exclude	Not primary research Presents a perspective by bringing together previous literature.
Bainton, J. and B. Hayes (2022). "Sleep in an At Risk Adolescent Group: A Qualitative Exploration of the Perspectives, Experiences and Needs of Youth Who Have Been Excluded From Mainstream Education." <u>Inquiry-the Journal of Health Care Organization Provision and Financing</u> 59.	Exclude	Exclude as not directly in school control
Carlile, A. (2012). "An ethnography of permanent exclusion from school: revealing and untangling the threads of institutionalised racism." <u>Race Ethnicity and Education</u> 15(2): 175-194.	Exclude	Focus is on institutional racism within local authority and education systems not a focus on what schools can do to reduce or prevent exclusions.
Caslin, M. (2021). "'They have just given up on me' How pupils labelled with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) experience the process of exclusion from school." <u>Support for Learning</u> 36(1): 116-132.	Exclude	Exclude as focus on experiences of exclusion rather than measures to improve
Cole, T., et al. (2019). "Factors associated with high and low levels of school exclusions: comparing the English and wider UK experience." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 24(4): 374-390.	Include	
Daniels, H., et al. (2019). "Practices of exclusion in cultures of inclusive schooling in the United Kingdom." <u>Revista Publicaciones</u> 49(3): 23-36.	Exclude	At LA/policy level Not a clear focus on actions for schools
Done, E. J. and M. J. Andrews (2020). "How inclusion became exclusion: policy, teachers and inclusive education." <u>Journal of Education Policy</u> 35(4): 447-464.	Exclude	Focus on exclusion more broadly
Done, E. J. and H. Knowler (2021). "'Off-rolling' and Foucault's art of visibility/invisibility: An exploratory study of senior leaders' views of 'strategic' school exclusion in southwest England." <u>British Educational Research Journal</u> 47(4): 1039-1055.	Exclude	Focus on 'unofficial' forms of exclusion
Duffy, G., et al. (2021). "School exclusion disparities in the UK: a view from Northern Ireland." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 26(1): 3-18.	Exclude	NI focus
Embeita, C. (2019). "Reintegration to secondary education following school exclusion: An exploration of	Exclude	Focus on parental experiences

the relationship between home and school from the perspective of parents." <u>Educational and Child Psychology</u> 36(3): 18-32.		
Evans, A. (2013). "From exclusion to inclusion; Supporting Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators to keep children in mainstream education: A qualitative psychoanalytic research project." <u>Journal of Child Psychotherapy</u> 39(3): 286-302.	Exclude	Focus on what actions external professionals could take rather than school staff
Farouk, S. (2017). "My life as a pupil: The autobiographical memories of adolescents excluded from school." <u>Journal of Adolescence</u> 55: 16-23.	Exclude	Focus on YP experiences
Farouk, S. and S. Edwards (2021). "Narrative counselling for adolescents at risk of exclusion from school." <u>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling</u> 49(4): 553-564.	Include	
Fazel, M. and D. Newby (2021). "Mental well-being and school exclusion: changing the discourse from vulnerability to acceptance." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 26(1): 78-86.	Exclude	Focus on characteristics related to young people who have been previously excluded not on actions to impact exclusion rates.
Ferguson, L. (2021). "Vulnerable children's right to education, school exclusion, and pandemic law-making." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 26(1): 101-115.	Exclude	Focus on policy as opposed to school level intervention? Commentary
Fernandes, L. (2019). "Could a Focus on Ethics of Care within Teacher Education Have the Potential to Reduce the Exclusion of Autistic Learners?" <u>Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal</u> 11(4): 47-56.	Exclude	Focus on ITT (out of direct control of schools)
Ford, T., et al. (2018). "The relationship between exclusion from school and mental health: a secondary analysis of the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 and 2007." <u>Psychological Medicine</u> 48(4): 629-641.	Exclude	Characteristics/ prevalence
Gage, N. A., et al. (2020). "Using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports to Reduce School Suspensions." <u>Beyond Behavior</u> 29(3): 132-140.	Exclude	Not UK specific
Gazeley, L. and M. Dunne (2013). "Initial Teacher Education programmes: providing a space to address the disproportionate exclusion of Black pupils from schools in England?" <u>Journal of Education for Teaching</u> 39(5): 492-508.	Exclude	Focus on ITT (out of direct control of schools)
Gazeley, L., et al. (2015). "Contextualising Inequalities in Rates of School Exclusion in English Schools: Beneath the 'Tip of the Ice-Berg'." <u>British Journal of Educational Studies</u> 63(4): 487-504.	Exclude	Characteristics/ prevalence
Gibbs, S. and B. Powell (2012). "Teacher efficacy and pupil behaviour: The structure of teachers' individual and collective beliefs and their relationship with numbers of pupils excluded from school." <u>British Journal of Educational Psychology</u> 82(4): 564-584.	Include	

Gilmore, G. (2013). "'What's a fixed-term exclusion, Miss?' Students' perspectives on a disciplinary inclusion room in England." <u>British Journal of Special Education</u> 40(3): 106-113.	Include	
Hatton, C. (2018). "School absences and exclusions experienced by children with learning disabilities and autistic children in 2016/17 in England." <u>Tizard Learning Disability Review</u> 23(4): 207-212.	Exclude	Characteristics/ prevalence
Hatton, L. A. and H. Lucy Ann (2013). Disciplinary exclusion: the influence of school ethos. United Kingdom. 18: 155-178.	Include	
Irvine, R. D. G., et al. (2016). "Exclusion and reappropriation: Experiences of contemporary enclosure among children in three East Anglian schools." <u>Environment and Planning D-Society & Space</u> 34(5): 935-953.	Exclude	Focus on informal exclusion due to environment/planning of schools.
John, A., et al. (2022). "Association of school absence and exclusion with recorded neurodevelopmental disorders, mental disorders, or self-harm: a nationwide, retrospective, electronic cohort study of children and young people in Wales, UK." <u>Lancet Psychiatry</u> 9(1): 23-34.	Exclude	Characteristics/ prevalence
King, H. (2016). "The Connection between Personal Traumas and Educational Exclusion in Young People's Lives." <u>Young</u> 24(4): 342-358.	Exclude	Characteristics/ prevalence
Kulz, C. (2019). "Mapping folk devils old and new through permanent exclusion from London schools." <u>Race Ethnicity and Education</u> 22(1): 93-109.	Exclude	Policy level
Machin, S. and M. Sandi (2020). "AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS AND STRATEGIC PUPIL EXCLUSION." <u>Economic Journal</u> 130(625): 125-159.	Exclude	Characteristics/ prevalence
Martin-Denham, S. (2020). "Riding the rollercoaster of school exclusion coupled with drug misuse: the lived experience of caregivers." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 25(3-4): 244-263.	Exclude	Not focused on persistent disruptive behaviour
Martin-Denham, S. (2021). "Alternatives to school exclusion: interviews with head teachers in England." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 26(4): 375-393.	Include	
Martin-Denham, S. (2021). "School exclusion, substance misuse and use of weapons: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with children." <u>Support for Learning</u> 36(4): 532-554.	Exclude	No focus on persistent disruptive behaviour
Martin-Denham, S. (2022). "Marginalisation, autism and school exclusion: caregivers' perspectives." <u>Support for Learning</u> 37(1): 108-143.	Exclude	Focus on caregiver experiences not actions for schools
Maxwell, T. and M. Tim (2013). A reflection on the work of an Educational Psychologist in providing supervision for a team of community based support workers, supporting families with vulnerable adolescents at risk of exclusion from school. United Kingdom. 31: 15-27.	Exclude	Not in direct control of school
McCluskey, G., et al. (2019). "Exclusion from school in Scotland and across the UK: Contrasts and questions." <u>British Educational Research Journal</u> 45(6): 1140-1159.	Exclude	Scotland rather than England focus

McCluskey, G., et al. (2015). "Children's rights, school exclusion and alternative educational provision." <u>International Journal of Inclusive Education</u> 19(6): 595-607.	Exclude	Welsh context
McCluskey, G., et al. (2016). "Exclusion from school and recognition of difference." <u>Discourse-Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education</u> 37(4): 529-539.	Exclude	Welsh context
Messenger, T. and A. Soni (2018). "A systematic literature review of the 'managed move' process as an alternative to exclusion in UK schools." <u>Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties</u> 23(2): 169-185.	Exclude (but check articles)	Review
Obsuth, I., et al. (2016). "London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Exploring Negative and Null Effects of a Cluster-Randomised School-Intervention to Reduce School Exclusion-Findings from Protocol-Based Subgroup Analyses." <u>Plos One</u> 11(4).	Include	
Obsuth, I., et al. (2017). "London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Results from a Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial of an Intervention to Reduce School Exclusion and Antisocial Behavior." <u>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</u> 46(3): 538-557.	Include	
Paget, A. and A. Emond (2016). "The role of community paediatrics in supporting schools to avoid exclusions that have a basis in health." <u>Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties</u> 21(1): 8-21.	Exclude	Not direct role of school staff
Paget, A., et al. (2018). "Which children and young people are excluded from school? Findings from a large British birth cohort study, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC)." <u>Child Care Health and Development</u> 44(2): 285-296.	Exclude	Not intervention/support focused
Parker, C., et al. (2016). "The "Supporting Kids, Avoiding Problems" (SKIP) study: relationships between school exclusion, psychopathology, development and attainment - a case control study." <u>Journal of Childrens Services</u> 11(2): 91-110.	Exclude	Focus is on characteristics of excluded young people not actions for school
Parker, C., et al. (2016). "...he was excluded for the kind of behaviour that we thought he needed support with..." A Qualitative Analysis of the Experiences and Perspectives of Parents Whose Children Have Been Excluded from School." <u>Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties</u> 21(1): 133-151.	Exclude	Parental experiences
Parker, C., et al. (2019). "Are children with unrecognised psychiatric disorders being excluded from school? A secondary analysis of the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys 2004 and 2007." <u>Psychological Medicine</u> 49(15): 2561-2572.	Exclude	Characteristics / prevalence
Power, S. and C. Taylor (2020). "Not in the classroom, but still on the register: hidden forms of school exclusion." <u>International Journal of Inclusive Education</u> 24(8): 867-881.	Exclude	Welsh context Unofficial exclusions Relevant for intro
Rechten, F. and A. E. Tweed (2014). "An exploratory study investigating the viability of a communication and feedback intervention for school children at risk of	Include	

exclusion: Analysis of staff perspectives." <u>Educational Psychology in Practice</u> 30(3): 293-306.		
Solomon, M. and G. Thomas (2013). "Supporting behaviour support: Developing a model for leading and managing a unit for teenagers excluded from mainstream school." <u>Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties</u> 18(1): 44-59.	Exclude	Nonmainstream context
Stanforth, A. and J. Rose (2020). "'You kind of don't want them in the room': tensions in the discourse of inclusion and exclusion for students displaying challenging behaviour in an English secondary school." <u>International Journal of Inclusive Education</u> 24(12): 1253-1267.	Exclude	Focus on informal/ internal exclusions
Tejerina-Arreal, M., et al. (2020). "Child and adolescent mental health trajectories in relation to exclusion from school from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children." <u>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</u> 25(4): 217-223.	Exclude	Not focused on support/intervention Characteristics/ prevalence
Thompson, I., et al. (2021). "Conflicts in professional concern and the exclusion of pupils with SEMH in England." <u>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</u> 26(1): 31-45.	Exclude	Local authority level - focus on policy not school level actions
Thomson, P. and J. Pennacchia (2016). "Hugs and behaviour points: Alternative education and the regulation of 'excluded' youth." <u>International Journal of Inclusive Education</u> 20(6): 622-640.	Exclude	Assessment of quality of alternative provision – does not directly inform actions for schools. Non-mainstream
Tillson, J. and L. Oxley (2020). "Children's moral rights and UK school exclusions." <u>Theory and Research in Education</u> 18(1): 40-58.	Exclude	Systemic level Commentary
Toth, K., et al. "From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem: fixed period school exclusions and mental health outcomes from routine outcome monitoring among children and young people attending school counselling." <u>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</u> .	Include	
Trotman, D., et al. (2015). "Understanding problematic pupil behaviour: perceptions of pupils and behaviour coordinators on secondary school exclusion in an English city." <u>Educational Research</u> 57(3): 237-253.	Include	
Tutt, R. (2020). "Commentary: Taking steps to reduce school exclusions: child and adolescent mental health trajectories in relation to exclusion from school from The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) – a commentary on Tejerina-Arreal." <u>Child & Adolescent Mental Health</u> 25(4): 224-227.	Exclude	Commentary
Valdebenito, S., et al. (2019). "What can we do to reduce disciplinary school exclusion? A systematic review and meta-analysis." <u>Journal of Experimental Criminology</u> 15(3): 253-287.	Exclude (but check papers included)	Review
Waters, T. (2014). "Story links: Working with parents of pupils at risk of exclusion." <u>Support for Learning</u> 29(4): 298-318.	Include	

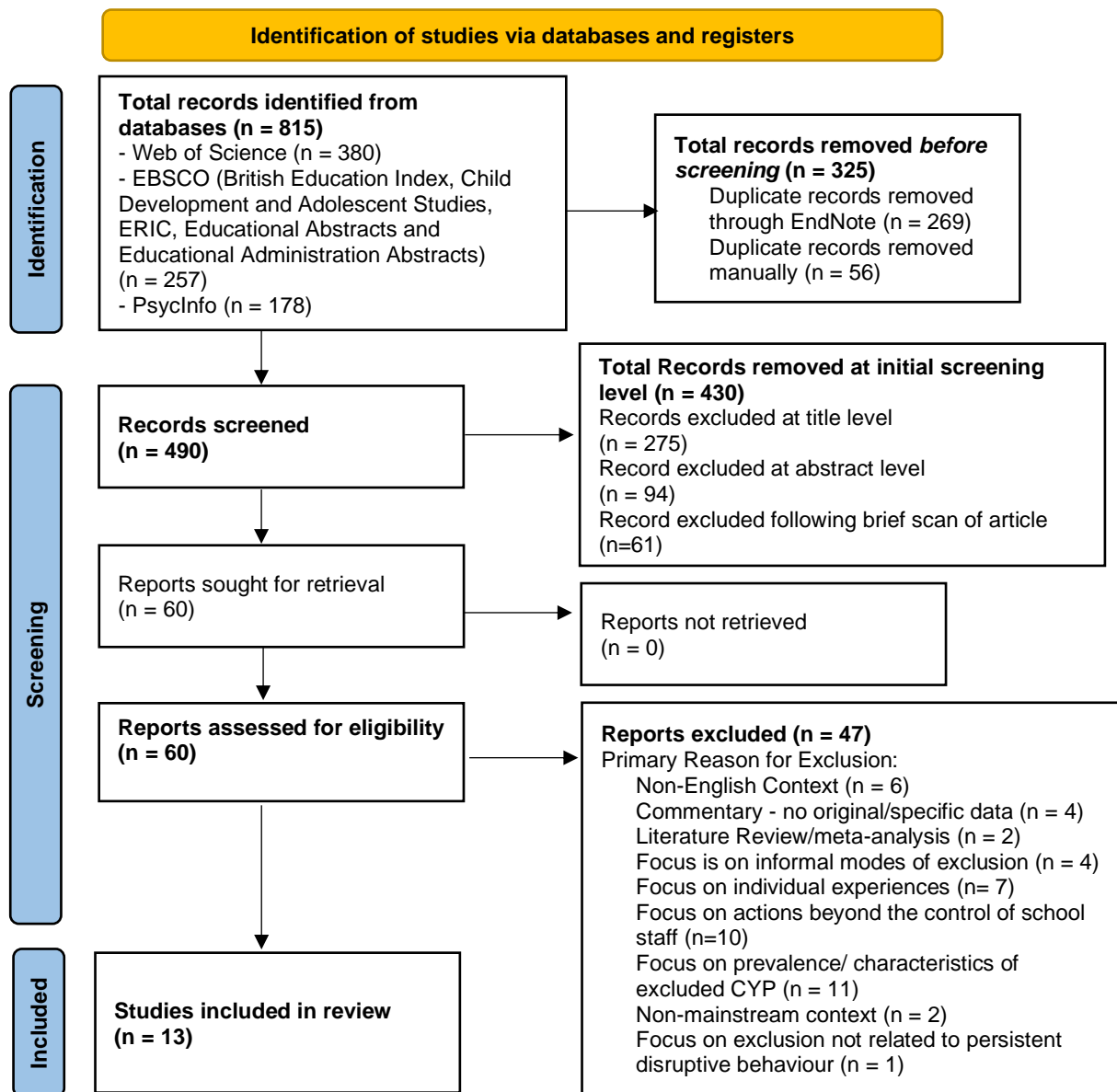
Wenham, L. (2020). "It was more a fear of the school thinking that I'd be a troublemaker'- Inappropriate use of internal exclusion through labelling by association with siblings." <u>Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies</u> 18(3): 154-187.	Exclude	Focus on experiences of one child rather than measures schools can take
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Search 2 (June 2023)

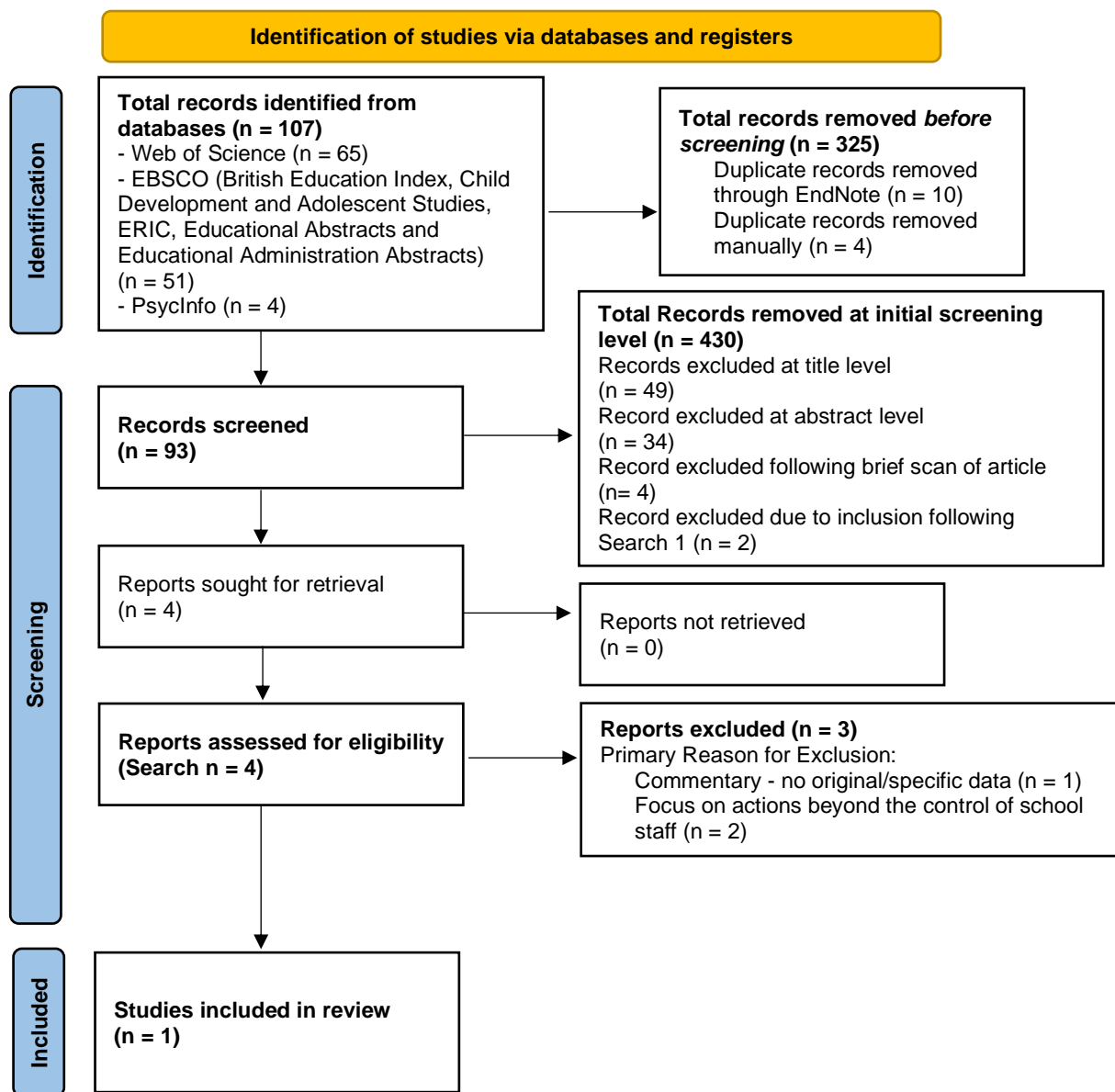
Reference	Decision	Reason
Daniels, H., Porter, J., & Thompson, I. (2022). What counts as evidence in the understanding of school exclusion in England?. In <i>Frontiers in Education</i> (Vol. 7, p. 929912). Frontiers.	Exclude	Commentary
Hulme, M., Adamson, C., & Griffiths, D. (2023). Geographies of Exclusion: Rebuilding Collective Responsibility in a Fragmented School System. <i>Leadership and Policy in Schools</i> , 1-19.	Include	
Mills, M., & Thomson, P. (2022). English schooling and little e and big E exclusion: what's equity got to do with it?. <i>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 27(3), 185-198.	Exclude	Focus not on actions for schools
Tawell, A., & McCluskey, G. (2022). Utilising Bacchi's what's the problem represented to be?(WPR) approach to analyse national school exclusion policy in England and Scotland: a worked example. <i>International Journal of Research & Method in Education</i> , 45(2), 137-149.	Exclude	Policy focus beyond actions for schools

Appendix F: PRISMA Diagrams

Search 1 – June 2022



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

Appendix G: Results from Hand Searching Reference Lists

Documents identified following hand search of reference list in all included articles	Found in	Include or exclude?
<p>Connolly, J. (2012). They never give up on you-the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into School Exclusions. <i>Education Review</i>, 24(2).</p> <p>Based on</p> <p>Office of the Children's Commissioner School Exclusions Inquiry</p>	<p>Ann Hatton, L. (2013). Disciplinary exclusion: the influence of school ethos. <i>Emotional and behavioural difficulties</i>, 18(2), 155-178.</p> <p>Trotman, D., Tucker, S., & Martyn, M. (2015). Understanding problematic pupil behaviour: Perceptions of pupils and behaviour coordinators on secondary school exclusion in an English city. <i>Educational Research</i>, 57(3), 237-253.</p> <p>Cole, T., McCluskey, G., Daniels, H., Thompson, I., & Tawell, A. (2019). Factors associated with high and low levels of school exclusions: Comparing the English and wider UK experience. <i>Emotional and behavioural difficulties</i>, 24(4), 374-390.</p> <p>Tucker, S. (2013). Pupil vulnerability and school exclusion: Developing responsive pastoral policies and practices in secondary education in the UK. <i>Pastoral Care in Education</i>, 31(4), 279-291.</p>	<p>Exclude Grey literature (not peer reviewed) – not suitable for inclusion in literature review.</p>
<p>Trotman, D., Martyn, M., & Tucker, S. (2012). Young people and risk. <i>Pastoral Care in Education</i>, 30(4), 317-329.</p>	<p>Trotman, D., Tucker, S., & Martyn, M. (2015). Understanding problematic pupil behaviour: Perceptions of pupils and behaviour coordinators on secondary school exclusion in an English city. <i>Educational Research</i>, 57(3), 237-253.</p>	<p>Exclude – irrelevant topic – not concerning exclusion</p>
<p>Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. <i>Child development</i>, 82(1), 405-432.</p>	<p>Obsuth, I., Sutherland, A., Cope, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2017). London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Results from a cluster-randomized controlled trial of an intervention to reduce school exclusion and antisocial behavior. <i>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</i>, 46(3), 538-557.</p>	<p>Meta- analysis so would not be directly included.</p> <p>Individual articles included in analysis all</p>

		published pre-2011
Ellis, P. (2013). Final evaluation of engage in education—A Department for Education funded pilot programme delivered by Catch22 and partners (2011–2013). <i>Third Sector Research Solutions (TSRS)</i> .	Obsuth, I., Sutherland, A., Cope, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2017). London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Results from a cluster-randomized controlled trial of an intervention to reduce school exclusion and antisocial behavior. <i>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</i> , 46(3), 538-557.	Not peer reviewed
Gazeley, L., Marrable, T., Brown, C., & Boddy, J. (2013). Reducing inequalities in school exclusion: Learning from good practice. <i>A report to the office of the children's commissioner from the centre for innovation and research in childhood and youth Brighton: University of Sussex</i> .	Obsuth, I., Sutherland, A., Cope, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2017). London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Results from a cluster-randomized controlled trial of an intervention to reduce school exclusion and antisocial behavior. <i>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</i> , 46(3), 538-557.	Not peer reviewed
Horner, R. H., & Sugai, G. (2015). School-wide PBIS: An example of applied behavior analysis implemented at a scale of social importance. <i>Behavior analysis in practice</i> , 8(1), 80-85.	Obsuth, I., Sutherland, A., Cope, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2017). London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Results from a cluster-randomized controlled trial of an intervention to reduce school exclusion and antisocial behavior. <i>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</i> , 46(3), 538-557.	Exclude US-based Commentary
Law, J., Plunkett, C. C., & Stringer, H. (2012). Communication interventions and their impact on behaviour in the young child: A systematic review. <i>Child Language Teaching and Therapy</i> , 28(1), 7-23.	Obsuth, I., Cope, A., Sutherland, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2016). London education and inclusion project (LEIP): exploring negative and null effects of a cluster-randomised school-intervention to reduce school exclusion—findings from protocol-based subgroup analyses. <i>PloS one</i> , 11(4), e0152423.	Exclude Systematic review Individual papers published pre-2004
Massey, A. (2011). Best behaviour: School discipline, intervention and exclusion.	Obsuth, I., Cope, A., Sutherland, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2016). London education and inclusion project (LEIP): exploring negative and null effects of a cluster-randomised school-intervention to reduce school exclusion—findings from protocol-based subgroup analyses. <i>PloS one</i> , 11(4), e0152423.	Exclude Not peer reviewed. Commentary
Bruhn, A., McDaniel, S., & Kreigh, C. (2015). Self-monitoring interventions for students with behavior problems: A systematic review of current research. <i>Behavioral Disorders</i> , 40(2), 102-121.	Obsuth, I., Cope, A., Sutherland, A., Pilbeam, L., Murray, A. L., & Eisner, M. (2016). London education and inclusion project (LEIP): exploring negative and null effects of a cluster-randomised school-intervention to reduce school exclusion—findings from protocol-based subgroup analyses. <i>PloS one</i> , 11(4), e0152423.	Exclude – related to general behaviour – no mention of

		suspension, exclusion etc.
Apland, K., Lawrence, H., Mesie, J., & Yarrow, E. (2017). Children's voices: a review of evidence on the subjective wellbeing of children excluded from school and in alternative provision in England. November 2017.	Toth, K., Cross, L., Golden, S., & Ford, T. (2022). From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem: fixed period school exclusions and mental health outcomes from routine outcome monitoring among children and young people attending school counselling. <i>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</i> .	Literature Review Not peer-reviewed No individual articles met inclusion criteria
Moore, D., Benham-Clarke, S., Kenchington, R., Boyle, C., Ford, T., Hayes, R., & Rogers, M. (2019). Improving Behaviour in Schools: Evidence Review. <i>Education Endowment Foundation</i> .	Toth, K., Cross, L., Golden, S., & Ford, T. (2022). From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem: fixed period school exclusions and mental health outcomes from routine outcome monitoring among children and young people attending school counselling. <i>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</i> .	Literature Review Not peer-reviewed No individual articles met inclusion criteria

Appendix H: Examples of Critical Appraisal

Study Overview	
Bibliographic Details	Narrative Counselling for adolescents at risk of exclusion from school Farouk and Edwards (2021)
1. What are the aims of the study?	'Describe how narrative counselling can be used to support adolescents at school, identify themes in student narratives that were the focus of the intervention, and to highlight the challenges and limitations of the intervention within a performance-focused institutional context.' (p.554)
2. If the paper is part of a wider study, what are its aims?	n/a
3. What are the key findings of the study?	Narrative counselling led to improved engagement and behaviour within school The ethos of schools around inclusivity, accountability/performativity etc is seen to impact upon the potential/outcomes of the intervention
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the study and theory, policy and practice implications?	Strengths – mixed methods approach – considered some of the factors affecting young people as well as using numerical outcomes figures, trialled a new type of intervention within school and found positive effects within a small sample. Limitations – no long term follow up, confounding variables not controlled, very small samples size, reliant on pupil report of change, lack of depth and transparency to qualitative analysis, limited analysis of the implications of themes identified and how specifically the programme could be used to support in these areas.
STUDY, SETTING, SAMPLE AND ETHICS	
5. What type of study is this?	Mixed methods
6. What was the intervention?	Narrative counselling
7. What was the comparison intervention?	n/a – no control group
8. Is there sufficient detail given of the nature of the intervention and the comparison intervention?	Clear outline of narrative counselling intervention/process is given within the methodology including breakdown of initial meetings, sessions and final reviews.
9. What is the relationship of the study to the area of the topic review?	Potential intervention schools could employ to support those AROE
10. Within what geographical and care setting was the study carried out?	Three schools One multicultural boys school in London 2 majority white British schools in West Sussex/Hampshire Not stated how schools were selected.

11. What was the source population?	Adolescents at risk of exclusion due to behaviour
12. What were the inclusion criteria?	Challenging behaviour and potential risk of permanent exclusion if behaviour did not improve (not reported whether this was more clearly specified)
13. What were the exclusion criteria?	Not specified
14. How was the sample selected?	Selected by schools (unclear who within school)
15. Is the sample (informants, settings and events) appropriate to the aims of the study?	Yes As selected by school staff I wonder whether there were any biases in the types of young people selected e.g. did they select young people they felt would respond best to this type of intervention? Would it have been better from schools to list all young people who met inclusions criteria and then randomised?
17. What was the size of the study sample, and of any separate groups?	11
18. What are the key characteristics of the sample (events, persons, times and settings)?	9 male (2 female pts came from same school) 4 School A 5 School B 2 School C
19. What outcome criteria were used in the study?	Student engagement Measured through the student engagement scale (Connor and Pope, 2013). Scale selected due to relationship between increased engagement and reduced risk of exclusion. Also separates affective, cognitive and behavioural engagement
20. Whose perspectives are addressed (professional, service, user, carer)?	Scale administered by counsellor to student pre and post intervention Long term impact once intervention ceased therefore unclear.
21. Is there sufficient breadth (e.g. contrast of two or more perspective) and depth (e.g. insight into a single perspective)?	Good depth as also thematically analysed young people's narratives alongside engagement scale. Less breadth – would have been good to include teacher perspectives or observation in class to see whether these matched pupil ideas. Also parents to understand impact at home
ETHICS	
22. Was Ethical Committee approval obtained?	Yes from both University of Portsmouth and New York University, Abu Dhabi
23. Was informed consent obtained from participants of the study?	Yes from school, parents and young person.

24. Have ethical issues been adequately addressed?	Yes
GROUP COMPARABILITY AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT (Quantitative)	
25. If there was more than one group was analysed, were the groups comparable before the intervention? In what respects were they comparable and in what were they not?	n/a
26. How were important confounding variables controlled (e.g. matching, randomisation, in the analysis stage)?	n/a
27. Was this control adequate to justify the author's conclusions?	n/a
28. Were there other important confounding variables controlled for in the study design or analyses and what were they?	n/a
29. Did the authors take these into account in their interpretation of the findings?	<p>Although the authors did not control for confounding variables, their potential impact upon outcomes was considered.</p> <p>e.g. in relation to whether results were a direct result of the intervention or another aspect of the support e.g. time with an adult each week, the impact of school ethos in relation to inclusivity and performativity.</p>
QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	
30. What data collection methods were used in the study? (Provide insight into: data collected, appropriateness and availability for independent analysis)	<p>Thematic analysis of the autobiographies created as part of the narrative counselling process (Session 1 was an autobiographical interview).</p> <p>Responses were audio recorded and transcribed and translated into a short autobiography by the counsellor. The young person then added comments and corrections.</p> <p>Given that spoken language does not translate directly into written narrative, it would have been helpful for the authors to provide a</p>

	<p>little more detail around this process, the decision-making involved etc.</p> <p>It is positive however that these were checked back with the young person although I wonder whether they would have felt sufficiently confident to share if they felt it wasn't an accurate summary.</p>
<p>31. Is the process of fieldwork adequately described? (For example, account of how the data were elicited; type and range of questions; interview guide; length and timing of observation work; note taking)</p>	<p>Participants asked to separate their lives into chapters and then talk about each chapter and recollect events. Not stated whether follow up question etc. were asked or participants were just allowed to talk. Counsellor (one of the researchers) conducted this. Sessions were reported to last between 30 and 45 minutes – doesn't seem a very long time to share life story in multiple chapters.</p>
<p>32. How were the data analysed? How adequate is the description of the data analysis? (For example, to allow reproduction; steps taken to guard against selectivity)</p>	<p>Thematic Analysis. Reported to follow Braun and Clarke, 2006 and Boyatzis, 1998. Reasons for selecting these approaches were not shared for example why more recent versions of Braun and Clarke's approach were not considered. Details also not given of how researchers engaged with the approach – e.g. what did each stage look like in the context of this research. Were stages engaged with in a purely linear fashion of returned to? etc.</p> <p>Looking for social interactions patterns that seemed to repeat themselves and the way ppts described events. Some themes only applied to the individual and were explored within their counselling sessions. Some were classified as 'higher order' themes and are therefore discussed in more depth in the analysis since these were seen to be shared across the participants. The process of how these were reached is not particularly well described. Thematic maps/clusters of codes etc are not reported.</p> <p>There are pros and cons to having the same researcher deliver the intervention as analyse the autobiographies. Has the relationship shaped the understanding of the young person beyond what is communication within the data – does this enhance or detract from conclusions? Requires some reflexivity on the part of the researcher perhaps to avoid biases.</p>
<p>33. Is adequate evidence provided to support the analysis? (For example, includes original / raw data extracts; evidence of iterative analysis; representative evidence presented; efforts to establish validity - searching</p>	<p>Only two short quotes used within the findings and this section in general is relatively short.</p> <p>Themes seem to be reported in a way which suggests they are inherently present as opposed to created through the analysis. In part this may indicative of their more semantic as opposed to latent nature.</p> <p>There is little mention of contrasting ideas or themes which were not shared by the majority/participants/ not reported etc.</p> <p>Limited linking of quantitative and qualitative findings.</p>

for negative evidence, use of multiple sources, data triangulation); reliability / consistency (over researchers, time and settings; checking back with informants over interpretation)	
34. Are the findings interpreted within the context of other studies and theory?	While a few links are made, in parts of the discussion these mostly related to one conclusion. Greater reference to existing literature within the findings/discussion would have been helpful.
35. What was the researcher's role? (For example, interviewer, participant observer)	Researcher acted both as counsellor, interviewer etc.
36. Are the researcher's own position, assumptions and possible biases outlined? (Indicate how these could affect the study, in particular, the analysis and interpretation of the data)	I wonder whether the results of the scale could have been impacted by this being delivered by the counsellor who had been providing support for several weeks e.g. were they subject to social desirability type effects on the second round as the young person did not want to upset the researcher?
POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS	
37. To what setting are the study findings generalisable? (For example, is the setting typical or representative of care settings and in what respects?)	Would need to be cautious in generalising due to very small sample however some suggestion that this might be a helpful approach for schools to apply to support 13-14 year olds at risk of exclusion to increase engagement. Authors recommend that schools could train up staff in this approach suggesting that 'giving away' of this type of psychology is helpful to equip schools.
38. To what population are the study's findings generalisable?	
39. Is the conclusion justified given the conduct of the study (For example, sampling procedure; measures of outcome used and results achieved?)	Conclusions took into account small sample size and were appropriately tentative 'Given the small number of participants, that do not constitute a representative sample of a wider population, the data obtained is only an indication of the progress that this kind of student can make' (p.556)

40. What are the implications for policy?	Implications around the impact of policy e.g. through high accountability measures, zero-tolerance measures etc. and how this might affect the most vulnerable learners for example whether their needs are prioritised effectively and whether school work to avoid exclusion.
41. What are the implications for service practice?	Implications around school ethos and the importance of finding time to support such approaches if they are to have the best outcomes. Change is possible for this group of students at risk of exclusion so schools have a responsibility to try approaches such as this intervention.
OTHER COMMENTS	
42. What were the total number of references used in the study?	32
43. Are there any other noteworthy features of the study?	
44. List other study references	
45. Name of reviewer/date	

Source: Long AF, Godfrey M, Randall T, Brettle AJ and Grant MJ (2002) Developing Evidence Based Social Care Policy and Practice. Part 3: Feasibility of Undertaking Systematic Reviews in Social Care. Leeds: Nuffield Institute for Health.

Paper for appraisal and reference: Tucker (2013) Pupil Vulnerability and school exclusion: de

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- what was the goal of the research
 - why it was thought important
 - its relevance

Comments: Original aim of research was to explore the reasons for increasing exclusion in Y9 pupils across the participating schools. During the research, the behaviour coordinators kept returning to the need for good pastoral approaches and the students frequently described the benefits of such interventions. The paper therefore focuses on the pastoral approaches which can be used to support young people at risk of exclusion. It is unclear whether the original aim has been addressed more fully elsewhere.

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
 - Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: Yes - wanted to understand what was shaping policy and practice by understanding the behaviours, interactions, relationships and pressures of those in the system.

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: Ethnographic methodology. Constructing a case study from a group of Birmingham schools. Researcher felt it important to engage with ppts in their 'naturally occurring settings' to help understand their social meanings and contexts. Wanted to understand pressures, relationships, strategies and behaviours underpinning policies and practices in the schools. Clear rationale for ethnographic approach however less clear what this approach actually entailed.

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
 - If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments: The schools were described as being at significant social and educational disadvantage although it is unclear specifically what this entailed. Describe a 'random sampling procedure to select schools' - unclear from where sample was selected (e.g. just from this consortium, Birmingham etc). Individual schools selected participants - while this may be appropriate as needed to meet criteria and schools may have an idea of needs etc. what would be appropriate, this leaves open the potential for bias in who was selected. E.g. did school select young people who were 'success stories' or who might have more positive viewpoints on staff practices or who would work well with an interviewer for example having higher verbal abilities.
good sized sample of 49 Y9 students, 8 behaviour coordinators and three school managers.

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
 - If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
 - If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
 - If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
 - If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments: Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (unclear how this links to ethnographic approach - was it just that interviews took place in school?). No explicit reasoning provided for choosing this approach although I would argue it meets the research aims. Interview topic guide not provided. Aims appeared to have been modified during the research- whether this impacted upon the approach of subsequent interviews or just redirected the focus of analysis is less clear. Unclear how interviews were recorded however transcripts are mentioned suggesting audio recording. Saturation not discussed however strong recurring themes across student and adults interviews alluded to.

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: Influence of researcher not addressed which seems surprising given reported ethnographic approach. How the researcher came to decide to adapt the aims during the study is described but there is little reflection upon their own positioning within this decision.

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments: Communicated key values of openness, confidentiality, mutual respect and tolerance to ppts. Also discussed ethical considerations around the involvement of CYP e.g. around dignity, informed consent (parent and YP) transparency etc. Transcripts anonymised . Followed school safeguarding procedures. Unclear if ethical committee involved.

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
 - If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
 - Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
 - If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
 - To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
 - Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: The data were developed into themes, the themes were described as having 'emerged' and 'arisen' suggesting perhaps a limited appreciation for the researcher's own role in their development. The method used to reach these themes is also unclear. The definition of a theme for the researcher was briefly considered. The method of analysis or stages/processes used to reach these themes are not outlined. Given that over 50% of the sample were young people, it is interesting that only 1/6 of the longer quotes used in the analysis were from the students themselves with the rest representing school staff. This could be due to the levels of depth or fluency of the student quotes as their views were more frequently presented in shorter phrases or words.

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider whether
- If the findings are explicit
 - If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
 - If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
 - If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: Contradictions and alternative viewpoints were taken into account for example the importance of shared responsibility for pastoral care but also reasons why this might be met with resistance by some teachers and how some approaches can be quite divisive. Limitations and strengths of findings not mentioned. Findings linked back to pastoral aim, less explicitly to reasons for increasing exclusion although this may have been assumed to be related to pastoral factors.

Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments: The discussion links the findings back to the recent research of policy context. Recognise that experiences may not be shared by all schools but provides arguments as to how they may be useful to schools . Recognition that have only outline one possible approach to developing pastoral systems but still concludes that the evidence is strong to suggest that this type of provision has positive potential for CYP. Several questions raised within discussion but not explicitly translated into directions for future research.

Appendix I: Literature Appraisal Overview

Date and author	Clear Statement of Research Aims	Appropriate qualitative methodology	Appropriate research design	Appropriate recruitment strategy	Appropriate data collection	Researcher-participant relationship considered	Ethical issues considered	Rigorous data analysis	Clear statement of findings
Cole et al. (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes
Gilmore (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell
Martin-Denham (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rechten & Tweed (2014)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trotman et al. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tucker (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes

Author and Date	Appropriate Context	Ethical issues considered	Quantitative		Qualitative			Justified Conclusions
			Appropriate Outcome Measures	Comparison Group	Appropriate data collection	Rigorous data analysis	Potential researcher bias considered	
Farouk & Edwards (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't tell	Yes
Hatton (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes
Hulme et al. (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Yes
Waters (2015)	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Can't Tell	Partially

Author and Date	Appropriate Context	Ethical issues considered	Appropriate Outcome Measures	Group Comparability	Justified Conclusions
Gibbs & Powell (2016)	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	No	Yes
Obsuth et al. (2016)	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes
Obsuth et al. (2017)	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes
Toth at al. (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Appendix J: Studies Included in Literature Review

Authors	Research Aims	Research Type	Participants	Data Collection/ Research Design	Key Findings in relation to literature review question
Cole, McCluskey, Daniels, Thompson & Tawell (2019)	Explore reasons for high rates of exclusion in English schools.	Qualitative	Five local authority officers and one 'third sector' officer working for a voluntary organisation across Northern and Southern LAs	Semi structured interviews	Approaches that can reduce/prevent exclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative, inclusive whole-school values/ethos driven by school leaders. - Strong SEND support - Targeted interventions in schools - Engaging with external support - Onsite inclusion units
Farouk & Edwards (2021)	Explore the impact of a new narrative counselling intervention to support young people at risk of exclusion.	Mixed methods (quasi-experimental/qualitative)	Eleven students (aged 13-14 years) from three secondary schools in London/South East England.	Student engagement scale administered at beginning and end of 6-7 week intervention. Analysis of autobiographical narrative generated within counselling sessions.	Narrative counselling intervention led to increased self-reported behavioural engagement. Factors within the school ethos and cultures (such as accountability and inclusivity) had the potential to affect outcomes. Transition between primary and secondary school, in particular reduced pastoral support and increased demands for independence, was shared by participants as a factor which made it more difficult to manage in the secondary environment.
Gibbs & Powell (2012)	Explore the relationship between the efficacy beliefs of teachers and exclusion practices.	Correlational	Teachers from 31 nursery /primary schools in North East England.	Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale. Number of fixed term exclusions across the previous year.	Individual teacher efficacy beliefs were not found to be related to rates of exclusion. Some aspects of collective efficacy related to exclusion practices: specifically, beliefs around the ability of school staff to mitigate against the effects of social deprivation.
Gilmore (2013)	Explore the perspectives of secondary students around the use of a 'disciplinary inclusion room'.	Qualitative	5 students in year 8 or 9 who had experience of the inclusion room.	Series of 30 minute, 1:1 interviews. Supported by analysis of relevant documents.	Students believed that the inclusion room was an effective deterrent and fair form of discipline. Mixed findings around the educational impact of the room. Potential for schools to create a relational space. Can be used to prevent the use of external exclusion.

Authors	Research Aims	Research Type	Participants	Data Collection/ Research Design	Key Findings in relation to literature review question
Hatton (2013)	Explore the relationship between school ethos and the use of exclusions.	Mixed Methods (qualitative/ correlational)	<i>Phase 1</i> 9 school staff/ 1 governor/ 1 parent. <i>Phase 2</i> 128 teachers (38 from excluding schools) from schools with high levels of deprivation in Northern England.	<i>Phase 1</i> Focus groups/interviews <i>Phase 2</i> Questionnaire based on outcomes of focus groups to measure perceptions around inclusion and exclusion. Data also collected on use of fixed term exclusions within participating schools.	Differences in responses from staff in excluding vs non-excluding schools in relation to six themes. Features of non-excluding schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared responsibility for behaviour - Preventative strategies at a whole-school level - Rewards used more frequently than sanctions - Reduced emphasis on relationships with parents - Behavioural difficulties viewed as SEND - Staff confident in their ability to meet needs. - Staff doubt the benefit of exclusion
Hulme et al. (2023)	Explore the impact of a local area project in secondary schools on rates of pupil movement.	Mixed Methods	5 MAT CEOs 15 School leaders 2 Council officers 2 PRU staff	Data collected on rates of pupil movement (including exclusions) pre and during the project. Semi-structured interviews	Approaches used to facilitate inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uniting behaviour and SEND systems - Commitment to early assessment - Graduated pathways for alternative provision - Conceptualising behaviour as unmet need - Broadening curricula - Training and policies to increase staff capacity. - Increased 'in-house' provision with right staffing.
Martin-Denham (2021)	Explore headteacher perspectives on alternative approaches to formal school exclusion.	Qualitative	46 headteachers from primary and secondary schools in North East England.	Semi-structured interviews	Alternatives to exclusion arranged through three themes <i>Exclusionary Approaches</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of isolation rooms and booths - Disciplinary measures e.g. report cards, detentions etc. - Team teach <i>Limbo</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transfers to specialist provision - Part-time timetables <i>Inclusionary Approaches</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to reflection or sensory rooms - Increased staff support - Reasonable classroom adjustments - Individualised behaviour support plans - Collaborating with families - Accessing external support
Obsuth, Cope, Sutherland,	Explore moderating factors	Randomised control trial	Students at risk of exclusion from secondary schools in	Considered treatment characteristics, individual baseline characteristics	Factors surrounding the design and implementation of the programme may have led to the null/negative effects.

Authors	Research Aims	Research Type	Participants	Data Collection/ Research Design	Key Findings in relation to literature review question
Pilbeam, Marray & Eisner (2016)	surrounding null and negative effects of Engage in Education London from Obsuth et al., (2017)		London (see below for participant numbers)	and demographic characteristics in relation to the outcomes from Obsuth et al. (2017).	
Obsuth, Sutherland, Cope, Pilbeam, Murray & Eisner (2017)	Evaluate the impact of Engage in Education London (a social communication intervention) on behavioural, socio-emotional and exclusion outcomes.	Randomised control trial	17 schools allocated to intervention condition (373 students) 19 schools allocated to control condition (365 students)	Primary measure of exclusion through student and teacher report alongside school data. Student and teacher questionnaires covering social/ communication skills, school relationships, discipline and behaviour. Academic assessment Arrest records	Mixture of negative (student report) and null effects (teacher report and school data) on exclusion outcomes as a result of the intervention. Null effect of the intervention on secondary social, emotional and behavioural outcomes.
Rechten & Tweed (2014)	Explore the viability of a feedback and communication intervention for young people at risk of exclusion.	Qualitative	32 education staff across 3 locations in the West Midlands.	Focus groups following workshops demonstrating the intervention.	The intervention was conceptualised as a viable option for supporting young people at risk of exclusion. Some adaptations were suggested if used with this population including utilising the approach as a staff training tool, considering how to ensure the young person felt safe and avoid potential discomfort.
Toth, Cross, Golden & Ford (2022)	Explore the relationship between school based mental health counselling and exclusion from school.	Quasi-experimental	6712 young people across 61 secondary schools and 308 primary schools. (440 had experienced fixed term exclusion)	Measured exclusions and mental health pre and post intervention.	Significant reduction in school exclusions in the year following beginning counselling sessions. Improved mental health following intervention.
Trotman, Tucker & Martyn (2015)	Explore potential factors	Qualitative	49 Year 9 students and 8 behaviour coordinators from	Semi-structured interviews	Factors impacting on behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transition to secondary school and key stage four. - Curricula

Authors	Research Aims	Research Type	Participants	Data Collection/ Research Design	Key Findings in relation to literature review question
	associated with school exclusion.		secondary schools in the West Midlands.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unmet SEND - Teacher perceptions and attitudes - Pastoral systems and behaviour support - Approaches to teaching and learning - Coordination between home and school
Tucker (2013)	Explore pastoral approaches which can be used to support young people at risk of exclusion.	Qualitative	49 Year 9 students, 8 behaviour coordinators and 3 school managers in Birmingham.	Semi-structured interviews	Pastoral approaches identified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared responsibility for pastoral care - Need for sufficient funding - Multi-professional, targeted intervention - Adults demonstrating care, tolerance and responsiveness - Opportunities for pupil voice - Early identification of need - Structures for information sharing
Waters (2015)	Evaluate the impact of the story links project for pupils at risk of exclusion who had weak literacy skills.	Mixed methods, (quasi experimental/ qualitative)	12 pupils aged 6-11, their parent/carers and school staff.	Semi-structured interviews pre and post intervention. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Reading assessment	Following programmes the author reported increased parental involvement in learning, positive changes in children's behaviour and attitudes to learning and a decrease in exclusions.

Overview of included literature

Appendix K: Theming the Literature

I began by reading through the literature review articles and highlighting key points and noting these on the individual papers as shown in the example below.

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All interviewees reported a deteriorating situation, exacerbated in their view, by national policy and acute funding difficulties at LA level and within individual schools. Reported inclusive practice usually couched in terms of reduced range, quality and availability, was in line the research background section above.

Effective local practice restraining the rise in exclusions

Approaches that minimise school exclusions

are no different from what we already knew ... It's about schools working together closely with the Local Authority to try to understand what's causing [a child's] challenging behaviour, to have good socialisation in place, to have good approaches to behaviour ... good support from the NHS (national health service) in relation to mental health. (ETS01, p.23)

The Third Sector Officer recalled the Every Child Matters strategy (DfES 2003b):

What a lot of people haven't got of and are in fact willing to embrace because it seemed to work. Youth offending teams, the police all working with, commissioning services, working together to prevent exclusions. So that's still out there. (ETS0, p.23)

Interviewees endorsed the Staged Intervention approach. EIAS1 (p.21) used the language of the 'Three Wave model of the English National Strategies of pre-2010. The interviewees still observed elements of such practice but feared that it was under increasing threat (see next section). The importance of collaborative inclusive values at a whole-school level ('wave one') was recognised. EIAS2 thought keeping exclusions to a minimum (probably comes down to the individual ethos and the structure within a school and that does start at the top' (p.18). EIAS2 reported 'Some schools just have really good inclusive practice and inclusive systems' (p.18). EIAS1 said:

We have headteachers who are inclusionists who 'look within and going to exclude for persistent disruptive behaviour ... Our job [is] to guide those young people and mentor them to a point where they're not behaving like that'. (p.18)

These schools were reported to have a deep understanding of and empathy for pupils with SEMH, particularly SEMH. They were willing to abide by national and local guidance. They had a good relationship with the LA and other schools. EIAS2 talked of

'Schools having a shared ownership of the children in their area ... not leaving one school having them, not to do with a really difficult child, but actually looking for shared solutions ... that still happens ... but not as often perhaps as ... in the past'. (EIAS2, p.17)

When asked about targeted and individual support that helped avoid exclusions (National Strategies Wave Two and Wave Three), the English interviewees said they still encountered effective within-school intervention of the kind reported in the research background above: nurture groups (EIAS2), support through SEND systems, School Support and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), or through pastoral/wellbeing support, often involving school counsellors (EIAS2, ETS01); maintenance of inclusion registers of vulnerable children (EIAS1); or through still operating LA and other support services (advisory teachers, educational psychologists).

On-site inclusion units is 'the first thing you do to reduce your fixed term exclusions' (EIAS1, p.23). Such facilities had been observed by EIAS1 in her previous authority:

They [were] basically like a PFI on the premises. It was, 'There's been some problems, go and do some intensive work and you go back in' [to your mainstream classes] and that actually worked really well and prevented exclusions'. (p.24)

EIAS1 described effective training in inclusive practice, funded as a time-limited project, for 'teachers who'd hung up the LA saying, "Right, this child's at risk of PEK [permanent exclusion]. We can't do anything more with them ... (p.29). Staff was encouraged to self-reflect on how they were managing the challenging pupils, to look for triggers for disruptive behaviour, to work as

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a team to develop strategies for a child. Rather than staff setting a plan, which is ... you set kids targets, they fail so then we've got a document that says they failed and we can get rid of them' (p.29). It was about 'what we all do collectively as a team at that point, to reduce the risk of that behaviour escalating' (p.19). She claimed a 'real success rate' after the training, staff retained 29 out of 30 children in their schools.

EIAS3 looked back a decade to when there were so few permanent exclusions' (p.25) and PFIU teachers could undertake outreach support' (p.24) observing children and teachers in mainstream settings, identifying unmet needs and calling in more substantial support from other services. There was also more scope for dual registration. EIAS3 reported, with pupils saved from permanent exclusion by splitting their week between host school and PFIU or extended courses at FE colleges. EIAS2 referred to the PFIU offering four-week short-stay courses addressing difficulties off-site prior to re-integration.

EIAS2 reported schools still buying Key Stage 4 vocational placements in local FE, or if they needed a greater degree of supervision and support, at the PFIU. EIAS1 had personal experience:

I set up a whole programme ... working with our local FE college ... to deliver alternative programmes for children either at risk of, or who had been permanently excluded ... they were taken out of the school environment, given a very different environment [including a safe place for the children to retreat to when it got too much for them, where they could ... have one-to-one time and the rest of the time they had vocational education, with some ... Maths and English ... focused on preparing for adulthood, for employment, and it was so successful'. (p.24)

In 2018 the northern LA still operated an Early Help strategy that involved social services and CAMHS of the School Nursing services' Strengthening Families' programme, sometimes triggered when a pupil received a fixed-term exclusion. This seemed a good example of what ETS01 advocated:

'a local area approach, bringing together all the agencies that have an interest in supporting children, working together, understanding the needs of the population, commissioning preventative services to meet need at the earliest possible point'. (p.25)

He still came across 'plenty of positive practice' and 'very low levels of exclusions ... where there's what we behaviour and attendance partnerships [part of the 'National Strategies'], so clusters or groups of schools working together, who're basically saying, "We're not going to exclude"' (p.21)

For pupils actually excluded, the work of LA specialist inclusion officers, described by EIAS2, advising and supporting schools as well as being advocates of excluded children and their families seemed important. They supported the re-inclusion of pupils after fixed-term exclusions and made alternative arrangements for those permanently excluded. The officers attend monthly district inclusion panel meetings, the usual mechanism for 'Fair Access Protocols' (Department for Education 2019) set-up between LAs and headteachers.

Discussions at such panels could be the catalyst for a child's transfer to a special school, particularly establishments for pupils deemed to have SEMH difficulties.⁹ The southern LA continued to maintain its own SEMH school while EIAS1 bought places in independent schools. ETS01 stressed the historical and continuing important role of these schools, providing for about 14,000 pupils, many of whom will have previously experienced exclusions from mainstream schools. However, the usual LA response to the child experiencing a fixed-term exclusion of six days or more or a permanent exclusion continued to be placed in the local PFIU.

English government policies associated with the rise in exclusions

The English interviewees were deeply concerned by current government behaviour (DfE 2011) and exclusions guidance (Department for Education 2012, revised 2017), seeing this as having a negative impact on their work, on schools and on children at risk of exclusion and their families. Government policy on school curriculum is explored later.

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These suggestions are at a v. broad level - potential for intervention in partnership and therefore outcomes.

Staged intervention approach.

Collaborative, inclusive, wide school values.

School ethos clear to start repaired, effective targeted support.

Good leaders' standards of SEND needs incl. SEMH.

Collaboration between schools.

Onsite incl. units.

LA training support on practice

with clear support from specialist.

Outreach support from specialist.

Multi-agency approach of local level.

Concerns around impact of behavior policy from gov.

Using External support e.g. ERS, ATs etc.

Mixing school intervention

→ nurture groups

→ pastoral support and counsellors

→ SEND support.

I allocated each paper a number to help with recording where ideas had been discussed.

1	Cole et al. (2019)	8	Obsuth et al. (2017)
2	Farouk and Edwards (2021)	9	Rechten and Tweed (2014)
3	Gibbs and Powell (2012)	10	Toth et al. (2022)
4	Gilmore (2013)	11	Trotman et al. (2015)
5	Hatton (2013)	12	Tucker (2013)
6	Martin-Denham (2021)	13	Waters (2015)
7	Obsuth et al.(2016)		

I then noted down key topic areas and began linking these to form a basic map with records of which paper each topic area/idea was discussed. This map consisted of larger ideas discussed in multiple papers with arms for specific key points. I recorded the number of each paper beside a topic area if a key area was discussed.

Key topic areas are listed in the table below with their corresponding papers.

Broad Areas	Corresponding Papers
School ethos	1, 2, 5, 7, 12
Teacher relationships	11
SEND systems	1, 5, 6, 12
Teacher beliefs	3, 12
Pastoral support	1, 6, 11, 12
Onsite inclusion units	1, 4, 6, 11
Staged Intervention Approach	1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13
External Support	1, 6, 12
Relationships with parents	2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12
Curriculum	11
Relationships with parents	2, 5, 6, 11, 12
Behaviour policies	5, 6
Voice and Choice	11, 12
Transition	2, 11

I then wrote out these main ideas onto post-it notes and began arranging them to create broad theme areas. My first thought was to structure the themes around individual approaches, family engagement and whole-school approaches. This led me to consider using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework to structure these ideas. However, some ideas spanned across several levels of the model. I therefore concluded this was not a helpful approach to present the ideas most clearly. I then considered arranging the themes around psychological theories which might relate to for example humanistic approaches, behaviourist approaches etc.

While this informed the final themes and acted as the basis for early drafts, some ideas did not quite fit neatly within these theories and this was therefore constraining and added unhelpful complexity.

The final themes developed were as follows:

- Relational and Pastoral Approaches
- Voice, Choice and Beliefs
- Collaboration and Communication
- Inclusion or Isolation

As I was writing up each of these themes and subthemes, I referred back frequently to all of the papers to ensure that the specifics in relation to the topic area had been recorded accurately. I also re-read the papers to ensure that ideas relating to other developed topic areas had not been missed and that in producing the themes I had not missed any key meanings from the papers.

Appendix L: Determining Initial Sample

I ranked schools within the LA based upon their rate of suspensions from the previous academic year (suspensions are more frequent and were therefore felt to be a more stable indicator of a school's exclusion practices than permanent exclusions). The schools were then categorised into groups of high, middle and low excluding schools. Five schools were selected from each of these categories. Across this sample, attempts were made to balance other characteristics including school size, locations within the LA area, rates of students with special educational needs and differing socio-economic status (as measured through rates of students accessing Ever 6 funding¹²). When a school declined the offer to take part, where possible a school with similar characteristics was contacted in their place. At this point, I should perhaps note that high rates of exclusion were not assumed to be due to unsuccessful approaches to reducing exclusions or vice versa, rather, that by exploring perspectives from a range of contexts that it was hoped a richer picture might be constructed.

¹² Ever 6 Funding is a form of pupil premium funding which is provided to schools for those students who have 'had a recorded period of free school meal eligibility' within the past 6 years (DfE, 2023d, para. 6).

Appendix M: Recruitment Timeline

27/04/22	Initial emails sent to 15 schools in LA 1.	1 participant
11/05/22	Reminder emails sent to 15 schools in LA 1.	1 participant
19/05/22	Initial emails sent to remaining schools in LA 1	
07/06/22	Reminder emails sent to remaining schools in LA 1	
08/07/22	Amendment to expand recruitment methods sent to ethics panel to include use of key contacts and expanding areas.	
22/07/22	Received agreement to amendments	
August 22	Recruitment paused due to school holidays	
30/08/22	Email to LA 1 EPS to request advertising through link EPs.	
06/09/22	Follow up email sent to all schools in LA 1 to recognise potential changes in capacity.	1 participant
	Permission to recruit in LA 2 sought from EPS.	
06/10/22	Emails sent to all schools in LA 2	1 potential participant – requested follow up in November to check capacity (no capacity at follow up).
11/10/22	Permission to recruit in LA 3 sought from EPS.	
12/10/22	LA 3 Response requesting to initially advertise through EPS communications before emailing directly.	
13/10/22	Research information sent to LA 3 be shared.	
18/10/22	Permission to recruit in LA 4 sought from EPS.	
31/10/22	Reminder emails sent to all schools in LA 2	
31/10/22	Chasing email sent to LA 3 to find out if information had been shared.	
31/10/22	Email sent to contact identified through EP colleague.	
02/11/22	Permission to recruit in LA 4 received.	
03/11/22	Emails sent to all schools in LA 4	1 participant
08/11/22	EPs in LA 1 send targeted emails to headteachers.	4 participants
25/11/22	Reminder emails sent to all schools in LA 4	
25/11/22	Follow up email to LA 3 EPS following no reply requesting permission to contact schools.	
27/11/22	Principal EP LA 3 asks locality leads to contact schools.	
27/11/22	Email received from individual in LA 2	1 participant
28/11/22	Locality leads/I contact 5 headteachers in LA 3	1 participant

SPS RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM: STAFF and DOCTORAL STUDENTS

- This proforma must be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School for Policy Studies, both staff and doctoral postgraduate students.
- See the Ethics Procedures document for clarification of the process.
- All research **must** be ethically reviewed before any fieldwork is conducted, regardless of source of funding.
- See the School's policy and guidelines relating to research ethics and data protection, to which the project is required to conform.
- Please stick to the word limit provided. **Do not attach** your funding application or research proposal.

Key project details:

1. Proposer's Name

Hannah Lithgow

2. Proposer's Email Address:

██████

3. Project Title

An exploration of school leaders' perspectives on the facilitators and barriers in reducing or preventing school exclusions: bridging the gap between research and practice.

4. Project Start Date:

23.02.22

End Date:

31.08.23

Who needs to provide Research Ethics Committee approval for your project?

The SPS REC will only consider those research ethics applications which do not require submission elsewhere. As such, you should make sure that your proposed research does not require a NHS National Research Ethics Service (NRES) review e.g. does it involve NHS patients, staff or facilities – see <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/>

If you are not sure where you should apply please discuss it with either the chair of the Committee or the Faculty Ethics Officer who is based in RED.

Social care research projects which involve NHS patients, people who use services or people who lack capacity as research participants need to be reviewed by a Social Care Research Ethics Committee (see <https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/social-care-research/>). Similarly research which accesses unanonymised patient records (without informed consent) must be reviewed by a REC and the National Information Governance Board for Health and Social Care (NIGB).

Who needs to provide governance approval for this project?

If this project involves access to patients, clients, staff or carers of an NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation, it falls within the scope of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social. You will also need to get written approval from the Research Management Office or equivalent of each NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation.

When you have ethical approval, you will need to complete the research registration form:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/study-notification.html>

Guidance on completing this form can be found at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/guidance.pdf>. Contact the Research Governance team (██████████) for guidance on completing this form and if you have any questions about obtaining local approval.

Do you need additional insurance to carry out your research?

Whilst staff and doctoral students will normally be covered by the University's indemnity insurance there are some situations where it will need to be checked with the insurer. If you are conducting research with: Pregnant research subjects or children under 5 you should email: ██████████

In addition, if you are working or travelling overseas you should take advantage of the university travel insurance (see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/insurance/travel-insurance/>).

Do you need a Disclosure and Barring Service check?

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Criteria for deciding whether you require a DBS check are available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about>

You should specifically look at the frequency, nature, and duration of your contact with potentially vulnerable adults and or children. If your contact is a one-off research interaction, or infrequent contact (for example: 3 contacts over a period of time) you are unlikely to require a check.

If you think you need a DBS check then you should consult the University of Bristol web-page:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/legal/dbs/>

5. If your research project requires REC approval elsewhere please tell us which committee, this includes where co-researchers are applying for approval at another institution. Please provide us with a copy of your approval letter for our records when it is available.

n/a

6. Have all subcontractors you are using for this project (including transcribers, interpreters, and co-researchers not formally employed at Bristol University) agreed to be bound by the School's requirements for ethical research practice?

Yes

No/Not yet

Not applicable

x

Note: You must ensure that written agreement is secured before they start to work. They will be provided with training and sign a detailed consent form.

7. If you are a PhD/doctoral student please tell us the name of your research supervisor(s).

Pauline Heslop (1st Supervisor) and Mary Stanley-Duke (2nd Supervisor)

Please confirm that your supervisor(s) has seen this final version of your ethics application?

Yes

No

8. Who is funding this study?

n/a

If this study is funded by the ESRC or another funder requiring lay representation on the ethics committee and is being undertaken by a member staff, this form should be submitted to the Faculty REC.

Post-graduate students undertaking ESRC funded projects should submit their form to the SPS Research Ethics Committee (SPS REC).

9. Is this application part of a larger proposal?

No

Yes

If yes, please provide a summary of the larger study and indicate how this application relates to the overall study.

10. Is this proposal a replication of a similar proposal already approved by the SPS REC? Please provide the SPS REC reference number.

No

Yes

If Yes, please tell us the name of the project, the date approval was given and code (if you have one).

Please describe any differences (such as context) in the current study. If the study is a replication of a previously approved study. Submit these first two pages of the form.

ETHICAL RESEARCH PROFORMA

The following set of questions is intended to provide the School Research Ethics Committee with enough information to determine the risks and benefits associated with your research. You should use these questions to assist in identifying the ethical considerations which are important to your research. You should identify any relevant ethical issues and how you intend to deal with them. Whilst the REC does not comment on the methodological design of your study, it will consider whether the design of your study is likely to produce the benefits you anticipate. **Please avoid copying and pasting large parts of research bids or proposals which do not directly answer the questions.** Please also avoid using *unexplained* acronyms, abbreviations or jargon.

- 1. IDENTITY & EXPERIENCE OF (CO) RESEARCHERS:** Please give a list of names, positions, qualifications, previous research experience, and functions in the proposed research of all those who will be in contact with participants

Hannah Lithgow - Trainee Educational Psychologist and Researcher

Qualifications:

Currently undertaking Doctorate in Educational Psychology (placement experience within a secondary school setting and within two local Educational Psychology Services; University of Bristol, 2020-2023).

Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Including placements in a first school and middle school; University of Exeter, 2015-2016).

BSc (Hons) Psychology (4-year Sandwich course including a placement year supporting children with special educational needs in a mainstream primary school; University of Surrey, 2010-2014).

Positions Held:

Primary Teacher in an all-through school (2016 – 2020). Positions of responsibility included Upper KS2 Lead and Mathematics Lead.

Outdoor Activity Instructor (2009-2010, 2014-2015 and ongoing volunteering)

Research Experience

Undergraduate Dissertation Research project investigating primary school children's perceptions of academic subjects. Interviews and scaling with children aged between 7 and 11. Quantitative methodology.

Year 1 DEdPsy Research Commission exploring secondary school teachers' perceptions of classroom practice for students with autism. Semi-structured interviews analysed using thematic analysis.

2. STUDY AIMS/OBJECTIVES [maximum of 200 words]: Please provide the aims and objectives of your research.

Aims:

The aim of this research is to explore some of the reasons school exclusion rates in England for persistent disruptive behaviour remain high. The research aims to gain a greater understanding of school leaders' perceptions of the facilitators of and barriers to the success of current approaches within their school as well as how these approaches have been informed. It is hoped that this understanding might help bridge the gap between research and practice

Objectives:

- To interview between 10 and 15 secondary school leaders within one local authority who have a responsibility for determining approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour.
- To conduct thematic analysis to identify themes within participants' responses.
- To report the findings in a dissertation format as well as a summary to be distributed to schools, and to discuss the findings with Educational Psychologists who may be able to support practice in this area.

Research Questions:

- What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?
- What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches within their school for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?
- What additional sources of support might be helpful for schools in reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?

RESEARCH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

(If you are undertaking secondary data analysis, please proceed to section 11)

3. RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY [maximum of 300 words]: Please tell us what you propose to do in your research and how individual participants, or groups of participants, will be identified and sampled. Please also tell us what is expected of research participants who consent to take part (Please note that recruitment procedures are covered in question 8)

A qualitative methodology will be used to explore the research questions.

Participants will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview discussing their school's approaches to exclusion (Interview Topic guide – Appendix 9). The content of the interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis.

Interviews will take place at the participant's school (dependent upon COVID-19 restrictions, interviews may need to be conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams).

The decision around the specific role of the interviewee will be taken on a school-by-school basis in terms of who the school identifies as a key decision maker around the school's approach to exclusions. This is likely to vary between schools based on the structure of their leadership team. It is recognised that more than one individual within a school may fit within these criteria however schools will be asked to select the most appropriate staff member.

The participants must have taken a lead role in at least one of the following areas for their school.

- Analysed school level exclusion data and helped to create action plans/provision maps/resource plans as a result.
- Undertaken research (formal or informal) into approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions (fixed term or permanent) to inform school level approaches or policies.
- Attended training focusing on school exclusions, or an aspect of exclusion, and helped to implement changes at a school level as a result.
- Contributed to decisions at a whole-school level surrounding approaches to exclusions.

Participants will be recruited from secondary/upper schools within a local authority (LA) in England where the researcher is on placement as a trainee educational psychologist.

Headteachers from the 30 secondary/upper schools within the LA where the researcher has not had significant professional involvement will be contacted and invited to express interest/disinterest. The headteachers/ senior leadership team will be asked to decide who within their school would be most appropriate to take part and to forward the study information onto them. Potential participants will be asked to respond within three weeks (by a date given). After two weeks, an initial reminder email will be sent to headteachers requesting that they forward on the information. After three weeks, I will assess the number of potential participants. If there are more than 15 potential participants, I will use a purposive sampling method to select a range of schools. This will be based upon local authority school exclusion data (rate of fixed term exclusions) from the previous academic year to ensure a spread of low to high excluding schools. See Appendix 10 for further detail on recruitment process.

4. EXPECTED DURATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Please tell us how long each researcher will be working on fieldwork/research activity. For example, conducting interviews between March to July 2019. Also tell us how long participant involvement will be. For example: Interviewing 25 professional participants for a maximum of 1 hour per interview.

- It is hoped that interviews will be conducted between April and July 2022
- It is possible that some interviews may need to be conducted in the autumn term (September-December 2022) if there are recruitment challenges.
- Aiming to interview approximately 10 - 15 professional participants for around 30 - 45 minutes each.

5. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND TO WHOM: [maximum 100 words] Tell us briefly what the main benefits of the research are and to whom.

The themes constructed within the analysis may help contribute to bridging the current gap between research and practice by identifying how current practices are informed as well as factors which may facilitate or limit successful implementation of approaches. This may help wider professionals, such as educational psychologists, to support schools more effectively to reduce or prevent exclusions.

By participating in the interviews, the school staff involved may be offered a reflective space which allows them to consider their practice whilst also being given a voice and feeling heard. The research findings may also support schools in reflecting on their practice.

6. POTENTIAL RISKS/HARM TO PARTICIPANTS [maximum of 100 words]: What potential risks are there to the participants and how will you address them? List any potential physical or psychological dangers that can be anticipated? You may find it useful to conduct a more formal risk assessment prior to conducting your fieldwork. The University has an example risk assessment form and guidance :

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/media/gn/RA-gn.pdf> and <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policies/>

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED
<p><i>Example 1: Participants may be upset during the interview</i></p> <p><i>Example 2: A participants may tell me something about illegal activity</i></p>	<p><i>Example 1: If a participant gets upset I will stop the interview at that time. I will give participants information about support services at the end of the interview.</i></p> <p><i>Example 2: The information sheet and consent form will warn of the limits of confidentiality and I will have a confidentiality protocol (submitted to the committee).</i></p>
<p>Participant becomes upset during the interview.</p>	<p>Pause the interview and check-in. Participant to choose if to continue.</p> <p>Signposting to support services at the end of the interview.</p> <p>Participants reminded of right to withdraw at start of interview. Discuss how participant would like to communicate this e.g. verbally, hand signal etc.</p>
<p>Participant presents a safeguarding concern.</p>	<p>A confidentiality protocol will be included within the consent form which warns of the limits of confidentiality.</p> <p>I will be aware of the name and contact details for the designated safeguarding lead for each participant's school and will follow the school's safeguarding procedures if a concern arises. I will also discuss any concerns with my research supervisors.</p>
<p>LA, schools or individual identified through writeup.</p>	<p>Pseudonyms will be used when reporting findings.</p> <p>Participants asked to share scenarios generally without the use of names or other identifying features.</p> <p>School or LA specific language anonymised.</p>
<p>Virtual interview may be conducted from participants' home (COVID contingency)</p>	<p>Quiet and secure room without interruptions</p> <p>Blurred background feature.</p> <p>Start of the interview: context check</p> <p>Recommend headphones</p> <p>Regain consent following interruption/break in the interview.</p> <p>If connection is lost, send follow-up email including debrief to participant to check welfare.</p>

*Add more boxes if needed.

7. RESEARCHER SAFETY [maximum of 200 words]: What risks could the researchers be exposed to during this research project? If you are conducting research in individual's homes or potentially dangerous places then a researcher safety protocol is mandatory. Examples of safety protocols are available in the guidance.

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED
<i>Example 1: Interview at the participant's home.</i>	<i>Fieldwork safety protocol will be followed. A colleague will know the start and approximate finish time of the interview. If there is no contact from the researcher, they will ring the researcher. If no contact is made the confidential address details will be accessed and the police informed.</i>
Researcher is unsafe in interview	Interviews to take place within school setting. Researcher to sign in and out of school.
Interviewee expresses emotionally challenging information.	Researcher is aware of wellbeing services and is supervised by a member of university staff who they will contact if needed.
Negative information shared about colleague which could be detrimental to working relationships.	Seek advice/follow up information with university supervisors to determine next steps if appropriate. (for example, issues concerning safeguarding).
Virtual interview may be conducted from researcher's home (COVID contingency)	Quiet and secure room without interruptions Use the blurred background feature/plain background

8. RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES [maximum of 400 words]: How are you going to access participants? Are there any gatekeepers involved? Is there any sense in which respondents might be "obliged" to participate (for example because their manager will know, or because they are a service user and their service will know), if so how will this be dealt with.

Due to the dynamic nature of schools, the headteacher in each setting will be better placed than the researcher to identify the most appropriate member of staff from their school to participate. In addition, since the interviews will discuss the school's approaches, it seems important that the headteacher would be informed about the research prior to recruitment of the staff. Headteachers will therefore act as gatekeepers, receiving an initial contact email in which they will be asked to forward the study information (information sheet and email – Appendices 1 and 4) to the appropriate member of staff. Within this email, the headteacher will be invited to complete an expression of interest form whereby they can state their approval for the research to take place within the school. If headteachers indicate they do not wish for their school to be involved, no further contact will be made.

A reminder email will be sent to headteachers (who have not expressed interest/disinterest) after two weeks to act as a prompt (Appendix 5).

The information sheet will state an initial cut-off date of three weeks from the date of sending for prospective participants to contact the researcher to express interest.

To minimise the influence of headteachers, potential participants will be asked to contact the researcher to express interest directly (independent of the headteacher). It will be made clear in the initial email to the headteachers that they will not be informed whether a member of staff from their school chooses to take part.

Once potential participants have contacted the researcher, the researcher will discuss with them key information such as the purpose of the research, what taking part would entail, the voluntary nature etc. to

ensure they are well informed. Questions will be asked by the researcher at this point to ensure that the individual meets the criteria for participation and the individual would have the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions they would like to. If the individual would like to proceed with the research, they will then be sent a consent form (Appendix 2) which they will be asked to complete prior to the interview. The consent form will be attached to an email which will also provide the participant with a brief overview of what to expect from the interview in order to support them in feeling prepared (Appendix 7).

9. INFORMED CONSENT [maximum of 200 words]: How will this be obtained? Whilst in many cases written consent is preferable, where this is not possible or appropriate this should be clearly justified. An age and ability appropriate participant information sheet (PIS) setting out factors relevant to the interests of participants in the study must be handed to them in advance of seeking consent (see materials table for list of what should be included). If you are proposing to adopt an approach in which informed consent is not sought you must explain in detail why this is not considered to be appropriate. If you are planning to use photographic or video images in your method then additional specific consent should be sought from participants.

An information sheet (Appendix 1) will be emailed to participants as part of the initial recruitment information.

Participants will speak with the researcher either via email/phone (according to their preference) following their expression of interest in order to check understanding, eligibility and answer any questions.

If participants still wish to take part, they will be asked to complete a written consent form (Appendix 2). A confidentiality protocol will form part of the consent form and will clearly state to participants the limits of confidentiality. Participants will be asked to confirm that they have read and understood this.

At the start of the interview, I will go through the consent form with the participant to ensure that they still wish to consent. I will discuss with participants their right to withdraw at any point. I will allow the participant to decide how they would like to show they would like the interview to stop (if needed) once it has started whether this be verbally or a gesture/signal for example a raised hand.

Please tick the box to confirm that you will keep evidence of the consent forms (either actual forms or digitally scanned forms), securely for twenty years.

x

10. If you intend to use an on-line survey (for example Survey Monkey) you need to ensure that the data will not leave the European Economic Area i.e. be transferred or held on computers in the USA. Online Surveys (formally called Bristol Online Surveys) is fully compliant with UK Data Protection requirements – see <https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/>

Please tick the box to confirm that you will not use any on-line survey service based in the USA, China or outside the European Economic Area (EEA).

x

11. DATA PROTECTION: All applicants should regularly take the data protection on-line tutorial provided by the University in order to ensure they are aware of the requirements of current data protection legislation.

University policy is that “personal data can be sent abroad if the data subject gives unambiguous written consent. Staff should seek permission from the University Secretary prior to sending personal data outside of the EEA”.

Any breach of the University data protection responsibilities could lead to disciplinary action.

Have you taken the mandatory University data protection on-line tutorial in the last 12 months?
https://www.bris.ac.uk/is/media/training/uobonly/datasecurity/page_01.htm

Yes

No

Do you plan to send any information/data, which could be used to identify a living person, to anybody who works in a country that is not part of the European Union?

See <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-and-brexit/data-protection-if-there-s-no-brexit-deal/the-gdpr/international-data-transfers/>

No

Yes

If YES please list the country or countries:

Please outline your procedure for data protection. It is University of Bristol policy that interviews must be recorded on an encrypted device. Ideally this should be a University owned encrypted digital recorder (see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/transcription/>).

If you lose research data which include personal information or a data breach occurs, you MUST notify the University immediately. This means sending an e-mail to [REDACTED] and telling your Head of School. See additional details at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/data-breaches-and-incidents/>

The UK Data Protection Act (2018) include potential fines of up to €20,000,000 for not protecting personal data – so please provide details about how you plan to ensure the protection of ALL research data which could be used to identify a living person.

Interviews will be recorded (with consent) on an encrypted device. The recording will be made on an iPhone (not connected to the cloud) and/or encrypted voice recorder. At the first possible occasion, recordings will be transferred to a secure university folder and deleted from the recording device. The data will be anonymised (see section 12 below) within the transcription process. Once transcribed, the recordings will be deleted. The transcripts will be saved in an encrypted, password protected word document on a secure university folder.

In order to allow for a consistent analysis and quality of data, if a participant does not wish to be audio-recorded, they will be unable to take part. This will be made clear within the consent form.

Consent forms will also be saved in an encrypted, password protected word document on a secure university folder separate from the transcripts.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY	Yes	No
All my data will be stored on a password protected server	x	
I will only transfer unanonymised data if it is encrypted. (For advice on encryption see: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/device/)	x	
If there is a potential for participants to disclose illegal activity or harm to others you will need to provide a confidentiality protocol.	x	
Please tick the box to CONFIRM that you warned participants on the information and consent forms that there are limits to confidentiality and that at the end of the project data will be stored in a secure storage facility. https://www.acrc.bris.ac.uk/acrc/storage.htm	x	

Please outline your procedure for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Interviewer and interviewee will refrain from using any identifiable features such as names or initials.

Pre-transcribed recordings will be kept in a secured university folder or a fully encrypted device.

Data will be anonymised during transcription (pseudonyms will be used and possibly identifying information removed or changed for example school or LA specific information)

A confidentiality protocol will be shared with participants within the consent form.

Where quotes are used within the analysis section of the write-up, these will be kept to a minimum length to convey the required meaning.

It is recognised that a potential limitation of this research is that participants may feel highly invested in their school's approaches and therefore may find it more challenging to speak objectively. For this reason, it is important that confidentiality and anonymity measures are clearly explained in order that participants feel safe to speak more openly. The researcher will also aim to emphasise interest in honest and open responses.

DATA MANAGEMENT

13 Data Management

It is RCUK and University of Bristol policy that all research data (including qualitative data e.g. interview transcripts, videos, etc.) should be stored in an anonymised format and made freely and openly available for other researchers to use via the data.bris Research Data Repository and/or the UK Data Archive. What level of future access to your anonymised data will there be:

- Open access?
- Restricted access - what restrictions?
- Closed access - on what grounds?

This raises a number of ethical issues, for example you MUST ensure that consent is requested to allow data to be shared and reused.

Please briefly explain;

- 1) How you will obtain specific consent for data preservation and sharing with other researchers?
- 2) How will you protect the identity of participants? e.g. how will you anonymise your data for reuse.
- 3) How will the data be licensed for reuse? e.g. Do you plan to place any restrictions on the reuse of your data such as Creative Common Share Alike 2.0 licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/uk/>)
- 4) Where will you archive your data and metadata for re-use by other researchers?

- 1) Given the small scale, localised nature of this student research and the potential for re-identification, the data will be stored in a closed-access format.**
- 2) Interview transcripts will be anonymised. Names will be removed and pseudonyms used where needed. Any references to the school or LA will also be anonymised. Efforts will also be made to remove possibly identifying language such as school or LA specific terminology.**
- 3) The data will not be licensed for reuse.**
- 4) The data will not be archived for reuse.**

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

14. Secondary Data Analysis

Please briefly explain (if relevant to your research);

- (1) What secondary datasets you will use?
- (2) Where did you get these data from (e.g. ESRC Data Archive)?
- (3) How did you obtain permission to use these data? (e.g. by signing an end user licence)
- (4) Do you plan to make derived variables and/or analytical syntax available to other researchers? (e.g. by archiving them on data.bris or at the UK Data Archive)
- (5) Where will you store the secondary datasets?

n/a

PLEASE COMPLETE FOR ALL PROJECTS

15. DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS [maximum 200 words]: Are you planning to send copies of data to participants for them to check/comment on? If so, in what format and under what conditions? What is the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication and dissemination of findings etc.?

The findings will be written up in the form of a 45,000 word dissertation.

A short summary (1-2 sides) of the research findings will be sent to all schools who expressed interest in taking part, following completion of the dissertation, to communicate key findings.

A presentation will also be offered to educational psychologists within the LA in which the research took place.

The research may also be written up in order to be considered for publishing in an educational psychology journal (or similar).

16. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Please identify which of the following documents, and how many, you will be submitting within your application: Guidance is given at the end of this document on what each of these additional materials might contain.

Additional Material:	NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS
Participants information sheet (s)	1
Consent form (s)	1
Confidentiality protocol	1
Recruitment letters/posters/leaflets	4
Photo method information sheet	n/a
Photo method consent form	n/a
Support information for participant	1
3rd party confidentiality agreement	n/a
Interview Topic Guide	1
Recruitment Process	1

Please DO NOT send your research proposal or research bid as the Committee will not look at this

SUBMITTING AND REVIEWING YOUR PROPOSAL:

- To submit your application you should create a **single Word document** which contains your application form and all additional material and submit this information to the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email to [REDACTED]
- If you are having problems with this then please contact the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email [REDACTED] to discuss.
- Your form will then be circulated to the SPS Research Ethics Committee who will review your proposal on the basis of the information provided in this single PDF document. The likely response time is outlined in the 'Ethics Procedures' document. For staff applications we try to turn these around in 2-3 weeks. Doctoral student applications should be submitted by the relevant meeting deadline and will be turned around in 4 weeks.
- Should the Committee have any questions or queries after reviewing your application, the chair will contact you directly. If the Committee makes any recommendations you should confirm, in writing, that you will adhere to these recommendations before receiving approval for your project.
- Should your research change following approval it is your responsibility to inform the Committee in writing and seek clarification about whether the changes in circumstance require further ethical consideration.

Failure to obtain Ethical Approval for research is considered research misconduct by the University and is dealt with under their current misconduct rules.

Chair: Beth Tarleton [REDACTED]

Administrator: Hannah Blackman [REDACTED]

Date form updated by SPS REC: January 2019

Study Name: An exploration of school leaders' perspectives on the facilitators and barriers in reducing or preventing school exclusions: bridging the gap between research and practice.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate secondary school approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. I am interested in exploring how schools decide upon particular approaches, the facilitators and barriers approaches might present as well as what can be supportive. As professionals working within school systems, your experiences are highly valued in exploring this topic.

This research has approval from the University of Bristol School for Policy studies research ethics committee.

Who can take part?

I am interested in speaking with a member of staff within the school who has held responsibility for planning and implementing school approaches to reducing and preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. It is appreciated that this role may differ between schools so a specific title is not specified however it is expected that this individual would hold some level of responsibility at the whole school level. The following criteria are suggested to help in identifying this member of staff within the school. It is expected that the individual might have undertaken at least one of these tasks.

- Analysed school level exclusion data and helped to create action plans/provision maps/resource plans as a result.
- Undertaken research (formal or informal) into approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions (fixed term or permanent) to inform school level approaches or policies.
- Attended training focusing on school exclusions, or an aspect of exclusion, and helped to implement changes at a school level as a result.
- Contributed to decisions at a whole school level surrounding approaches to exclusions.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and there is no expectation that any member of staff should take part if they do not wish to.

What would happen if I chose to participate?

The research will involve a short interview of around 30 - 45 minutes with a trainee educational psychologist from the University of Bristol. Interviews will be conducted in

person (a virtual video call platform may need to be used if current COVID-19 restrictions do not allow for in person meeting). The researcher will audio record the interview and then transcribe the conversations in an anonymised form. This is essential for the data analysis process and as such all participants would need to consent to these recordings being taken in order to take part.

During the interview, you would be asked about your school's approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. You would be asked to consider facilitators and barriers to the success of these approaches and to consider what support might be beneficial for schools. An email would be sent to you prior to the interview with some further information to help you to feel prepared for the interview however there is no expectation that you would complete any additional research or work to take part.

How would my data be used?

- Your school will not be informed whether or not you have taken part.
- All data collected as part of this research will be kept confidential and stored anonymously for 20 years in a password protected university drive.
- There are limits of confidentiality and any information which poses a safeguarding risk may need to be shared.
- Steps will be taken to fully anonymise the data (for example removal of names, school names, specific terminology) however complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- If you choose to take part, you will be asked to complete and sign a consent form.
- The data from this research will be written up in a dissertation format to contribute to the researcher's doctorate in educational psychology. The findings will be made available online following completion. A short summary of findings will be sent to all participants. A presentation may also be created to summarise the key findings and communicate these to educational psychologists within the Local Authority. The final report will include anonymised quotations and discuss the ideas shared within the interviews. In the future, publication within a research journal may also be explored.

What if I changed my mind?

Participants who choose to take part can withdraw from the research at any point without needing to provide reason. Participants also have the right to ask that their data is deleted for any reason. If a request is received after data have been anonymised, this may not be possible.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part, please send an email to Hannah Lithgow [REDACTED] by **DATE**. In your email, please include the following information.

- Your name and job title
- What your involvement has been in approaches to reducing/preventing exclusion in your school.

If the above date has passed, please do enquire if you are interested as there may still be remaining spaces.

Please also feel free to contact me at the email above if you have any questions or would like any further information. If you have any concerns about this research which you would like to discuss, please contact my research supervisor [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request.

Kindest regards,

Hannah Lithgow,

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Bristol

Informed Consent for Research Study: An exploration of school leaders' perspectives on the facilitators and barriers in reducing or preventing school exclusions: bridging the gap between research and practice.

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated [XXX], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

I understand that taking part in the study involves taking part in an interview of around 45 minutes in length which will be audio recorded.

I understand that the audio recording will be transcribed into an anonymised format (as per the attached confidentiality protocol) and that the original recording will then be deleted.

2. Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for a doctoral dissertation, a short summary report and presentation. In the future, findings may be published in a research journal.

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team.

I understand that the data will be archived within a secure university system for 20 years following collection.

I agree that the information I provide in the interview can be quoted in an anonymous form within research outputs.

I confirm that I have read the attached confidentiality protocol and understand the limits of confidentiality.

3. Signatures

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]

Signature

Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS]

Signature

Date

Appendix 3: Confidentiality Protocol



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bristol.ac.uk/sps

Confidentiality and anonymity are of the utmost importance within this research. However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are limitations to confidentiality. While all will be done to ensure that your identity remains anonymous, it is essential also to acknowledge that this risk can be minimised but not entirely eliminated.

For example, other schools in the local area will also be aware this research is taking place as well as some staff and may recognise an approach as being aligned with a particular school increasing the risk of identification. However, in order to minimise the risks, the following steps will be taken:

- The identity of those taking part in the research will not be shared with other school staff, Local Authority workers, such as educational psychologists, university colleagues or any other individual outside the research team. The names of any schools taking part will also be kept confidential within the research team. Participants will also be encouraged to do the same.
- Within the interview, participants will be asked to avoid using any names or features which could be used to identify a member of the school community. Participants will be encouraged to talk more generally about their school's approaches rather than to share specific instances or student stories.
- The data will be anonymised during transcription to ensure names or identifiable features which might have been used are not included in the analysis. This might include for example changing school specific terminology to a more general term and removing place names.
- Within the analysis and final report, quotes from the original data will be used. These will be kept as short as needed to convey meaning and will be presented in anonymised form.

While the experiences and the information shared during the interviews will remain anonymous, there are some exceptions where it may be necessary to share any safeguarding concerns raised. For instance:

- If the information shared puts you, someone with the school community or anyone else at the risk of harm or potential danger.

In this situation the school's safeguarding procedures will be followed, and any concerns will be discussed with the research supervisor. This will happen as soon as possible after an incident.

Appendix 4: Initial School Contact Email

Dear [HEADTEACHER NAME],

My name is Hannah Lithgow and I am a postgraduate student currently undertaking a doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Bristol. I am carrying out **a research study exploring the views of school leaders about exclusions on the basis of persistent disruptive behaviour**. More specifically, I am interested in understanding more about the approaches schools use to reduce or prevent these exclusions and the facilitators and barriers to these approaches. At present, some research has investigated the views of local authority officers within England however the voices of school staff are less well represented in this area. This research therefore aims to provide school staff with an opportunity to share their views and experiences from practice in order to contribute towards our understanding in this area.

I am looking to carry out one-off interviews of approximately 30 - 45 minutes with members of staff in secondary schools across your Local Authority which will then be analysed as part of my dissertation project. It is hoped that these interviews will be held in school with the relevant member of staff. I understand that schools have different approaches and structures to one another so have not stated a specific title for the most appropriate member of staff and instead have created a set of criteria below to help schools identify this person. It is recognised that there may be more than one member of staff within your school who would fit within these criteria. I am only looking to interview one member of staff per school so ask that you/your team select the most appropriate individual to forward the information to.

Eligibility criteria:

The participants should have taken a lead role in at least one of the following areas for the school.

- Analysed school level exclusion data and helped to create action plans/provision maps/resource plans as a result.
- Undertaken research (formal or informal) into approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions (fixed term or permanent) to inform school level approaches or policies.
- Attended training focusing on school exclusions, or an aspect of exclusion, and helped to implement changes at a school level as a result.
- Contributed to decisions at a whole school level surrounding approaches to exclusions.

The term 'approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions' can be considered in a broad sense. It is not assumed for example that schools will necessarily have specific interventions or programmes in place. Instead, I am interested in finding out about the wider practices, policies and procedures which schools are employing to support young people who are displaying or who might display persistent disruptive behaviour in order to avoid exclusions.

I have attached an information sheet to this email with more detailed information about the research however I am more than happy to provide any further information which may be helpful.

The research has been approved by the University of Bristol School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee. It is hoped that the interview itself might provide a reflective and productive space which allows participants to consider practices within their school. In addition, when the research is complete, a research summary will be offered to all interested schools as well as the local

educational psychology service. This will include an overview of key findings which may support school staff and wider professionals in developing their practices to further reduce or prevent exclusions.

If you are happy for this research to take place within your school, please could you forward the information sheet onto the appropriate member of staff along with the short message which has been pasted at the end of this email. Participation within the research is voluntary and confidential. For this reason, contact must be made directly between the participant and researcher and not via a third party. I will not be able to discuss with any other school staff whether a member of staff has or has not chosen to take part. I thank you in advance for your understanding in this. **The deadline for registering interest is DATE so if you are able to forward the information prior to this point in order to allow the staff member time to consider participation this would be very much appreciated.**

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the research in more detail, then please don't hesitate to get in touch. **I would also appreciate if you would be able to complete the following table of questions and return your responses to me.** This will help me to understand the level of interest from your school and to focus any future communications.

Expression of Interest				
School Name				
Contact Details				
Please mark the relevant column			Yes	No
I agree for a representative from my school to be potentially involved in this research.				
I have forwarded on the study information to the relevant member of staff within my school.				
I would like to receive a summary of findings when the project is complete.				
I would like more information before I decide.				
Please tick here if you would <u>not</u> like to be contacted again in relation to this research.				

Kindest Regards

Hannah Lithgow

Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Bristol

Message to school staff member:

My name is Hannah Lithgow and I am a postgraduate student currently undertaking a doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Bristol. I am carrying out **a research study exploring the views of school leaders about exclusions on the basis of persistent disruptive behaviour**. More specifically, I am interested in understanding more about the approaches schools use to reduce or prevent these exclusions and the facilitators and barriers to these approaches. At present, some research has investigated the views of local authority officers within England however the voices of school staff are less well represented in this area.

I am looking to carry out one-off interviews of approximately 30 - 45 minutes with members of staff in secondary schools across your Local Authority which will then be analysed as part of my dissertation project.

I am particularly interested in speaking to members of staff who have been involved in decision-making at a whole school level around approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions. The term 'approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions' can be considered in a broad sense. It is not assumed for example that schools will have specific interventions or programmes in place. Instead, I am interested in finding out about the practices, policies, procedures which schools are employing in order to support young people who are displaying or who might display persistent disruptive behaviour in order to avoid exclusions.

If this is something you think you might be interested in, then please take the time to read the attached information sheet and follow the instructions to get in touch with me directly at [REDACTED] by DATE.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to send me an email at the address above.

Kindest Regards

Hannah Lithgow

Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Bristol

Appendix 5: Follow-up recruitment email 1

Dear [HEADTEACHER NAME],

I am hoping that you received contact from me recently about an opportunity for a member of staff from your school to be involved in research exploring school leaders' perspectives on the facilitators and barriers in reducing or preventing school exclusions. If you did not receive this initial contact, please let me know and I would be more than happy to resend and provide additional information.

I have attached the information sheet for the research to this email. If you would be happy for the appropriate member of staff from your school to participate, then please forward the information sheet along with the short message pasted at the bottom of this email.

If you can complete to following table to indicate your level of interest it would be appreciated as this will allow me to focus any future communications.

Expression of Interest		
School Name		
Contact Details		
Please mark the relevant column	Yes	No
I agree for a representative from my school to be potentially involved in this research.		
I have forwarded on the study information to the relevant member of staff within my school.		
I would like to receive a summary of findings when the project is complete.		
I would like more information before I decide.		
Please tick here if you would <u>not</u> like to be contacted again in relation to this research.		

If you would like further information, have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the research then please get in touch.

Best Wishes

Hannah Lithgow

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Bristol

Appendix 6: Follow-up recruitment email 2

Dear [HEADTEACHER NAME],

Earlier this term, you were contacted regarding participation in a research project exploring approaches to exclusion for persistent disruptive behaviour.

Thank you to those schools and staff members who have given up time to take part so far. There are still some spaces available for interviews so if a member of staff within your school would like to participate then please do forward on the information sheet which I have attached to this email.

If you would like further information, have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of the research then please get in touch.

Best Wishes

Hannah Lithgow

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Bristol

Appendix 7: Pre-interview Contact Email

Dear [PARTICIPANT NAME],

Thank you so much for offering up your time to take part in the research project: An exploration of school leaders' perspectives on the facilitators and barriers in reducing or preventing school exclusions: bridging the gap between research and practice.

I am fully aware how busy schools can be and am extremely grateful. I hope also that the interview will be a valuable experience for you which allows you some space and time to reflect upon practices within your setting. In addition, I hope that the product of this research will be useful to schools and local authorities in supporting their approaches around exclusion.

To allow you to get as much out of the research as possible and to ensure that you feel well prepared and comfortable, I just wanted to send you this email to give you a brief idea of how the interview will work and what might be covered. Within the research, I am looking to explore the approaches that schools are using to prevent or reduce exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. I will be interested in hearing what is used within your school setting and how these approaches were decided upon/informed. I will be asking about what has been implemented within your school at present and previously if applicable. There will be space within the interview to consider what has contributed to success and challenges within the work you've carried out in this area. There will also be some time to reflect upon what could be helpful for schools in supporting their approaches.

I understand that the way schools have planned for this area may be very different. Below is a list of some examples of possible sources of information that might have been considered when planning these approaches however, your setting may well have used another form which has not been listed.

- Academic research
- Training courses
- Prior experience
- Sharing of practice between schools
- School, local or government policies
- Books or internet resources

Please do not feel the need to do any specific preparation for the interview. The time you are giving up for the interview is plenty and I do not wish to create any additional workload! Instead, I am interested in hearing your honest reflections, experiences and thoughts.

If you have any questions in advance of the interview or need to reschedule, then please do let me know. If not, I look forward to meeting with you on (DATE).

Best wishes,

Hannah Lithgow

Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Bristol

Appendix 8: Debrief



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Thank you for taking part in this research study. I am investigating the approaches which schools use to reduce/prevent exclusions on the basis of persistent disruptive behaviour, how these approaches are informed and some of the facilitators and barriers to these approaches. It is hoped that the information you have shared in this interview will help educational psychologists to consider the support they offer to schools and how this might be most effective, particularly in bridging gaps between research and practice. The information may also be useful for school staff when planning for students at risk of exclusion.

I will be analysing the information shared across the interviews with school staff from secondary schools within the local authority and using this to inform a 45,000-word writeup. I will also send you a short summary of the findings once this process is complete. If in the meantime you have any questions about the research or your data, then please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]. If you have any further concerns about this research which you would like to discuss, my research supervisor can be contacted via [REDACTED].

I appreciate the time and effort you have given to today's interview and hope that you have found it a valuable experience. However, if any of the material discussed has raised concerns or affected you personally, or if you would simply like more information on the matters discussed then you may wish to access some of the resources or contacts listed.

Education Support

Free telephone support and counselling for education staff
UK-wide: 08000 562 561 day or night
Text: 07909 341229 (answered within 24 hours)
<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Mind

Mental Health charity offering information and support
Infoline: 0300 123 3393
Email: info@mind.org.uk
Text: 86463
<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

MindEd

Resources, information and advice on mental health and wellbeing for those who work with children and young people. <https://www.minded.org.uk/>
Coronavirus staff resilience hub (support for frontline staff) <https://covid.minded.org.uk/>

Childline

Advice and support for children who have been excluded from school

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/excluded-from-school/>

Tel: 0800 1111

National Autistic Society

School Exclusion helpline offering advice and support to families with an autistic child at risk of exclusion.

Helpline: 0808 800 4002

Exclusion Information and Resources: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/education/exclusions/exclusion-england>

School Exclusion Project

Advice and information for students, families and professionals affected by/involved in school exclusion.

<https://schoolexclusionproject.com/>

Local Offer

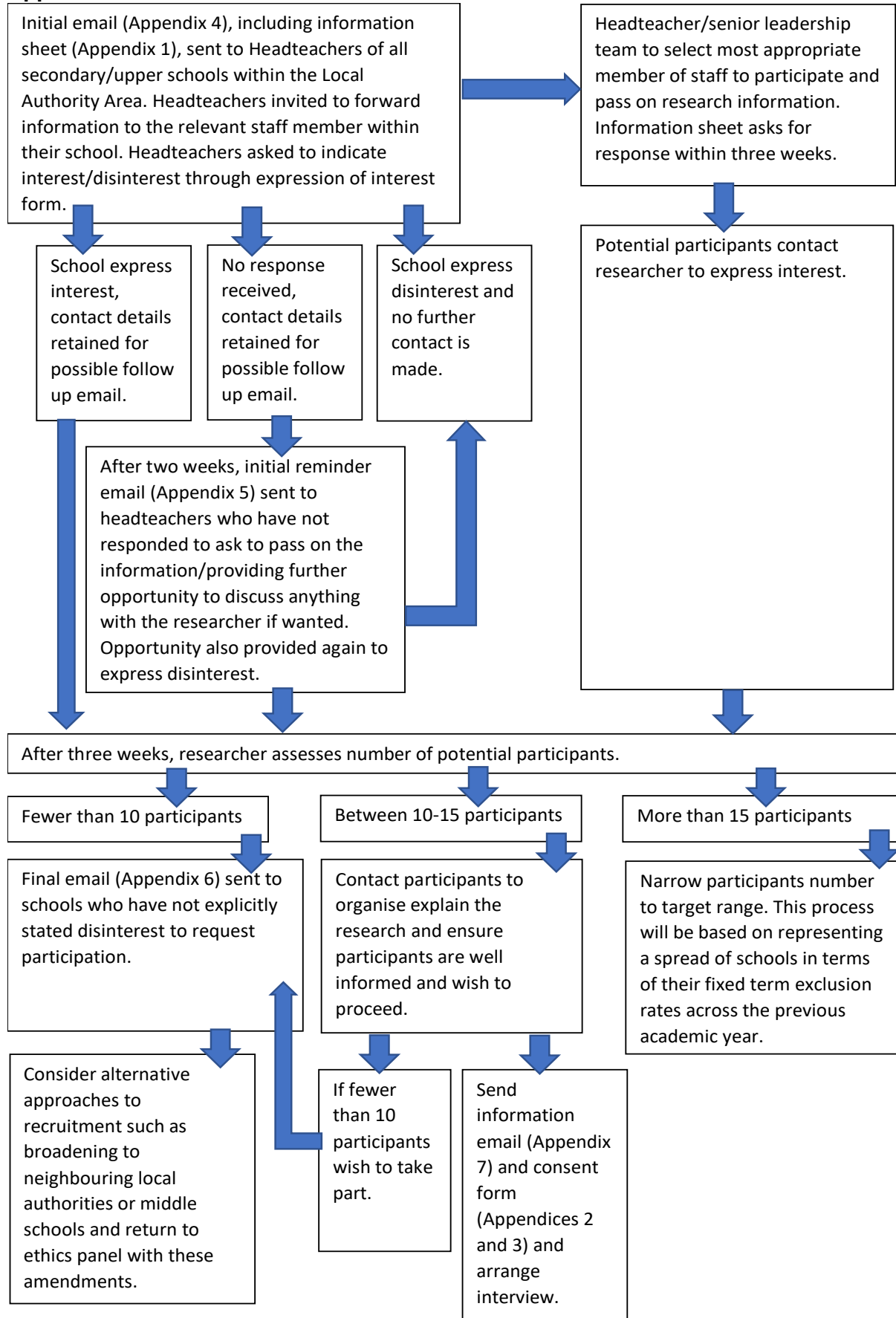
Information around services and procedures within the local authority to support young people at risk of exclusion.

[https://www.\[LOCAL AUTHORITY NAME\].gov.uk/education-and-families/school-exclusions](https://www.[LOCAL AUTHORITY NAME].gov.uk/education-and-families/school-exclusions)

Appendix 9: Interview Topic Guide

Research Question	Example interview questions
What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?	Tell me about your current approach to reducing or preventing exclusions in your school.
	How did you come to decide on this approach?
	Have you tried any alternative approaches previously?
	What other approaches are you aware of?
What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school within their school?	If you wanted information to inform a new approach, where would you turn to?
	How successful do you believe your current approach has been? What has helped, what have the challenges been?
	What made you choose not to use approach in your setting?
	What would you like to change to improve success?
What additional sources of support might be helpful for schools in reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?	What are the greatest barriers to preventing or reducing exclusions within your school?
	What do you think makes an approach to reducing exclusions effective?
	In an ideal world, what would your school's approach to reducing exclusions look like. What would help you to achieve this? What is preventing you from achieving this?
	Are there approaches you would like to employ within your school but haven't because the barriers are too great?
	What support do you currently receive?
	What support would you like to receive?

Appendix 10: Recruitment Process Flow Chart



Appendix O: Updated Interview Topic Guide

Research Question	Example interview questions
What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?	I wonder if you could start by just telling me a little bit about your role within the school?
	Have you held any other roles in relation to exclusions previously?
	Have you had any involvement in deciding what practices your school is using to prevent or reduce exclusions? Tell me more about this? How did you come to decide upon these approaches? Were there any particular sources of information which you drew upon? Has your school considered any alternative approaches? Are there any other approaches that you are aware of?
	When talking about these approaches I wonder whether any young people are brought to mind where the school has been able to put things in place to prevent an exclusion which seemed likely? Tell me about this...
	What do you think has been the impact of what has been chosen in your school?
	If you were looking to develop your approaches, where would you turn to for information/ideas?
What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches within their school for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?	What have you found to be most successful? Why do you think this has worked well?
	Do you have any thoughts on what makes approaches to reducing exclusions successful?
	Are there any changes you would like to make to practices in your school? What might these be?
	You spoke earlier about ... approach? Which factors made you choose to use/not use this?
	Have you come up against any problems in implementing/continuing your school's approaches to reducing or preventing exclusions? What have these been?
What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?	In an ideal world, are there any changes that you would like to be able to make to reduce or prevent exclusions within your school? What is currently preventing you from doing this? What would help you to achieve this?
	Have you received any other support as a school for reducing/preventing exclusions? Tell me about this. Where has this come from/what did this look like?
	Is there any support which you would like to receive but don't currently?
	What support have you found helpful previously?
	Have there been any occasions that an EP has been involved with reducing/preventing exclusion? Tell me about this.

	Is there any support which you feel the EPS could offer which would be helpful?
	Any other thoughts to share?
	Any questions?

Appendix P: Reflexive Account

Introduction

My aim for the introduction chapter was to communicate something of my rationale for the focus of this research project and to ensure that the reader holds an awareness of the current educational context with regards to exclusions within English schools. While I have presented this in terms of the data which support the need for research, it is undeniable that the rationale is also tied to my own personal views and values. To me, the disparity between the countries of the UK in rates of exclusion points to potential systemic and cultural issues within English educational systems and a need for research and action. This sits within personal and political motivations around concerns about inclusion, equality and equity within educational and wider social structures which have the potential to perpetuate disadvantage. I aim here, and throughout this research, to remain open around my influence upon this project. As will be expanded on in more depth with regard to the selected methodology, it is my belief that all research is subject to researcher influence and subjectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2023b) for example in terms of the groups and topics chosen, access to resources and promotion of messages. Rather than attempting to hide or even eliminate my influence, I aim to be transparent throughout in order to help the reader to make their own informed judgements (Yardley, 2000).

Literature Review

Having not conducted a literature review of this type previously, I was aware of my own limitations in terms of knowledge and experience and nervous to ensure that I had followed procedures appropriately. I sought out additional advice through supervision and university library services to attempt to manage this limitation. I also ensured I undertook the searches at a point where I had sufficient time to track my actions and complete whole phases to support consistency in decision-making. When making decisions towards the end of the search I recorded explicitly for each paper the reasons for exclusion/inclusion in order to help me express and remain accountable for these decisions.

Reflections

I found the process of appraising the literature challenging. While I was confident to speak qualitatively about the strengths and limitations of each paper and the

research as a whole, I found it hard to make objective decisions around the quality criteria each had achieved for example when evaluating against the CASP. The complexity of each of these categories for appraisal and my awareness of broader factors which might have led to omission of details such as writing conventions or word limits in academic journals made placing a definitive tick in a box feel somewhat reductionist. I should perhaps draw on this as reassurance for my selection of qualitative methods in allowing participants the chance to explain and justify their responses in a way which can be more challenging through quantitative methods. I make this point to perhaps suggest to readers to not rely solely on the overview table with regard to the quality of the included literature but to also take the time to reflect upon the elaborated strengths and weaknesses.

Methodology

Although I expected some challenges in the recruitment process, I was not prepared for how difficult it would be to find participants. I knew from my experiences working within a school that ease of participation and time implications would have affected my likelihood to engage in research. I therefore had tried to organise processes to support ease of participation such as through keeping interviews relatively short and holding interviews at the participants' schools. In hindsight, given the busy nature of senior teachers, I wonder whether online interviews might have been more accessible to school leaders as these can be more flexibly arranged. I made the decision to avoid this form of interviewing as I wanted to be able to build rapport and read body language effectively which I believe is perhaps easier in an in-person context and might have facilitated higher quality data. However, I think following the pandemic, professionals are perhaps much more confident and familiar with using online meeting platforms (Beauchamp et al., 2023) and as such, this may have been an easier option for participants. I'm not sure that this would have significantly changed my participant numbers as many simply did not respond to any communications however, I do think this might have been a possible option to support the busy working lives of school leaders.

It is possible that some school leaders felt less comfortable participating in the research knowing that I also worked within a local authority service. However, while this might have influenced interactions within the interview – I noticed for example

that some participants were very quick to follow up any criticisms of the LA with positive feedback or qualifiers around EP experiences – I am less sure that it drove initial participation. Several participants were recruited through contacts within the EPS, making very explicit my links with the LA, however, were still happy to speak with me. I wonder whether the subject matter of the research had some impact upon participation. As rates of exclusion are very high in some of the schools contacted, leaders may not have either felt qualified to contribute or may have felt that research would be used to judge their practices or setting. The research topic is politically charged and school leaders may not have fully trusted my rationale. Perhaps I could have been more transparent in presenting my rationale and positionality within recruitment materials; however, this may have impacted upon which leaders chose to take part and reduced the breadth of perceptions shared.

Reflections

The decision to utilise RTA as a methodology was primarily driven by the research questions. Although it took me significant time, discussion and deliberation to reach this conclusion, I felt confident in this decision. However, given the theoretical flexibility of RTA, I then was required to confirm my epistemology and ontology. This was a new area of exploration for me and initially one I found quite difficult to comprehend and engage with. I therefore spent a lot of time reading up in this area. The variation in terminology between texts (Crotty, 1998; Clark et al., 2021) did not perhaps help my developing understanding however, once I had unpicked and designated my positioning around the research, I actually found that framing and making decisions around the research became much simpler as I had a set of guiding principles around the nature of reality and knowledge in which to base this.

Findings

I think it was important that I undertook multiple rounds of coding. When returning to look at my codes, there were points where I noticed that I had perhaps been overly judgmental or interpretative and needed to reconsider the language I had selected. I took note of my emotional reaction to each interview and held in mind where the views and personalities of certain participants aligned more closely with or appealed to my own and tried to respond reflexively. For example, for one participant where I felt challenged by their descriptions, I spoke with a colleague who had worked within

the same local authority systems in order to attempt to broaden my perspective and empathy for this participant's point of view. Returning to coding following this discussion, allowed me to approach with a more open mind and notice new meanings. I also shared short, coded extracts in supervision and was intentional in ensuring these spanned different participants and topics to allow me to engage in curious discussions on a breadth of my coding.

When generating themes, I found it hard to embrace my knowingly subjective influence (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). In the earlier stages of analysis, I found myself directly avoiding focusing on codes which I had pre-empted before the analysis or felt like were strongly linked to my own personal views. For example, an aspect of my professional work in recent years has involved working with schools on trauma-informed and relational approaches to managing behaviour and I was wary of my influence upon codes which linked into key ideas associated with these models. While an initial distancing from these ideas was perhaps helpful to allow space to explore other ideas which may not have been at the forefront of my mind, I was perhaps also doing a disservice to the views of the participants by excluding them completely. I had not created these codes from nothing and there were elements of the data which I had interpreted to have meaning in relation to such a positioning.

Reflections

Ongoing recursiveness is a hard concept to adhere to when placed in the context of wanting to progress with the research and meet a deadline. I found myself willing the outcome of each stage of the thematic analysis for me to be satisfied that the findings were fully coherent and rigorous so that I could move onto the next phase. However, my values around integrity and sense of responsibility to produce rigorous research which did justice to the voices of the participants perhaps anchored me here and I felt compelled to return to the data, my codes, prospective themes and guides to analysis. There was also some freedom to be experienced in acknowledging that qualitative analysis can never be finished and always reflects one perspective and reality amongst many. This perhaps helped manage the draw to perfectionism in accepting that my findings could never be perfect even with infinite work and therefore what was more important was ensuring that my findings were accurately informed and meaningful in the context in which they were presented.

Even with regular reflection through memos and the reflexive diary, at times it was difficult to keep up with changes in my thinking. I used photographs to track groups of codes to also help keep a chronological log of changes but still felt overwhelmed at times. I think that this is perhaps part of the analytic process that I have had to come to accept as it was simply not possible to track and record every fleeting thought and reflection that filtered through my brain across the course of several months of analysis. However, through following the stages of thematic analysis as outlined within the methodology and engaging in reflexive processes, I hope to have thoughtfully constructed meaning from the data which can be helpfully applied.

Reflections on the discussion

The discussion chapter was a challenge for me to write. There was a huge breadth of educational literature that could have been linked to the findings and initial drafts in attempting to say everything ended up not saying much at all due to lack of depth of exploration and coherence. Following feedback from my supervisors, I needed therefore to reconsider how to communicate my key meanings to the reader such that findings were well situated in literature and theory and led to clear implications. I restructured this chapter therefore from a structure around themes to a structure around research questions in order to help explain key meanings more clearly. This change should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the importance of the themes but rather a practical decision to support accessibility and application of findings.

Making decisions around which theories to use to help make sense of the findings was also a slow and thought-provoking process. Throughout this course, I have doubted the quality of my theoretical knowledge and I worried at this stage that perhaps the perfect theory was out there and I was simply not aware of it. I tried to take steps to combat this, spending time researching particular theories, through a combination of conversations with colleagues, reading articles and books, and key sources on social media. In initial drafts, each theme was linked to a single theory however my reflections upon this were that some linked more effectively than others. Conversations in supervision helped me to feel confident in 'trusting my gut' around what was helpful or where I was making tenuous links for the sake of the write up and not the research findings themselves. Linking a theory to a single theme also perhaps prevented opportunities to consider broader applications of theory across themes. For example, the very nature of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1977)

meant that it cut across the interacting ideas presented within the findings. To apply it to a single theme or research question would have felt reductionist and utilising it as an overarching model allowed application in the spirit intended by Bronfenbrenner (1974, 1977). Broadening the application of PCP also allowed a lens to reflect on all findings as opposed to those which immediately made sense to me in relation to PCP and perhaps allowed me to make deeper connections. Nevertheless, this level of theoretical thinking was complicated. I needed to write this section in short chunks with space for reflection between to help me make sense of and therefore more clearly communicate my meaning.

Reflections on the research process as a whole

The process of writing this thesis and completing the broader doctorate has been filled with uncertainty. This has generally not sat well with me as my instinct is to attempt to plan and organise to maintain a sense of calm and control. The reality of the research process has been much messier than this and even where I have made tentative plans, some parts have been beyond my direct control, and I have needed to work with flexibility in the processes of rethinking, restructuring and redrafting. While I have not yet come to embrace uncertainty, I perhaps became better at accepting it as part of the process remaining open and flexible. I found that at points where my thinking felt overwhelming, talking through with others or writing down my thinking focusing first on what I was worried about and what I did know, generally allowed me to generate clearer next steps than when I attempted to hold this process solely within my head.

Having not written a piece of research of this size or timescale previously, I found worries around time management and project planning difficult. At points, my own personal worries about meeting deadlines and ensuring that the project was completed on time had the potential to overshadow decisions and prevent careful thought without reflexive processes in place. Conversely, at other points, my anxieties over my limited experience in research and values around integrity in terms of 'getting it right', both in terms of the mechanics of the research process and doing justice to my participants led to reluctance to finalise decisions or move on within the research process. Drawing on supervision and conversations with colleagues was helpful in these moments for me to verbalise my thinking and processes so far,

alongside expressing any worries, to interrogate my rationale around what had been done and was to be done. However, managing the project over an extended time was a challenge and although the reflexive processes described above helped with this, I do not want to present these as a panacea for all concerns, as I still often felt a sense of uncertainty throughout the project. Managing the time of the project was difficult and being aware that my concerns over completing and remaining on track for my plans had the potential to affect my decision-making processes, I put in place steps to ensure that this did not reduce the rigour of the process. This involved for example regularly returning to the research aims, questions and data to ensure I remained faithful to these.

References

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Appendix Q: Extracts from Reflexive Diary

Extract 1 – Thinking Around Methodology

Reflexive exercises from Clough and Nutbrown (2002) Chapter 1.

“All social research sets out with specific purposes from a particular position, and aims to persuade readers of the significance of its claims; these claims are always broadly political.”

Clough and Nutbrown (2002, p.4).

<p>Social Research is Persuasive</p>	<p>What is research to me? Research is investigating a topic to find out more about it. This might be through analysis of data, asking questions, comparing sources/writings. Research takes many forms and on a personal level I am not wedded to a particular methodology. Instead, I am of the view that different methods are best to answer different questions and often it is the combination of methods across different pieces of research which allows a richer understanding.</p>	<p>What if anything am I trying to persuade?</p> <p>Need for attention on exclusion practice.</p>
<p>Social Research is Purposive</p>	<p>What is the purpose of your research study? Underpinning my research is a desire that the findings might in some small way make a difference to the way in which schools approach exclusions. The research was motivated by very high levels of exclusion within the LA in which I work and the knowledge that outcomes for excluded students can be very poor. Despite advances in research the figures around exclusion do not seem to be changing and I was therefore led to wonder what schools are doing, how they are informing their approaches and whether there are barriers stopping effective implementation.</p>	<p>A desire for change has motivated my research.</p> <p>As a point of social justice, my personal view is that exclusions are most often not in the best interest of the young person and as such measures should be taken to reduce or prevent this as a disciplinary approach.</p>
<p>Research is positional</p>	<p>The report which is written on data is what makes it research. The data alone do not express a perspective.</p>	

	Research is informed by its context. People drive it when they identify an issue and decide how it can be understood and how to communicate their findings.	
Research is political	What do you want your research to change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy? - Practice? - Professional development? - Further research? 	What difference could your research make? <p>My honest position is to question whether it really will make any difference. Having read tens of student theses on the topic of school exclusion, it think it would be naïve to think that mine will make a significant/large change where others have not. I cling onto some hope that the research might make a small difference even if this is just within one or two of the participants or schools involved. Perhaps there will be something in the summary of findings which prompts a school to adapt their approaches or the participants may identify ways in which the EPS can better support them. My hope for change therefore would be on a much smaller local level much as I would like to see national policy changes!</p>

Extract 2 - Literature review writing

I deliberately allowed some time away from my literature review to allow me to reapproach the task of thematically organising the findings with a fresh mind. I created a new plan and when I then started to reflect upon the theories underpinning some of these, realised a new way to arrange these which then coordinated around uniting psychology. However, I remain open to developing/changing these if I find they don't work when I get further into writing. I think it has been helpful just to get writing even if the arrangement changes to start organising ideas on paper. Still a long way to go though!

I am feeling a bit constrained by only writing about the papers identified within the review when I know there is other research which might help to qualify/ support the findings. I'm unsure whether I can bring anything additional in (obviously not as part of the review) but to help with making sense of what has been found in the review. I

think perhaps I need to take some time to read the literature around writing a literature review so that I am more confident in what I should be doing. I think we did cover this in Y1 but this was some time ago and I think it would be worth reminding myself to ensure that what I am doing is theoretically and practically well grounded.

Extract 3

Post Interview Reflections

Reflections on process

I felt quite nervous prior to the interview. While my pilot interview and discussions in supervision had allowed me to try out some of my questions and mould them to be a little more personable/accessible, I was still concerned about how the interview would land. My pilot interview was with a teacher who had held leadership positions but not in the area of behaviour/SEND etc. This meant some answers were not as deeply answered as I might have liked. My hope was that this had been because of the participant's limited knowledge in the area rather than an issue with the topic/interview structure itself but this was in the back of my mind when preparing for the first interview.

I was therefore very relieved when the participant spoke so openly and at length around the area. I had been really worried before that I might clam up and forget my questions/not know where to take the interview. In reality, I relied much less on the questions I had prepared than I thought I might. I was more led by the ideas and thoughts of the participant however, I was careful to try to link these to the topic areas of my questions. The participant was quite enthusiastic and initially began to just tell me about their general view in the area. It felt important to let them do this and have an opportunity to voice some of the things they wanted to. This was actually quite helpful for giving an overall picture of the context within the school.

I am still quite conscious of my lack of interview experience and would therefore suggest that I probably still have lots to learn and could make adjustments and improvements within the interview. However, I do not wish to make major adjustments as my initial interview feels to have been quite successful and there needs to be a general consistency between the experience of the participants in order to make comparisons.

Reflections on content

They spoke about there being some children who it is necessary to exclude which is a view which I'm not sure I necessarily agreed with. For example, they suggested that fixed term exclusions can be a positive intervention if used in the right way. I tried to remain neutral and not provide my views in the interview as it isn't my platform however, I wonder whether the very nature of the research question indicates my leanings in that my focus is on reducing and preventing exclusions. This was not seen to necessarily always be a priority for this member of staff and this may need some reflection when analysing the data to answer the research questions.

Some of their views seemed to present a certain dissonance for example heralding restorative and relational approaches but then at other times swinging towards the need for more standard behaviourist approaches to fall back on. This will be interesting to reflect upon – I wonder if it might be indicative of teachers' lack of complete faith in some of the approaches in and of themselves and as such a reluctance to let go of more punitive approaches like exclusion.

They spoke about the holistic nature of the topic and how all aspects of educational experience can tie into it and how it feeds back down to classroom teachers for example. I think this may be key to part of the question as to why it is so complicated to reduce exclusion but also perhaps why there is such variation seen.

Reflections for next interview.

I perhaps also need to be more explicit within my questioning around focusing on PDB. There were points in the interview where they spoke about the challenges of more extreme behaviour and events and how these can be difficult to manage.

Funding and time came out as a specific barrier unsurprisingly to me. I think it is really important to explore this a bit deeper as in to consider for example if you had more money/time /staff, what would be the difference – what would you do that you aren't. This then allows a slightly deeper reflection perhaps around what is or is not currently effective.

They spoke about approaches the school was keen to avoid and gave good reasons for them. In hindsight, I wish I had asked them for their perspective on why they felt these approaches were so popular to understand more of the thought processes which schools are employing.

When I spoke about facilitators and barriers, I'm not sure that they conceptualised this language in the same way as I had. Perhaps I need to ask something more along the lines of changes or problems you have encountered when implementing approaches or what has helped implementation of these approaches to be successful.

Extract 4 – Example Reflections During Data Analysis

15.02.23

I wonder if there is a story constructing within the data around responsibility, autonomy, control and the impact of what different individuals perceive to be their role. E.g. PPT X talked about things being beyond their control whereas PPT Y spoke about external things happening but being able to support nevertheless. Schools seem again to be drawing lines around what level of need is theirs to meet, e.g. this school isn't the right setting. Mainstream isn't for them etc. I wonder if once a school has made a decision that they cannot control an outcome whether this then affects actions. I think there is also something around levels of autonomy and how responsibility/support is shared between schools and LA which might be interesting

to explore further. These ideas feel quite hard to articulate right now but perhaps as I code further, more data may help the construction.

16.02.23

Following discussion in thesis supervision meeting I have changed my approach to coding. I was only coding statements which I felt were very directly answering my research questions but found this was constraining my thinking so that I was only identifying very literal and surface level meanings resulting in majority semantic codes. This approach alone would risk creating domain summaries where I had constructed ideas in a narrow way without trying to reflect upon what had been said in a more interpretivist approach. I have broadened the way in which I am coding to construct meanings more generally which will create themes which in themselves may help to answer the research questions but without holding them so tightly that I am unable to think about things from a different angle.

25.02.23

My codes are now annotated on printed transcripts however I am now transferring them to NVivo to help me to arrange and organise the data. In this process, I am having to make my wordings more concrete/consistent between transcripts. I am very aware that it is easy to lean towards my own interpretations and views and subtly change the code title to perhaps align more with my own interpretations and perceptions than those of the participant – to bias the co-construction further towards my constructions so to speak. For example, in coding this section of text

Participant: so it's just trying to make sure we've got all of those, all of those teams within school work together collaboratively to make sure we support best you know support young people the best way we can.

Interviewer: Yep.

Participant: **But inevitably that sometimes leads to fixed term suspensions.**

When I annotated the transcript, I wrote suspensions as inevitable. Having read other transcripts I think this probably fits within the ideas of the necessity of suspensions. However, when I went to name the code my initial thought was 'accepting suspensions as necessary' however I think the word accepting comes from my view of suspensions as not an essential tool but rather a structure that has become socially assumed and accepted. In using the word accepting, there is perhaps an element of me placing my own judgment and assumptions upon what was said by the participant. Instead, I have coded this as 'perceiving suspensions as necessary' which although still an interpretation feels to me slightly closer to the data.

04.03.23

The process of beginning theming felt overwhelming. I was surrounded by pieces of paper and had ideas swimming in my head but was also conscious that these ideas all overlapped and that some were likely to lead to domain summaries rather than themes but still felt important to capture somehow. I began by just writing some of

my first thoughts on post it notes and gathering printed codes around these and as a new idea occurred to me added in post it notes.

Some ended up very large and I think perhaps too broad to be helpful in telling the story of the data. Investment in people for example had around 30 codes attached at the point I stopped for the evening with more codes that still could be added.

Arguably probably most codes could be linked to this theme so I wonder whether I need to rethink of somehow split this theme to make it more meaningful.

Some potential themes I didn't get to add many codes to but I don't know if that was more because they came to me later or because they overlap with or are eclipsed by other ideas. One to watch.

I very much see the ideas at this stage as a starting point and am trying not to become too attached such that I limit creativity and innovation. However, it is also hard when a story seems well formed in your mind to let it go. I think this is where it may be helpful to share these reflections with my supervisors and hear an alternative perspective to help me be reflexive around my own.

10.03.23

Following on from our discussions in supervision, I wonder about adding in the code 'The appeal of certainty' particularly in relation to the idea of zero tolerance/black and white behaviour system schools etc., clarity of expectations, clear tiers of escalation - as I'm writing this I wonder if this is a code or perhaps actually a broader subtheme for example which might fit within the existing 'creating boundaries' element - I was already wondering whether this quite fitted with the story of reduced support and increased responsibility as I'm not sure if this is the reason why schools construct their own limits - I think it is much more complex than that.

It's hard to know how long to spend on this stage of thinking about initial themes. I'm certainly feeling the pressure that it is mid-March and I still have most of my thesis to write but I equally don't want to rush through the analysis and end up with something thin and partial. I returned to Braun and Clarke's textbook on RTA to help my thinking and I think I will begin stage four in my next thesis day. Reading this reminded me firstly that the process is recursive so if I do move on too soon, I can always return. It also reminded me that the next stage is about checking when the themes really work so if they're not quite right then this next stage will help to clarify that. I know I need to give time to the analysis but this is a hard discipline when all I want to do is get on with writing. It can be hard with analysis when you feel you don't have much to show for the end of a day's work where writing has a clear productive element.

I'm struggling to work out where the code moving not solving the problem might fit within my themes. It feels really important to me as a story from the data but I wonder whether the reasons I'm struggling with it is because it is swayed towards my own interpretative stance more than it is the participants'? It could fit in line with the limiting system part of 'doing what we can with what we've got' in the sense that this is perhaps driven by a lack of other options and meeting the need to reduce exclusion numbers and be accountable to this goal whilst balancing the needs of

other students. Alternatively, it might fit within the section around how exclusion is understood. Either way, the question remains as to whether there is enough in the data to support this code. I think one or two ppts did talk about how some approaches just move the problem, so I don't think it is all my interpretation...

I'm a bit worried that the limiting systems subtheme has become a catch-all for any barriers. This then is not really a theme and just a domain summary of part of RQ2. I need to look at this again – I wonder if not all aspects are really systems related and therefore need to be themed elsewhere.

I can't decide if I have made my analysis worse today in how I've rearranged things or whether I'm just seeing more flaws and things from a different angle. I have a nagging feeling that these themes might be trying to do too much and in which case that they will be unmanageable to write up meaningfully and usefully such that they are wither unwieldy or shallow. This worries me though as I am really feeling the time pressure.

Appendix R: Example Coding

Interviewer: Brilliant erm and its great to kind of hear about the successes but I imagine its not been sort of a straightforward route. What have been some of the challenges you've come across, when you've been trying to implement things?

Participant 5: Ah that's a good question, erm...do you know what, not...not many actually, I am really really lucky to have you know a staff group that care about children, they really do you know we don't really have shouting at all in school and that's not because I've instructed that, it's just because the staff are very caring.

Interviewer: Yeah

Participant 5: They're, as a small school we've got [number] children on roll, staff know the children well erm that's always been the case so I think as I've said before, we've always had quite a good base I would say. I was very clear when I arrived that looking at the data, three years ago when our data as a school was was poor, but our SEN data er in terms of er NEETs in terms of progress eight and outcomes was the poorest so we actually said three years ago when I first joined you know SEN is is a huge priority, and and supporting students in terms of particularly SEN behaviour and their curriculum, and people still talk about that I think so I think the fact that we made it such a priority three years ago is still feeding in

Categorising or grouping students
Family or home life as barrier to teacher

Lack of chance
Aiming for more provision and support onsite (but barriers to this)

Staffed time and expectations

Impacted by practice and staff in local schools

Limits of staff's skills and expertise

Evidence base or just best on premises try in
Balancing educational and behaviour needs

Importance of knowing students

Boundaries need to be clear

Some boundaries appear more concrete than others

School construction is to tolerance

Embedded cultures

Curriculum issues

Choice, subject mix and variability in the construction of boundaries

Constructing myths and boundaries

Shifting responsibility into school

COVID impact

Change takes time

Openness

Staff attitudes

Clarity in expectations

Care and investment
Importance of relationships

Lack of accessibility of external support

Need to continually train staff

Continual development of approaches

Coding Derived by

Mmm, you talked a little bit about kind of your escape routes along the way and one of the key focuses I'm interested in is kind of the approaches that schools are using to reduce or prevent exclusions and I just wondered what you kind of have got going on at the moment or you've sort of looked into along those lines.

Yeah ok well our suspensions have gone up

Right

Since covid as many schools have.

Yep

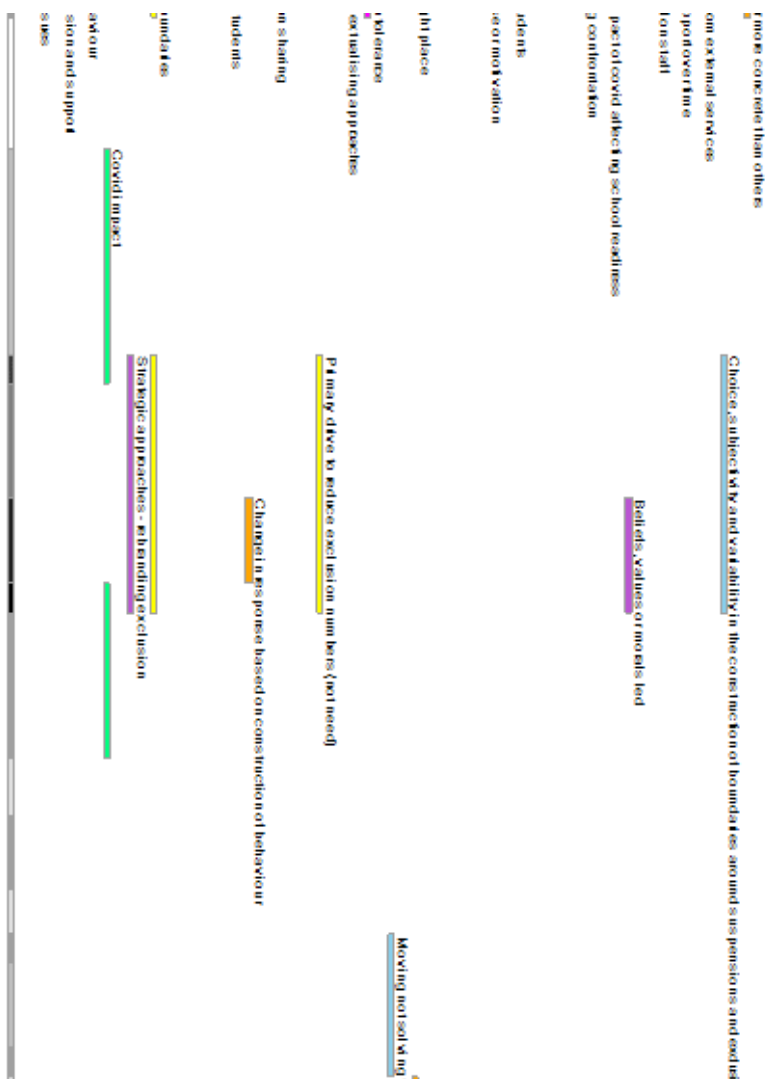
Erm, and I think a lot of that is to do with, I would say the impact of covid and also maybe some particular I would say sort of structural things outside of schools because I think that you know some schools undoubtedly are better at handling things than others certain students and all of that but I think an awful lot of it comes down to where they decide to draw the line. So some schools for example, decide we can't have any more suspensions and so for tactical reasons if someone goes up and calls someone an effing whatever, they won't suspend but not because it's anything do with I you know educational provision or whatever but just because they don't want their rates to go up. Other schools may have a strategy where where you know there is something more behind it where actually they won't immediately exclude or well suspend for those sorts of things because they decide to take that approach so I think there's all sorts of things. I mean in terms of trying to reduce suspensions, so basically up until covid, erm our aim every year was to sort of reduce suspensions by 10% and I think we pretty much did that

Yep

Erm not not working at the moment. So so what would we do, things to reduce suspensions. Erm so we would try to involve parents. So often before a suspension, the parents would be rung up and say you know er student x, they're just not following the instructions, you can have a word with them if you want, you can come in if you want erm so those sorts of things you know, there there is no virtue in suspending or excluding

Mmm

I think it needs to be done sometimes, and I would argue there's sort of a almost a bit of an unholy alliance between left and right whereby the right don't want the suspensions because they know it's going to cost the state money and the left don't want suspensions because they have an ideological reason why they don't think there should be suspensions and they sort of merge together but I don't think that solves the fundamental issue so the sorts of things we would say so involvement with parents,



Appendix S: Themes, subthemes and codes

Theme 1: A focus on understanding: knowing individuals and communities.

Approaches informed by community context

Belonging

Care and investment

Community engagement

Early intervention (school level)

Family engagement and support

Gentleness/avoiding confrontation

Group dynamics

Importance of relationships

Importance of information sharing

Inconsistency is problematic

Increase in unidentified SEND post-Covid

Meeting holistic needs

Mistakes are to be expected

Preventing escalation

Right body of staff

Right staff in right place

Transition

Theme 2: A question of interpretation: perceptions matter	
<i>Subtheme 2A: Perceptions of behaviour</i>	<i>Subtheme 2B: Perceptions of support</i>
Balancing sanction and support Behaviour as communication Behaviour as unmet SEND Behaviour perceived as separate to SEND Behaviour perceived to represent choice EP supports through understanding need Need to understand behaviour PDB as intervenable Perceived importance of separating behaviour and SEND SEND and behaviour overlap	Approaches are evaluated from a subjective position Attitude over experience Buy-in Changing narratives Evidence base/justification promotes buy-in Framing of approaches Hope Importance of staff wanting to develop Parent voice and feedback Perception of shifting cultures Staff resistance to change Student perceptions of support Student sense of purpose or motivation

Theme 3: A balancing act: prioritising information, purposes and demands.		
<i>Subtheme 3A: Balancing information</i>	<i>Subtheme 3B: Balancing purposes</i>	<i>Subtheme 3C: Balancing demands</i>
<p>Accessibility of research</p> <p>Approaches informed by external professionals</p> <p>Approaches informed by external training</p> <p>Approaches informed by LA</p> <p>Approaches informed by literature</p> <p>Approaches informed by policy</p> <p>Approaches informed by previous experience</p> <p>Approaches informed by school data</p> <p>Approaches informed by sharing with other schools</p> <p>Approaches informed by specific individuals in school</p> <p>Approaches informed by specific projects</p> <p>Approaches informed by wider media</p> <p>Conflicting advice</p> <p>EEF helps evaluate and compare</p> <p>EP cast in expert role</p> <p>Pragmatic challenges to engaging with literature</p> <p>Sharing ideas with other schools</p> <p>Sharing practice within school</p> <p>Staff at saturation point</p> <p>Synthesising evidence</p> <p>Time investment in planning approaches</p>	<p>Balancing educational and behavioural needs</p> <p>Balancing the needs of all students</p> <p>Beliefs, values or morals led</p> <p>LA deterrents/incentives</p> <p>Placing student needs above accountability structures</p> <p>Primary drive to reduce numbers</p> <p>Purpose/outcome driven decision-making</p> <p>Short vs long term thinking</p> <p>Strategic use of exclusionary alternatives</p>	<p>Affected by school context</p> <p>Approaches determined by funding</p> <p>Approaches don't work consistently</p> <p>Approaches have side effects</p> <p>Balancing values and pragmatics</p> <p>Curriculum issues</p> <p>Fitting within education systems</p> <p>Limits of staff skillset</p> <p>Luck/chance</p> <p>Need for staffing</p> <p>Ongoing impact of covid on staff</p> <p>Options reduced during covid</p> <p>Prioritising</p> <p>Schools feel underfunded</p> <p>Staff conditions and expectations</p> <p>Staffing requires funding</p> <p>Time pressures</p>

Theme 4: A blurred picture: constructing boundaries, roles and responsibilities.	
<i>Subtheme 4A: Constructing boundaries</i>	<i>Subtheme 4B: Constructing roles and responsibilities</i>
Balancing adjustment and expectations Balancing educational and behavioural needs Balancing flexibility and consistency Boundaries need to be clear Choice subjectivity and variability in construction of boundaries Clarity in expectations Clear or structured consequences Control Embedded cultures Exclusion communicates a boundary How much adjustment is reasonable? PDB as intervenable Perceived individual approach to DM Schools construct limits to tolerance Schools perceive and construct limits to their support Shared decision-making around exclusions Some boundaries appear more concrete Suspensions communicate boundaries and expectations Systems to reduce subjectivity in exclusion decision-making Tiers of escalation	Above and beyond Aiming for more provision onsite Alone Backwards not forwards Building relationships with external professionals Collaborating with other schools Developing provision in school in response to reduced external support Early intervention External support is expensive Financial stretch in public services Hopelessness Impact of rurality Impact of wider social issues Importance of MAW Increased responsibility need increased investment Issues with external support systems not individuals LA bureaucracy LA service unreliable Lack of accessibility of external support Lack of capacity in provision/support Lack of understanding from external support Limited EP impact Limited staff in external services Moving not solving Need for LA to take greater responsibility Need funding to develop own / onsite approaches Outsourcing support

	<p>Perceived limits to the school's responsibility for students and their behaviours</p> <p>Poor MAW</p> <p>Reduction in level of support over time</p> <p>Reduction in support due to funding</p> <p>School feel need to take responsibility because no one else is</p> <p>Shifting responsibility into school</p>
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Appendix T: Application of Quality Control Measures

Quality Control Measure	Application
Sensitivity to Context	<p>Vertical generalisation – situating the research within previous literature to support with contextual sense making. Applied through a systematic literature review, situating the topic within relevant cultures, language and practices within the introduction and links to previous research explored in the discussion chapter.</p> <p>Reflection on contextual factors within the analysis and presentation of findings including the influence of cultures and systems at the school and wider level.</p> <p>Applying an inductive approach to analysis, driven by the data provided by participants.</p> <p>Use of a qualitative interview approach which allowed participants to explain and contextualise their perceptions and practices.</p> <p>Carefully but also flexibly defined participant roles to ensure well-informed and experienced participants.</p> <p>Consideration of the needs of participants within the research design including awareness of potential power imbalances and their effect.</p>
Commitment and Rigour	<p>Selection of analytical method appropriate to the skills and experience of the researcher.</p> <p>Experience and engagement with the research topic over time both professionally and in relation to research activities.</p> <p>Dedication of significant time in the research process to the analysis process including careful adherence to selected methods and openness to the recursive nature of the approach.</p> <p>Continued checking back from findings to the data throughout analysis and writing to ensure rigour and monitor/manage my own subjective, interpretative influence.</p>
Transparency and Coherence	<p>Application of processes and practices to encourage reflexivity. This included keeping a reflexive diary throughout the research project and accessing regular supervision.</p> <p>Careful consideration of fit between research topic and questions, epistemological/ontological positioning and philosophy and methodology/methods and analysis.</p> <p>Explicit linking of findings to the research questions within the discussion to help situate themes and understand key messages.</p> <p>Ongoing restructuring and redrafting for clarity and coherence.</p>
Impact and Importance	<p>Selection of topic with social justice implications.</p>

	<p>Adherence to aims of research.</p> <p>Range of specific and broad findings and implications relevant to a range of professionals.</p> <p>Planning for dissemination approaches.</p>
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Appendix U: Professional Considerations

	Key finding from present research	Cross References	Findings from previous research/guidance	Reflection points for professionals
Research Question 1 What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?	School leaders were drawing on multiple forms of external information which was in part determined by accessibility and availability.	4.42 Subtheme 3A: Balancing information	<p>Accessibility of research could be a barrier to engagement for schools (Scott & McNeish, 2013; van Schaik et al., 2018)</p> <p>Increased accessibility of research (e.g. content, length, physical access) might support application in schools (Fusarelli, 2008).</p> <p>Educational systems should include space and support for considering research (Fusarelli, 2008, Cordingly, 2012; Scott & McNeish, 2013).</p>	<p>Researchers How can research be presented in a way which supports its accessibility for school leaders?</p> <p>EPs How could school leaders be supported to consider what information is most relevant and access this easily?</p> <p>School leaders How can we create time, space and support for leaders and staff to engage with information effectively?</p>
	School leaders made decisions around applying information based upon key values, experiences and school context.	4.42 Subtheme 3A: Balancing information 4.43 Subtheme 3B: Balancing multiple purposes	<p>School teachers may be more likely to draw on their experience than evidence from research literature (Walker et al., 2019).</p> <p>School staff often use data to inform their practices (Leithwood, 2012; Datnow & Hubbard, 2015; Young et al., 2018) but the quantity, quality and integration with values can create challenges (Murray, 2014, Wang, 2019, Potter & Chitpin, 2021).</p> <p>Values led decision-making can promote inclusion (Potter & Chitpin, 2021; Higham & Booth, 2018). Implementation planning is important for considering the transfer of information to action (Chidley & Stringer, 2020).</p>	<p>School leaders and EPs What expertise and experience is available within school? How can this be built upon? Are there any gaps and how can these be identified?</p> <p>What are the key values of the school community? Are these shared and well represented in current practice/future decision-making?</p> <p>What support, systems or actions are needed to contextualise and effectively apply information?</p>

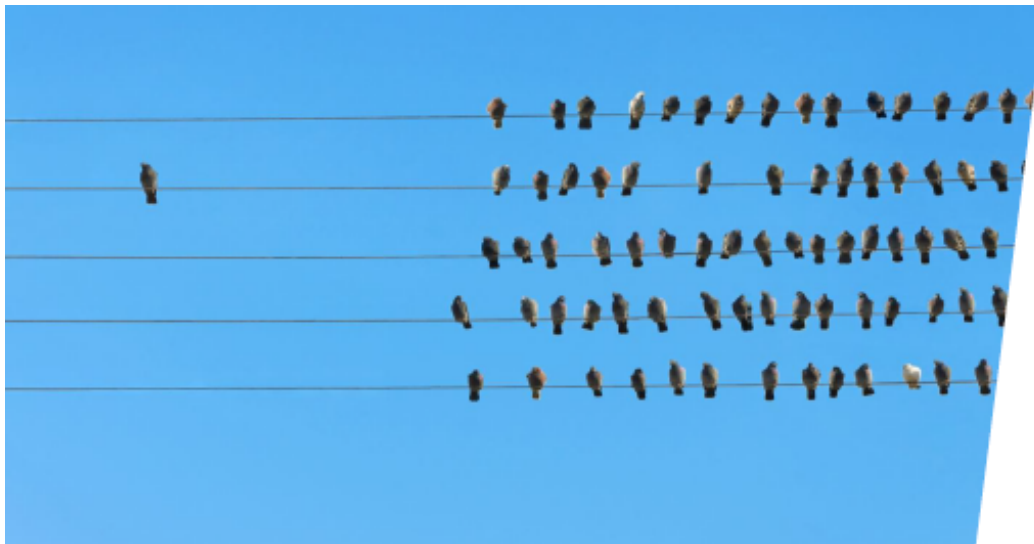
	Key finding from present research	Cross References	Findings from previous research/guidance	Reflection points for professionals
	Constructions of behaviour may inform the approaches implemented to reduce or prevent exclusions.	4.32 Subtheme 2A: Perceptions of behaviour 4.52 Subtheme 4A: Constructing boundaries	Divisions between SEND and behaviour may negatively impact upon support for students at risk of exclusion (Hatton, 2013; Trotman et al., 2015; Cole et al., 2019; Hulme et al., 2023). Understanding behaviour as a need, communication or learning process could lead to supportive approaches (Millei & Peterson, 2015; Middleton and Kay, 2020, Stanforth & Rose, 2020; Hulme et al., 2023).	School Leaders and EPs How are school staff constructing children's behaviours? How are these constructions impacting upon practices and decisions? Would changing perspectives around the behaviour change responses? EPs How are behaviours being constructed within the child's ecosystem? How am I constructing behaviour and demonstrating this within my communication? How can key adults be supported to reflect upon and possibly reframe their constructions?
Research Question 2 What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour	Knowing students and understanding their context can facilitate effective support. Successful implementation of approaches is affected by buy-in across the school community.	4.2 Theme 1 - A focus on understanding: knowing individuals and communities. 4.33 Subtheme 2B: Perceptions of Support	Empathic cultures and positive teacher-student relationships may support approaches to reducing exclusions (Quin, 2017; Cole et al., 2019; Dean & Gibbs, 2023). Understanding a young person's context may increase staff propensity towards support (Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Student voice and agency may support behaviour and engagement with approaches (Tucker, 2013; Trotman et al., 2015; Conner et al., 2022; Mitra, 2018). Staff perceptions of value, efficacy and necessity of approaches can affect investment (Tucker, 2013; Feuerborn et al., 2015).	School Leaders How do our systems, structures and cultures promote or prevent building of positive relationships? How do our systems, structures and cultures promote or prevent understanding students' needs and contexts? School Leaders and EPs How can the views of young people, families and school staff be understood and listened to in planning approaches to reduce or prevent exclusions.

	Key finding from present research	Cross References	Findings from previous research/guidance	Reflection points for professionals
within their school?			<p>Involving teachers in planning for approaches, explaining rationale and considering the impact of implementation may support buy-in (Gutierrez, 2022).</p> <p>Trust in school leadership may affect staff investment (Leithwood et al., 2008; Brücknerová & Novotný, 2017; Gülbahar, 2017).</p>	<p>What is the rationale and evidence for the chosen approach? How does this approach align with the values of the school community?</p> <p>How can we plan implementation to ensure effective buy-in and change?</p>
	Limited funding and/or staffing can create barriers to effective implementation of approaches in the context of balancing multiple purposes.	<p>4.44 Subtheme 3C: Balancing demands</p> <p>4.43 Subtheme 3B: Balancing multiple purposes</p>	<p>English schools are experiencing funding challenges with potential to affect their staffing levels (Bettsworth, 2022a).</p> <p>English schools are experiencing recruitment and retention challenges (Bettsworth, 2022b).</p> <p>Approaches to reducing and preventing exclusion are reliant upon sufficient capacity in staffing (Ofsted, 2019).</p> <p>Funding concerns may reduce inclusive practices (Ofsted, 2019; Thompson et al, 2021; Hulme et al., 2023).</p> <p>Accountability measures and inclusive expectations or practices may not always be easily compatible (Cole et al., 2019, Hulme et al., 2023).</p>	<p>EPs and LAs</p> <p>How do policies and recommended practices fit within perceived constraints of staffing, funding and accountability?</p> <p>Is there additional support which schools might need to implement or sustain practices?</p>
<i>What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent</i>	School staff were concerned about the level of responsibility they held. They felt support from external professionals	4.53 Subtheme 4B: Constructing Roles and Responsibilities	<p>EP services are experiencing consistent challenges with capacity in part due to recruitment as well as increasing statutory workloads (Lyonette et al., 2019; Atfield et al., 2023)</p> <p>Networking between schools can reduce feelings of isolation (Chitpin, 2021). Education systems may not incentivise collaboration between schools (Armstrong et al., 2021; Hulme et al., 2023).</p>	<p>EPs</p> <p>How are the responsibilities within the school changing or being experienced? What support can be offered to help with this?</p> <p>LAs</p> <p>How are schools working together to share knowledge and/or resources?</p>

	Key finding from present research	Cross References	Findings from previous research/guidance	Reflection points for professionals
<i>disruptive behaviour?</i>	should be more accessible.			Are their ways in which schools could support one another more effectively? How do LA structures support collaboration between schools?
	School staff felt support should offer quicker support and earlier intervention.	4.53 Subtheme 4B: Constructing Roles and Responsibilities	Early intervention may reduce disruptive behaviours (Dodge et al., 2015) and decrease the risk of suspension (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). HCPC guidelines (2022) indicate that EPs should work proactively and preventatively.	EPs and LAs What is the current range of work delivered within the service? How does this support early intervention/preventative working?
	School staff appreciated support which helped them to better understand the needs of young people and how to help them.	4.53 Subtheme 4B: Constructing Roles and Responsibilities 4.2 Theme 1 - A focus on understanding: knowing individuals and communities.	School staff may have lower confidence in assessing student needs beyond academic learning (Ramsay et al., 2018). Effective assessment can support inclusion of students displaying PDB (Hulme et al., 2023)	School leaders and EPs What are current assessment skills within the staff body? Are there any areas for development? What systems are in place to ensure that students' needs are well understood?

	Key finding from present research	Cross References	Findings from previous research/guidance	Reflection points for professionals
	School staff identified that where external services were not available, they may need support (both in terms of finances and external professional input) to develop their own provision.	4.53 Subtheme 4B: Constructing Roles and Responsibilities	Schools in previous research have described the requirement to develop their own alternative provision (Tucker, 2013; Hulme et al., 2023). Timpson (2019) recommend that schools should not be expected to support students with broader needs alone.	School Leaders and EPs What are the current/changing needs of students at risk of exclusion? What alternative provision within school might be needed to support these? EPs How can schools be supported to develop their onsite provision. e.g. What information/evidence/ assessment is needed? What is required for successful implementation?

Appendix V: Draft Research Summary



The perceptions of secondary school leaders on reducing or preventing exclusions and suspensions for persistent disruptive behaviour: A reflexive thematic analysis.

Doctoral Research Summary, July 2023
Hannah Lithgow

Introduction to the Research

Thousands of children and young people in English schools experience exclusion each year. This can be for a fixed period (suspension) or permanently. Consistently, the most frequent reason provided for exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2022).

Previous research has linked school exclusion to negative short and long term outcomes including in relation to education and employment (Sutherland & Eisner, 2014; Rosenbaum, 2020), and mental and physical health (Ford et al., 2018; Tejerina-Arreal et al., 2020, Obsuth et al., 2022).

Despite research looking to support schools in reducing exclusion (for example Timpson, 2019; Valdebenito et al., 2019), rates of exclusion have remained relatively consistent and comparatively high to other UK nations (McCluskey et al., 2019; DfE, 2022).

The present research therefore aimed to explore the approaches being used by schools to reduce and prevent exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. The research questions focused upon the sources of information used to inform practices, the facilitators and barriers of school approaches and what might support schools in their approaches to reduce and prevent exclusions.

Research Design

The research followed a qualitative design informed by a relativist ontology, constructionist epistemology and interpretivist theoretical perspective. Ten secondary school leaders from four local authorities in Southwest England participated in a semi-structured interview held at their school. The interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Four key themes were developed through the analysis as shown in Figure 1.

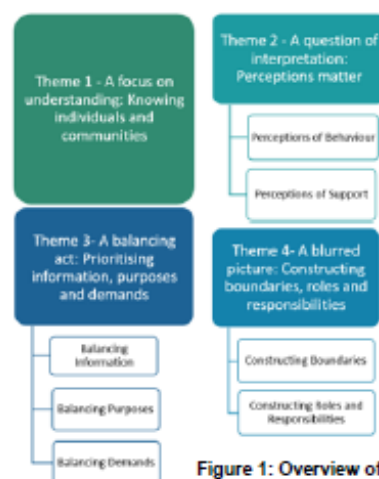


Figure 1: Overview of themes

Key Findings

Research Question 1: What sources of information are school leaders using to inform their approaches to reducing/preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour in school?

School leaders reported to be drawing on a wide range of sources of information from academic research and books to social media, data collected in school and knowledge and experience across the school community. Information which was available and accessible for example through synthesised research or local knowledge and projects looked to be prioritised. The way in which school leaders constructed behaviour, for example as a need, communication or choice appeared to inform the approaches used in response to persistent disruptive behaviour.

Research Question 2: What do school leaders perceive to be the facilitators and barriers surrounding successful implementation of current approaches for reducing/ preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour within their school?

Facilitators

Knowing the school community was constructed as a key facilitator to reducing or preventing exclusions. This meant school staff understanding a student's background and needs and responding accordingly. It was also important to build positive relationships and foster communication with students and families to facilitate this understanding. School leaders also discussed the importance of the perceptions of school staff with regards to the success of approaches to reduce or prevent exclusion.

Barriers

School leaders were identified to be balancing multiple purposes and demands for example in relation to curricula, funding and staffing, and perceived needs across the school community. Balancing these demands simultaneously meant that, at times, although school leaders might have held an ideal around what would best support a young person at risk of exclusion, it was not always perceived to be practically possible to implement this.

Research Question 3: What additional support might be helpful for schools in reducing/ preventing exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour?

In general, school leaders valued support from external professionals but felt it was not accessible enough. Across the interviews school leaders mentioned

streamlined systems, access to wider and earlier intervention and increased involvement from services in schools. Assessment work, such as from educational psychologists, which led to increased understanding of needs and clear and practical next steps to support young people was also discussed as helpful.

Some school leaders also described potential to expand their onsite provision to meet the changing needs of students however also indicated the need for sufficient funding, staffing and training to achieve this successfully.

Potential Future Considerations

Educational Psychologists

- Being attuned to constructions of behaviour, across the child's ecosystem, and aware and responsive to the potential impact of this.
- Supporting assessment of students' needs both through direct work and facilitating school-based assessments.
- Working with schools to consider expanded provision to best meet changing needs of students including through supporting staff to identify and contextualise key information.

Local Authorities (LAs)

- Working with schools to ensure clarity within processes so that these are not perceived as a barrier to support.
- Reflecting upon how systems might better support early intervention across services.
- Supporting collaboration between schools to share knowledge and resources effectively.

Researchers

- Considering how research findings can be made available and accessible to school staff for example through dissemination and synthesised formats.

School Leaders

- Considering how to deepen understanding of students, their needs and their behaviour through information sharing and assessment.
- Considering the perceptions of school staff in order to promote buy-in and plan for effective implementation.
Creating time and space for staff to reflect upon their personal constructs in relation to persistent disruptive behaviour.

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